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Motivations, learning activities and challenges: learning Mandarin Chinese in Australia

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Abstract

Mandarin Chinese is ane of the priority languages in the Australian Government's {2012} 'Australia in the Asian Century' White Paper. However the number of Australian learners of Mandarin remains the smallest among six commonly taught foreign languages in Australia. What are Australian learners' motivations and preferred learning activities for learning Mandarin Chinese? What challenges do teachers face when promoting this language? To answer these questions, this study conducted surveys with 149 school students and with 18 principals and language teachers in New South Wales. Results show that the Australian students' study of Mandarin was primarily driven by extrinsic motivation although intrinsic interests in Chinese language and culture played a certain role. The students prefered collaborative and multifaceted learning activities which involve multiple verbal and visual modes. Offering and teaching Mandarin in schools is challenged by a lack of qualified teachers, teaching resources, funding, professional guidance and opportunities to establish national and international collaboration. The findings suggest that it is necessary to reinforce the role of agencies at the meso level which bridge policy makers at the macro level and policy implementers at the micro level, respectively.

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Abstract

Mandarin Chinese is one of the priority languages in the Australian Government's Australia in the Asian Century White Paper 2012. However, the number of Australian learners of Mandarin remains the smallest among six commonly taught foreign languages in Australia. What are Australian learners' motivations and preferred learning activities to learn Mandarin Chinese? What challenges do teachers face when promoting this language? To answer these questions, this study conducted questionnaire surveys with 149 school learners and 18 language teachers in New South Wales, Australia. Results show that the Australian school learners' study of Mandarin was primarily driven by extrinsic motivation although intrinsic interests in Chinese language and culture played a certain role. The school learners prefer collaborative and multifaceted learning activities which involves multiple verbal and visual modes. Offering and teaching Mandarin in schools are challenged by deficiencies in qualified teachers, teaching resources, funding, professional guidance, and opportunities to establish national and international collaborations. The findings suggest that it is necessary to reinforce the role of agencies at the meso level which bridge policy makers and policy implementers at the micro level.

1. Introduction

Mandarin Chinese[i] (henceforth Mandarin) became the most common language other than English spoken at home in Australia in 2006. It is now spoken by approximately 1.8% of the Australian population (Australian Bureau of Statistics Census, 2012). Mandarin has become one of the most commonly taught foreign languages in Australian for over 20 years (Orton, 2010), but the number of Mandarin learners in Australia remains the least among the six commonly taught languages (Orton, 2012). The rapid increase in the number of Mandarin speakers is probably a reflection of the increase (1% of the Australian population) in the number of migrants from China (excluding SARs and Taiwan) over the period between 2001 and 2011 (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2013).

The status of Mandarin teaching and learning in Australia remains a great concern of the Australian Government and educators. Mandarin was identified as one of the priority

Asian languages in the Australia in the Asian Century White Paper in 2012. In doing so, the Government appealed to the nation to 'gain understanding of Asian languages and cultures' in order to achieve continued success in the 21st century. The White Paper is the Australian Government's fifth campaign to promote Mandarin as one of the priority languages in the last two decades [ii](see Liddicoat, 2013). However, problems remain. The majority (94%) of classroom second language (L2) learners drop out before Year 12 (see Orton, 2008). As mentioned above, the number of Mandarin students also remains the smallest among all six commonly taught foreign languages (Orton, 2012). The number of Victorian schools that offer Mandarin fell by about 20% (from 89% to 69% between 1999 and 2010) (Premier of Victoria, 2013). As Orton stresses, the retention of L2 learners needs to be the first priority in any campaign to increase numbers in Year 12. Furthermore, since the release of the 2012 White Paper, we have not seen the expected increase in the number of Australian learners of Mandarin. Therefore, people are curious about the impact of the government policies on educational practices and learners' motivation to learn Mandarin. To provide first-hand information to policy makers, educational administrators, and teachers, this study addresses the following:

1. What are Australian school students' motivations to learn Mandarin?
2. Which learning activities are favoured by Australian school students to learn Mandarin?
3. What challenges do principals and teachers face when promoting and teaching Mandarin?

2. Motivation

This study focuses on two factors that potentially influence Australian learners' learning of Mandarin: motivation and preferred learning activities. Motivation is by far the most studied construct about individual differences in the field of second language acquisition (Gardner, 1985, 2010; Ellis, 2008; Dörnyei, 2010, 2012; Dörnyei & Ushioda, 2011; Dörnyei & Kubanyiova, 2013). Motivation is multifaceted and has been defined in different ways. Generally speaking, motivation is a goal-directed psychological motor which has a set of three characteristics: *effort*, *want* (a desire to achieve the goal), and *affect* (favourable attitudes toward doing so) (Gardner, 1985; Masgoret & Gardner, 2003). In Gardner's social-educational model, motivation is classified into *integrative motivation* and *instrumental motivation* depending on whether the purpose for learning is to know the language and culture of the community or to benefit one's employment or education (Gardner, 1985, 2010). Motivation can also be categorised into *intrinsic motivation* (i.e., factors internal to the learner such as individual curiosity or interest) and *extrinsic motivation* (i.e., factors externally determined by the socio-political setup of the learner's environment such as language attitudes influenced by the relationships within language communities) (see Deci & Ryan, 1985; Dörnyei, 2010, 2011, Campbell & Storch, 2011). Noels, Pelletier, Clement and Vallerand (2000) further developed a detailed model based on the distinction between intrinsic and extrinsic motivation. They defined extrinsically motivated behaviours as 'those actions carried out to achieve some instrumental end' (p.61), and divided extrinsic motivation into three types: (1) *external regulation*, which involves behaviours motivated by sources external to the learner such as tangible benefits and costs, (2) *introjected regulation*, which involves behaviour that results from some kind of pressure that individuals have incorporated into the self, and (3) *identified regulation*, consisting of behaviour that stems from personally relevant reasons. Intrinsic motivation was defined as 'motivation to engage in an activity because it is enjoyable and satisfying to do so' (p.61). The three types were distinguished (1) *knowledge* (i.e. the motivation derived from exploring new ideas and knowledge), (2) *accomplishment* (i.e. the pleasant sensations aroused by trying to achieve a

task or goal), and (3) *stimulation* (i.e. the fun and excitement generated by actually performing a task). Noels et al. also considered amotivation (i.e. the absence of any motive to learn). This model of motivation was largely confirmed by a factor-analysis study based on the responses to a questionnaire by Anglophone learners of L2 French in Canada. Given the fact that there is no clear one-on-one mapping of intrinsic motivation and integrative motivation, this paper adopts Noels *et al.* 's taxonomy.

It is necessary to distinguish between motivation and orientations. Although motivation, orientations or reasons are sometimes used interchangeably, they are defined differently in L2 motivation research. Reasons for learning are considered as orientations but not motivation because an orientation simply reflects a goal while motivation includes a complex of three components: attitudes toward learning the language, desire to learn the language and motivational intensity (Gardner, 1985). Only if an orientation is linked with effort spent on achieving a goal, a desire to learn and an enjoyable experience in doing so, can we meaningfully speak of a motivation. In this sense, motivation is closely related with goal-oriented language planning. Motivation can be characterised as a stable variable of individual difference (i.e., a trait) or a transient-state attribute, or a process that is in constant flux, going through ebbs and flows (Dörnyei, 2014). Finding out learners' motivations to learn a foreign language and how they are related to learners' learning strategies and behaviours will provide first-hand information to policy makers and improve the effectiveness of the implementation of policies (cf. Ager 2001).

3. Learning activities and strategies

Learning strategies define the approach learners adopt and specific actions or techniques used in learning an L2 (Ellis, 2008). They are influenced directly by learners' explicit beliefs about how best to learn, self-efficacy beliefs (Yang, 1999). Students' learning activities and strategies may also be influenced by teachers' teaching strategies and educational conditions. For instance, in the teacher-centred learning contexts, students dominantly adopt independent learning strategies. In student-centred teaching or learning contexts, students are given more chances to adopt collaborative and communicative learning strategies with a main focus on inter-personal communication. For young learners, their learning strategies in the classroom are generally the reflection of the teaching activities used by their teachers. In addition, the construct of learning strategies is closely related to motivation since effort to learn a foreign language is closely related to actions involved in learning activities. Studies show that matching teaching activities to preferred learning strategies can significantly enhance academic achievement, student attitudes, and student behaviour at the primary and secondary school level (Grigg & Dunn 1984; Smith & Renzulli, 1984). Therefore, finding out the learning activities preferred by L2 learners will inform policy makers and allow educators to adopt effective teaching strategies.

4. Method

4.1 Participants

Due to the time and logistic constraints (i.e. collecting data from a large number of young school learners and their teachers), this study used self-report questionnaires to collect data. Ten schools in the Illawarra region of NSW that offer Mandarin classes (6 Government primary schools, 1 independent school, 2 Christian schools, and 1 community school) were

approached by email. Four non-government schools gave consent and participated in the study. Because few government schools in this area offer Mandarin as a LOTE course, their students usually study Mandarin at after-school programs offered by Chinese community schools. In fact, the 120 participants recruited from the Chinese community school were officially enrolled in 10 different government schools in this region. In this sense, the participants of this study represent a large sample of the targeted population.

The survey was conducted between March and May in 2013. After obtaining consent from their parents, the students in the 4 schools were approached in class through their teachers. All questionnaires were administered in a written form in English. In the case where young participants had difficulties to read and understand written items, their teachers explained the items verbally to ensure that the questions were understood and the students' responses reflected their own beliefs. Participants received stationary as incentives.

Participants consist of 149 school students, 4 school principals/coordinators and 14 teachers. The students who participated in this study consisted of 72 males (47%) and 77 females (53%), with a mean age of 8.6 years old (range 4-14). 130 participants (87%) claimed that their first language was English; 16 of them (11%) spoke other languages as their first language; and only 3 students (2%) claimed that their first language was Chinese. They started learning Mandarin at approximately 5.6 years of age. According to the clarifications of foreign language learners in Australian Curriculum, 74% of the participants (n=108) were L2 learners 'who are introduced to learning the target language at school as an additional, new language'. The rest of them (26%) were background language learners 'who may use the language at home, not necessarily exclusively, and have varying degrees of knowledge of and proficiency in the language being learnt' (Australian Curriculum, 2014). This cohort of participants fell into three categories: 1) 5 Chinese born in a Chinese speaking environment (e.g. China, Taiwan, Hong Kong, Singapore) (3.5%), 2) 17 Chinese born in a non-Chinese speaking environment (e.g. Australia) (15.5%), and 3) 12 Chinese-related (e.g. one of parents or grandparents is Chinese) (23.9%). None of the participants in this study was first language learners 'who have undertaken at least primary schooling in the target language environment' (Australian Curriculum, 2014). Only 27 (18%) of the participants had ever visited China.

The distribution of students enrolled in different school years is shown in Figure 1. It shows that Year 7, Year 4 and Year 3 students accounted for more than 50% of the population. The participants can be divided into three groups: Kindergarten (n=9), primary (n=78), and secondary students (n=62), which account for 6%, 52%, and 42% of the whole sample, respectively.

Figure 1. The distribution of the Mandarin students in different school years
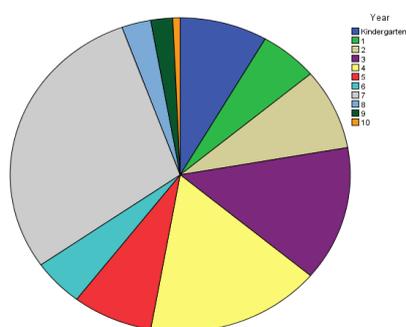
The average hours of Mandarin lessons that the students took every week (see Figure 2) was about the same except for Kindergarten (i.e., pre-school) and Year 7 students. This

reflects the fact that the pre-school students had sufficient time to learn a foreign language and the new Mandarin programs designed for Year 7 students provided more contact hours. That is, the Year 7 students took approximately 4 hours of Mandarin lessons per week, which is much higher than the mean of 2.6 hours.

Figure 2. Average hours of Mandarin classes in terms of school years (Mean= 2.6)
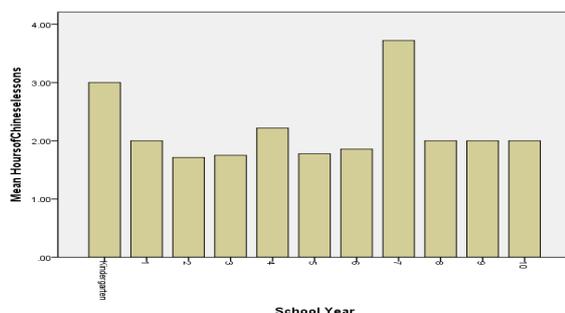
With regards to 'time spent on learning Chinese outside of class', the students spent more time on studying out of class with the increase of school years although the number dropped in Year 10 (See Figure 3). A large group of school learners (n=61) never studied Mandarin outside of class.

Figure 3. Hours of learning out of class in terms of school years
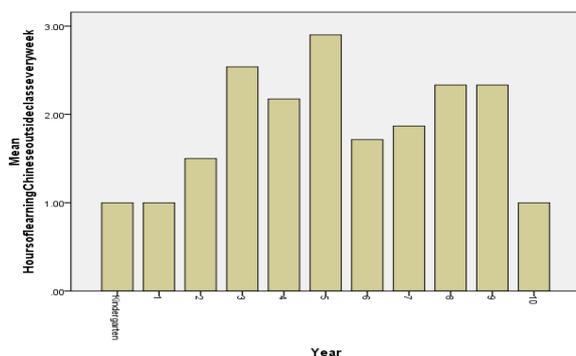
4.2 Instruments

The questionnaire for students consisted of three sections: a background section containing 11 items, a motivation section (item 12) and a preferred learning activities section (item 13) (See Appendix 1). The background section was used to obtain information on learners' age, gender, first language, ethnicity, starting age and hours of Mandarin lessons, etc.. Each of the learning activities and motivation sections contains 17 items, as well as one open question. Students were required to select on a six-point Likert Scale, with 0 representing strongly disagree and 5 representing strongly agree. A number of school teachers were consulted on if the content of the items reflects actual teaching situations in local schools and whether the wording suits school students' levels of proficiency in English. The questionnaires were piloted with five school learners of Mandarin and two Mandarin school teachers in Australia. The wording of some items was revised (e.g., 'strategies' was replaced by 'methods') to accommodate participants with low literacy. Two items (i.e. 'Crafts and

other cultural activities' and 'excursions' which were actually used by the teachers) were added to the learning activities section.

Principals and teachers were invited to complete text-based interviews by responding to different questionnaires (see Appendices 2 and 3) during the above period of the survey. Each of the questionnaires consists of multiple choice and open-ended questions. The Questionnaire for Principals asks information on the student number of the school, hours of Mandarin lessons, numbers of Mandarin teachers, when and why their Mandarin lessons started, what support they received, and what challenges they face when promoting Chinese language and culture.

The Questionnaire for Teachers includes questions about their teaching background, teaching strategies; reasons for teaching Mandarin at schools, hours of teaching, numbers of students, what challenges they face when teaching Mandarin, and what kinds of support are needed.

4.3 Analysis

A mixed method approach was used to analyse the data. Descriptive statistics and factor analysis were used to analyse quantitative data. The former was used to find out mean rating scores of learners' responses to the items about motivations and preferred learning activities; the latter was used to extract underlying factors characterising learners' motivations and preferred learning activities. The reliability of the two Likert scales (Cronbach's Alpha) reached 0.88 and 0.89, respectively, which meets the established reliability criterion (an alpha value of 0.8 is generally acceptable). Qualitative data collected from the teachers' and principals' narrative responses to open-ended interview questions were summarised to answer research question 3 (See Sections 5.3 and 5.4 for more details).

5. Results and discussion

5.1 What were the students' motivations to learn Mandarin?

The first research question investigated what was the students' motivation to learn Mandarin. As descriptive statistics (Table 1) show, the students' top five orientations for learning Mandarin were: 1) understand people with different language and cultural background (13.2) (M= 3.90); 2) benefit my travel or living in China (13.5) (M= 3.61); 3) I'm curious about Chinese language and culture (13.1) (M= 3.56); 4) It is cool to speak a language that most of Australians cannot understand (13.14) (M= 3.50); and 5) to communicate with relatives and native speakers who don't speak English (13.6) (M= 3.45).

In order to reveal underlying factors characterising relationships among the orientations, a factor analysis (Principal component analysis along with Varimax rotation method) was used. Criteria for remaining factor are a minimum Eigenvalue of 1. KMO and Bartlett's Test was significant at .000 level with a Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy of .82. A total of five factors were extracted from the 17 orientations and characterise the students' motivations for learning Mandarin. Table 2 demonstrates the rotated component (factor) matrix and the total variance explained by the five factors.

Table 1: Description Statistics for orientations for learning Mandarin

Orientation items	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
13.2	149	3.90	1.57
13.5	149	3.61	1.93
13.1	149	3.56	1.72
13.14	149	3.50	1.79
13.6	149	3.45	1.97
13.9	149	3.43	1.74
13.4	149	3.41	1.79
13.17	149	3.30	2.07
13.13	149	3.30	1.78
13.15	149	3.30	1.97
13.10	149	3.25	2.01
13.7	149	3.22	2.45
13.3	149	2.93	2.36
13.16	149	2.93	2.45
13.11	149	2.72	2.60
13.8	149	1.76	2.15
13.12	149	1.72	1.88

Table 2: Rotated Component Matrix _orientations for learning Mandarin

Rotated Component Matrixa					
Orientation items	Component				
	1	2	3	4	5
13.1		.57			
13.2		.71			
13.3			.64		
13.4		.70			
13.5		.75			
13.6		.74			
13.7			.72		
13.8				.72	
13.9	.65				
13.10	.81				
13.11			.83		
13.12				.72	
13.13	.77				
13.14	.57				

13.15	.64				
13.16			.79		
13.17					.83
Variance explained (%)	17.83	17.58	16.68	10.27	7.88
Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis. Rotation Method: Varimax with Kaiser Normalization.					

Factor 1 includes items 13.9, 13.10, 13.13, 13.14, and 13.15, which are related to external regulation and the ideal self (e.g., ordering food, loving martial arts, linguistic self-confidence, and pleasing parents). These factors explained 17.83% of the total variance. Factor 2 represents items 13.1, 13.2, 13.4, 13.5, and 13. 6, which are related to intrinsic motivation (knowledge and accomplishment) such as interests in the language and culture, understanding the people who speak the language, and making friends with them. This factor explained 17.58% of the total variance. Factor 3 includes items 13.3, 13.7, 13.11, and 13.16, which are related to personally relevant reasons (e.g., mandatory study at school, family reasons and friendship). This can be identified as the third type of extrinsic motivation, identified regulation. This factor explained 16.68% of the total variance. Factor 4 consists of items 13.8 and 13.12, which are related to the force of parents and the society. This can be identified as the second type of extrinsic motivation, introjected regulation, which involves the behaviour that results from some kind of pressure that individuals have incorporated into the self. This factor explained 10.27% of the total variance. Factor 5 only represents item 13.17 (employability). This type of extrinsic motivation, external regulation, explained 7.88% of the total variance. The five factors accounted for 70.23% of the total variance.

The results show that the school students' learning of Mandarin was motivated by three types of extrinsic motivation and intrinsic motivation (knowledge and accomplishment). This finding largely confirmed Noels et al.'s motivation model because intrinsic and extrinsic motivations generally loaded on different factors. The only exception was that factor one consists of external regulation and the ideal self. In fact, the ideal self or linguistic self-confidence to a certain extent is extrinsic in nature. This is because if learners cannot receive respects or compliments for their behaviours, the effects of motivation may cease immediately. This finding can be explained by the fact that the young school learners (4-14 years of age) generally studied Mandarin for instrumental needs (e.g. ordering food) and the requirements of their parents and schools. Their intrinsic motivation (e.g. 'interest in Chinese language and culture') was driven by the desire to understand Chinese people and culture and to develop friendship and social relationships with Mandarin speakers.

Interestingly, item 13.8 ('my parents force me to study') received the second lowest mean score although all teachers confirmed that parents' attitudes influenced students' performance in their text-based interview. It seems that the external factor (parents' attitudes) influenced students through stimulating students' intrinsic motivation ('interests in Chinese language and culture') in combination with teachers' inspiring and interesting teaching. This is because meaningful input perceived by the learner as relevant to his/her needs can stimulate intrinsic motivation and indirectly favour learning (Dörnyei, 1998; Keller, 1983). Studies show that learners with an instrumental reason for learning an L2 can be successful although it appears less influential and less stable than integrative/intrinsic motivation. However, the effects of extrinsic motivation may cease as soon as the reward stops (Ellis, 2008). This explained the Australian Mandarin learners' high drop-out rate. Once rewards or funds stop, school learners will stop learning this difficult language. If their achievement could not be admitted and recognised by the society, they will lose their interest in continuing their study.

Item 13.17 (employability) and other items representing external regulation (e.g. ordering food) loaded on different factors. This may reflect the fact that it was far too early for the young school learners to consider their future career and employment. Therefore, item 13.17 ('help me to find a good job') loaded on a factor different from the one related to other instrumental needs in their real-life situations.

5.2 What learning activities did the students prefer when learning Mandarin?

Research question two dealt with what learning activities the school learners preferred when learning Mandarin. This question was answered by comparing the means of the students' responses to item 12 in the Questionnaire to Students. Descriptive statistics (Table 3) show that the top five learning activities preferred by them were: crafts and cultural activities (12.13), playing games (12.9), visiting or travel in China (12.3), singing Chinese songs (12.15), and getting a reward from teachers (12.7). There was a good match between the preferred learning activities chosen by the students and the effective teaching strategies reported by their teachers. For example, Joe, one of the teachers, mentioned that "I have initiated cultural activities (e.g. cooking and crafts) this year. The students love these lessons very much and talk constantly about our experiences". The finding suggests that young school learners prefer learning Mandarin through playing games and collaborative tasks. Materialistic rewards and incentives play a significant role to motivate their learning.

Table 3: Description Statistics for preferred learning activities in Mandarin classes

Learning activities items	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
12.13	149	3.13	1.61
12.9	149	2.87	1.62
12.3	149	2.71	1.58
12.15	149	2.68	1.83
12.7	149	2.66	1.78
12.12	149	2.63	1.81
12.16	149	2.56	1.79
12.14	149	2.48	1.92
12.6	149	2.47	1.60
12.2	149	2.45	1.60
12.10	149	2.39	1.64
12.17	149	2.32	1.70
12.11	149	2.26	1.82
12.5	149	2.22	1.77
12.8	149	2.21	1.67
12.4	149	2.06	1.59
12.1	149	1.91	1.62

A factor analysis (Principal component analysis along with Varimax rotation method) was used to reveal underlying factors characterising the preferred learning activities. Criteria for remaining factor are a minimum Eigenvalue of 1. KMO and Bartlett's Test was significant at .000 level with a Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy of .77. A total of six factors were extracted from the 17 items about learning activities. Table 4 demonstrates the rotated component (factor) matrix and the total variance explained by the six factors. Items 12.9, 12.10, 12.11, 12.12, 12.13, and 12.16, which are related to collaborative social activities, loaded on factor one. This factor explained 18.89% of the total variance. Factor 2 consists of three items 12.2, 12.5, and 12.7 which are related to audio-oral classroom learning activities (e.g. audio-tapes, singing Chinese songs). This factor explained for 14.25% of the total variance. Factor 3 includes items 12.4 (reading Chinese stories) and 12.8 (role play in class) which involves narrative and story elements. Factor 4 consists of items 12.14, 12.15, and 12.17 which are related to immersion in Chinese cultural and real-life contexts. This factor explained 10.27% of the total variance. Factor 5 consists of items 12.1 (watching Chinese movies/TV shows) and 12. 6 (writing characters), which are the extension activities of classroom learning. This factor explained 10.09% of the total variance. Factor 6 only consists of item 12.3 (reading Chinese textbooks). This factor explained 8.31% of the total variance. The six factors explained a total of 73.72% of the total variance.

Table 4: Rotated Component Matrix _Preferred Learning Activities

Rotated Component Matrix[a]						
	Component					
	1	2	3	4	5	6
12.1					.82	
12.2		.78				
12.3						.86
12.4			.81			
12.5		.68				
12.6					.76	
12.7		.74				
12.8			.81			
12.9	.60					
12.10	.77					
12.11	.49					
12.12	.74					
12.13	.63					
12.14				.48		
12.15				.77		
12.16	.77					
12.17				.79		
Variance explained (%)	18.89	14.25	11.92	10.27	10.09	8.31
Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis. Rotation Method: Varimax with Kaiser Normalization.						
a. Rotation converged in 12 iterations.						

The finding suggests that the young Australian school learners prefer to process information actively through engagement in physical activities or experiencing the real world collaboratively. For the young school students, they preferentially perceive sensory – sounds, sights and physical sensational over intuitive memorises, ideas and insights. They perceive sensory information through multifaceted modes: verbal (spoken and written), visual-auditory (e.g., hearing speech) and visual-verbal (e.g., reading text and seeing pictures) modes. The audio-oral method that the participants preferred combines inductive acquired verbal skills and deductive learned reading and writing skills, with emphasis on the former. Community language learning (e.g. excursions) and physical responses (e.g. cooking) also fall into the former category. The loadings of the six factors lend support to Stice (1987)'s finding about the effectiveness of different learning modes, that is, students retain 10% of what they read, 26% of what they hear, 30% of what they see, 50% of what they see and hear, 70% of what they say, and 90% of what they say as they do something. Because matching teaching strategies to learning styles can significantly enhance academic achievement particularly in foreign language settings (Griggs & Duun 1984; Smith & Renzulli, 1984), this finding suggests that teachers should balance different teaching approaches and match their teaching styles to learners' learning styles and preferences.

5.3 Challenges faced by school teachers

Research question three intends to find out the challenges faced by school teachers when teaching Mandarin and by principals when offering this language. This question was answered by analysing the participants' narrative responses. The teachers' names used below are pseudonyms. The text-based interview data show that the challenges faced by the teachers mainly lie in three aspects:

1) Challenges to motivate learners.

For example, Jane, a high school teacher, claimed that "Students like Chinese culture and food more than Chinese language". Other teachers also commented that "The students are not well motivated, so classroom management is challenging", "It is hard to motivate students' interest in picking up a foreign language", and "Students like Chinese culture and food, but feel it's hard to remember words". Linda, a pre-school teacher added that "Students are too young to learn a second language in a classroom environment". Peter also reported that "It is difficult to make learning of a foreign language relevant to students' experience". To motivate students to learn a difficult foreign language (e.g. Mandarin), teachers need to teach new material (vocabulary, rules of grammar) in the context of situations to which the students can relate in terms of their personal experiences rather than simply more material to memorise. This requires that bilingual teachers should be familiar with both English and Chinese languages and cultures, L2 pedagogy, and classroom management.

2) Difficulties in obtaining accreditation and assistance in professional development.

Several Chinese community school teachers mentioned that it was extremely difficult to get qualifications and accreditation required for teaching at government schools in NSW. In particular, those who obtained their qualifications in China on a non-Chinese majored degree encountered double barriers: 1) difficulties in finding suitable Chinese subjects at the designated universities. This is because the majority of Chinese subjects in Australian universities were designed for non-native speakers; 2) financial pressure. To get the qualification and accreditation, applicants must complete four subjects in the area of teaching (Mandarin) associated with a degree in designated Australian universities (Department of Education, New South Wales, 2012). There is no Chinese proficiency

placement test available in NSW as in Victoria. To avoid extra financial burden, the majority of interested pre-service teachers chose to teach at Chinese community schools where the requirements for accreditation are relatively loose.

In addition, some teachers claimed that the lack of suitable teaching resources made it more difficult to teach such a difficult language, particularly for non-native speaker teachers. As Peter mentioned, "As I am not proficient I really rely on programs such as Google Translator to fill in the gaps when my Mandarin audio-visual resources are not with me." He was in desperate need of assistance in teaching materials, textbooks, and teacher training. Although the Hanban (the Head Office of Chinese Language funded by Chinese Government) donated teaching resources and organised volunteer trainee teachers to help with Chinese programs in Australian schools, their contact with local schools, particularly with the non-government ones, was generally neglected. In addition, the textbooks and teaching materials without English notes can neither reflect Australian contexts and local teaching situations nor satisfy the needs of non-native speaker teachers with a low proficiency level of Mandarin. Teacher training programs delivered in Mandarin are often far beyond the understanding and language competencies of the non-native speaker teachers. It is necessary to edit teaching material and resources which meet the requirement of Australian Curriculum for L2 Chinese and provide them to local non-native speaker teachers.

3) Challenges in recruiting and teaching students.

Some teachers also mentioned that recruiting students was challenging. At the schools which offer multiple foreign languages, students have more choices rather than only one. Therefore, foreign language programs and teachers have to compete with each other in order to reach the benchmarking number required for offering that language. This to a certain extent led to tensions between foreign language teachers. Even though the language subject was offered, the teachers struggled with getting sufficient teaching hours. Due to budget constraints, students with different proficiency levels were allocated to one class, which increased the difficulties in classroom management and providing high-quality teaching tailored to students' specific needs. To avoid these problems, some local schools encouraged the interested students to study Mandarin at Chinese community schools rather than offered this subject.

With regards to 'parents' influences on students', the teachers consistently reported that parents' attitudes determined students' performance in Chinese lessons. For example, some claimed that "If parents are very supportive and the teaching in the right way, the result would be very satisfactory." Joe also reported,

> "Students tend to show more interest if their parents are also learning or used to learn Chinese. Also, if students' parents have an interest in China/ Chinese students are also more motivated to learn the language."

5.4 Challenges that principals faced to promote Mandarin

Principals/coordinators of foreign language programs were text-interviewed regarding the challenges that they faced to promote Mandarin. Based on their responses, the challenges that they faced can be summarised in four aspects: (a) teacher, (b) teaching, (c) funding, and (d) the difficulty of the language itself.

First, it is difficult to find teachers-in-services in Mandarin. On the one hand, principals, particularly those of independent schools, were pushed by parents to offer Mandarin; on the other hand, they struggled to find qualified teachers, who have both bilingual language competencies and accreditation. As previously mentioned, Hanban set

apart native-speaker trainee teachers to assist Mandarin teaching at local schools. However, the trainee teachers also confronted a set of challenges, for example, they are unfamiliar with Australian 'cultures of learning', perceive low levels of learner motivation, and have difficulties in teaching Mandarin in English (Scrimgeour, 2010). Moreover, without accreditation, the trainee teachers must be mentored by accredited teachers as a teaching aid. Even though qualified volunteer teachers were available, the majority of the schools struggled to meet the minimum requirement for hiring them (i.e., paying for their accommodation). Therefore, the principals were desperate for local specialists' regular visits, guidance to their Chinese classroom teaching, and professional teacher training.

The second challenge was the shortage of funding (i.e., sustainable financial support) and resources. For example, an independent school initiated the Mandarin program to develop an Asian language curriculum three years ago after receiving a community grant. However, with the end of the funding period, they had to desperately seek external financial support to maintain teachers and a student pathway.

Third, the school principals also indicated their needs for assistance with establishing international collaborations with sister schools in China. This is usually beyond Chinese teachers' duties and requires an enormous amount of work, intercultural understanding, native speaker language fluency, and broad networks with schools in China.

Finally, some principals reinforced that the difficulty of the language itself was a huge challenge for both teachers and students. Indeed, research shows that Mandarin students take five times longer to reach a specified level of competency than learners' of European languages (Kane, 2006). In effect, learning Mandarin equals to learning two different languages because there is no direct relationship between its phonetic and orthographic systems. Both pictorial characters and tonal phonetic system are challenging to English speaking learners. To learn this language, students need sustainable motivation to drive them through the relatively longer process in addition to sufficient time in teaching and learning. To teach Mandarin, teachers need to match their teaching approaches to those which students prefer and to accommodate their proficiency levels. To promote this language, different types of support are needed, for example, personnel support from principals and volunteer teachers, financial support from all sorts of funding bodies, and professional support from experienced teachers and academics.

6. Final Discussion and Conclusion

This study examined the Australian school learners' motivations for learning Mandarin, their preferred learning activities, and the challenges that teachers and principals faced in teaching and promoting this language. It was found that Australian school learners' primary motivation to learn Mandarin was a combination of extrinsic (external regulation, introjected regulation and identified regulation) (e.g., getting material incentives from teachers) and intrinsic motivations (e.g., understanding Chinese language and culture). The young school learners favoured collaborative and cultural immersion learning activities (e.g., crafts, cooking, and excursions) over traditional classroom learning activities (e.g., character writing and reading textbooks). Teachers faced a number of challenges when promoting and teaching Mandarin, for example, the difficulties in motivating younger learners to learn a foreign language, pressure in recruiting students, shortage of teaching resources, and a lack of assistance in professional development. Principals saw the significance of promoting Mandarin, however, their actions were restricted by the availability of funding and qualified teachers.

As a descriptive study, its limitations are inevitable. First, the school students were not selected randomly but following the convenience principle. Second, some participants were too young to read and understand the questions themselves. Their school teachers helped with explaining the questions, which may potentially influence the students' responses.

This study allows us to make a number of suggestions in terms of language planning and language teaching. To improve the effects of language planning, it is necessary to strengthen the role of educational administration at the meso level[iii], in addition to the macro and micro levels (see, Kaplan and Baldauf 1997). For example, agencies like Languages and Cultures Network for Australian Universities (LCNAU) and Chinese Language Teachers Associations could play a critical role in this campaign. There is a need to establish collaborations between school teachers and 'specialists' at universities and develop national and international collaborations to improve teaching quality in schools. It is necessary to build relationships among academics, Chinese teachers, Chinese communities, and local societies to promote Mandarin among Australians. To increase student numbers of Mandarin and improve teaching quality, it is necessary to put the Australian National Chinese Language Curriculum into practice, develop different pathways for learners with different backgrounds (L1, background and L2 learners). It is better to prioritise one of the language competencies for L2 learners (say spoken competence), which mirrors the trajectory of the learning process by Chinese native speakers. This will ease the learning process by allowing students to cope with many challenges one at a time. Academics with expertise in teaching and learning Mandarin as an L2 should be involved in providing language training and consultations for Mandarin school teachers. By doing so, we can develop healthy and sustainable pathways for Australian students of Mandarin.

Notes

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[i] The Chinese language family consists of seven major dialect families, each of which consists of many dialects. The Mandarin dialects (or the northern dialects) are spoken by more than 70 percent of Chinese population and is a lingua franca in China. Mandarin mainly focuses on the spoken system, while Chinese is used as an overarching word for both spoken and written systems and culture. Given the fact that Mandarin is widely used in the Australian context, this paper uses Mandarin to indicate Chinese language and uses Chinese to modify Chinese people and culture.

[ii] The previous campaigns include:
(1) 1991, the Australia's language: the Australian language and literary policy White Paper (ALLP) (1991-2005) (DEET, 1991a, 1991b)
(2) 1994-2002, National Asian Languages and Studies in Australian Schools (NALSAS) Strategy (COAG,1994)
(3) the National Statement and Plan for Language Education in Australian Schools (2005-2008) (henceforth Statement and Plan) (MCEETYA, 2005)
(4) the National Asian Languages and Studies in Schools Program (NALSSP) (2009-2012) (DEEWR, 2009b)

[iii] With regard to the field of language policy and planning, Kaplan and Baldauf (1997) suggested that language planning occurred at several levels, the macro, the meso and the micro.

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Appendices

Appendix 1. Questionnaire to Students

Please circle the most suitable answer for each of the following questions or fill an answer in each blank.

1. You are a _____.

Pre-school student   B. Primary school student   C. High school student

      Gender   A. Male   B. Female

        Age   5-6   7-8   9-10   11-12 13-14 15-16 17-18

2. What year are you in?

Kindergarten

Year 1 2 3 4 5   6   Year 7   8   9   10   11   Year 12

Tertiary level   1   2   3

3. Are you _____?

        A. Chinese born in a Chinese speaking environment

           (e.g. China, Taiwan, Hong Kong, Singapore)

        B. Chinese born in a non-Chinese speaking environment (e.g. Australia)

C. Chinese-related (e.g. one of parents or grandparents is Chinese)
D. a non-Chinese background student

4. What is your first language?
 A. English   B. Chinese   C. Other language _____

5. What other languages do you speak?
_____

6. What languages do you speak most frequently at home?
_____

7. How old were you when you studied learning Chinese?
_____

8. Have you visited China? If 'yes' for how long?
   A. Yes   B. No
   For how long? _____

9. Where have you studied Chinese previously and for how long?

Place?	For how long?

10. How many hours of Chinese lessons do you take every week？
A. < 1 hour   B. 1 hour   C. 2 hours   D.   3 hours   E. _____

11. How many hours do you spend on learning Chinese outside class every week？
 A. None   B. < 1 hour   C. 1 hour   D. 2 hours   E.   3 hours   F. _____

12. Which of the following helped you in your learning of Chinese?

Method	Not effective at all	Somewhat effective	A little effective	Not sure	Effective	Very effective
	0	1	2	3	4	5
12.1 Watching Chinese movies/TV shows /animations						
12.2 Using Chinese educational resources						
12.3 Reading Chinese textbooks						
12.4 Reading Chinese story books						
12.5 Listening to audio-tapes/mp3						
12.6 Writing characters						
12.7 Sing Chinese songs						
12.8 Doing role play in class						
12.9 Playing games						
12.10 Chatting with Chinese friends						
12.11 Playing Chinese games online						
12.12 Getting a reward from my teacher						
12.13 Crafts or other cultural activities						
12.14 Excursion						

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Slightly disagree	Slightly agree	Agree	Strongly agree	Not applicable
12.15 Visiting or travel in China							
12.16 Making new friends							
12.17 Making oversea Chinese friends							
Other_____							

13. What are your reasons for learning Chinese? Please rate the following reasons on a 6-point scale where 0 = Strongly disagree, 1= Disagree, 2 = Slightly disagree, 3 = Slightly agree, 4 = Agree, 5 = Strongly agree, NA = Not Applicable.

Reason?	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Slightly disagree	Slightly agree	Agree	Strongly agree	Not applicable
	0	1	2	3	4	5	NA
13.1 I am curious about Chinese language and culture							
13.2 It will allow me to understand people with different language and cultural background							
13.3 It is mandatory to study at my school							
13.4 It will help me to make more Chinese friends							
13.5 It will benefit my travel or living in China							
13.6 It will allow me to communicate with relatives and native speakers who don't speak English							
13.7 For family reasons (e.g., a member of family is Chinese)							
13.8 My parents force me to study							
13.9 I like Chinese food, so learning Chinese will allow me to order food in Chinese restaurants							
13.10 I like the Chinese martial arts							
13.11 My best friend is Chinese							
13.12 Everybody in Australia should be able to speak Chinese							
13.13 I want to do well in this class because it is important to show my ability to others (such as my family/ friends/ supervisors/others)							
13.14 It is cool to speak a language that most of Australians cannot understand							
13.15 If I can speak Chinese, it will make my parents happy							
13.16 If I can speak Chinese, I can help with my parents' business							
13.17 It will help me to find a good job							
Other_____							

Appendix 2. Questionnaire to Principles/Coordinators

Your email:_____

Please circle the most suitable answer for each of the following questions or fill an answer in each blank or answer the questions in either English or Chinese.

1. What is the total number of students at your school?
   A. <49   B. 50-99   C. 100-199   D. 200-399
   E. 400-599   F. 600-799   G. 800-999   H. >1000
2. Is your school a _____?
   A. public school B. private school   C. Community school D. Independent school
   E．Other_____
3. Does your school currently offer Chinese (Mandarin) lessons?
   A. Yes   B. No
   IF YOUR ANSWER TO THIS QUESTION IS 'NO', PLESAE GO TO QUESTION 15
4. How long ago did your school start offering Chinese lessons? What motived your school to do so?
5. How many students are taking Chinese lessons in your school?
6. How many hours do your students study Chinese per week?
7. How many Chinese language teachers do you have?
8. Do you follow any of these Chinese language curricula? Why?
K-10 Curriculum   B. 7-10 Curriculum   C. Not applicable
What benefits have you seen from students taking Chinese?
9. Have you identified any disadvantages from students taking Chinese? If so, what are they?
10. Has your school received any funding or support to offer Chinese lessons?
Yes   B. No
11. If your answer is 'Yes', what are the funding sources?
 Federal Government   B. State Government   C. Local communities
Private Grants   E. Others_____
12. What challenges have your school faced in offering Chinese classes?
13. Do you prefer to receive assistance in any of the following ways?
Textbooks   B. Teaching resources
C. Qualified Mandarin teachers   D. Teaching assistants (volunteer teachers from China)
E. Chinese Teacher Training Program
F. Others_____
14. What opportunities are appealing to your school?
A. Sponsored principals' visits to China
B. Sponsored Chinese teacher training programs in China
C. Receiving teaching material
D. Students' visits to schools in China
E. Mandarin camps for students and language teachers
F. Others_____
ANSWER THE QUESTIONS BELOW IF YOUR SCHOOL DOES NOT CURRENTLY OFFER CHINESE LESSONS.
 15. Are you intending to offer Chinese lessons in the future?
Yes   B. No
If your answer is 'Yes', when are you going to offer Chinese lessons?
16. What challenges do you face if you offer Chinese lessons?
17. What challenges do you face if you do not offer Chinese lessons?
OTHER COMMENTS

Appendix 3. Questionnaire to teachers

Your email:_____

Please circle the most suitable answer for each of the following questions or fill an answer in each blank or answer the questions in either English or Chinese.

1. How long ago did you start teaching Chinese? What motived you to do so?
2. How many hours of Chinese lessons do you teach per week?
3. How many different Chinese lessons do you teach per week?
4. How many students are you teaching at the moment in total per week?
5. What years are your students in?

Kindergarten

Year 1   2   3   4   5   6   Year 7   8   9   10   11   Year 12

Tertiary level   1   2   3

Adults

Not applicable

6. Do you teach Chinese to any of the following groups of students?

Chinese background students

Chinese heritage students

Non-Chinese background students

D.   _____

7. Do you follow any of the Chinese language curricula? Why?

K-10 Curriculum   B. 7-10 Curriculum   C. Not applicable

8. What support have you received from your school?
9. What challenges have you faced in your teaching?
10. Do you expect to receive support in any of the following ways?

A. Textbooks   B. Teacher training   C. Teaching resources   D. Teaching assistants (volunteer teachers from China)

E. Others_____

11. What opportunities are appealing to you?

A. Sponsored Chinese teacher training programs in Australia

B. Sponsored Chinese teacher training programs in China

C. Receiving teaching material

D. Getting a teaching assistant

F. More teaching hours

G. Others _____

12. Based on your teaching experience, does parents' attitude determine/influence students' performance in your Chinese lessons? If so, in what ways?

13. Which of the following are effective in motivating your students to learn Chinese?

A. Interactive teaching using fun games or multimedia facilities

B. Only speak Chinese to students in class

C. Peer-to-Peer learning (e.g., ask Chinese background students to work with non-background students)

D. Give students incentives (gifts, rewards, credits)

E. Ask them to make friends with Chinese background students

F. Organising cultural activities

G. Show students movies and pictures about China

H. Parents' cooperation and encouragement

I. Others_____