

# Influence of Chinese Cultural Circumstances on Improving English Speaking of College Students in Nanchang, China

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## Abstract

The purpose of the research is to develop a detailed understanding of Chinese cultural circumstances and its influence on English speaking skills of students. The problem of the research is the inability of communication of students in the English language due to cultural influence. From the findings of the research, it can be demonstrated that influence of Confucianism and Taoism has impacted cultural beliefs and values of students in their English speaking skills. Collectivism and group Harmony are other aspects of Chinese culture which influence English speaking skills. The literature gap of the research is lack of availability of research based on the influence of cultural circumstances on specially English speaking skills of college students of Nanchang, China. The methods applied in this study aimed at comprehensively examining the relationship between English language learning and Chinese cultural influences was in the form of positivism research philosophy, deductive approach and explanatory research design. It was further followed by a primary quantitative data collection method. It enables us to gather first-hand data and learn the challenges which college students face while learning an English language and provide tailored solutions to them. The method employed harmoniously intertwined with the research topic and rendered a structured as well as systematic framework to extract the information required to meet the objective of the study. The sample size of 250 teachers and the students associated with the different colleges in Nanchang were considered for this research study. The use of the mixed study methodology contributed to providing the value of English language proficiency among Nanchang, China's college students. The survey was used to conduct the quantitative research and the data collected was analysed with the aid of statistical tools like the SPSS.

**Keywords:** Chinese Cultural Circumstances, English Speaking Skills, Inability of Communication, Confucianism, Taoism

**Introduction**

Chinese Mandarin has the highest number of native speakers. However, the English language is becoming popular among college students across China as it has become a basic means of communication enabling students to exchange their views with foreign students. Established as a mode of easy communication, conversing in English allows students to engage in interaction for varied purposes and requirements. This universal language helps them to explain or elaborate their ideas, give commands, and ask questions so that every matter gets resolved through proper interaction. The purpose of the study is to evaluate how students in Nanchang are coming out of their cultural barriers and welcoming the English language as their primary mode of communication (Tan & Yang, 2019). The study will focus on why a large section of Chinese students have started learning English and use this language in their daily lives. While the research focuses on the effects on the English language as an outcome of its universal use among orators from many dialectal and cultural backgrounds, the main focus of the study will remain on the influence of Chinese cultural circumstances on improving English speaking abilities among college students in Nanchang, China and also on the influence of English language on Chinese native language and ethos.

The study will address some core concerns and issues about the influence of the English on Chinese language and culture, and signify some of the implications for instructors and language students so that they can reflect on their learning experience and learning targets. The reason to conduct the study is to understand the profound impact of the English language on the daily learning experiences of students across various colleges in Nanchang. The study will analyse how recent trends in the global education system have influenced students to improve their communication skills and help themselves in learning new ways to express their ideas or thoughts without disrupting their cultural ethos (Shi, 2022). It is important to understand how much students should devote their time to learning a foreign language so that they get all the needed skills to communicate to a large audience easily. The need of this study is to assess how Chinese students react when they are asked to learn English as this is a foreign language and they might face hardships in acquiring the required skills to grasp it and be able to speak and write properly. Understandably, the students' cultural circumstances do not support them to converse in English. Unaccustomed to the communication procedure, students are reluctant and afraid to engage in speaking that should be done spontaneously and naturally (Gan, Liu & Nang, 2023).

The challenges are mainly exhibited in the communication training for a college level in which the researcher is involved as an educator. Despite the universal appeal of the English language, students in most colleges in Nanchang seem to be lacking in learning enthusiasm. The need for this study has arisen to understand why the students are reluctant to participate and learn this language and engage themselves in communicating in English. It has been observed that instead of utilizing the opportunity to enhance their speaking capabilities, they are passive with less attention to the study material handed over to them. These behaviors and attitudes will inevitably have an impact on their communication abilities (Li, Xie & Zeng, 2023). However, the students cannot be blamed for such dilemmas. Hence, it is important to help the students to be able to learn and use the English language in real-life situations and engage in both formal and informal discussions. The purpose of the study is to find out key points that need to be addressed so that proper study materials are prepared with adequate, authentic, and relevant resources. However, it has been found that several study materials

that are used in most colleges in Nanchang do not meet the required criteria that would encourage students to learn English in the most effective manner.

The reason of this investigative research work is to understand the psychological issues faced by the students who intend to come out of their closet and learn a completely new language and use it as their second language. They know that learning and speaking the English language is a need of time and hence they are participating in various workshops under guidance of trained educators to get familiar with the English diction. The purpose of the study is highlight the importance of culture infiltration in the English learning process in various colleges in Nanchang, China. The main aim is to cultivate learners and improve their listening and speaking skills and encourage them to use the language for their future work as well as social interactions. The requirement of this research is demanding as the outcome will help numerous students to enhance their capability of autonomous education and boost their comprehensive cultural quality to adapt to the requirements of present economic development and global exchange in the country (Lyu, 2022). Hence the study will help to identify that the educators should come forward and teach students not only the basic English but also train them to use the language in their career development programs. The instructors should also help students to target culture and historical knowledge. Earlier the students were only allowed to use their native language to study and conduct research. But due to globalisation of education, there has been a need for English learning techniques across China and hence the study is required to assess all angles from both students' perspective as well as teachers'.

The cultural education in China is chaotic currently. Teachers are arbitrary and random in instruction methods, while learners only get the opportunity to learn languages based on their interests. At the same time, some educators' cultural literacy requirements need to be enhanced. Affected by the traditional education procedure, classroom teaching is made to teach only the fundamental cognitive languages, where the instructors cannot give full attention to any specific language and hence neglect the learners' cultural consequences (Liu, Zhang & May, 2022). This issue encouraged the researcher to conduct an investigative study to understand the present education format where languages are taught based on cultural preferences and not based on present day requirements. The researcher finds this issue serious and the scholar thinks that modifications need to be made to popularize the English language in every college in Nanchang, China. This will help the students in increasing their intercultural consciousness and global communication capability as English is a connecting language of today's world. The study will also aim to assess the students' eagerness to learn a completely new language that can also help them in distinguishing the cultural differences. This is necessary as these students, after their college, may visit another nation where they might face challenges to communicate with others in case they fail to express their ideas and beliefs to others.

Considering all these troublesome circumstances, the target of this study lies in preparing oral study material of English in harmony with Contextual Teaching and Learning (CTL) system (Solissa et al., 2023). This learning system will help both the students and educators overcome cultural barriers and adopt new learning tactics to improve English learning abilities. The target of the study is to analyse every aspect of the CTL process and understand how various course materials can be used to motivate students so that they can

attain their learning goals and use English as the main language while speaking in different public forums or within their college premises. The concept of CTL helps every student and educator to understand the need of learning the English language and stay connected with others who visit their colleges from other nations without having a basic knowledge of the Chinese Mandarin dialect. This format of learning English is perfect for designing and developing verbal English study materials or modules due to its smart construction and applications (Ma et al., 2022). The study intends to make students aware of the numerous benefits of learning English and becoming proficient in solving problems and expressing ideas fluently. Owing to this phenomenon, the scholar of this study carried out research to find out what Nanchang's college students actually require to learn and speak English and how the influence of Chinese cultural circumstances on boosting English speaking is addressed to ensure the students learn language without forgetting their cultural heritage and local dialect. It is also important to assess and understand the level of Chinese cultural influence on English speaking among the students in various colleges and universities in Nanchang, China (Wu, 2022). The study needs to identify the advantages and disadvantages of English speaking so that the study can be concluded with an understanding of the key facts regarding Chinese culture that impacts the students' enhancement of English speaking in colleges across Nanchang, China.

The communication style in China is likely to influence their communication and interaction process while adapting to a second language. Therefore, a crucial insight has been drawn from the research that students in China perceive difficulties to develop proficiency in the English language due to their cultural stresses. The inability for communicating with the target language encumbers students' adjustment to their new living environment. As a matter of fact, adjustment issues are faced by students as a means of stress which must be handled. China is a country with 56 nationalities and Putonghua is utilised as the lingua franca in almost all provinces including Nanchang (Haidar & Fang, 2019). Some people in this country also think that the craze for English learning can threaten the survival of the Chinese language and culture. The aim of teaching English in colleges in China is to help students cultivate students' ability for English comprehensive application, particularly speaking and listening skills. It enables students to improve English-spoken communication effectively for work in the future and social interaction (Li, 2020). At the same point of time, it is important to improve the autonomous learning of students to not only improve their comprehensive cultural quality but also, enable them to adapt to the requirements of international exchange and economic development in China. Therefore, in line with this, English language teachers should teach students the fundamental knowledge of pragmatics and along with this, they can target the language countries, local customers and market situations, historical background, culture and cultural knowledge.

On the other hand, the aspect of cultural teaching within China at present is chaotic. It has been noted that teachers are arbitrary and random in the teaching process and the students can only learn the languages depending on their own interest. From the viewpoint of teachers, the cultural literacy of some teachers is not up to mark which can impact students' improvement in English speaking in colleges. Traditional teaching mode is another challenge in colleges of Nanchang, China. Therefore, part of the classroom teaching for developing fundamental language knowledge is affected. During the teaching process, teachers are not able to provide equivalent attention towards the development of cultural

knowledge and language knowledge, thereafter, neglecting students' ability to develop cultural consciousness (Li, 2020). Hence, it is required to plan and practice cross-cultural communication ability as well as implementation.

English contains the largest number of second language learners across the world because of its uniqueness as a means of a common language for international communication (Zheng, Lu, & Ren, 2019). Presently, all countries are having diverse communication features, therefore, one not only needs to realise the customs of other nations due to interaction but also, one has the responsibility and obligation to recognise each other and respect each other's culture. However, in the context of English teaching in Nanchang, China, teaching Chinese culture has not developed a unified form yet (Li, 2020). The series of textbooks that are used are about the reface of the cultural and social background of knowledge regarding English-speaking nations, while on the contrary, the introduction of traditional Chinese culture does not almost exist.

In this regard, the concept of language transfer is important, it happens when students who are going through the learning process of a new language, transfer the solicitation from their native language towards the newly adopted language. In the case of China, there is no real environment for speaking English, hence, it is quite common for students to encounter the phenomena of transferring their native mother tongue (Zhou, 2020). Therefore, such negative transfer of native language to English learning by college students is a systematic and complex task that is influenced by grammar, vocabulary, thinking mode, syntax, and cultural differences. Most of the Chinese students in colleges China while speaking English, produce non-standard pronunciation of spoken English inability to improve English communication and strange rhythm of accent. Many college students experience negative transfer in terms of pronunciation as English letters and Chinese pinyin are almost the same in pronunciation and writing (Zhou, 2020). However. There are also differences which are impacted by native language transfer either consciously or unconsciously students are prone to spell English words like Chinese pinyin. Instead of being a tone language, Chinese is distinct from English in terms of pronunciation rules including skimming, linking, swallowing and others. Therefore, the English tone of Chinese students is too much flat, there are no ups and downs as they are not confirmed about the falling and raising English tone (Zhou, 2020). Consequently, their English is powerful and sonorous which sounds unnatural, having a Chinese accent.

It has been explored from the research that failure in language learning is directly associated with psychological demotivation in the field of language teaching. The factors which influence the psychological demotivation of students to learn a language include the confidence of students, teachers' personalities, the attitude of learners, the English learning environment and curriculum organisation (Wang & Guan, 2020). It has been noted that teachers rely too much on textbooks without the provision of knowledge regarding additional curricular knowledge. The teaching mode is single, the activities in the class are few as well as far between, and the method of English immersion is also a primary reason for the demotivation of students in class. Psychological demotivation for learning English among students is that they are affected by the fear of not being capable of answering the questions of teachers (Wang & Guan, 2020). The methods of English learning are not effective, students also lack interest in Western culture, and inefficient peer learning, as well as difficulty in



memorizing English words, have also become rational for students to adopt English speaking in education.

In the same context, another study has found stated that features of learners are found consistently to account for learning foreign language performance such as anxiety, belief and motivation of learners. Specifically, it can be stated that beliefs in language learning are critical as they possess a strong influence on the way how students utilize and evaluate strategies of language learning (Wang & Zhan, 2020). There are different opinions among students about learning English and adapting English speaking in higher education. For example, some students hold the idea that English vocabulary and grammar are the major tasks while other students think that it is immensely significant to speak as well as use English in an appropriate environment of language learning (Wang & Zhan, 2020). In the aspect of foreign language learning, students feel uncomfortable while learning a foreign language, such anxiety is common among Chinese EFL learners (Wang & Zhan, 2020). Especially students at the beginning level feel anxiety when they are forced to speak English for responding to the teachers in class (Wang & Zhan, 2020). On the other hand, students in Chinese universities learn the English language to meet the minimum requirements to acquire an academic degree, while other students consider it as a tool for their future careers. Therefore, motivation plays a vital role in generating a reason for students to adopt the English language positively. According to Xiuwen & Razali (2021), with the advancement of Web 2.0 technology and computer programming, English language learners can improve their speaking ability through a self-regulating process. Even they can use social media platforms to improve their communication competence.

Therefore, from the above discussion, it has been understood that there is no effective environment for learning as well as speaking the English language in Chinese colleges. The Chinese students do not find any motivation to adopt the English speaking skills positively, they only consider it as a requirement for their career improvement. In this context, the education system in China and the role of teachers are effective. Students are not comfortable speaking in foreign languages like English and their English speaking reflects the Chinese accent which does not match the exact accent and tone of the English language, Therefore the present study has focused on the negative cultural circumstances that hinder the progress of students in speaking the English language.

### **Objectives**

Specific research objectives include:

- i. To analyse the key aspects of Chinese culture that could impact improving the English speaking of students in colleges of Nanchang, China
- ii. To analyse why college students in Nanchang, China are strongly influenced by the cultural circumstances to improve their English speaking skills
- iii. To evaluate the problems that Chinese students face during the adaption of English speaking in the colleges of Nanchang. China

### **Method**

According to Haydam and Steenkamp (2020), research design is defined as the framework of research methods selected by the researcher in order to sharpen research methods appropriately for the subject matter. Explanatory, descriptive and exploratory are some of

the important research design which helps the research set a blueprint. Explanatory research design is associated with investigating the cause-and-effect relationship between variables in the research process (Benitez et al., 2020). It intends to understand the reason for the occurrence of a certain phenomenon by examining the potential factors which contribute and influence to them. On the other hand, the descriptive research design is associated with rendering a detailed as well as accurate depiction of the specific situation or phenomenon (Pandey & Pandey, 2021). It basically aims to answer the question about when, how, where and what without necessarily delving into underlying causality or reasons. In relation to exploratory research design, it is associated with investigating a topic which is not well researched before. It involves studying new things and generating new ideas (Al-Ababneh, 2020).

In this research “explanatory research design was preferred over exploratory and descriptive”. The reason for choosing this research design was to understand the premises in detail. Applying this research design allowed for a more comprehensive exploration of the reasons as well as the way Chinese cultural circumstances have an impact on the English speaking abilities of college students in China. The study sought to uncover certain factors as well as a mechanism which contributes to language improvement in a unique cultural context. It is by incorporating an explanatory research design, the research went beyond just a mere description of language learning experiences in Chinese college students. Rather, it aimed to dissect the complex interactions between language proficiency as well as cultural circumstances. The explanatory research design enabled to learn about the causal relationships between multiple cultural elements, for example, social norms, communication styles, language exposure and English speaking abilities enhancement. Through systematic research design, the study provided evidence-based insights into the rooted reason behind improvised language skills among Chinese college students in Nanchang.

It is helping the researcher to truly collect only relevant data on English language speaking and to understand how design has evolved into it making it competitive in Nanchang. Any other samples except those that are associated with English language speaking have been eliminated here using exclusion criteria. In order to conduct the survey procedure, the researcher here is using 250 students and teachers from a population of 500 teachers and students who are associated with the colleges in Nanchang, China. In this case the margin of error was 5% and the confidence interval was 95%.

In this case, the researcher has opted to use primary data gathering to get solely first-hand information. A quantitative research technique known as semi-structured surveys combines aspects of organised and unstructured surveys. Surveys that follow a planned list of questions but aren't always conducted in the same order or with the same amount of detail are known as semi-structured surveys (Kaliber, 2019). The main advantage of semi-structured surveys is that they allow the researcher to explore the topic in more depth than a structured survey. The researcher has prepared a pre-designed set of questions for the semi-structured survey session with five groups of participants. The researcher has designed questions based on the objectives of this research and has made open-ended questions allowing participants giving more space for detailed responses.

**Findings**

The findings of the study reveal a nuanced understanding of the intricate relationship between Chinese cultural circumstances and the improvement of English speaking skills among college students in Nanchang, China. Through a comprehensive examination of various cultural factors and their impact on language learning, the study sheds light on the challenges and opportunities faced by students in navigating linguistic and cultural barriers. One of the key findings of the study pertains to the influence of Confucianism and Taoism on cultural beliefs and values, which in turn affect English speaking abilities. The deeply ingrained cultural values of collectivism and group harmony play a significant role in shaping students' attitudes towards language learning. The emphasis on conformity and harmony within Chinese culture can sometimes hinder individual expression and experimentation, thereby impacting the development of English speaking skills among students.

Moreover, the study highlights the impact of the traditional education system on language acquisition. The arbitrary teaching methods and the limited focus on cultural literacy contribute to a lack of motivation and engagement among students. The prevalence of a single teaching mode and the absence of diverse learning activities further exacerbate the challenges faced by students in acquiring English speaking proficiency.

The findings also underscore the phenomenon of language transfer, wherein students unconsciously apply rules and structures from their native language to English learning. This transfer often results in non-standard pronunciation and linguistic errors, reflecting the influence of Chinese phonetics and syntax on English speaking patterns. Additionally, the study reveals the psychological demotivation experienced by students, stemming from factors such as fear of failure, lack of interest in Western culture, and ineffective teaching methods.

Furthermore, the findings highlight the importance of motivation in driving language learning efforts. While some students view English proficiency as a means to enhance their career prospects, others perceive it as a requirement for academic success. However, the study underscores the need for a more holistic approach to language education, one that incorporates cultural awareness and cross-cultural communication skills.

The study also emphasizes the role of educators in facilitating language learning and promoting cultural understanding. By adopting innovative teaching methods and providing diverse learning opportunities, educators can create a supportive environment conducive to language acquisition. Moreover, the integration of contextual teaching and learning (CTL) principles can help bridge the gap between language learning and cultural competence, enabling students to develop practical language skills while preserving their cultural heritage. Overall, the findings of the study underscore the complex interplay between Chinese cultural circumstances and English language proficiency among college students in Nanchang, China. By identifying key challenges and opportunities, the study provides valuable insights for educators, policymakers, and curriculum developers seeking to enhance language education and promote intercultural communication in the globalized world.



**Discussion**

The discussion of the study delves into the multifaceted implications of the findings, exploring the broader significance of the research outcomes and their relevance to language education policies, pedagogical practices, and cultural awareness initiatives. At its core, the study illuminates the intricate interplay between Chinese cultural circumstances and English language learning outcomes among college students in Nanchang, China.

One of the central themes emerging from the study is the pervasive influence of cultural beliefs and values on language acquisition processes. The deeply rooted principles of Confucianism and Taoism shape students' attitudes towards language learning, influencing their motivation, learning styles, and communication strategies. The emphasis on collectivism and group harmony within Chinese culture can both facilitate and hinder English language proficiency development. While collectivism fosters a sense of collaboration and community-oriented learning, it may also discourage individual expression and risk-taking in language acquisition. Similarly, the emphasis on harmony may lead students to prioritize social cohesion over linguistic experimentation, potentially constraining their language learning experiences.

Moreover, the study underscores the impact of the traditional education system on language learning outcomes. The prevalence of arbitrary teaching methods and the limited focus on cultural literacy present significant barriers to effective language acquisition. The rigid adherence to a single teaching mode and the neglect of diverse learning activities hinder students' engagement and motivation, undermining their ability to develop communicative competence in English. As such, the findings underscore the urgent need for pedagogical reforms that prioritize student-centered approaches, foster cultural awareness, and promote communicative language teaching methodologies.

Furthermore, the study sheds light on the phenomenon of language transfer and its implications for language learning. The unconscious application of rules and structures from students' native language to English learning often results in linguistic errors and non-standard pronunciation patterns. The influence of Chinese phonetics and syntax on English speaking can pose significant challenges for students striving to achieve native-like proficiency. However, the study also highlights the potential benefits of language transfer, suggesting that educators can leverage students' existing linguistic knowledge to scaffold their English language learning experiences effectively.

Additionally, the findings underscore the importance of addressing psychological factors that impact language learning motivation and self-efficacy. The study reveals the pervasive effects of fear of failure, lack of interest in Western culture, and ineffective teaching methods on students' language learning experiences. By acknowledging and addressing these psychological barriers, educators can create a supportive learning environment that promotes risk-taking, experimentation, and resilience in language acquisition.

Moreover, the study emphasizes the critical role of motivation in driving language learning efforts among college students. While some students view English proficiency as a means to enhance their career prospects and academic success, others perceive it as a requirement for global citizenship and intercultural communication. By tapping into students' intrinsic and

extrinsic motivations, educators can cultivate a sense of purpose and engagement in language learning, fostering lifelong learning habits and cross-cultural competence.

Furthermore, the study underscores the importance of integrating cultural awareness and cross-cultural communication skills into language education curricula. By exposing students to diverse cultural perspectives, practices, and communication styles, educators can cultivate global citizens who are capable of navigating intercultural interactions with sensitivity and respect. Moreover, the integration of contextual teaching and learning (CTL) principles can bridge the gap between language learning and cultural competence, enabling students to develop practical language skills while preserving their cultural heritage.

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