

**RHYTHM AND RESULTS: INVESTIGATING THE ROLE OF MUSIC IN ENHANCING  
CHINESE LANGUAGE LEARNING OUTCOMES**

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**Abstract**

This study examined the effect of using Chinese songs as a motivational factor in learning Chinese language. One hundred participants from St Patrick's College Awka Anambra state was randomly selected and assigned to experimental and control groups. Statistical Package for the social sciences (SPSS 25) was used for data analysis and the statistics used which was descriptive showed that Chinese songs have a motivating effect towards Chinese Language Learning and also that Females are more likely to learn Chinese language when music was used as a motivational element. The study recommended introduction of strategic Chinese songs at various levels of learning to help the students have a better grasp of the language.

Key words: Chinese songs, Motivational element, learning, Chinese Language

**Introduction**

This study aims to examine the extent to which Chinese songs serve as a motivational element in learning Chinese language. Before delving in, it is pertinent to examine the nature of Chinese language and its dialects. According to Chinese traditionalists, Chinese is a language with several dialects. It is understood that Chinese people read and share the same writing system called *Hanzi* (character-based), despite speaking in different ways.

Dong (2004), Zhou and Marslen-Wilson (1994) see Chinese as a language that is very complex and difficult to understand. There are so many arguments on this issue and various schools of thoughts which will not be further explored as it is not the focus of this paper. Summarily, Chinese language is usually perceived by their native speakers as dialects of a single monolithic Chinese language, rather than separate languages, although this identification is considered inappropriate by some linguists and sinologists (Mair, 1991).

The Chinese language is a language or language family consisting of varieties which are mutually intelligible to varying degrees (Crystal, 1987). Chinese is distinguished by its high level of internal diversity, although all varieties of Chinese are tonal and analytic. There are between seven and thirteen main regional groups of Chinese (depending on classification scheme), of which the most spoken, by far, is Mandarin (about 850 million), followed by Wu (90 million), Cantonese, locally called Yue (70 million) and Min (50 million). Of these varieties of Chinese language, Mandarin, also called *Putonghua* or *Guoyu* and *Hanyu* is the official language of the People's Republic of China (PRC) and Taiwan, as well as one of four official languages of Singapore. It is one of the six official languages of the United Nations. Cantonese is popular in Guangdong Province and Cantonese-speaking overseas

communities, and one of the official languages of Hong Kong and Macau. Min is widely spoken in southern Fujian, in neighboring Taiwan and in Southeast Asian, known as Hokkien in Philippines, Singapore and Malaysia.

In this study we are only interested in Mandarin Chinese. Mandarin is a standardized form of spoken Chinese based on Beijing dialect, called *Beifanghua*. Mandarin is known as *Putonghua* in Mainland China, *Guoyu* in Taiwan and *Hanyu* in Singapore. Mandarin Chinese history can be dated back to the 19<sup>th</sup> century, particularly by the upper classes and ministers in Beijing. The English word 'mandarin' (from Portuguese *mandarim*, from Malay *menteri*, from Hindi *mantra*, from Sanskrit *mantrin*, minister or counsellor), originally meant an official of the Chinese empire. 'Mandarin' refers to Standard Chinese, which is often simply called 'Chinese'. In study, Mandarin and Chinese language are used interchangeably. Mandarin is now used in education, media, and formal situations both in China and Taiwan. It can be spoken intelligibly by younger people in Mainland China and Taiwan, with various regional accents.

All spoken Chinese use tones. A few dialects of north China may have as few as three tones, while some dialects in south China have up to six or ten tones, depending on how one counts it. One exception from this is *Shanghainese* which has reduced the set of tones to a two-toned pitch accent system much like modern Japanese. Mandarin has four major tones with a neutral tone making it five in number. A very common example used to illustrate the use of tones in Mandarin are five tones applied to the syllable 'ma'. The tones correspond to these five characters.

S/N	Tone Mark	Meaning	Example	Character	English Meaning
1	-	High level	Mā	妈	Mother
2	´	High rising	Má	麻	Numb
3	ˇ	Low falling-rising	Mǎ	马	Horse
4	`	High falling	Mà	骂	Scold
5	(no mark)	Neutral	Ma	吗	Question particle

Bing(2022) emphasized that the positive role of Chinese songs is to help a learner to acquire a sense of language:

### 1.1 Chinese Songs and Voice Sense

First, the relationship between language and music is already very close (Dalia et al.,2022). Wang Li (1990), a modern Chinese linguist, pointed out that "the relationship between language and music is very close, and there is interoperability between language and music". As a sound-based tool for conveying information and expressing emotions, Marx has also recognized music as "the second language of mankind". The three essential elements of music are pitch, rhythm, and timbre and the phonetic characteristics of the Chinese language are precisely in line with these three essential elements of music. Meanwhile, Chinese belongs to the Sino-Tibetan languages, and its syllables are composed of three parts: consonants, rhymes and tones and the change of tones is also one of the characteristics of Chinese. Tone changes include the level tone, the rising tone, the falling-rising tone and the falling tone. Its permutations and combinations give the Chinese language a rhythmic sense of staccato. This kind of rhythmic sense of Chinese speech with its high and low changes also coincides

with the expression form of music. Therefore, while appreciating the rhythm and melody of the songs, Chinese songs also help to improve the learners' ability to recognize sounds and pronounce Chinese. Ultimately, the goal is to improve the phonological sense of second language learners.

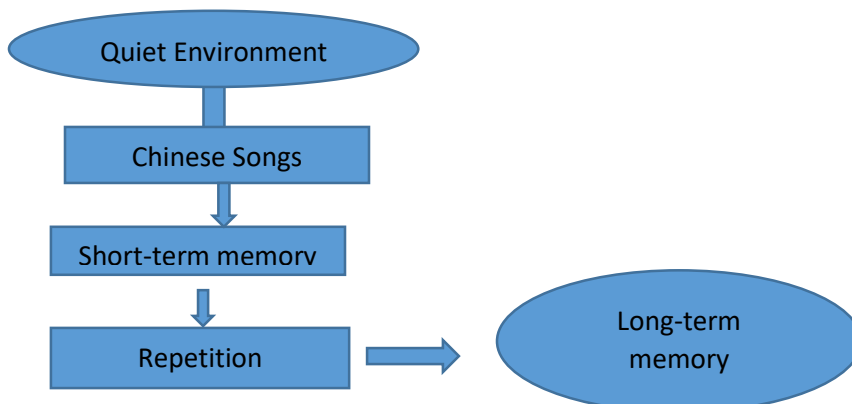
### 1.2 Chinese Songs and Sense of Awareness

According to the affective filtering hypothesis proposed by Stephen D. Krashen, the process of second language acquisition will be affected by three affective factors: the learner's motivation, personality, and affective state. Motivation is the intrinsic power that propels an individual to engage in a particular behavior. If the learner is strongly motivated and driven, the learning efficiency is higher, and the learning effect will be better; the affective state mainly refers to anxiety and relaxation; if the learner has a weaker sense of anxiety, a high degree of mental relaxation and a low affective barrier, they are prone to get more input. Both are constantly changing under the influence of subjective factors of second language learners. Applying Chinese songs in teaching Chinese as a foreign language can enliven the classroom atmosphere, reduce the learners' sense of boredom in learning Chinese, enhance their motivation to learn Chinese, reduce their anxiety about second language learning, stimulate their interest in learning Chinese, and make them actively participate in the process of second language learning. Secondly, from the division of labour between the left and right brains, it can be found that the left brain processes language. Still, if the right brain can be brought into full play in second language learning, it will be more conducive to the learners' language learning. Chinese songs are characterized by lively language, and a distinctive sense of rhyme and rhythm.

### 1.3 Chinese Songs and Grammatical Sense

The fact that Chinese grammar does not emphasize the order of words but the meaning of words makes grammar learning especially difficult for second language learners. In addition to the complexity of Chinese grammar, grammar teaching in Chinese as a Foreign Language classroom often needs to be more exciting and acceptable to learners. Even teaching grammar is difficult, not to mention cultivating learners' sense of Chinese grammar. Chinese songs are rich in grammar teaching materials; some contain repetitive sentences or chorus parts emphasizing grammatical structures. These songs can be used to consolidate grammar points vividly, turning abstraction into something concrete and tangible. As a result, applying Chinese songs in teaching Chinese as a foreign language can effectively improve the learners' sense of grammar while changing the classroom atmosphere of grammar knowledge explanation from boring to lively and exciting.

#### Flow chart of how to improve grammatical sense



#### **1.4 Chinese Songs and Vocabulary Sense**

Chinese songs are rich in themes and all-encompassing, and the vocabulary used in the lyrics is primarily daily idioms. Most of the lyrics are straightforward and easy to understand and most of the language materials and expressions come from daily life, which is more likely to arouse the learners' interest and enthusiasm and more likely to be accepted by Chinese language learners. Therefore, the application of Chinese songs to the teaching of Chinese as a foreign language can not only help students better understand the meaning of words and their usage but also help them understand the meaning of words in specific contexts, make their memory of words more profound and thus improve their sense of the Chinese vocabulary.

#### **Motivation, Cognition and Learning Context in Pintrich's Theoretical Model**

This theory can explain learning process in classroom settings, Pintrich 1994, 2000b, 2003a, pointed out three types of elements

- Motivation elements such as achievement goal/ orientation, expectancies for success and failure, self-perceptions of ability and competence (Self-efficacy belief) Control beliefs, Task Value and affective and emotional. Chinese songs can affect mood of the learners in positive way.
- Cognitive elements, such as cognitive Self-Regulation Strategies, meta-Cognition, activation of prior knowledge, etc. The more the songs played repeatedly, the more the activation of the prior knowledge of tones, grammar point and vocabulary.
- Learning Context elements such as task features, classroom context, success perception of both the task features and the classroom contexts, goals promoted in the classroom, type of work structure, teacher's behaviour, type of interaction between teachers and students. When the learning is going on in a noiseless environment and the teacher is accommodating, the students are likely to learn more.

Pintrich considers motivation a multifactorial construct (Linnenbrink & Pintrich, 2002b)

According to Pintrich (2003b), integrating cognitive and motivational elements is necessary for completing our understanding of learning process in school contexts and for understanding difficulties that may appear during the instructional process. When Chinese songs are played students know the meaning of the songs, if those songs are subtitled in English and pinyin (spoken Chinese), it is more likely to trigger their interest to learn the language.

This study considers the theory of cognitive development by Piaget (1896-1980) in participant's selection and songs selection in order to add something new to existing knowledge. This developmental psychologist emphasized that for learning to be effective, one has to consider the age and the cognitive development of the child. The two songs that the researcher used in this study; the first one is talking about the importance of friendship and the second one is talking about importance of Mother in the life of a child.

#### **Methodology**

Context and participants

100 senior students of St Patrick College, Awka within the age range of 15-16 who are studying Chinese language were randomly selected for the experimental study.

Instrument

Laptop that is connected with wifi, projector .

### Procedure

The focus was Senior Students of St Patrick College Awka who chose Chinese language as one of the foreign languages they prefer to study. Their informed consent was sought and they were randomly selected and assigned to Control and Experimental groups. The study was carried out in a controlled environment to avoid noise which is an extraneous variable.

The experimental Group were promised to be taught different Chinese songs and informed about how learning them could help in understanding Chinese culture and language. This information was not passed to the control group.

After the information, a song by Emil Chau Titled (( 朋友)) meanings Friend in English language and a Chinese folk song by Kim Friesen Wiens was played with a laptop that is connected and projected to the wall. After playing the Chinese Song which had English, Chinese and pinyin (spoken Chinese) as the subtitle, independently and monitored for 30mins for each song, they were presented with the print out of the lyrics of the songs mixed with other Chinese characters of the first song, to choose the correct option and the second song was used to test their ability to memorize and read correctly.

### First song

-The English Version of the Lyrics

English version

All these years, me alone been through wind and walk through rain

Had tears, had mistakes when had I insist something

Only the one who had loved will understand, will understand, will be lonely, regret.

Still have dream and you in my heart

Friends walk together all life time these days won't come back

One sentence, one life time one love, one cup of wine

Friends are never lonely one-word friend, you will understand

Still have wounds, still have pain still need to walk, you still have me

### Chinese Version

这些年一个人风也过雨也走

有过泪有过错还记得坚持甚麽

真爱过才会懂会寂寞会回首

终有梦终有你在心中

朋友一生一起走那些日子不再有

一句话一辈子一生情一杯酒

朋友不曾孤单过一声朋友会懂

还有伤还有痛还要走还有我

### Pinyin version

Zhè xiē nián yī gè rén fēng yě guò yǔ yě zǒu

Yǒu guò lèi Yǒu guò cuò hái jì de jiānchí shén me

Zhēn ài guò cái huì dǒng huì jì mò huì huí shǒu

Zhōng Yǒu mèng Zhōng Yǒu nǐ zài xīn zhōng

Péngyou yīshēng yī qǐ zǒu nà xiē rìzi bù zài Yǒu

Yījùhuà Yībèizi yīshēng qíng yībēijiǔ  
Péngyou bù céng gū dān guò yīshāng Péngyou nǐ huì dǒng  
Hái Yǒu shāng hái Yǒu tòng hái yào zōu hái Yǒu wǒ

The Chinese character version of the lyrics was printed with gaps to fill when the first song was stopped to determine their performance:

这些年一个人风也过雨也走  
\_\_\_\_\_过泪有过错还记得坚持甚麽 (没有 or 有)  
真爱过才会懂会寂寞\_\_\_\_\_回 (能 or 会)  
终有梦终有你在心\_\_\_\_\_ (理 or 中)  
朋友一生一起走那些日子不在\_\_\_\_\_ (有 or 没有)  
一句话一辈子一生情一杯\_\_\_\_\_ (水 or 酒)  
\_\_\_\_\_不曾孤单过一声朋友会懂 (妈妈 or 朋友)  
还有伤还有痛还要走还有\_\_\_\_\_ (我 or 你)

### Second song

-The English Version of the Lyrics

Mom is the best in the world.

A child with a mother is like a precious gem.

Throw yourself into your mother's arms and you will find happiness.

Mom is the best in the world.

A child without a mom is like a blade of grass.

Away from your mother's arms

Where will you find happiness?

Pinyin version

Shì shàng zhǐ yǒu mā mā hǎo  
yǒu mā de hái zì xiàng kuài bǎo  
tóu jìn mā mā de huái bào  
xìng fú xiǎng bù liǎo  
shì shàng zhǐ yǒu mā mā hǎo  
méi mā de hái zì xiàng gēn cǎo  
lí kāi mā mā de huái bào  
xìng fú nǎ lǐ zhǎ

Chinese Version

世上只有妈妈好  
有妈的孩子像块宝  
投进妈妈的怀抱  
幸福享不了  
世上只有妈妈好  
没妈的孩子像根草  
离开妈妈的怀抱  
幸福那里

**Data Analysis**

**Table 1**

Variable	Frequency	Percent
Gender Male	50	50
Gender Female	50	50
Age 16yrs	17	83
Age 15yrs	83	17
Group Experimental	50	50
Group Control	50	50
Class SS1	50	50
Class SS2	50	50

The above table 1 shows the descriptive statistics of the participants; 100 Male (50%) and female (50%) Senior Students were randomly selected from SS1 (50%) and SS2 (50%) with the age range 15-16 and they were randomly assigned to control (50%) and experimental group (50%)

**Table 2**

	Performance		Total
	Excellent	Poor	
Gender Male	24	26	50
Gender Female	27	23	50
Total	51	49	100

The above table 2, shows that females in the experimental (27) group performed better than the males (24) in the experimental group

The result shows that Chinese songs can be used as a motivational element in learning Chinese language. This study also shows that females are more motivated to learn when songs are used as a learning tool.

**Conclusion**

The researcher discovered that the 27 females in the experimental group performed well in the song test. They showed interest in the study because they were promised to be taught Chinese songs stressing the importance of Chinese songs in learning Chinese language. This shows that Chinese songs can be used as a motivational element in learning Chinese language, especially SS1 and SS2 of St Patrick's College Awka. The result of this study also shows that females can learn more when Chinese songs are used for teaching.

Generally, the results of the findings in this study strongly agree with the Bing (2023), assumptions on the role of Chinese songs in learning Chinese language. Based on the above findings, the researcher therefore makes the following recommendations.

### Recommendations

Opportunities for inter-secondary school Chinese songs competition should be made available. This will enable the senior secondary students to learn and speak Chinese language while they put in efforts in winning the prizes. This would motivate them to learn more Chinese vocabulary, pinyin (spoken Chinese) and hanzi (Chinese character).

Chinese language teachers should play a pivotal role in secondary schools by employing Chinese songs effectively in teaching Chinese language. They should be selective in their choice of Chinese songs picking songs that are interesting with moral lessons, idioms and sub-titled in English, Chinese Character (hanzi) and pinyin (spoken Chinese). They should ensure a conducive learning environment by ensuring they are free from noise.

Most importantly, the Chinese language teachers in St Patrick's College Awka should be empowered to put more effort in the discharge of their duties. Since learning and teaching Chinese language is especially difficult for a non-native of China, the effort of the Chinese teachers should be rewarded with good salaries and various incentives. When the efforts of the Chinese language teachers are generously rewarded, it will boost their morale and increase their zeal to provide effective teaching.

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