

A Study on the Admission System of Foreign Students in Chinese Public Schools

—Focus on Chinese Language Education

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Abstract

Under the policy “reform admission and management for foreign students” promoted by Chinese government from 1990s, the admission system construction for foreign students of primary and secondary schools becomes an unneglectable issue. At present, there is a discrepancy existing between regulation and facts that the “international students’ division” was established noncompliance with the principle “learning in regular class”. The main reason is that it is more convenient to do necessary Chinese language instruction at “international students’ division”. In view of the above, this paper clarifies the problems on Chinese language education through analysis of relative policies and regulations at national and local level as well as investigating on 6 typical primary and secondary schools in Shanghai. According to the empirical research, the actual situation of Chinese language education for foreign students in primary and secondary schools has been revealed, such as the shortage of TCFL teacher, no amiable teaching materials and insufficient financial support etc. In conclusion, this paper proposed some suggestions to improve Chinese language education like training and allocation of TCFL teachers or development of professional TCFL materials adaptive to students in primary and secondary schools under the educational administration financial supports and so on.

Keywords

TCFL for Foreign Students in Primary and Secondary Schools, TCFL Teacher’s Training, Foreign Students’ Admission System

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1. Introduction

1.1. Foreign Students' Admission Policy of Primary and Secondary Schools

In China, internationalization of education has been promoted since 1980's. After that, the principle of "reform admission and management for foreign students" was announced under the policy of "Program for the Reform and Development of Education in China" in 1993. From then on, the admission of foreign students was positioned as a national policy. Under these circumstances, the development of supervision and management has been specifically highlighted in the education activities for children with foreign nationalities. As for the admission of foreign children, the following two points were mainly mentioned. 1) It should be assured that examination of acceptance qualification of schools thoroughly and the admission of foreign children in the elementary and secondary schools is facilitated smoothly in accordance with the guideline "develop actively and reliably". 2) Elementary and secondary schools which acquire the admission qualification should enhance the teaching system and the management policy.

Based on these strategies, the Ministry of Education reaches a consensus with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Ministry of Public Security to establish the "Interim Measures for the Management of Primary and Secondary Schools for Foreign Students' admission" in 1999 (hereinafter referred to as the "Interim Measures"). Therefore, the admission system for foreign children in public primary and secondary schools in China, which is based on the "Interim Measures", stresses the recognition of the qualification for schools which are qualified to admit foreign children and the management of schools after admission. On the contrary, the rules concerning the learning guidance were not greatly positioned. In particular, the language teaching which is thought to be the basis of the learning is stipulated as "In addition to arranging necessary supplementary Chinese lessons, no separate classes are generally arranged for foreign students". In other words, it is considered that the Chinese language course is only allowed to be conducted in a special class on the assumption that the foreign students are admitted to the normal class learning with the Chinese students under the principle of "learning in regular class".

1.2. Practical Difficulties on Foreign Students' Admission

However, with regards to the actual situation of the foreign students' admission of primary and secondary schools in Shanghai, a city with largest number of foreigner residents, the schools which admitted foreign students into regular classes don't have the ample force concerning their Chinese ability because of the needs to improve proportion of all students entering schools of a higher grade. Therefore, for teachers, it is difficult to provide high-quality Chinese instruction for foreign students. In addition, cases such as foreign students whose Chinese language ability is too weak to be refused to admit into primary and secondary schools are also reported occasionally, in that schools lack Chinese language

education due to the shortage of teachers which leads to foreign students being unable to keep pace with other Chinese students (Zhao, 2011). On the other hand, irrelevant to principle of admission system “learning in regular class” decided by administrative department for education, schools with “international students’ division”, providing teaching activities for foreign students only, are increasing now. There is a common view that the Chinese language teaching is valued and it is more effective to adjust the contents and methods according to foreign students’ Chinese language ability within “international students’ division”.

2. Problems on Chinese Language Education for Foreign Students

2.1. TCFL’s Deficiency

The teaching of Chinese as a foreign language in China began from 1950. In 1883, the “Research Association of teaching Chinese as a foreign language of the Chinese education society” was established. In September 1988, the strategy “teaching Chinese as a foreign language is a part of national and ethnical undertaking” was proposed by National Conference on Teaching Chinese as a foreign language initially. Till now, it has been nearly 40 years since the establishment of the subject status of Teaching Chinese as a Foreign Language (hereinafter referred to as the “TCFL”) in China. In December 1999, the second National Conference on Teaching Chinese as a foreign language was held in Beijing. This conference is the largest and the most clear-cut meeting on TCFL since the founding of China, which points out the direction of teaching Chinese as a foreign language in the new century.

In the TCFL policy, training of TCFL teacher is one of the important initiatives. In particular, with the policy making for the recognition of the qualification for TCFL teachers in 1990 as “Measures for examining and approving the qualifications of teachers of Chinese as a foreign language” and the revision in 1996 and 2004 twice, the Certificate of TCFL system was established. Along with revision of the recognition method “Measures for Certifying Teachers’ Ability to Teach Chinese as a Foreign Language” in 2004, as a conventional qualification certificate, the “foreign Chinese teacher’s license” was changed to “Certificate of Ability to Teach Chinese as a Foreign Language”, while the certificate was classified into elementary, intermediate, and high-grade according to competency. However, these two certificates policy implementation was terminated in 2004 and 2005. Although Chinese government attaches great importance to augmenting of the teaching staff of TCFL, the understanding of quality or ability standard is not unified among related researchers and teachers. Up to now, the quality of unstandardization of TCFL teachers is still an unsolved issue which leads to amount of teaching problems. The complexity of the composition of teaching staff is one of the reasons for the uneven quality of TCFL teachers (Yan, 2018).

In terms of teachers construction, although the specialty of TCFL has been set up since the 1990s while it has been pointed out in the “Confucius Institute Development Plan (2012-2020)” that it is necessary to formulate and issue standards for teachers of international Chinese language, to implement the qualification certification of TCFL, to formulate measures for the evaluation and appointment of teachers’ posts (professional titles) in line with the characteristics of international Chinese language education, it is still defective (Huang, 2017).

Specifically speaking, there is no significant achievement in the research of teaching theory and teaching practice of TCFL in China, and inadequate learning from relevant research results, resulting in the general low quality and shortage of teachers, the lack of understanding of academic disciplines, the teachers’ single knowledge structure (Hao, 2010). Till now, half of the teachers who graduated from TCFL with master’s degree, however, there are many teachers with bachelor’s degree or below from science and engineering without any Chinese language education background, and non-professional teachers account for a large proportion. Therefore, the number of professional teachers is unable to meet the growing teaching needs.

As for teaching system, it is difficult to realize the differentiated instruction for Chinese learners from different countries due to the immature curriculum system. Since the implementation of TCFL, there is no perfect teaching material and textbooks development system because of insufficient professional researchers.

2.2. Discrepancy between Regulation and Facts of Foreign Students’ Admission

According to the results of empirical research which was conducted by the author in Shanghai primary and secondary schools (3 typical schools with “international students’ division”), the concrete reasons for setting up the separated divisions are: 1) In order to facilitate the subject teaching, it is more efficient to do Chinese language intensive course in advance for those who are facing obstacles in daily learning because of Chinese language insufficiency. 2) By organizing the class only for foreign students, the teacher can adjust the teaching contents and teaching method to promote learning instruction flexibly basing on the students’ Chinese language ability. 3) During Chinese language and the subjects’ instruction, it is easier to respond to every student in a small class than large classes, which creates an environment for individual special instruction for foreign students (Ma & Ma, 2019).

As a result, from the aspect of the necessity of the Chinese language instruction, it is easy to understand why there is a discrepancy existing between the admission system and the admission fact like “international students’ division” were established noncompliance with the principle “learning in regular class”.

On the other hand, the number of foreign students who need Chinese language instruction is increasing in public elementary and secondary schools. Therefore, it is required to further enhance the present admission system in order to

improve the Chinese language instruction in the premise “learning in regular class” principle.

Under this circumstance, it’s necessary to clarify the present state and problems of the admission system in public elementary and secondary schools for foreign students in China by focusing on Chinese language education in order to investigate an appropriate approach to Chinese language education for them. Concretely, the case study of Shanghai is taken up to analyze issues concerning the certificate system of TCFL after a general view of Chinese language education regulation in admission system.

3. Regulations of Chinese Language Education for Foreign Students in Shanghai

First of all, it is necessary to give an overview of the Chinese language education situation from perspective of policies and regulations of primary and secondary schools’ admission system in Shanghai. As the city where foreigners are most assembled, Shanghai has promptly responded to “Interim Measures (1999)” to promulgated the specific implementation regulations “Implementation Rules for the Administration of Foreign Students in Primary and Secondary Schools for Foreign Students’ Admission” (hereinafter referred to as the “Implementation Regulations”) in 2000.

In accordance with the provision of the primary and secondary schools’ admission at national level, the duties and responsibilities of the educational administration at each level (district or county) in the city are mainly stipulated detailly in “Implementation Regulations”. On the other hand, in the stipulation “qualification and requirements of the admission school” within “educational environment” of Implementation Regulations, it is described as “except for necessary Chinese lessons, any separate classes for foreign students only is generally unavailable in the teaching process. Chinese is the basic instructional language”.

In addition, the rule “teacher qualification requirements” regulated that “In addition to equipped with the corresponding teaching staff, the teachers engaged in teaching must occupy a certain proportion of middle and senior positions” and “full time teachers of TCFL should obtain the National Certificate of teaching Chinese as a foreign language. Part time teachers of TCFL should reach the same level of full-time teachers in the language ability, literature, and foreign language (Article 4)”. It is considered that the quality of the teacher in the Chinese language teaching providing for foreign students is noticed in Shanghai at that time.

From above, it is clarified that the principle for primary and elementary schools’ admission of children with foreign nationality who reside in Shanghai is the form of “learning in regular class” and should be taught in Chinese. Besides, the full-time teacher must acquire the teacher’s certificate of TCFL and the part-time teacher in charge should with almost equal proficiency on Chinese teaching as the full-time teacher for implementation of Chinese instruction.

4. The Actual Situation of Chinese Language Education in Shanghai

4.1. The Current Situation of TCFL Teacher

Just as it has been mentioned above, promoting the certificate system is one of the approaches to improve Chinese TCFL teacher's training in China's international education policy. By 2004, a total of 5366 teachers had obtained the TCFL certification, but as of 2009, the number has not exceeded 10,000 (Li, 2009). Up to 2004, there were only 45.3% of them that had become full-time or part-time teacher of TCFL. At present, the situation of training TCFL teachers is far from meeting the needs of the development of Chinese education in the new century.

Focusing on Shanghai, according to the survey report on the TCFL teachers in Pudong New Area, among the 1766 respondents, only 4% of them are engaged in teaching Chinese as a foreign language and only 11 teachers acquired the TCFL certification. 40.7% of the 1699 valid questionnaires illustrated that "eager to teach Chinese as a foreign language", but only 10.7% of them considered they are qualified in it (Su, 2009).

In the case study on Chinese language education in elementary and secondary schools for Korean students, Park Xuanshu pointed out that there are only few schools allocating TCFL teachers for the small scale of foreign students or the students are too young to be taught under the Chinese language instruction system available now. Moreover, it has also been pointed out that teachers are lack of teaching experience even they obtained the TCFL teacher's certification (Park, 2005). In conclusion, it is obviously hard to equip schools with full-time qualified TCFL teachers at elementary and secondary level for foreign students because of the shortage of teachers with TCFL certificate.

4.2. Chinese Language Education in Public Elementary and Secondary Schools

In this part, we will analyze the situation of Chinese language teaching under the principle of "learning in regular class" in comparison with "international students' division" of public primary and secondary schools as a case study in Shanghai.

4.2.1. Selection of Sample Schools

The author picked up 6 public schools from each district where are the traditional foreign settlement district A, economy developed rapidly with increasing number of foreign residents in recent years district B, and locating in the center of Shanghai with fewer foreign residents in district C. As the comparison, 3 schools with "international students' division" were chosen to, such as **Table 1**. The investigation was conducted in 2010 and 2011. The data collection in this study originated from interview on principals, Chinese language teachers and relative persons in charge.

Table 1. Schools for case study.

	A District	B District	C District
foreign students' division	school A	school B	school C
learning in regular class	school D	school E & F	

4.2.2. Introduction of Sample Schools

School A: Secondary and high school; In 2010, there were 26 secondary school students with nationality of Japan, Korea, America, Australia and France.

School B: Elementary and secondary school; In 2010, the number of foreign students in elementary school is 210, mainly with nationality of America, Japan, Singapore, UK, Korea, Canada and Australia. There were 23 foreign students in secondary school, mainly with nationality of Japan, Korea, America, Canada and Australia.

School C: Secondary and high school; There were 35 foreign students with nationality of Japan, Korea, Finland, and Germany in 2010.

School D: Elementary and secondary school; There were 3 foreign students with nationality of Japan, Brazil and Italy in 2011.

School E: Elementary and secondary school; There were 19 foreign pupils and 3 junior high school students, mainly with nationality Japan, Korea and Russia.

School F: Secondary and high school; As of 2004, there were 110 foreign students in the “foreign students’ divisions”, and the number of foreign students in the secondary school was only 11 limited in 2010 under the principle of “learning in regular class”.

4.2.3. Chinese Language Education in Public Schools

In the light of interview results, the specific situation of Chinese language instruction in schools with “foreign students’ division” and schools under principle of “learning in regular class” is as **Tables 2-4**.

4.2.4. Analysis on Chinese Language Education of Sample Schools

Investigation findings clarified that: 1) Chinese language instruction was merely to be implemented in the schools under the principle of “learning in regular class”. 2) On the contrary, in the schools with “foreign students’ division”, the establishment of Chinese language teaching system has been more emphasized than the former, which attached more importance to develop Chinese language teaching materials or allocate the teachers of TCFL. 3) It is worth noting that the pattern “teachers in charge of ‘Chinese’ subject are providing Chinese instruction without certificate of TCFL” was usually utilized at schools regardless of “learning in regular class” schools or “foreign students’ division”.

As previously described, teachers are really aware of the importance of Chinese teaching for foreign students; Nevertheless, there is insufficient Chinese language instruction at schools now because of shortage of TCFL teachers and lack of financial support according to the interview.

Table 2. The Chinese Language Instruction in schools with “foreign students’ division”.

	school A	school B		school C
	secondary school	elementary school	secondary school	secondary school
Presence or absence of Chinese language teaching	○	○	○	○
Chinese language instruction (teaching material and curriculum)	The “Chinese language intensive class” was established. The teachers are compiling the teaching materials by themselves based on the students’ Chinese language ability.	The “Chinese” subject teachers established “reinforcement classes” to provide Chinese language instruction after classes 2 - 3 times a week by using “Chinese” subject teaching material.	Implement the Chinese instruction in accordance with foreign students’ Chinese language ability by using teaching materials of “Chinese” subject after classes.	Establish the “Basic Chinese Class” to teach Chinese by using school-based Chinese language teaching materials.
Allocation of teachers with TCFL certification	○ 2 of teachers acquired TCFL certification after on the job training.	×	○ 6 of teachers acquired TCFL certification. Half of them are TCFL-major graduates while the rest are obtained certification after on the job training.	○ 3 of teachers acquired TCFL certification after on the job training.

Table 3. The Chinese Language Instruction in schools under principle of “learning in regular class”.

	school D	school E	
	elementary and secondary school	elementary school	secondary school
Presence or absence of Chinese language teaching	×	×	×
Chinese language instruction (teaching material and curriculum)	×	Teachers take lessons after school voluntarily if they have time; Teaching materials of “Chinese” subject is × mainly used.	
Allocation of teachers with TCFL certification	×	○ Only 1 teacher had TCFL certification. This teacher attended on the job training and passed TCFL certificate examination for after admission of foreign students. ×	

Table 4. School F transition from the “foreign students’ division” to the “learning in regular class”.

	school F	
	period of “foreign students’ division”	period of “learning in regular class”
Presence or absence of Chinese language teaching	○	×
Chinese language instruction (teaching material and curriculum)	Chinese language classes are established. Teachers with TCFL certificate are teaching Chinese with materials purchased from outside.	×
Allocation of teachers with TCFL certification	○ 2 of teachers acquired TCFL certification. Both of them attended on the job training and passed TCFL certificate examination after admission of foreign students.	×

5. Conclusion

Through analyses from empirical and theoretical research on foreign students' admission system of public primary and secondary schools in Shanghai, some issues on Chinese language teaching can be prompted here.

5.1. Issues Concerning the Allocation of TCFL Teachers

With regard to the admission provision, the Chinese language teachers who are providing education activities for foreign students must be qualified to acquire certification of TCFL regardless of being full-time or part-time teacher. In other words, teachers are required to have the ability to be evaluated through the TCFL system to teach foreign students. However, there are 2 problems within the admission system that are evident.

Firstly, the shortage of the TCFL teachers: Relatively speaking, the number of teachers who acquire certification of TCFL is too small to meet the increasing necessity of Chinese language instruction for foreign students, which implied that the training system of TCFL teachers in China is far from satisfying the learning demands of foreign students in public schools. Therefore, the situation calls for establishment and improvement of TCFL teachers training system urgently. At that time, the expertise of the teacher's knowledge aimed at foreign students in primary and secondary schools should be considered on the basis of the present TCFL system.

There are four suggestions that could be considered: 1) Construct training bases for TCFL teachers relying on the training base in colleges and universities now available to improve the level of Chinese language training of TCFL. 2) Strengthen the training for TCFL teachers based on internet. Particularly there is a need to formulate targeted, personalized and practical programs for training teachers with different levels and nationalities. 3) Set up volunteer talent bank by expanding the admission of students majoring in TCFL and non-English majors to enrich the knowledge of students majoring in TCFL. 4) Enlarge the volunteer designation to primary and secondary schools and promote their treatment. It is suggested that the volunteers can be mainly selected from the undergraduate students majoring in humanities and social sciences (Zhang, 2018).

Secondly, the lack of support from the educational administration: Specifically, the first problem is the unawareness of the necessity for arrangement of TCFL teachers to public schools and the second one is the no financial supports for training them.

From the interview of the principals and the directors of three schools in the form of "learning in regular class", it is difficult to hire TCFL teachers outside or training current TCFL teachers at school to level up professional ability because of inadequate financial support from the educational administration. Furthermore, it is indispensable to promote the teachers' training program of TCFL. At that time, the arrangement of TCFL teachers should be considered with efforts according to the actual needs of schools at different districts. In order to compensate for the shortage of TCFL teachers at this stage, there is also a need to

incorporate people with TCFL certificate as volunteers.

5.2. Issues on Development of Teaching Materials

The field investigation, testified that the schools which are implementing the Chinese language instruction had some problems in compiling textbooks. In particular, it is reflected that the language teaching syllabus such as what's for Chinese students hasn't been designed for foreign students so that the teaching materials are not unified and the teachers had to teach Chinese as feeling for stone crossing a river which is evidently the obstacle during the teaching process. Therefore, it is necessary to develop educational materials for TCFL foreign students in primary and secondary schools by education administrations for each school.

In 2005, the Chinese government shifted the policy of foreign education from teaching and learning of language to the spread of Chinese culture into the world through Chinese language. Under this circumstance, in order to strengthen the function of local government and schools in popularizing Chinese language and culture, the project "Primary and secondary school base for international promotion of Chinese" has started in 2007. The identified base schools are mainly responsible for the Chinese language curriculum development for foreigners, the dispatch of Chinese language teachers and volunteers to foreign countries, and the training of TCFL teachers. However, the Chinese language curriculum development within subject is mainly aimed for adult learners. Nowadays, it is necessary to develop Chinese language curriculum for foreign students in public elementary and secondary schools under the consideration of the necessity of Chinese instruction for foreign students in the above-mentioned problems faced by schools.

At present, the Chinese language curriculum for foreign students in public elementary and secondary schools is not mentioned. In the case of Shanghai, the educational management problems and countermeasures for foreign students even as Chinese language teacher training were discussed in the first seminar on "Chinese teaching in primary and secondary schools of Shanghai international promotion of Chinese language" held on 24, Mar, 2009, but the curriculum development was passed over. From the above, it is considered to be an important subject for the educational administration organization to develop curriculum and materials effectively.

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Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

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