

Achievements and Challenges of Chinese Language Teaching in Nigeria: Study of the Confucius Institute at Nnamdi Azikiwe University, 2008-2023

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Abstract

Africa is considered the region with the best performance by the Confucius Institutes, and the Confucius Institute at Nnamdi Azikiwe University in Nigeria (hereafter referred to as CI at NAU or the Institute) is an outstanding exemplar among Africa's Confucius Institutes. It has provided Chinese language training to more than 50,000 Nigerians and supplied about 30,000-strong Chinese-proficient manpower to different enterprises in Nigeria and beyond. In terms of efficiency in Chinese language teaching and multiple data indicators of the HSK exam, the Institute has set several records. Since 2018, in the "Chinese Bridge" competition, the Institute has produced 3 continental (African) champions, 2 "First Prize" winners, and 4 "Third Prize" winners in the world. Despite these achievements, the Institute faces the challenge of a severe shortage of teaching resources. This paper argues that, only by increasing support for Chinese language education, can the difficulties in Chinese language teaching in Nigeria be resolved.

Keywords

Confucius Institute, Chinese Teaching, HSK, Chinese Bridge, Achievements, Challenges

1. Introduction

The Confucius Institute, named after Confucius (551-479 BC) and funded by

Hanban, is a non-profit education organization, devoted to:

- 1) Satisfying the demands of people from different countries and regions in the world who learn the Chinese language;
- 2) Enhancing understanding of the Chinese language and culture by these peoples;
- 3) Strengthening educational and cultural exchange and cooperation between China and other countries;
- 4) Deepening friendly relationships with other nations;
- 5) Promoting the development of multi-culturalism, and constructing a harmonious world (MOE, 2008, 25 April).

Its services are:

- 1) Conducting Chinese language teaching and relevant research;
- 2) Carrying out teaching and research in other related disciplines or fields where the Chinese language is used as the teaching language;
- 3) Providing education and training for Chinese language teachers;
- 4) Developing Chinese language teaching and learning resources;
- 5) Running language and cultural exchange programs between China and other countries;
- 6) Administering examinations and offering certification regarding Chinese language and culture;
- 7) Conducting research and providing consulting services regarding Chinese education, culture, economy, etc.;
- 8) Providing other activities consistent with the mission of the Confucius Institutes (CI, n.d.).

It is established under an equal partnership between a Chinese university and a foreign university and must be sited on campus. Hanban supplies the Chinese teachers as well as the teaching materials, while the teaching point institution (TPI) provides the building facilities (classrooms, offices, etc.), guarantees the safety of the teachers and may pay a token living allowance to the teachers. Where there are security concerns, the teachers must live on campus. To extend their reach, the Institutes establish affiliates called Confucius Classrooms at universities, high schools, primary schools, etc., for example, the ones established by CI at NAU at Nnamdi Azikiwe High School, Federal Polytechnic, Oko and the University of Port Harcourt. The Chinese Embassies may establish their own Confucius Classrooms, for example, the one established at the University of Nigeria.

Some Confucius Institutes mingle their mandate with non-language programmes. Examples of such Institutes are the Victoria Business Confucius Institute, Australia; the Confucius Institute for Chinese Medicine at the Federal University of Goiás; the Academic Confucius Institute, Göttingen; the Tourism Confucius Institute at Udayana University; the Chinese and Regenerative Medicine Confucius Institute at National University of Ireland, Galway; Arizona Confucius Institute of Traditional Chinese Medicine; the Radio Confucius Classroom at Japan-China Friendship Association of Nagano Prefecture and the

Confucius Institute for Dance and Performance at Goldsmiths, University of London.

The first Confucius Institute in the world was established at the University of Seoul in 2004 (The pilot Institute was established at the University of Tashkent in 2004). The first Institute in Africa was established at the University of Nairobi on December 19, 2005 (*Xinhua*, 2005). In January 2007, Nnamdi Azikiwe University (hereafter, NAU) signed an agreement with Xiamen University to jointly establish a Confucius Institute. On March 7, 2008, Ilochi Okafor (the then Vice-Chancellor of NAU) and Jiang Weiming (蒋伟明) (the then Cultural Counsellor of the Chinese Embassy in Nigeria) inaugurated the Confucius Institute, thereby marking the official establishment of the first Confucius Institute in Nigeria (*Embassy of PRC*, 2008). 7 months afterward the University of Lagos (hereafter, Unilag) and Beijing Institute of Technology signed their own agreement to jointly establish a Confucius Institute. The second Confucius Institute in the country was formally established on October 16, 2009 (*China News*, 2009).

In the past 2 decades, Africa has become the region with the best record in harnessing the Confucius Institutes for effective Chinese language education in the world. At the Joint Conference of Confucius Institutes in Africa held on May 14-15, 2018 in Maputo (the capital of Mozambique), Li Zhanshu (the then Chairman of the Standing Committee of the National People's Congress) pointed out in his opening speech that "Africa currently has 54 Confucius Institutes and 30 Confucius Classrooms established across 41 countries, having cumulatively trained over 1.4 million students of various kinds, making it the region with the best educational outcomes for Confucius Institutes worldwide" (*International Society*, 2018, May 17). His viewpoint was echoed by Ma Jianfei (马箭飞), then one of the five Deputy Directors General of the Confucius Institute Headquarters: "Although it is not the continent with the most Confucius Institutes, Africa is regarded as the region with the best performance in Confucius Institute education globally" (*International Society*, 2018, May 17).

At the closing ceremony of the conference, Yu Yunfeng (郁云峰), then one of the five Deputy Directors General of the Confucius Institute Headquarters, pointed out that CI at NAU was the epitome of the "best performing region" in Africa (*CI at NAU*, 2018, May 20). Inferentially, the Institute is the best-performing Confucius Institute in the world.

This article focuses on CI at Nnamdi Azikiwe University, exploring both its achievements and challenges. The Institute is faced with certain challenges. Firstly, is located in an urban center that still lacks most modern amenities. There is also the challenge of insecurity. These two challenges impact the Chinese teachers' social life, which is essential for recreation and acquaintance with the culture of the host community. The second challenge is the difficulty in harnessing the talents of its outstanding students for competitions. The Institute's achievements in the face of multifarious challenges can be adopted as a survival template/toolkit for the other Institutes, particularly those in the developing regions. These achievements can help the Institutes to focus their work toward

achieving their own goals.

2. Overview of Chinese Language Teaching at CI at NAU

It was mentioned in the foregoing that CI at NAU, jointly established by Xiamen University and Nnamdi Azikiwe University in 2008, is the first Confucius Institute established in Nigeria. The Institute is located in Awka, the capital of Anambra State, in south-eastern Nigeria. It was inaugurated on March 7, 2008. Ji Nengwen (纪能文), its founding Chinese Director, arrived on February 10, 2009. He was preceded by Liu Guancai (刘冠才) and Zhang Jinping (张金平), who laid the groundwork for the take-off of the Institute.

During the past 15 years of its existence, in addition to the parent centre at NAU, CI-NAU currently has 7 affiliated centers—3 in Anambra State and 4 outside the State. In Anambra State, it has established 2 Confucius Teaching Points (CTPs) one each at Nnamdi Azikiwe University Primary School and Nnamdi Azikiwe University Secondary School and one Confucius Classroom at the Polytechnic, Oko. Outside the State, it has established 4 CTPs one each at Enugu State College of Education (Technical), Enugu, Enugu State; Federal College of Agriculture, Ishiagu, Ebonyi State (CI at NAU, 2018, November 4); University of Port Harcourt, Rivers State (CI at NAU, 2019, July 3), and the Chinese Cultural Centre in Abuja.

In 2012, CI at NAU and its host university jointly established a diploma programme. In 2014 the programme was detached from the department of Igbo, African and Asian Studies (now department of Igbo, African and Communication Studies) where it was domiciled and upgraded to a full-fledged undergraduate programme. The department, currently the only full-fledged one in the country, produced its pioneer graduates in 2018 (CI at NAU, 2018, August 13). 10 of the 14 pioneers have done master's in China. The department has passed 2 rounds of quinquennial accreditation by the National Universities Commission—in 2017 and 2022. Its current student number exceeds the combined total in the department of Modern European Languages where French, German, Italian and Spanish languages are taught. The department has become one of the most-sought-after departments among the about 60 departments there are in the university, and the Chinese language has not only displaced French as the most popular foreign language in the Faculty of Arts, it has also made Chinese Studies one of the most popular majors in the university.

There are currently 3 categories of students at the Institute: single-programme students, combined-programme students and executive programme students. The first do only the HSK programme; and most of them are secondary-school leavers who have not gone to university. The second combines their degree studies with their HSK programme. The third are government officials or Unizik Business School students, whose syllabus focuses on basic and business Chinese. About 1800 students study at the Institute every year. Majority of HSK programme students are young boys and girls age 16 - 24 years who have not passed

the university entrance examinations or who cannot afford to continue their education beyond high school. Some parents now enroll their wards in the programme, rather than keeping them at home during the wait for admission to university.

HSK stands for Hànyǔ Shuǐpíng Kǎoshì (汉语水平考试), which, translated, means Chinese Proficiency Test. It is an international standardized test that focuses on examining the ability of non-native speakers of Chinese to functionally use Chinese in daily living, for study, and at work. It includes written and oral tests. The written test has 6 levels—the first and second levels are elementary levels, the third and fourth are intermediate, while the fifth and sixth are advanced.

HSKK (Hànyǔ Shuǐpíng Kǒuyǔ Kǎoshì), Spoken Chinese Proficiency Test, is comprised of 3 levels—the elementary level, the intermediate level and the advanced level (Beijing International Studies University, 2006). HSK 4 and intermediate HSKK are among the requirements for Confucius Institute Scholarships (CIS) for Bachelor's in Teaching Chinese to Speakers of Other Languages (BTC SOL) in China. Likewise, HSK 5 and intermediate HSKK are required for Master's in Teaching Chinese to Speakers of Other Languages (MTC SOL) (CLEC, n.d., Application Procedure). Only Chinese universities and a handful of Confucius Institutes provide HSK 6 and training in advanced HSKK. CI-NAU is one of the few Confucius Institutes in the world that offer these 2 levels of HSK. In addition to the HSK program, the Institute offers Chinese language courses to Unizik Business School's MBA students and refresher courses for local Chinese language teachers each year at its parent center. The Chinese Cultural Centre in Abuja leverages its location in the federal capital to provide basic Chinese language courses to servicemen (the police, the military, Civil Defence, Department of State Service, immigration and customs), airport and staff of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. About 200 such officials are trained every year.

In summary, in the past 25 years, the Institute has provided various Chinese language training programs (short-term, medium-term and long-term) to about 50,000 people, including HSK program students, primary and secondary school students, students of the Department of Chinese Studies, MBA students, local Chinese language teachers and public/civil servants.

3. Advantages and Achievements in Chinese Proficiency Training

CI at NAU's foremost advantage over the other Institutes is arguably its ability to foreshorten the length of time its students learn Chinese. According to the International Curriculum for Chinese Language Education supervised by CLEC, the total number of periods from HSK 1 to HSK 6 are 826 periods: HSK1 (45 periods), HSK2 (45 periods), HSK3 (80 periods), HSK4 (120 periods), HSK5 (216 periods), HSK6 (320 periods) (BLCUP, 2014). Generally, the class meets twice a week, namely 4 periods per week. If it is according to 36 weeks per academic

year, the span of 826 periods should be 206.5 weeks, 5.74 years; that is to say, it takes nearly 6 years to complete all levels of courses. Given that each class meets twice a week, amounting to 4 periods per week, the duration for learning Chinese at various levels is as follows:

The elementary level of Chinese (HSK1-HSK2), which requires 90 periods, spans over 22 weeks;

The intermediate level of Chinese (HSK3-HSK4), which requires 200 periods, spans 50 weeks;

The advanced level of Chinese (HSK5), which requires 216 periods, spans 54 weeks;

The highest level of Chinese (HSK6), which requires 320 periods, spans 80 weeks.

The reason why the advanced level of Chinese language training is divided into HSK 5 and HSK 6 is that, as mentioned previously, to apply for MTC SOL, one only needs to attain HSK 5; so, most Confucius Institutes do not have the need to go beyond HSK 5. At the Institute class sizes thin out as students move upwards on the HSK ladder. For example, a class that started off with 200 students in HSK 1 could shrink to as few as 5 students after the HSK 5 examination.

The Institute's greatest strength is its HSK program for adults. As mentioned above, the total number of lessons from HSK 1 to HSK 6 are 826 periods, which should span 206.5 weeks. The Institute, however, can halve the period, enabling its students to complete the same span in just only 102 weeks. Here is the span of each level: HSK 1 and HSK 2 span 18 weeks; HSK 3 and HSK 4 span 26 weeks; HSK 5 spans 28 weeks; HSK 6 spans 30 weeks.

The Institute excels in providing highly efficient Chinese language training within the shortest possible time span, and it has consistently excelled in the HSK exams and currently holds a couple of world records. According to the HSK exam repository of Chinese Testing International Co., Ltd (the agency in charge of HSK), the Institute's average pass rate in elementary HSK is more than 90%, the pass rate in the intermediate level is about 85%, and the average pass rate in HSK 5 is more than 75%. This achievement in Chinese language teaching is very rare among the 499 Confucius Institutes and 793 Confucius Classrooms we currently have in 160 countries in 2023. Its performance in HSK is also outstanding globally, as evidenced by the following cases.

All the 15 students from the Institute who took the HSK 6 exam in February 2018 attained the top world ranking in writing, listening, and reading among the 1,417 test sites worldwide that year in 2018 (CI at NAU, 2018, October 27). In 2019, 34 students sat the HSK 6 exam. 24 of them passed at a rate of 70.6% (CI at NAU, 2019, February 19). These 24 were among the global total of 34 who sat the exam from more than 500 Confucius Institutes worldwide. For the second time, students of the Institute achieved the top world ranking in writing, listening, and reading in the HSK 6 exam. Thirdly, in 2018 the Institute became the second Institute in the world to offer advanced HSKK training. In January 2019 it entered 21 candidates in the advanced HSKK exam for the first time since its

inception. All its 21 candidates passed the exam and at a pass rate of 100% (CI at NAU, 2018, November 14). A total of 22 passed the exam in that year from among the world's more than 500 Confucius Institutes. The Institute took the first place in the world in both the total number of students who passed the advanced spoken test and the pass rate. Those 2 records remain unbroken. 13-year-old Lucy Obiajulu (罗茜) passed her HSK 5 exam in 2020. She was the youngest secondary school student in Nigeria to pass that level (CI at NAU, 2020, July 13). The level is designed for adults. Patrick Ohazurume (张智豪), an undergraduate in the faculty of Engineering at the host university, set the following 4 consecutive outstanding records at the Institute and in Nigeria within 18 months of studying Chinese, despite his heavy study load: HSK 4: 300/300; HSK 5: 288/300; HSK 6: 252/300; Advanced HSKK: 73/100 (CI at NAU, 2019, March 5).

These scores, which were the best not only in Nigeria but also among all the Confucius Institutes in the world, truly stand him out among Chinese language learners globally.

CI at NAU became an HSK center in 2012. As of December 2023, over 10,339 candidates have taken their exams at that centre (West Africa News Weekly, 2023, December 10). It won the 2023 Outstanding Chinese Test Center at the first World Chinese Language Conference held in Beijing on December 7, 2023. 48 out of 1, 374 centers from different parts of the world (including 16 in Asia, 12 in Europe, 5 in the Americas, 6 in Africa, 1 in Oceania, and 8 within China) were nominated for the award by CLEC (CTI, 2023, December 8). That was the fourth time that it had won the same award. It had previously won it in 2017, 2019 and 2021 (CI at NAU, 2023, December 10). Consistent recognition underscores its commitment to excellence in Chinese language education.

4. Corporate Recognition of Chinese Language Learners

CI at NAU established a relationship with China General Chamber of Commerce in Nigeria in March 2018. The chamber has a membership of over 1000 enterprises, including all Chinese State-owned enterprises (SOEs) operating in Nigeria. These enterprises are engaged in various sectors of Nigeria's economy—oil and gas, infrastructure, manufacturing, communication, agriculture, mining, internet, engineering construction, building materials, automobile, electricity, etc. (China General Chamber, n.d.). It regularly recommends students for employment as interpreters/translators, sales representatives, public relations officers, etc. to enterprises, such as China Civil Engineering Construction Corporation (CCECC), TEC Engineering International (TEC), China Harbour Engineering (CHEC), SINOMA International Engineering (SINOMA), China National Petroleum Corporation (PetroChina) and China Petrochemical Corporation (Sinopec), Yongxing Steel (Yongxing), Star Times, Times Ceramics, Rongtai Aluminum Industry, Kingrock Nigeria Ltd, (Kingrock), Anhui Construction Engineering Group (AHCE), Juddy-Bolema Luggage Company (Juddy-Bolema),

SinFrica Business Station (SinFrica), China-Nigeria Friendship Hospital (CNFH), Huawei, OPPO Mobile Communications (OPPO) and China Blue Sea Petrochemical and Godfrey Technology (Godfrey).

It also consults (for free) for provincial chambers of commerce, such as the Fujian Fellow Association, Fujian Chamber of Commerce, Anhui Chamber of Commerce, Jiangsu Association of Business, Shandong Chamber of Commerce, Jiangxi United Chamber of Commerce, the Fellow Association of Guangdong, Hong Kong, Macao and Guangdong Chambers of Commerce, the Association of Chinese Enterprises in the Lekki Free Trade Zone, Association of Chinese Enterprises in the Ogun Free Trade Zone, etc. These entities equal about 3, 000 medium and small-scale private enterprises.

About 18,000 alumni were employed by Chinese enterprises between 2018 and 2023 on the recommendation of the Institute. Those alumni are working in different Chinese enterprises operating in Nigeria as well as in other countries such as South Africa and Ghana. In fact, the students and/or alumni of the Institute are now ubiquitous in Chinese enterprises operating in Nigeria. Some of them have even joined the management cadre of their respective employers. For example, Esther Egwu Etta (陈思思) who, in 2018, became public relations officer of China Blue Sea Petrochemical Co. Ltd., was liaison between Sinopec and CNOOC in Nigeria (CI at NAU, 2019, April 14). Paul Chinedu Dike (耿一凡), then a fourth-year undergraduate in the Department of Chinese Studies interned at China Harbour Engineering Co., Ltd in 2022. The firm oversaw the construction of Lekki Deepwater Port in Lagos, Nigeria (CI at NAU, 2022, December 6). The CEO was so impressed with his services that he re-engaged him upon his graduation a year later, this time as his personal assistant. Martin Leonard (李汉文) and Okoli Marycynthia (李红梅) respectively got employed as personal assistants to the CEO of Rongtai Aluminum Industry Ltd. and Godfrey Technology Co., Ltd. in 2023, after passing HSK 5. Some alumni even work overseas in countries such as the UK, France and India for businesses with ties with China. For example, Maryjane Oge Ifekpolugo (叶文婷) worked as a Hanban-supported local teacher in both the Confucius Institute and the Department of Chinese Studies from 2019 until 2021 (CI at NAU, 2021, September 22) when she joined Jackdaw Capital International Asset Management Company, a firm engaged in facilitating business contacts for Chinese investors in the UK.

Some alumni have even started their own Chinese language centers or consultancy services. One such alumnus, Moses Shuaibu-Yahaya Efe (吴文仲), owns the Lagos-based Efe Best Chinese Training School which he started in 2021 after obtaining his master's degree in China (Efe Best Chinese, n.d.). He was elected founding president of the Confucius Institute Alumni Association of Nigeria in 2023 (Voices of Lagos, 2023, July 23). After completing their studies, some alumni will opt to stay back in order to work in China, rather than returning to Nigeria. An example of such alumni is Nwaegbu Ugoyahweh (林君浩), who studied at Xiamen University (our partner university) from 2016 to 2019. This

alumnus and his Chinese classmate co-founded the El-Safari Trade Company in Xiamen in 2019. The company primarily engages in the export of electronic products, epidemic prevention kits, etc. (from China) and import of rosewood and other raw materials (from Nigeria). He and his Chinese wife own their own 3 businesses in China (XMU, 2022, February 13).

About 50,000 Nigerians have studied at the Institute in the past 15 years of its establishment. 30,000 of them are gainfully employed. Demand by Chinese enterprises for Nigerians with proficiency in Chinese appears insatiable. Grati­fyingly, the Institute has been supremely able to meet their demand. The employment rate of alumni with HSK 3 proficiency is 100%. Alumni prefer working in other African countries such as Ghana and South Africa because it pays higher than working in Nigeria (Interview with select alumni, 2023). The starting salary for those who have reached the intermediate HSK is generally N200,000 - N300,000 per month, excluding fringe benefits, such as free accommodation, performance-related commission, all-expenses-paid trips and bonuses. For those who have reached the advanced levels, the starting salary is N300,000 - N800,000 per month. Those who have reached these levels and have also studied in China can earn a starting monthly salary of N1,000,000 - N1,500,000.

The alumni's standing with Chinese enterprises is so high that some people from private Chinese language centers in the country will scheme to pass off as alumni of the Institute during job hunt. Many Chinese enterprises or local enterprises with Chinese employees now source the bulk of their local mid-cadre-cum-white-collar staff (interpreters/translators, sales representatives, etc.) from the pool of talents produced by the Institute. So impressed by the alumni are the Chinese enterprises that now feel the need to foster the mutually beneficial relationship that has created a corporate stake for them in the development of the Institute. That need is the major reason why they are supporting the Institute in different ways. Here are some of the enterprises that are giving back to the Institute for its contribution to the production of Chinese-proficient local manpower. CCECC (China Civil Engineering Construction Corporation), in 2018, donated 3 200-meter-deep boreholes to the Institute: one at the parent center, one at the Chinese teachers' lodge and one at the Confucius Classroom at Federal Polytechnic, Oko. The 3 boreholes solved once and for all the perennial water problem that had plagued both the Institute and its affiliated center for years (CI at NAU, 2018, April 8). In the same year, SinFrica Business Station donated a solar energy system to the Confucius Classroom at Oko (CI at NAU, n.d., Document). Since 2020 (following the outbreak of COVID-19), Yongxing Steel Company (based in Benin City, Edo State) has without fail always donated both foodstuffs and medicines to the Institute during the Chinese festivals (CI at NAU, 2023, February 6). In fact, more than 80% of the Chinese teachers' foodstuffs since the pandemic have come from this Chinese enterprise. Just last January, TEC Engineering Company Nigeria Limited (TEC) repaired leaky roofs at the Confucius Institute and replaced the wire fence around the teachers' lodge with razor-wired brick fence to improve security for the teachers. Lastly, Anhui

Construction, Xiamen Luggage Company, SINOMA, Star Times and China-Nigeria Friendship Hospital have donated learning materials for the students and foodstuffs for the teachers (CI at NAU, n.d., Document).

5. Alumni's Outstanding Performance

A total of 719 Chinese-language learners from CI at NAU have received various scholarships to study in China during the past 15 years of the Institute's inception—86 one-year scholarships, 313 undergraduate scholarships, 233 master's scholarships and 87 doctoral scholarships (21 doctoral students have finished their studies). Many of these scholarship students have excelled among their classmates from other countries.

In 2015, Obodoefuna Doris Chigozie (范思齐), a Confucius Institute Scholarship (CIS) awardee, started her undergraduate studies at the Communication University of China. During her studies, she hosted "Happy Chinese" (XMU, 2017, December 18)—a CCTV-4 program that is hugely popular with millions of Chinese language learners across the world. In 2016 Justina Chukwuma (金佑琪) won a scholarship to do a master's degree at Lanzhou University. During her studies, she mastered the art of making the Lanzhou beef noodle soup (Lanzhou la mian), a popular dish with origin in Lanzhou, the capital of Gansu province. Courtesy of her culinary prowess in preparing a bowl of the soup in just 30 seconds, which has been widely reported in the Chinese media, she has become famous in China. She plans to open a restaurant in Nigeria on completion of her studies (China News, 2019, December 12). In 2017 Harford Michael Kenechuwu (韩懋宇) went to Nankai University for his master's. He participated in the 2nd Competition of Chinese Teaching Hero (Global Competition for International Chinese Teaching Skills Exchange) organised by Hanban in 2018. The competition lasted more than 90 days and featured 353 master's students majoring in Chinese in different universities in China from 36 countries across 4 continents: Asia, Africa, Europe, and South America. He won the competition (People's Daily, 2018, July 6), becoming the first world champion among Chinese language learners in Nigeria. In recognition of his achievements, he was invited to the Global Confucius Institutes Conference held in Chengdu, Sichuan Province in November 2019. During the conference he had the honor of meeting Prof. Joseph Eberendu Ahaneku (the then Vice Chancellor of Nnamdi Azikiwe University), Prof. Charles Okechukwu Esimone (the then Deputy Vice Chancellor (Academic) and current Vice Chancellor), and Prof. Carol Chinyelugo Arinze-Umobi (the then Deputy Vice Chancellor (Administrative)) in Chengdu.

In 2023, during his doctorate at the same university, he was featured in the bilingual video documentary, "China's Poverty Alleviation Story" produced by Xinhua (China Youth Daily, 2021, July 19). He became a celebrity in China, courtesy of that documentary. Nweke Chioma Precious (赵馨兰) came second in the national championship of the Chinese Bridge for College Students in both 2019 and 2020 editions. She received a Confucius Institute scholarship to do

BTC SOL (Bachelor's in Teaching Chinese to Speakers of Other Languages) at the Communication University of China. Under the stage name Honmma, she participated in the widely acclaimed talent show, "The Avenue of Stars" (CCTV, n.d.) organized by CCTV General Channel. This show is modeled on the Hollywood's "Walk of Fame". She made the selection stage of the 2020 "The Avenue of Stars" (Honmma microblog, n.d.). She has released multiple singles (Honmma Youtube, n.d.), synchronized for sale on Apple Music (Honmma Apple music, n.d.), and has become a popular pop singer.

Ifeoma Amuche Gladys (陈悦) started her undergraduate studies at Southwest University in China in 2019. Her outstanding performance in the "2022 China Poetry Conference" held in China catapulted her to international stardom. She was followed by nearly a hundred media outlets, including Xinhua and China News, plus the massive media coverage of her proficiency in Chinese, which made her widely acclaimed in China (Xinhua, 2022, April 6). She was her university's 2023 valedictorian. Her speech attracted attention in China and beyond. As a result, Peter Obi (one of the 3 leading candidates in Nigeria's 2023 presidential elections) retweeted her speech in full on his X (Twitter) handle, congratulating and praising her (Obi, 2023, June 23).

The second alumnus of the Confucius Institute to become a world champion was Ojimmadu Raphael Ebube (李昊瑞), the "First Prize" winner of the 19th Chinese Bridge Competition for College Students held in 2020. Currently a BTC SOL student at Shanghai Foreign Studies University, participated in the 2023 edition of "Chinese Bridge Chinese Proficiency Competition for Foreigners Across the Globe: Storytelling Contest". The competition creates a new model of "Chinese Bridge and media integration," allowing Chinese language enthusiasts from all over the world to gather online to tell stories in Chinese, with a view to helping the language go global, enabling the world to embrace Chinese and popularizing the building of a community with a shared future for mankind (Chinese Bridge, n.d.). More than 3000 contestants from over 70 countries took part in the competition. He won the championship (West Africa Business Weekly, 2023, September 23).

Divine Azubuike Chidera (王成功) won the "Third Prize" in the 13th Chinese Bridge Competition for Secondary School Students held in 2020, an achievement that earned him a scholarship to study at the Shanghai Foreign Studies University. He won the 6th SFLEP (Shanghai Foreign Language Education Press) Cup of Intercultural Competence Contest for College Students, funded by the Shanghai Foreign Language Education Press). The final which was held in December 2023 involved participants from 52 Chinese and 20 international students from 741 universities across 23 provinces and cities in China. He won the competition (West African Business Weekly, 2023, December 23), thereby becoming the third world champion produced by the Institute.

6. Recognition

The students of the Confucius Institute at Nnamdi Azikiwe University have

convincingly demonstrated their advantages in various Chinese language-related competitions at national and international levels by winning awards and acclamation. So far, there has not been even one single competition in which they have not reached the podium. This assertion is buttressed in the following sections.

6.1. Participation in National Championships

There are currently 2 Confucius Institutes in Nigeria—at Nnamdi Azikiwe University and at the University of Lagos. Additionally, 4 Embassy-supported CTPs have been established at the University of Nigeria, Ahmadu Bello University, Afe Babalola University, and University of Ibadan. There are also a number of private teaching centers that have been established at secondary schools. About 20,000 study at these Chinese language centers in Nigeria every year.

To commemorate the 70th anniversary of the founding of the People's Republic of China, the Chinese Embassy in Nigeria in September 2019 organized a national Chinese language competition titled "China in My Eyes". Remarkably, all 3 entrants from CI at NAU took the first 3 positions. Oruna Amarachi Lynda (张静雯) took the first prize, Nwachukwu Oluchukwu Maryjane (金玛丽) the second prize, and Chukwuemeka Ebuka Cosmos (孟思凯) the third prize (CI at NAU, 2019, September 11).

In the "CCECC Cup" Chinese speech competition hosted by the Chinese Embassy in 2020 to commemorate the 50th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between China and Nigeria, all 7 contestants from the Institute won prizes: Dike Paul Chinedu (耿一凡)—1st position; Agbo Victoria Ene (安然) and Anenechi Judith (郑歆柔)—2nd position; Onyekere Nancy Ngozi (安若溪), Ogwe Udoka Sophia (欧亚), and Chidozie Afiomah (柴青云)—3rd position, Ogbonna Emmanuella Oluchi (李佳蔚)—"Excellence Award" (CI at NAU, 2020, December 18).

Since 2018, CI at NAU has produced 27 winners in the national championship of the Chinese Proficiency Competition for Foreign College Students ("Chinese Bridge")—4 champions, 7 runners-up, and 16 winners of "Third Prize", "Best Talent Prize", and "Best Eloquence Prize". Ekwensi Anthony Ebuka (丁家明) and Nweke Chioma Precious (赵馨兰) took the first position and second respectively in the 2018 edition. Alaoma Ebubechukwu (张浩凯) was the runner-up in 2019. The champion and runner-up in 2020 were Ojimmadu Raphael Ebube (李昊瑞) and Ifemeje Promise (李墨翰) respectively. In 2021 the champion and runner-up were Agbo Victoria Ene (安然) and Michael Praise Chinecherem (何书仪) respectively. Azubuike Divine Chidera (王成功) won the championship in 2022. In 2023 Okechukwu Chioma Lovinah (苏瑾玥) was the champion, while Olorunyomi Titilayo Janet (郝萱怡) and Mbah Lawrence Chidera (洛聿为) tied for the runner-up position. The champion and runner-up in 2019 were Samuel Miracle (顾思源) and Ojimmadu Raphael Ebube (李昊瑞) respectively. The champion and runner-up were Azubuike Divine Chidera (王成功) and Nekeorji

Victoria Kenekwkwu (李悦然) respectively in 2020. In 2021 the champion and runner-up were Ogbonna Oluchi Emmanuella (李佳蔚) and Mr. Afiomah Chidozie (柴青云) respectively. In 2022, the champion and runner-up were Okorie Nelson Somuadina (张帅哲) and Obiajulu Ijeoma Lucy (罗茜) respectively. The champion and runner-up in 2023 were Jacob Angel Omotola (安姝瑶) and Innocent Emmanuel Ihuoma (常博胜) respectively.

In short, since 2018 CI at NAU has produced 9 championships and 12 runners-up in the national championship of the Chinese Bridge competition.

6.2. Participation in International Competitions Organised by Xiamen University

CI at NAU was co-founded by Xiamen University and Nnamdi Azikiwe University. It is one of the 16 Confucius Institutes Xiamen University has co-founded with universities in the United States, Canada, the United Kingdom, Germany, France, Poland, South Africa, Nigeria, Turkey, New Zealand, Thailand, and the Philippines. Its international students come from 5 continents, namely Asia, Africa, Europe, America, and Oceania. Therefore, all its language-related competitions are international competitions.

3 alumni from CI at NAU debuted in the “Understanding China” short video competition for international students at Xiamen University in 2022. Both Okorie Nelson Somuadina (张帅哲) and Obiajulu Ijeoma Lucy (罗茜) won the “First Prize” respectively, while Agbo Victoria Ene (安然) secured the “Third Prize” (CI at NAU, 2022, December 19).

In 2023, all 7 contestants from the Institute who participated in the competition received prizes. Innocent Emmanuel Ihuoma (常博胜) won the “First Prize”, while both Titilayo Janet Olorunyomi (郝萱怡) and Jacob Angel Omotola (安姝瑶) jointly won the “Second Prize”. Both Chioma Lovinah Okechukwu (苏瑾玥) and Betty Shun-Chang (周文静) won the “Excellent Prize” respectively (CI at NAU, 2023, November 26). 2 alumni of the Institute won 2 prizes in the 2023 “Fu Culture to the World” short video competition: Okorie Nelson Somuadina (张帅哲) won the “Most Potential Prize”, while Obiajulu Ijeoma Lucy (罗茜) won the “Best Creativity Prize”.

6.3. Participation in International Competitions Organised by CLEC

499 Confucius Institutes and 793 Confucius Classrooms have been established in 160 countries and regions around the world, and more than 190 countries and regions have launched Chinese education projects. More than 160 countries have set up more than 1300 Chinese proficiency test centers, and the current number of people learning Chinese overseas exceeds 30 million (Guangming Daily, 2023, December 12). Therefore, all the Chinese-language competitions organized by the Center for Language Education and Cooperation (CLEC) are global competitions.

CI at NAU scooped 11 awards in the “One Minute ‘Fun’ Environmental Protection” video contest hosted by CLEC in September 2022. 8 contestants won the “Excellent Awards”. Nwankwo Chioma Henrietta (张一), at the time a first-year undergraduate in the Department of Chinese Studies, won the “Third Prize”. Their coach, Zhang Le (张乐), a Chinese teacher, won the “Excellent Tutor” award. The Institute won the “Excellent Organization Prize”.

In April 2023, the Institute won 3 awards at the 2022 Chinese Proficiency Competition for Foreigners Across Globe-Online Dubbing Show) Dike Paul Chinedu (耿一凡), at the time a fourth-year student in the Department of Chinese Studies, won the “Best Male Voice” award. His co-entry, Ibikunle Abigail Oluwatofunmi, then a second-year coursemate, clinched the “Dubbing Show Star” award. In addition to these individual awards, the Institute was also honored with the “Excellent Organization Prize”, which further reinforced its standing among the Confucius Institutes (CI at NAU, 2023, April 24).

6.4. Participation in Chinese Bridge

Chinese Bridge is a CLEC-organised international Chinese proficiency competition for foreigners. It is comprised of 4 categories, namely Chinese Bridge for Foreign College (University) Students, Chinese Bridge for Foreign Secondary School Students, Chinese Bridge for Foreign Primary School Students and Chinese Bridge for Foreign Students in China. Over 1.5 million young students from over 160 countries have participated in this premier Chinese language competition since its inception 22 years ago.

It is not only a test of students’ Chinese proficiency but also an important parameter for measuring the Chinese teaching level of the Confucius Institutes. The largest Chinese language competition in the world, it has been dubbed the “Chinese Olympics” (Chinese Bridge, 2023, October 19). It is organized in two stages: the preliminary round and the finals. The preliminary round, coordinated by the cultural offices of the Chinese Embassies, Consulates General, or the Confucius Institutes themselves, takes place among the Confucius Institutes in the same country. National champions are then invited to China to compete in the finals.

Typically, national champions have at least 3 - 5 years of experience in learning the Chinese language; and most have spent several years studying or living in China. However, none of the 9 national champions from CI at NAU had prior experience learning Chinese before joining the Institute or living in China. For all of them, the longest duration of Chinese language study is 78 weeks; the shortest is 50 weeks.

Remarkably, since its debut in the competition 11 years ago, it has produced 5 national champions in the college (university) students’ category and 4 in the secondary school students’ category. All its 9 champions not only competed in the finals in China, they also made the “Top 30”. This means that in all the 9 instances, it has never exited the finals in China without some prize. 3 of the 9

champions who competed in the finals in China became continental (African) champions (1 college student and 2 secondary school students), 2 global “First Prize” winners, and 4 global “Third Prize” winners (1 college student and 3 secondary school students). Moreover, in the online voting for contestants started in 2021, 4 of the 5 contestants entered by the Institute received not only the most votes but also the “Most Popular Contestant” award.

Ekwensi Anthony Ebuka (丁家明), then a second-year student in the Faculty of Education, distinguished himself in the 17th Chinese Bridge for Foreign College (University) Students in 2018. He came 4th among 152 contestants from 118 countries, emerging the continental (African) Champion (Sohu News, 2018, August 13). He was the first continental (African) champion produced by the Confucius Institutes in Nigeria.

CI at NAU first participated in the Chinese Bridge for Secondary School Students in 2019. Its entry in that year’s edition (the 12th edition), Samuel Miracle (顾思源), competed against 124 fellow national champions from 105 countries. He did not only emerge the continental (African) champion but also made the “Top 3” in the world (XMU, 2019, November 15). He was the first secondary school student in Nigeria to become a continental (African) champion.

Owing to the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, the 2020, 2021 and 2022 editions of the Chinese Bridge competition were all held online. Ojimmadu Raphael Ebube (李昊瑞), competing against 148 other national champions from 83 countries, won the “First Prize” as well as 8th position in the world in the 19th edition of the college students’ category held in 2020 (Chinese Bridge, 2020, November 6). In the 13th edition of the secondary school students’ category held in the same year and which featured 148 national champions from 83 countries, Azubuike Divine Chidera (王成功) won the “Third Prize”, in addition to being ranked 20th in the world (Chinese Bridge, 2020, December 8).

125 national champions from 101 countries participated in the 20th edition of the college students’ category held in 2021. Michael Praise Chinecherem (何书仪), who was in her second year of undergraduate studies in the Department of Chinese Studies, won the “Third Prize”, in addition to being ranked 28th in the world. Online voting for contestants was first used for the competition in that edition (Chinese Bridge, 2021, October 25). Michael received the highest number of votes in the contest and was also awarded the “Most Popular Contestant”. In the same year, Ogbonna Oluchi Emmanuella (李佳蔚), won the “First Prize” and took the 9th place as well in the 14th edition of the secondary school students’ category in which 100 national champions from 76 countries participated. She also won the “Most Popular Contestant” award in the online voting (Chinese Bridge, 2021, December 2). Okorie Nelson Somuadina (张帅哲) won the “Third Prize” and ranked 21st in the 15th edition of the secondary school students’ category that featured 96 national champions from 78 countries. He also received the most votes in the online voting, in addition to his recognition as the “Most Popular Contestant” award (Chinese Bridge, 2022, December 14).

Chinese Bridge finals with national champions physically gathering in China resumed in 2023, following the end of the COVID-19 pandemic. 150 contestants from 124 countries participated in the finals of the 22nd edition of the college students' category held in that year. Chioma Lovinah Okechukwu (苏瑾玥) won the "Third Prize" and was also ranked twentieth in the world. She also became the fourth contestant from the Institute to win the "Most Popular Contestant" award in the online voting of the competition (Chinese Bridge, 2023, September 7). In the same year, 168 contestants from 97 countries attended the 16th edition of the secondary school students' category. Jacob Angel Omotola (安姝瑶) emerged continental (African) champion and was ranked third in the world (Chinese Bridge, 2023, November 6). This made her the Institute's third continental (African) champion in the competition as well as the second among secondary school students. The world champion, who competed alongside her, was a Russian boy who had been learning Chinese since his childhood and had lived in China for 9 years. The first runner-up, a Japanese girl, had been learning Chinese and living in China for 6 years. By contrast, Jacob had been learning Chinese for only 50 weeks, which currently represents the shortest learning time for participants in the Chinese Bridge.

6.5. Institutional Recognition

CI at NAU has been severally commended by the Confucius Institute Headquarters (redesignated Hanban in 2020) and the Chinese International Education Foundation (CIEF) for its outstanding contributions to youth empowerment in Nigeria. For example, Hanban honored Ji Nengwen (the pioneer Director of the Institute) with "Advanced Individual" award in 2009 and 2014 (XMU, 2017, May 25). Likewise, the Institute has received Hanban's "Global Advanced Confucius Institute" award twice—in 2015 and 2017 (XMU, 2019, November 29). Furthermore, "The Fearless Spirit" (a special documentary on the Institute) was featured during the 2023 online Chinese Lunar New Year gala for Confucius Institutes (CICEF, n.d.). In another documentary by CICEF featured on CGTN (China Global Television Network) the Institute was represented as a model Confucius Institute on May 1, 2023, the International Labor Day (CI at NAU, May 1, 2023). The documentary was simultaneously published on CGTN's social media platforms—Weibo, Facebook, and Twitter (CI at NAU, 2023, May 15).

The Institute has trained thousands who have become proficient in Chinese. Recognition of this singular contribution to the growth of China-Nigeria relationship has been extended to not only the Institute but also to officials of the host university; for example, in January 2019 the Chinese Consulate General in Lagos conferred "China-Nigeria Friendship" award on the then Vice Chancellor, Prof. Joseph Eberendu Ahaneku, and the then Public Relations Officer, Dr Emmanuel Chukwunonye Ojukwu (CI at NAU, 2019, January 24). In September 2023, the Consulate General gave the same award to Charles Okechukwu Esimone (incumbent Vice Chancellor) and to the Institute as well (West Africa

Business Weekly, 2023, October 7).

7. Major Challenges Faced by Chinese Language Teaching in Nigeria

CI at NAU has one of the best records in Chinese language teaching and training among the Confucius Institutes. This accounts for its status as an exemplar among the Institutes. As for its challenges, the following are the major ones.

Firstly, from the perspective of the human resource market for Chinese language talents, there is a huge asymmetry between demand and supply in that the talents produced by the 2 Confucius Institutes in the country are still unable to meet the increasing demand for their services. As noted previously, Chinese enterprises in Nigeria are not the only ones employing the talents, other multinational corporations with operations in the country and in other countries with trade relations with China also employ them. With focus on Chinese enterprises in Nigeria, the growth of local talents has led to the localization of management and staffing, which is a typical win-win policy between Nigeria and China. When such enterprises employ more local talents, they resultantly create more jobs locally, thereby gaining more recognition and support from the local community. Since it costs far less to employ local manpower than to employ expatriate manpower from China, localization can enhance employers' competitiveness. Therefore, Chinese enterprises that have operated in the country for reasonably long years have a growing demand for locals with proficiency in Chinese.

Nigeria joined the Belt and Road Initiative 5 years ago. Over those years, its economic and trade relations with China have grown exponentially. For example, the number of Chinese enterprises investing directly in Nigeria has rapidly increased. The enterprises, especially the entrants, have an explosive demand for Chinese products from the Confucius Institutes.

In summary, Chinese enterprises in Nigeria—established and entrants alike—source the bulk of their Chinese language talents from the Confucius Institutes in the country.

Presently, Nigeria has 2 Confucius Institutes, namely the Confucius Institute at the University of Lagos, which mostly focuses on Chinese language teaching in primary and secondary schools and the Confucius Institute at Nnamdi Azikiwe University, which focuses on employment-oriented adult Chinese language training.

The 2 Confucius Institutes in Nigeria have faced various serious challenges since their establishment. One of those challenges common to them was the COVID-19 pandemic which significantly disrupted their operations. In 2020, CI at Unilag evacuated all its Chinese teachers back to China; and it was not until 2023 that it began to gradually recover. By contrast, CI at NAU, the primary source of intermediate and advanced Chinese language proficient youths in Nigeria, accounting for 99% of the country's Chinese talent supply, remained open

but switched over to online mode of teaching for those 3 years of 2020-2022. It is that decision to reorientate rather than shut down that accounts for the speed at which it has recovered from the pandemic.

CI at NAU has also grappled with a high rate of strike action by the 3 premier university unions—ASUU (Academic Staff Union of Universities), NASU (Non-Academic Staff Union of Universities) and SSANU (Senior Staff Association of Nigerian Universities). For example, public universities were closed for long periods during 2020-2022. The strike action, coupled with the pandemic, greatly constrained its ability to supply Chinese talents optimally, despite its managing to remain operational by causing a drastic decrease in the number of lecturers received from China, which consequently has caused a drop in graduate output from approximately 2500 per year before the pandemic to approximately 1,800 per year ever since.

Rough estimates suggest that the burgeoning Chinese language market in Nigeria needs at least 10,000 to 15,000 new talents every year. The demand far exceeds the available supply, creating a huge gap in the provision of talents. Chinese enterprises always turn to CI at NAU for help with bridging the gap. Secondly, although CI at NAU is always operating beyond its capacity, as evidenced by work overload for its Chinese teachers, it is unable to meet the demands of the steadily increasing number of people who want to learn the Chinese language. The Institute currently lacks enough classrooms necessary for increased student intake as well as enough offices necessary to receive more teachers from China.

As mentioned previously, CI at NAU caters to a diverse groups of Chinese language learners—students from Nnamdi Azikiwe University Secondary School, pupils from Nnamdi Azikiwe University Primary School, undergraduates from the Department of Chinese Studies, school-leavers, MBA students from Unizik Business School, local Chinese language teachers, and government officials. In addition to these groups, there are more than 1800 enrolled in the HSK program, the largest source of students at the Institute. *Vis-à-vis* this number, there are only 13 Chinese teachers, which is responsible for the highly disproportionate student-teacher ratio of 138:1 in the HSK program alone. Therefore, in terms of student-teacher ratio, CI at NAU teaches the largest number of students with the smallest number of teachers among all faculties, schools, and institutes at NAU. In a bid to address student overflow, CI at NAU has pushed its classrooms to the uttermost limits of their carrying capacity. Classrooms originally designed to hold 30 people now hold 80, and those meant for 60 now hold 150.

To expedite the training cycle, the Institute operates without breaks, except for the Spring Festival, Christmas and Sundays. Even during the strikes that lasted 9 months in 2020 and 8 months in 2021, it was the only unit in the host university that remained operational. This rigorous schedule enables the Institute to complete 90 periods for the elementary levels of the Chinese Proficiency Test (HSK1-HSK2) within 22 weeks, 200 periods for the intermediate levels

(HSK3-HSK4) within 50 weeks, 216 periods for the advanced level (HSK5) within 54 weeks, and 320 periods for the uppermost level (HSK6) within 80 weeks. However, even with this accelerated pace of teaching, the demand for Chinese talents in the job market still outpaces supply.

Enrolment at CI at NAU is strictly on a “first come, first served” basis. Because of limited teaching resources, including classrooms and teachers, the Institute can only accept a maximum of 1800 applicants each year. However, more than 5000 applicants were received for 2023, which means that more than 3000 applicants will be waiting for registration until 2025.

In summary, the major challenges for Chinese language teaching in Nigeria are the growing demand for Chinese language learning and the severe lack of critical support for Chinese language teaching. These issues significantly constrain the performance and capacity of Chinese language training in Nigeria.

8. Approaches to Improving Chinese Language Training in Nigeria

Indeed, as CI at NAU is typically representative of the outstanding Confucius Institutes worldwide, the problems and challenges it faces are ipso facto typical and representative. If these typical challenges can be effectively tackled, it will undoubtedly contribute to the overall development of the Confucius Institutes.

Firstly, the number of Confucius Institutes in Nigeria should be increased with a view to enhancing access for potential learners in different parts of the country

CI at NAU has been making proactive efforts in addressing the aforementioned challenges. One such effort is the establishment of new Chinese teaching points. As mentioned previously, besides establishing Confucius Teaching Point at NAU-affiliated secondary and primary schools, CI at NAU has also established a Confucius Classroom at the Federal Polytechnic, Oko, and set up 4 CTPs at Enugu State College of Education, College of Agriculture, Ishiagu, University of Port Harcourt, and the Chinese Culture Center, Abuja. Given the considerable distance between these 4 cross-state TPs and the parent center, commuting poses significant safety risks, due to less-than-ideal security conditions.

The number of students at the Confucius Classroom at Federal Polytechnic, Oko is more than 500, which surpasses what is obtained at many Confucius Institutes in developed countries, such as the UK and the US. This strategy of establishing CTPs affiliated with CI at NAU across different states in Nigeria, has already reached its utmost limits, with the result that the parent center is finding it increasingly difficult to continue it.

South Africa, with a population of 60 million, currently has 5 Confucius Institutes: the Confucius Institute at Stellenbosch University, the Confucius Institute at the University of Cape Town, the Confucius Institute at Rhodes University, the Confucius Institute at Durban University of Technology, and the Confucius Institute at the University of Johannesburg (Xinhua, 2019, August 6).

Kenya, with a population of 50 million, has 4: the Confucius Institute at the University of Nairobi, the Confucius Institute at Kenyatta University, the Confucius Institute at Egerton University, and the Confucius Institute at Moi University (*People's Daily*, 2015, April 2). In contrast, Nigeria, the most populous country (200 million) and the largest economy in Africa currently has only 2 Confucius Institutes, and both are located in the south of the country. Not only is the distribution geographically skewed unbalanced, the number is also exiguous. What, to all intents and purposes, is the most effectual way to redress the contradiction between the growing demand for Chinese proficiency talents in Nigeria and the serious lack of support for Chinese language teaching is to increase the number of Confucius Institutes in Nigeria to cover the renaming geopolitical regions—southsouth, northcentral (Middle Belt), northwest and northeast (There are 6 geopolitical regions in Nigeria. Anambra State where CI at NAU is located in southeast and Lagos State where CI at Unilag is located in the southwest).

Secondly, the Institute should be supported to subsidize local Chinese language training centers. After all, where there is demand, there is a market. Because there is a huge gap in the supply/availability of Chinese proficiency talents in Nigeria's job market, many students of the Institute have established their own private Chinese language training schools after studying in China and returning to Nigeria. As mentioned earlier, Efe Moses Shuaibu-Yahaya (吴文仲) founded the Efe Best Chinese Training School in Lagos. In fact, there are many such private Chinese language training centers in Lagos. In addition to this, similar Chinese language training centers exist in Abuja (Nigeria's capital) and Enugu State. Those centers are helping to make up for the acute shortage of people with Chinese language proficiency. Being a non-profit organization, the Confucius Institute cannot cooperate with these profit-oriented private Chinese language centers under its extant management regulations. CLEC, however, can modify the regulations, with a view to allowing the Institutes to support, and cooperate with local private Chinese language training centers.

These centers vary in standard. Of course, there are some centers that defraud students by claiming to be Chinese language centers or even claiming to have a cooperative relationship with the Confucius Institute, which not only harms the local youths but also reflects badly on the Institute. As a quality control measure, there should be avenues through which the Institute can oversee the centers, for example, by assessing the suitability of those they want to employ as Chinese language teachers.

Thirdly, classroom blocks should be built for the Confucius Institutes. The biggest, the most urgent, and the most direct challenge faced by the 2 Confucius Institutes in Nigeria is that they do not have enough classrooms and offices. This infrastructural deficit frontally encumbers the development and expansion of Chinese language education in Nigeria.

Investment in public universities in Nigeria has been grossly inadequate for

long decades. Such neglect is the major reason for the alarmingly high strike rate that has bedevilled the universities. There have been 16 strikes during the 23 years between 1999 and 2022 totalling about 300 weeks or 6 years. That is to say, the public universities have to stop for one year every four years. The last 3 strike actions were 3 months in 2018-2019, 9 months in 2020, and 8 months in 2021-2022.

Despite this, Nnamdi Azikiwe University (CI at NAU's host university) has provided stupendously generous support for its Confucius Institute. Here are a few instances of how the university has supported the Institute. Firstly, the parent center occupies more than 2700 square meters. Secondly, in 2018, to improve residential conditions for the Chinese teachers, the university expanded and renovated the Chinese teachers' lodge. The lodge occupies about 1000 square meters, and has a total of 15 rooms and 6 common kitchens. In fact, apart from the students, the Chinese teachers are the only staff who live on campus. In 2020, the university also built 6 new offices for the teachers. The offices cover about 320 square meters. However, this investment can no longer meet the growing demand for Chinese language students. Chinese enterprises can help to increase the scale of Chinese language training at the Confucius Institute by severally or jointly donating classroom blocks to the two Confucius Institutes we currently have in Nigeria.

9. Conclusion

The Confucius Institutes (CIs) in different parts of the world are playing a critical role in the spread of the Chinese language and, by extension, of Chinese culture. These Chinese language and culture institutes are following in the footsteps of similar institutes—Alliance Française, the British Council, the Goethe Institute, the American Spaces, etc. Since the establishment of the first CI 20 years ago, millions have learned the Chinese language at institutes in different countries. It has been observed that the challenges faced by the CIs in developed countries differ remarkably from those faced by those in developing countries. One obtrusive example has to do with official attitude, for whereas their number is increasing in developing countries, it is decreasing in most developed countries.

Most CIs in developing countries are grappling with challenges that threaten their continued existence. Those challenges have constrained their development. CI at NAU is one of the few CIs in developing countries that have defied the odds to earn for themselves a pride of place among their peers. It has done this through its steadily outstanding performance in HSK exams and in global competitions, such as the Chinese Bridge.

The achievements of CI at NAU resound around the world. Its history, however, has remained largely undocumented; and the few works that have been done on it are mostly inaccurate and speculative. To address the problem, a team of insiders has decided to reconstruct the history, determined to bequeath a leg-

acy of authoritative reference works. The team, the majority of which members have worked at the Institute for 4 - 8 years, adopts the participant-observation method in its look at the Institute from within.

Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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