Learners' Beliefs about Second Language Learning: A Study of Saudi University Students of Chinese at King Saud University

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Abstract

This study explores the motivations, difficulties, beliefs, and attitudes of Saudi students learning Chinese as a foreign language (CFL). Beliefs about Language Learning Inventory (BALLI) scale by Horwitz (1987) was employed as a research instrument. Data was gathered through a structured survey of seventy-eight male and female students at King Saud University who had completed one semester of Chinese language study. The collected data was analyzed using SPSS version 27 and thematic analysis to examine learners' perspectives on the relevance, difficulty, and social importance of learning the Chinese language. The findings reveal that Saudi EL students are highly motivated by personal ambitions and professional prospects, which align with Saudi Arabia's economic relationship with China. However, gender inequalities were identified, with female learners finding it more difficult to learn Chinese, notably its tonal and orthographic systems. Furthermore, learners emphasized practical and multimodal strategies such as repetition and audiovisual aids. Conversely, they obtained mixed ratings for grammar and translation. Additionally, social and cultural factors, particularly gender stereotypes, shape their attitudes toward language learning. This study emphasized the importance of culturally sensitive and gender-inclusive instructional techniques for overcoming perceived challenges. To build on these findings, future suggestions include connecting curricula with national legislation, raising public awareness, and strengthening teacher training programs to foster an equal learning environment.

Keywords: BALLI, Beliefs and attitudes, Chinese as a foreign language, Gender differences, Saudi learners.

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تصورات المتعلمين حول تعلم اللغة الثانية: دراسة على طلاب الجامعات السعوديين الذين يدرسون اللغة الصينية في جامعة الملك سعود

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الملخص

تكشف هذه الدراسة الدوافع والصعوبات المتصورة والمواقف لدى الطلاب السعوديين الذين يتعلمون اللغة الصينية باعتبارها لغة أجنبية (CFL). وتم استخدام مقياس تصورات تعلم اللغة (BALLI) الذي وضعه هورويتز (1987) أداةً بحث. ثم تم جمع البيانات من خلال مسح منظم، لـ 78 طالب وطالبة في جامعة الملك سعود، ممن أكمل فصلًا دراسيًا واحدًا في دراسة اللغة الصينية. ثم تم تحليل البيانات المجمعة باستخدام برنامج (SPSS 27)، والتحليل الموضوعي لفحص وجهات نظر المتعلمين حول أهمية وصعوبة تعلم اللغة الصينية. وكشفت نتائج الدراسة أن الطلاب لديهم دافعًا كبيرًا من الطموحات الشخصية والآفاق المهنية، ومع ذلك، ظهر فرق بين الجنسين، إذ وُجد أن المتعلمات لديهن صعوبة أكبر في تعلم اللغة الصينية، ولا سيما أنظمتها النغمية والإملائية. وعلاوة على ذلك، أكد المتعلمون على أهمية الاستراتيجيات العملية ومتعددة الوسائط مثل التكرار والوسائل السمعية والبصرية. بينما حصلوا على تقييمات متباينة حول تصوراتهم للقواعد والترجمة وتشكل العوامل الاجتماعية والثقافية، وخاصة الصور النمطية الجنسانية ومواقفهم تجاه تعلم اللغة. وأكدت هذه الدراسة على أهمية تقنيات التدريس الحساسة ثقافيًا والشاملة للجنسين للتغلب على التحديات المتصورة. وللبناء على هذه النتائج، تتضمن الاقتراحات المستقبلية ربط المناهج بالتشريعات الوطنية، ورفع مستوى الوعي العام، وتعزيز برامج تدريب المعلمين لتعزيز بيئة تعليمية متساوية.

الكلمات المفتاحية: التصورات والمواقف، المتعلمون السعوديون، اللغة الصينية باعتبارها لغة أجنبية، BALLI، الاختلافات بين الجنسين.

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1. Introduction

Second language learners have diverse learning attitudes in different circumstances, influenced by their underlying ideas about language learning. Beliefs are an essential component of any discipline dealing with human learning and performance; they help people to describe and comprehend the world and themselves; they define tasks and have a crucial role in shaping action (White, 1999). In language learning, researchers have recently recognized the significance of linguistic beliefs. They are interested in students' perspectives on language acquisition and how they affect learner motivation, foreign language anxiety, and efficacy (Bidari, 2021).

An increasing number of studies reveals that beliefs significantly impact learning experiences and outcomes, in both the foreign language and second language context (see e.g., Debreli, 2012; Horwitz, 1987; Peacock, 2001; Radwan, 2019). A student, for example, who believes that learning a second language involves acquiring new vocabulary will focus on mastering it. In contrast, adults who think that younger learners are superior will likely start language learning with relatively low expectations of success. In response to the significance of understanding these beliefs, Horwitz developed a tool to assess students' attitudes and beliefs toward learning a new language known as the BALLI "Beliefs About Language Learning Instrument" (Nikitina & Furuoka 2014; Al-Rashed, 2021; Al-Otaibi, 2021). This research employs the BALLI survey instrument to find and examine the views of Saudi Chinese language learners on language acquisition and place them into a taxonomy of language learning beliefs.

There is limited research on the rise of Chinese as a Foreign Language (CFL) policy in Saudi higher education. Hersi et al. (2024) used the Language Comprehensive Competitiveness Framework (LCCF) (Xu, 2007) to investigate government discourse, stakeholder perceptions, and policy recommendations for CFL education. Analysis of policy documents, media sources, and interviews with teachers, students, and investors showed that Saudi Arabia's investment in CFL results from China's global economic power. Teachers valued all LCCF components, but students ranked economic and cultural competitiveness as the most important reasons for learning Chinese. These findings imply that CFL plays a strategic role in Saudi education policy.

Previous studies have investigated language policy perspectives and classroom dynamics. While students' motivation and challenges in learning Chinese as a foreign language have also been explored, very few studies compared the beliefs, importance, and perceived difficulty of CFL students from different departments within the same university. These cognitive and affective factors need to be examined to improve the curricula, and instruction, as well as encourage students' engagement. This study aims to bridge the gap by exploring the attitudes and beliefs of Saudi learners towards the Chinese language as a foreign

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language. It intends to evaluate how the motivational level, belief systems, and perceived difficulty impact students' learning across different academic disciplines.

1.1 Aim of the Study

Ultimately, this study aims to determine if a specific group of Saudi Chinese language learners had constructive or obstructive ideas about language learning and how these beliefs influence their motivations and expectations. Furthermore, identifying these ideas and reflecting on their possible impact on language learning and teaching in general, as well as particular areas like the learners' expectations and strategy used, can inform future syllabus design and instructional practices in the curriculum. Additionally, the goal was to determine whether the students' desire and passion for language learning and their estimated requirements were related to their positive beliefs. As Imsa-ard (2020) found students with positive attitudes and beliefs are more likely to motivate themselves to attain their goals in language learning. Moreover, Garner (2007) stated that "students with higher levels of motivation will do better than students with lower levels" (p.241).

1.2 Research Questions

1. **What are Saudi male and female students' perspectives on the future market opportunities for learning Chinese?**

2. **What is Saudi male and female students' assessment of the difficulty of learning Chinese languages?**

3. **What are Saudi male and female students' perception of the importance of learning Chinese for personal and professional growth?**

4. **What are Saudi male and female student's beliefs and attitude toward Chinese as a foreign language?**

2. Literature Review

Research over the last three decades, in the context of foreign language learning, indicates that learner beliefs can influence their experiences and behaviors. Beliefs may impact language learners' motivation, intentions about learning, opinions on what is simple or complicated, and their learning strategies (Richards & Lockhart, 1994). According to Victoria and Lockhart (1995, p.224), beliefs regarding language learning include "general assumptions that students hold about themselves as learners, about factors influencing language learning, and about the nature of language teaching." These ideas have many different roots and differ greatly from the views of second language researchers today. They also have variable degrees of validity (Horwitz, 1987).

Learners' beliefs are shaped by Krashen's (1982) Input Hypothesis and Ellis's (1994) SLA model. These theories identify the role of motivation and perceived difficulty in language acquisition. Moreover, the

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Expectancy-Value Theory (Eccles & Wigfield, 2002) explains students' interest in learning by considering their expectations and perceived benefits. Building on these theoretical frameworks, the present study employs the Horwitz model to investigate the beliefs about CFL. It explores how the motivation, value, and perceived difficulty impact CFL learning.

Many studies in the relevant literature underline the importance of knowing learners' beliefs (Hayashi, 2009; Tanaka & Ellis, 2003). Horwitz's study in the 1980s represented a crucial turning point by presenting the BALLI, which expanded on the core concept of learner beliefs. Horwitz's earlier work particularly his 1985 study paved the way for many studies on learner beliefs (Bernat & Gvozdenko, 2005; Mercer & Ryan, 2010; Al-Ghamdi, 2025; Al-Ghamdi, 2024). Papalia (1978) was one of the first to study beliefs about language learning with 316 ninth-grade students. However, Horwitz is the one who initiated the significant investigation of beliefs about language learning through the development of the BALLI- Beliefs About Language Learning Inventory (Horwitz 1983, 1985, 1987, 1988) to examine the beliefs of the students and teachers.

With the increasing use of BALLI, it has been applied in several minor and large-scale studies and research. For example, three major studies were conducted in American schools to analyze instructors' and students' perspectives on some language acquisition challenges (Horwitz 1988). The findings revealed that students tended to overestimate the challenges of language learning moreover, had misconceptions about the procedure of learning foreign languages, and lastly, placed a greater value on their accents than their teachers.

A growing mass of research has offered valuable insights into the fact that during the last two decades, numerous studies have investigated language learning beliefs in a second language context (Bernat, 2006; Yang & Kim, 2011) as well as in a foreign language context (Kassem, 2013; Al-Roomy, 2015; Al-Seghayer, 2014). Ali and David (2023) examined the problems of learning Chinese in a multilingual environment where English is the official language. The study used a survey to explore student and teacher attitudes toward Chinese language policy. The study found that Chinese language classes are struggling to replace English language classrooms due to resistance from minority language speakers who already resist majority languages in many situations.

In the Saudi context, Alsamaani (2012) conducted research to assess Saudi university undergraduates' overall attitude toward learning English as a foreign language. The study's results demonstrated that participants had positive attitudes about the English language and its learning processes. It has also been observed that students' prior educational backgrounds influenced their perceptions about the nature of language learning. The findings of this empirical study suggest that understanding learners' beliefs is critical for identifying additional elements that influence learning and teaching techniques.

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In Saudi Arabia, Chinese as a foreign language (CFL) differs greatly from Arabic in writing, pronunciation, grammar, vocabulary, and culture, which makes it difficult to teach and learn CFL. The Chinese logographic writing system, with hundreds of characters, is one of the most challenging aspects. Learning to write in a deeper cultural context is not easy, and it is hard to master form, sound, and meaning (Lin 2017). Alshammari (2019) researched the Chinese language in Saudi Arabia to identify the difficulties for learners, instructors, and the curriculum designer while incorporating CFL into the Saudi education system. The paper focused on five factors, including CFL learning difficulties, the learner's cultural and educational background, the learner's motivation, and curriculum design. The findings highlighted significant differences and concerns among CFL learners' motivation, difficulty in learning language, culture, and ability. However, the CFL curriculum had no problems.

As research into learner beliefs has advanced, the worldwide significance of Mandarin Chinese has become more explicit, prompting countries such as Saudi Arabia to incorporate CFL into their curricula. Because of its growing popularity among non-native Chinese speakers, it is expected that the number of Chinese language speakers online will surpass that of English users (Chua 2015). Though the Chinese language has a rapid boost in Saudi Arabia there is very little research on the Saudi university students' beliefs and attitudes towards it. Based on the prior literature on learner beliefs and motivation, the present study specifically concerns Saudi male and female students' perceptions of CFL. This paper explores the attitudes of Saudi male and female students regarding the relevance, level of difficulty, and prospects of learning the Chinese language. It is intended to address the research gaps by investigating CFL learner beliefs within the Saudi context.

3. Research Methodology

3.1 Research Design

In this study, a mixed-method approach was employed. A quantitative research design was used to gather data from Chinese language learning students through a structured survey, which can be compared systematically. Additionally, thematic analysis was applied to gain deeper insights into the participant's responses. This approach was adopted to get broad characteristics and tendencies of their beliefs and attitudes to language learning. The quality of mixed methods research depends on how strong each part is, and combining both numbers (quantitative data) and words (qualitative data) makes the research stronger (Riazi & Farsani, 2023).

The research instrument used in this study was the Beliefs About Language Learning Inventory (BALLI), designed by Horwitz (1983, 1985, 1987 and 1988). The BALLI survey is popular in research to measure language learners' beliefs and has shown high reliability including examining gender differences. As

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an instance, Siebert (2003) utilized BALLI to investigate the association between language learning beliefs and gender among university students and discovered significant gender variations in language learning beliefs. The survey was considered for any cultural and contextual suitability for Saudi learners before the study. Only minor changes were introduced to make the statements as clear as possible (Nikitina & Furuoka, 2014). For example, there is a minor word difference (Statement 3: "The language I am trying to learn is a difficult language" vs. BALLI's "The language I am learning is a difficult language"). The focus of the statements switched to the target language (Chinese), while certain elements reflect the cultural setting, such as Saudi Arabia. (Statement 28: "People in Saudi Arabia feel that it is important to speak Chinese").

However, BALLI normally employs a quantitative method, whereas thematic analysis is a qualitative approach that can help in the identification of patterns that underlie ideas and their categorization. Moreover, thematic analysis can be utilized to uncover patterns within the data, providing a higher level of interpretability. It aligns with the research where Sari and Rahmat (2023) employed thematic analysis on BALLI statements to identify different types of foreign language anxiety among students, demonstrating that this method may be applied in qualitative research. Using thematic analysis, the study can get deeper insights into participants' views and experiences, as well as a more systematic and comprehensive classification of language acquisition perceptions.

3.2 Thematic Analysis

Thematic analysis, as described by Braun and Clarke (2006) is applied to extract the main themes from the 34 BALLI statements provided by Horwtiz (1983, 1985, 1987, and 1988). This method can use either an inductive or deductive approach to identify codes within the data set. Liamputtong and Ezzy (2005) highlight that thematic analysis helps to extract significant themes and characteristics. To closely analyze the data and recurring themes such as ideas patterns, and topics- MAXQDA software is utilized. This widely used tool allows researchers to explore documents by searching for keywords and applying automatic coding (Rosario 2023). The analysis revealed four primary themes: 1) Motivation and market value of language, 2) Difficulty of language learning, 3) Importance of language learning, 4) Beliefs and attitudes toward Chinese as a foreign language.

3.3 Sample Size

The sample size is critical to the reliability and generalizability of the study findings. Mustafa and Robillos (2020) found that a sample size of 46 to 59 individuals is sufficient to predict the genuine population mean in language testing. Because the sample mean is closely related to the population mean, increasing the sample size beyond this range does not appreciably increase accuracy. Given that this study's sample size of

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78 is far larger than the required criterion, the findings can be regarded as robust and generalizable while being time- and cost-efficient.

The participants include 78 Saudi students learning Chinese as a foreign language at King Saud University, Riyadh, Saudi Arabia. These participants enrolled in the Chinese language course because of its growing global significance. Moreover, both males and females participated in the research to enhance its meaningfulness and versatility. The convenience sampling technique was used to choose the participants. Golzar, Tajik, & Noor (2022) define convenience sampling as follows: "One of the non-probability sampling techniques is convenience sampling which is a way of selecting participants from the target population based on ease of access (p. 72). Meessen and Garattini (2023) emphasize that "sample size calculation should also take into account the differences in outcome rates between male vs. female genders" (p. 1). The study aims to explore gender-based differences in attitudes, motivations, and difficulties while learning Chinese language. Furthermore, the participants who had already completed one semester of a Chinese language course were selected to ensure that they had basic knowledge and exposure to Chinese. So that they can provide valid responses related to the language learning process.

3.4 Statistical Analysis

The collected data were analyzed using the statistical software SPSS 27. The quantitative analysis techniques used were descriptive statistics in which the means, standard deviations, and frequency distributions were computed for all the BALLI items. This approach was utilized to establish general beliefs and attitudes of the participants as recommended by Field (2013). Furthermore, to compare the beliefs of male and female students' Independent samples t-tests (Inferential statistics) were employed. According to this analysis, all the potential gender differences in perceptions concerning the difficulty, importance, and viability of learning Chinese have been highlighted (Pallant, 2020).

3.6 Ethical Considerations

The study was approved by the institutional review board that deals with ethical issues. All participants were informed of the purpose of the study and agreed to participate in the study (Cohen et al., 2007). All the responses received were kept confidential and stored securely to ensure that the participant's identities were not revealed (Babbie, 2010). Participants were also told that they had the right to withdraw from the study at any time without any reason.

4. Data Analysis

This section analyzes the data in three parts. In the first part, Clark and Braun's thematic analysis is applied to the 34 statements of beliefs about language learning (Horwitz 1987) to categorize them into four main groups: motivation, importance, difficulty, and beliefs and attitudes about Chinese language learning. After

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that, descriptive statistics is applied to all four groups separately. Finally, the t-test is used to observe the difference in responses between males and females.

Before analyzing the responses, reliability of the survey questionnaire was assessed using Cronbach's Alpha, which is 0.662 indicating moderate reliability (Cronbach, 1951).

4.1 Results

Q 1: What are Saudi male and female students' perspectives on the future market opportunities for learning Chinese?

Table 1: Descriptive Statistics of Motivation and Market Future

Statements	Mean	Median	Mode	Standard Deviation	Range	Variance
4. If I learn to speak the language I am learning very well, I will have better opportunities for a good job.	4.0526	4	4	0.7982	3	0.6372
28. People in Saudi Arabia feel that it is important to speak Chinese.	3.6184	4	4	1.1772	4	1.3858
29. I would like to learn Chinese so that I can get to know the Chinese people better.	4.3026	5	5	0.9095	3	0.8272
30. If I learn Chinese very well, I will have better opportunities for a good job.	4.5921	5	5	0.6768	3	0.4581
31. I would like to learn to speak Chinese well.	4.8026	5	5	0.4007	1	0.1605
32. I would like to have Chinese friends by learning Chinese.	4.4342	5	5	0.9428	4	0.8889

The average mean score of motivation and market future is 4.23 indicating that respondents strongly believe in the professional and economic benefits of learning Chinese as a foreign language. The results show that respondents are highly motivated to learn Chinese, particularly for personal and professional development, as evidenced by statements such as "I would like to learn to speak Chinese well" (mean = 4.8026) and "If I learn Chinese very well, I will have better opportunities for a good job" (mean = 4.5921). However, there was moderate agreement for "People in my country feel that it is important to speak Chinese" (mean = 3.6184, SD = 1.1772), demonstrating that societal perspectives vary.

Table 2: T-test Results of Motivation and Market Future

Statement	t-statistic	p-value
4	-0.4135	0.681
28	2.3703	0.0216
29	0.4315	0.668
30	-0.6207	0.5374
31	0.1604	0.8731
32	-0.3307	0.7423

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The average mean score for male respondents is 4.33, and for female respondents is 4.25. Both male and female participants have strong motivation and positive perceptions regarding the Chinese language. However, the male mean score indicates a slightly higher motivation level, the difference is minor.

The t-test analysis shows a small difference in Saudi CFL learners' opinions about motivation and the future of learning Chinese in the Chinese market. In particular, Statement 28, which indicates that people in Saudi Arabia believe, it is important to learn Chinese, was statistically significant (t=2.3703, p=0.0216). It suggests that there is a high acknowledgment of the CFL in society. Other statements like 4, 29, 30, and 32 revealed no significant differences, indicating that participants were generally homogeneous. However, the societal value mentioned in Statement 28 emerged as a powerful motivator for learning Chinese.

Q 2: What is Saudi male and female students' assessment of the difficulty of learning Chinese languages?

Table 3: Descriptive Statistics of Difficulty in Learning Chinese Language

Statements	Mean	Median	Mode	Standard Deviation	Range	Variance
3. The language I am trying to learn is a difficult language.	3.7105	4	4	1.0174	4	1.0351
10. Some languages are easier to learn than others.	4.6053	5	5	0.5675	2	0.3221
11. Learning a foreign language takes a long time	3.7536	4	4	1.0901	3	1.1884
12. It is easier to speak than understand a foreign language.	3.1316	3	3	1.1117	4	1.2358
13. It is easier to read and write Chinese than to speak and understand it.	3.1842	3	4	1.2828	4	1.6456
25. I feel timid speaking Chinese with other people	2.8816	3	2	1.3757	4	1.8925
26. If beginning students are permitted to make errors in Chinese, it will be difficult for them to speak correctly later on.	3.0395	3	4	1.3706	4	1.8784

The average mean score of difficulty in learning a language is 3.47. The examination reveals that respondents equally acknowledged the difficulties in learning the Chinese language but expressed diverse opinions regarding reading, understanding, writing, and speaking. For instance, statement 10, showed the highest agreement with the mean score of 4.6053, reflecting the recognition of differing language difficulties. Similarly, statements 3 and 11 are related to the difficulty and time required to learn a new language indicating moderate agreement. Whereas statement 25, has the lowest mean of 2.8816, suggesting that participants are not afraid of speaking Chinese. Overall, the responses highlight the challenges in learning the

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Chinese language but reveal differences in experience and confidence level across specific aspects of the language learning process.

Table 4: T-test Results Difficulty in Learning Chinese Language

Statement	t-statistic	p-value
3	2.1732	0.033
10	0.6349	0.5276
11	0.8564	0.3956
12	-1.8354	0.0721
13	-0.4359	0.6644
25	0.0722	0.9427
26	-0.3677	0.7144

The t-test results compare the male and female responses against all the statements, the difference is observed in statement 3 where the p-value is below the threshold of 0.05. This indicates that males and females differ significantly in their opinions on the difficulty of learning Chinese, females perceive greater difficulty. Statement 12 with the p-value = 0.0721 also shows a difference in how males and females discern the ease of speaking versus understanding the Chinese language. All the other statements do not reflect any significant differences. Generally, male and female participants have the same views about the difficulty of learning Chinese.

Q 3: What are Saudi male and female students' perception of the importance of learning Chinese for personal and professional growth?

Table 5: Descriptive Statistics of the Importance of Learning Chinese Language

Statements	Mean	Median	Mode	Standard Deviation	Range	Variance
14. It is necessary to know about Chinese-speaking cultures in order to speak Chinese.	4.0395	4	4	0.7736	3	0.5984
15. It is best to learn Chinese in a Chinese-speaking country.	4.3947	5	5	0.8806	3	0.7754
16. The most important part of learning a foreign language is learning vocabulary words.	4.2368	4	4	0.7809	3	0.6098
17. The most important part of learning a foreign language is learning the grammar.	3.8421	4	4	0.9805	4	0.9614
18. Learning a foreign language is different than learning other academic subjects.	4.4474	5	5	0.6612	2	0.4372
19. The most important part of learning Chinese is learning how to translate from my native language	3.8816	4	4	1.0194	4	1.0391
20. It is important to speak Chinese with an excellent	4.2763	4	5	0.8579	4	0.736

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Statements	Mean	Median	Mode	Standard Deviation	Range	Variance
pronunciation.						
21. You shouldn't say anything in Chinese until you can say it correctly.	3.1974	3	5	1.4331	4	2.0539
22. I enjoy practicing Chinese with the Chinese I meet.	4.0789	4	5	1.0297	4	1.0604
24. It is important to repeat and practice a lot.	4.8421	5	5	0.3671	1	0.1347
27. It is important to practice with audio and visual equipment.	4.5526	5	5	0.6407	3	0.4105

The table contains descriptive statistics for statements concerning different aspects of learning the Chinese language, focusing on culture, learning approach, and preference. The average mean score of this dimension is 4.16. The overall mean values are slightly above 3, which means that the respondents mostly agreed with the statements with slightly higher agreement towards statements that are 24, mean = 4.8421 and 27, mean = 4.5526. These statements also have a relatively small standard deviation (0.3671 and 0.6407), which shows that respondents are highly consistent. On the other hand, there is the least agreement with Statement 21, with the lowest mean score of 3.1974 and the highest standard deviation of 1.4331. Learning statements regarding grammar (17) and translation (19) have a lower mean of 3.8421 and 3.8816, respectively, indicating rather mixed views on their relevance. Overall, the findings indicate that the learners prefer practical approaches to learning a language including repetition, exposure to correct pronunciation, and practice. In contrast, more formal elements, including grammar, translation, and insisting on the proper way of speaking seem to elicit variation in responses.

Table 6: T-test Results of the Importance of Learning Chinese Language

Statement	t-statistic	p-value
14	0.2513	0.8026
15	0.1485	0.8825
16	1.2558	0.2141
17	0.3691	0.7135
18	1.1003	0.2754
19	0.3134	0.7553
20	-1.2695	0.2109
21	-1.2744	0.2075
22	-0.7285	0.4695
24	0.3774	0.7072
27	1.1556	0.2519

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The average mean score for male is 3.47 and for female is 3.48 shows that both genders perceive difficulty similarly. The t-test results reveal that all p-values are above 0.05, indicating no statistical differences between male and female responses. However, in statement 16, male respondents rated the importance of vocabulary a little higher than females, but still, the difference is not considered statistically significant. Similarly, in statement 21, females rated slightly higher on "Whether one should refrain from speaking Chinese until they can say it correctly". Furthermore, in statements 14 and 15, identical agreements between male and female respondents have been observed regarding the importance of learning the Chinese language and the need to understand Chinese culture to learn the language.

Q 4: What are Saudi male and female student's beliefs and attitude toward Chinese as a foreign language?

Table 7: Descriptive Analysis of the Beliefs and Attitudes about the Chinese Language

Statements	Mean	Median	Mode	Standard Deviation	Range	Variance
1. It is easier for children than adults to learn a foreign language.	3.7632	4	4	1.0566	4	1.1165
2. It is easier for children than adults to learn a foreign language.	4.3289	4	5	0.7727	3	0.597
5. People who are good at mathematics or science are not good at learning foreign languages.	2.1053	2	2	0.9463	4	0.8954
6. I have a special ability for learning foreign languages.	3.8816	4	4	0.7995	3	0.6391
7. Women are better than men at learning foreign languages.	3.3553	3	3	1.2512	4	1.5654
8. People who speak more than one language are very intelligent.	4.1579	4	5	0.8952	4	0.8014
9. Everyone can learn to speak a foreign language.	3.8289	4	4	1.0506	4	1.1037
23. It's OK to guess if you don't know a word in Chinese.	3.8289	4	4	1.0506	4	1.1037

The average mean score of beliefs and attitude is 3.66, a moderate score implies that while respondents believe language learning is important, they may have mixed opinions on individual abilities, learning styles, or social factors. The findings highlight the participant's beliefs and attitudes regarding learning the Chinese language. The values in the table show varying levels of agreement across the

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statements. Respondents show similar responses in statement 2, with a mean of 4.3289. Similarly, respondents strongly agreed with statement 8, with a mean of 4.1579. These statements show high mean values and low variability, reflecting consistent agreement. Contrastingly, participants did not agree with statement 5, (mean = 2.1053). Notable variations were observed in statement 7, *"Women are better than men at learning foreign languages"* with a standard deviation of 1.2512. Moreover, statements 9 and 23 showed moderate agreement but some variability. Overall, responses indicate strong consensus on the importance of natural ability and intelligence in language learning, while opinions on gender differences and guessing strategies vary significantly.

Table 8: T-test Results of the Beliefs and Attitudes about Learning Chinese Language

Statement	t-statistic	p-value
1	0.4779	0.6344
2	-0.4345	0.6656
5	1.0122	0.3155
6	-0.3975	0.6927
7	-3.3079	0.0015
8	-3.4253	0.001
9	1.1366	0.2603
23	-1.8818	0.0643

The average mean score for males is 3.77 and for females is also 3.77 indicating that both genders hold the same attitude towards the Chinese language. The t-test results demonstrate that the p-values of most statements are below 0.05, indicating no significant differences. For example, statements 1 and 2, with p values of 0.6344 and 0.6656, respectively, indicate consistent responses of males and females. Statement 23 suggests a marginal difference and reaches the significance level with a p-value of 0.0643. Lastly, statements 7 and 8 highlight significant variation across groups especially on gender and intelligence in language.

4.2 Thematic Analysis of Open-Ended Responses

A thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) was conducted to identify the codes, patterns, and thematic labels in the open-ended responses to the BALLI statement, *"I believe that the learner's level of motivation and their expectations about the language and methods of learning it affect their level of acquisition"*. The analysis revealed themes of 1) Intrinsic motivation, 2) self-directed learning, 3) the role of structured resources, and 4) expectations shaping learning outcomes.

Most of the participants strongly agreed with the statement, highlighting the significance of motivation in the language learning process. One respondent stated that *"motivation is enough to learn anything new,"* At the same time, another respondent said, *"willpower is everything in learning in general."*

Apart from this, various students identified the need for self-learning and practicing the targeted language. As a participant responded, *"One should not rely solely on the university but should engage in self-learning and communicate with Chinese speakers."* On the other hand, some participants showed dissatisfaction regarding curricula and teaching methodologies and emphasized the need for a structured syllabus outline, for example, a respondent stated, *"accurately written curricula should be available based on a structured plan."* It showed that motivation without an accurate teaching plan is of no use. Lastly, a significant pattern was noted in the responses concerning expectations, e.g., *"I am forced to learn the language because of my grades, nothing more."* These patterns helped to interpret the role of motivation in second language learning.

The other statement is "To what extent have the following factors affected your learning of the Chinese language: a) The difficulty of the Chinese language, b) Your innate readiness to learn foreign languages, c) The nature of the foreign language studied by the learner". The perceived difficulty, Innate readiness, language learning background, and nature of language, are themes found in this statement. Respondents initially faced difficulties in learning Chinese due to its pronunciation and character-based writing system. One learner reported, *"The difficulty affected me a lot at the beginning... it requires more time and effort than any language I have learned before,".* While others responded, *"It becomes easier over time."* A few participants had the opinion of having interest and innate readiness to learn a new language and reduce the level of difficulty, with one stating, *"Readiness helps, but it does not distinguish you without effort, learning, and patience."* Chinese was considered as the culturally rich and a symbolic language, some participants called it a puzzle e.g., *"It's like a puzzle... our job is to decode the symbols."* These themes and patterns helped to integrate with the findings of quantitative data to interpret the results in the discussion section.

5. Discussion

This research helps to provide a deeper understanding of Saudi learners' beliefs, motivations, and attitudes toward learning the Chinese language, as well as what may be done differently to improve it, identifying more relevant trends and noteworthy differences. These findings highlight the connection between sociocultural influences, learner perceptions, instructional approaches, and areas of misalignment

5.1 Motivation and Market Future of Learning Chinese

The study reveals that Saudi learners show strong motivation to learn Chinese due to personal aspirations and career perspectives. The mean responses to questionnaire statements such as "I would like to learn to speak Chinese well" was 4.8026 and "If I learn Chinese very well, I will have better opportunities for a good job" was 4.5921, showing that they considered Chinese as indispensable to career opportunities and world interaction. The statistically significant response to Statement 28 (t=2.3703, p=0.0216t), which

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discusses the importance of Chinese as a foreign language from the perspective of society, suggests that there has been an enhanced recognition of the importance of Chinese in Saudi Arabia. Thus, as Saudi Arabian economic and cultural relations with China deepen in line with Vision 2030, the necessity for learning Chinese is growing. This accords with recent research to the effect that global and economic factors play a crucial role in determining the trends in language learning. This work explores the use of instrumental and integrative purposes as the learners seek professional advancements with the bonus of embracing Chinese culture. This two-fold motivation can be justified with Dörnyei's L2 Motivational Self System, which focuses on future visions as the main drive for long-term language learning processes (Dörnyei & Al-Hoorie, 2020).

Moreover, the thematic analysis demonstrates the participant's genuine interest and motivation in learning the Chinese language not only for better job opportunities but also to connect with the broader Chinese community. Learners portray Chinese as "a coded story", showing curiosity in the challenge of decoding characters and symbols. This aligns with Taguchi et al. (2020), who highlighted when learners have a clear vision of their future goals and develop an association with the targeted language, the chances of successfully learning that language increase, and learners tend to remain committed to the learning process for a long time.

5.2 Difficulties in Learning the Chinese Language

The study highlights significant gender differences in perceptions of the difficulty of learning Chinese, with female learners rating it as more challenging than male participants as shown in the responses of statement 3 (t=2.1732, p=0.033). The finding aligns with research by Dewaele et al. (2020) which indicates that female learners express higher levels of language learning anxiety, especially when dealing with complex linguistic systems. These dissimilarities are due to sociocultural factors and differences in confidence. As Mercer and Ryan (2020) pointed out, there is a need to adopt sensitivity and design anxiety-reducing strategies to enhance learners' engagement. By recommending certain learning activities and the model learning progressive paths, instructors can help female learners erase perceived barriers and learn language successfully.

In addition to gender differences, several common challenges related to learning Chinese were identified by learners, including tone and the use of characters. The strong response to the statement "Some languages are easier to learn than others'?" (mean = 4.6053) corresponds to the views of Jiang and Cohen (2020) who identified the orthographic and phonological uniqueness of Chinese as key factors in its perceived difficulty. However, regarding the three identified aspects of communication (reading, writing, and speaking), the learners had lower anxiety levels in the oral communication aspect (mean = 2.8816) on

Statement 25, thus implying that they were more comfortable speaking than writing. Likewise, Bao (2021) noted that learners have found it easier to attain conversational flow, but written Chinese remains a challenge.

The thematic analysis identifies certain patterns regarding difficulties of learning the Chinese language, most of the learners acknowledged that mastering Chinese characters and pronunciation was difficult at the start. However, they also reported that continuous practice made it possible. One of the participants stated that "learning Chinese was more demanding than any language I've studied, but with routine, it became manageable." This lineup with Lan and Wang's (2022) research, which explored that language learners face difficulties and challenges at the start due to the character-based writing system and gradually adapt it through consistent practice.

5.3 Importance of Chinese Language Learning

Cultural and pragmatic reasons for learning Chinese are underlined by the participants concerning their necessity. Concerning the learners' own words, there is a clear preference towards students' active and multimodal learning strategies, which is confirmed by such statements as "It is important to repeat and practice a lot", with a mean of 4.8421 and "It is important to practice with audio and visual equipment", with the mean of 4.5526. These findings are consistent with the modern paradigms of learning that focus on the effectiveness of the rather transformative and technology-integrated learning paradigm for language acquisition (Li et al. 2022). In response to the question about the realism of the proposed strategies, the learners gave strong positive feedback towards their value. However, opinions regarding the other linguistic components, such as grammar and translation, the learners' attitudes were more diverse.

Interestingly, participants expressed interest in learning language beyond the four walls of traditional classrooms. Many believe in interacting with native speakers and using advanced technology alongside multimedia resources to enhance their la. One student reported that "I need more than lectures; real interaction helps me remember." This supports the findings of Han and Huang (2023) who emphasize introducing advanced technology and tools to make language learning more engaging and meaningful.

5.4 Beliefs and Attitudes Towards Language Acquisition

Research suggests that learners' attitudes and beliefs impact their success in language acquisition. Syukur (2016) emphasizes that a positive attitude encourages passion and promotes a constructive learning environment, ultimately increasing language outcomes. In this study, learners supported the following statements, "Some people have a knack for learning foreign languages" (mean = 4.3289) and "People with the ability to speak more than one language are very intelligent" (mean = 4.1579). These views imply an understanding of language and its relation to intelligence, in sync with global research that shows positive learner attitudes predict higher performance (MacIntyre et al., 2021).

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Moreover, recent studies evidenced the impact of social and cultural factors on the learners' beliefs regarding their language learning capabilities and gender-related beliefs. For example, Li and McLellan (2021) showed that female learners in China are considered more capable and hardworking than male learners in language acquisition. Similarly, Kollmayer et al. (2018) discovered through a survey that German EFL (English as a foreign language) teachers held traditional gender stereotypes, believing that females are dedicated and perform better than males in language studies. Furthermore, according to Bernat and Lloyd (2007), male and female learners generally held the same beliefs about language learning. There are some minor differences influenced by the cultural and social factors. These findings emphasize the need to address gendered beliefs across diverse cultures. It also highlights the importance of eradicating stereotypical tendencies that impact student motivation and transform self-identity.

6. Conclusion

Learner beliefs and attitudes were the focus of this study, specifically Saudi learners of Chinese and their reasons for learning Chinese, perceived barriers, and perceived social status of the language. The study found strong personal and professional motivation among learners, who agreed that learning the Chinese language could enhance their career opportunities. However, there are differences in how males and females perceived the difficulty of the language and their proposed language learning abilities, indicating a need to increase awareness about its value in Saudi Arabia. The enhancement of Chinese language foreign education and learning requires the inclusion of learner's preference for practical and multimodal learning and teaching strategies as well as gender-sensitive interventions in tackling gendered issues and gender stereotypes. These strategies provide insights into the current state and future developments of the acquisition process, with educational applications for culturally sensitive and student approaches.

6.2 Implications

This study underscores the significance of designing Chinese language education to reflect students' lived experiences, motivations, and challenges. Indeed, learners are not only motivated by career and cultural aspirations but also by a strong desire to be engaged in meaningful language work in authentic, real-world contexts. Moreover, the learners' responses identify that the complexity of the language can often slow progress, and instructional limitations can hinder advancements. To overcome this issue, participants suggest introducing more flexible, interactive, and resource-rich environments that go far beyond passive instruction. Furthermore, the findings reflect that there are variations in the confidence of the learners, especially in gender, which indicates that inclusive pedagogical strategies are also needed to facilitate equal participation and decrease anxiety. These insights are important to second language instructors, curriculum developers, and policymakers, particularly in contexts where promoting language learning aligns with broader national goals.

Ultimately, this study demonstrates that learner-centered frameworks foster autonomy and motivation, among other factors. These are essential for successful language acquisition in multilingual and multicultural settings.

6.3 Recommendations

This study recommends that Chinese language programs adopt more learner-centered and context-sensitive approaches. These methods should be based on learners' motivations such as career aspirations, cultural interest as well as challenges they face including complexity of character, and pronunciation difficulties. Teachers are encouraged to add interactive tools along with multimedia resources and authentic communication opportunities to support active learning moving beyond the traditional methods.

Additionally, special attention should be given to gender-responsive teaching strategies that promote inclusive and confidence-building environments. Moreover, to increase the perceived value of Chinese language education, it is necessary to align it with other broad national goals, including international collaboration and economic development, at the policy level. Future research should investigate the relationship between instructional practices, learner autonomy, and long-term language acquisition outcomes.

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