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The Impact of Introducing the Chinese Language Program for Employability Improvement in Cambodia

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ABSTRACT

Chinese language program is as important as English language program in Cambodia for employability improvement. However, some universities in Cambodia have not yet created the program for their students due to political controversy. This study aims to thoroughly investigate the impact of Chinese proficiency on employment capabilities in Cambodia. Through surveys and data analysis of Cambodian participants, we systematically examined the role of Chinese proficiency in the job market. Qualitative research method has been used in order to interview and survey 200 participants for exploring the salary and expected income after Chinese language acquisition in firms. Using a nonprobability sampling approach for current research participants to find potential new subjects from their social network. The survey results indicate that a majority of participants believe that mastering Chinese can bring additional income in the workplace, with some expressing that learning Chinese can significantly increase their salary. However, from the perspective of employers, Chinese proficiency is not a direct prerequisite for salary increments but serves as an important screening criterion in the hiring process. The research explores the impact of Chinese language proficiency on salaries and career development in Cambodia. It suggests that improving listening and character writing skills is challenging, but employers value Chinese proficiency in communication. To improve Chinese proficiency, schools should focus on comprehensive language skills, align instructional content with job requirements, and provide practical experience.

Keywords: Career Development, Chinese Proficiency, Employability, Language Skills

INTRODUCTION

The gross enrollment rate of higher education in China has increased over the past 40 years of Reform and Opening Up, the country's national policy started by Deng Xiaoping in 1978. Data released by the Ministry of Education of the People's Republic of China on May 20, 2020, shows that the country has surpassed the average level of middle- and high-income countries, making China the country with the largest number of people receiving higher education worldwide (Li and Pu 2021).

College students no longer have advantages in the employment market as of late. Even with a bachelor's or master's degree, they discover that obtaining a solid job is still challenging for them. And even when they do land a decent job, they struggle to do it successfully. In the sense that having a degree does not ensure that one would have a successful career in work (Chen 2018).

Along with the complicated terrain of international student mobility in the context of global higher education (HE), graduate employability in connection to vocational development has emerged as a key research area (Dai and Pham 2024). Employability is the term used to describe a person's qualities that enable them to find and keep a job. Work and the capacity to find employment are related to employability. Because graduates never stop studying once they get a job, their employability keeps growing. According to this definition, employability is therefore about learning not least about learning how to learn and about enabling students to become critical, reflective citizens. Because it places a strong emphasis on graduates' employability which is relevant to our context it can also shed light on how to gauge graduates' employability and highlight the distinctions between recent graduates and more seasoned workers in the labor market (Chen 2018).

Although scholars and educators are still delving into business Chinese-related problems and difficulties, there hasn't been much quantitative research on the particular abilities that Chinese and non-Chinese working professionals believe would increase students' employability after graduation. Expanding and improving research agendas in this area would help practitioners, academics, and decision-makers in language departments create more practical business Chinese curricula and materials, as well as teach in a way that recognizes the needs of a globalized world and benefits business Chinese learners by increasing their employability for positions requiring Chinese language and cultural proficiency (Zhou 2020).

The field of international higher education and graduate employability would benefit greatly from this research. After graduating from Chinese universities, international students' job experiences will be thoroughly examined using the study's findings. Furthermore, this study will provide fresh insight into how overseas students adjust to working in a different sociocultural setting after finishing their studies. In addition, the research will examine the major drivers of

these changes in China, offering valuable perspectives to various stakeholders on how to enhance higher education and the employability of graduates in the Chinese setting. This study provides a foundation for future research on the best ways for international students to get ready for work in their new environment (Dai and Pham 2024). This study will attempt to answer the following questions: (1) what is the state of Chinese language education in Cambodia and how proficient are Cambodians in Chinese; (2) what role does Chinese language proficiency play in enhancing employment capabilities of Cambodia's workforce; (3) how to improve the Chinese language programs to further enhance the employability of Cambodia's workforce. This research is conducted to provide a comprehensive understanding of how the introduction of a Chinese language program influences employability in Cambodia and contribute valuable insights for educational institutes, policymakers, and individuals seeking to enhance their career prospects.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Research on Chinese language learning motivation and international students' Chinese cultural identities in China is crucial because they are significant determinants of second language acquisition. Intercultural identity is somewhat impacted by foreign students' ambition to learn Chinese. The purpose of this study is to investigate how international students' drive to learn Chinese affects their sense of intercultural identity. It also intends to offer insights and experiences for future teaching and day-to-day administration of foreign students (Keat and Jia 2023).

The following factors are the key ones that Mandarin has an impact on income: Enhance the effectiveness of your job search first (Chiswick and Miller 2014). Mandarin proficiency can assist workers in better understanding their range of capabilities and, as a result, better matching those skills and abilities to the employer's employment requirements. Employees must speak Mandarin during numerous hiring processes since it facilitates faster and more efficient communication and information transfer. Secondly, increase productivity at work (Stöhr 2015). Employees that speak well in public are able to interact with superiors, coworkers, and clients more effectively, which increases productivity. Third, the social network can be broadened, giving workers greater chances to interact with various classes and groups and gain more expertise, information, and abilities (H. Wang, Cheng, and Smyth 2016).

H. Wang, Cheng, and Smyth (2016) explore the relationship between Mandarin proficiency and consumption expenditure in China. Results show that proficiency in Mandarin positively impacts consumption, reducing discrimination, lowering search costs, increasing cultural and social activities, and promoting future earning ability. Mandarin is highly valued in education and entertainment,

and its impact on transportation, communication, and transfers consumption is also significant.

The study investigates how foreign learners' views toward learning Chinese are influenced by motivating variables. Results indicate that important causes include things like socioeconomic advantages, employment opportunities, open communication, and cultural experiences. Foreign students are eager to learn more and have a good attitude about Chinese cinema, culture, and economic advancement (Yaqoub Muhammad 2023).

According to research on how language affects laborers' income, the primary theories are that language can raise workers' incomes through the development of their social capital, human capital, and employment chances. From the standpoint of human capital, workers' income is directly impacted by their proficiency in Mandarin, which is one type of human capital with the income effect. Learning Mandarin is a personal decision. Inequitable resource distribution among employees will result in different human capital distribution, which will ultimately lead to different salaries. In the job market, "language discrimination" is a real occurrence. The more people who speak Mandarin in the workforce, the more difficult it will be for members of this minority group to obtain employment due to linguistic barriers. At the same time, proficiency in Mandarin is a prerequisite for certain jobs in the tourism and service sectors, which are only open to workers with a strong command of the language. Mandarin has the potential to influence labor income by fostering the development and accumulation of people's social capital (L. Wang and Dai 2021).

Only a few researches address the relationship between intercultural identity and the motivation to learn Chinese from the viewpoint of foreign students studying in China. In order to better support the management and instruction of international students on a daily basis. International students enrolled in an independent university in Henan Province as its research subject and applies Self-Determination Theory to analyze the effects of Chinese language learning motivation and intercultural identity (Keat and Jia 2023).

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The study used as snowball sampling which can be effectively used to analyze vulnerable groups or individuals under special care. In fact, it allows researchers to access susceptible populations. Thus, it is suggested to consider snowball sampling strategies while working with the attendees of educational programs or samples of research studies. This design was qualitative, allowing for locating, recognizing, and interpreting themes and patterns in qualitative data (Naderifar, Goli, and Ghaljaie 2017).

The semi-structured questionnaires included Service industry (tourism, hospitality, corporate customer service), financial industry (banking, insurance, finance, auditing), hospitals or clinics, pharmacies, education sector, translation

field, and manufacturing sector. The researcher has interviewed 200 participants who are involved in Chinese learning sectors.

The researcher has done 5 main steps to ensure that valid questionnaires are understood and answerable like determine clearly interview questions, questions reviewed by experts, select the participants who are involved in digitalized studying and teaching, piloting the interviews, and make some modification modes (Majid et al. 2017).

Mincer equation refers to a widely used economic model in labor economics proposed by (Hartog and Gerritsen 2016). The Mincer equation is used to estimate how an individual’s earnings are influenced by factors such as education, work experience, and other personal characteristics. It is often used to analyze the relationship between education and earnings. The basic form of the Mincer equation is as follows:

$$\text{Ln (Earnings)} = \beta_0 + \beta_1 * \text{Years of Education} + \beta_2 * \text{Experience} + \beta_3 * \text{personal characteristics}$$

Description:

1. Ln (Earnings) represents the natural logarithm of earnings.
2. Years of Education refers to the number of years of formal education an individual has completed.
3. Experience represents the number of years of work experience.
4. $\beta_0, \beta_1, \beta_2$, etc., are coefficients that indicate the impact of each variable on earnings.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The study reveals that 60.5% of respondents are female, 39.5% are male, and 88.5% are under 30 years old. 84% of respondents work in Phnom Penh, with 60% working with Chinese companies. The majority work in service, education, factories, financial, hospitals, and translation industries. Education status is mainly bachelors, with a small percentage holding a master’s or Ph.D. degree as shown in Table 1:

Table 1. Demographic Profile of Respondents

Demographic Categories	Valid Percentage
Gender	
• Female	60.5
• Male	39.5
Age	
• Under 30	88.5

• From 31-50	11.0
• Above	0.5
Workplace	
• Phnom Penh	84
• Other Provinces	16
Employer Types	
• Chinese Company	60
• Not Chinese Company	40
Industry	
• Service Industry	32
• Education industry	21
• Factories	5
• Financial Industry	3.5
• Hospitals	2.0
• Translation industry	2.0
• Clinics and Pharmacies	1.5
• Others	33.0
Education Status	
• Bachelor's Degree	81.0
• High school and below	15.0
• Master's degree	3.5
• PhD degree	0.5

Source: Processed Data by Researchers

The study reveals that 43.5% of people are proficient in Chinese, with 21.5% completing basic communication tasks, 12.5% fluently discussing a wide range of topics, 4% reading Chinese newspapers and magazines, and 3.5% fluently expressing opinions. The remaining 13.5% don't know Chinese. 33% study in Chinese schools, 20.5% in Chinese language institutes, and 14% study in local universities. 9% learn Chinese because family members speak Chinese, while 8.5% study in China. The majority of people study Chinese for job

opportunities, 42.5% for Chinese culture, and 22.5% for love of learning new languages. The study also shows that 41% of respondents believe they have better Chinese knowledge than other foreign languages. 76% believe knowing Chinese will help find a job easily, while 20% think it will not as shown in Table 2 below:

Table 2. Chinese Status and Level

Chinese Status and level	Valid Percentage
Chinese level	
Level 1-2	43.5
Level 3	21.5
Level 4	12.5
Level 5	4.0
Level 6	3.5
Level 7-9	1.5
Others	13.5
Learning Status	
Hua Xiao	33.0
Institutes	20.5
Universities (Cambodia)	14.0
Family members	9.0
Study in China	8.5
Not studied	15.0
How long	
6 months and below	31.5
6 months – 1 year	25.0
1 year – 2 years	12.5
More than 5 years	12.0
2 years – 3 years	7.0
3 years – 5 years	5.5

Source: Processed Data by Researchers

The study found that 91% of respondents agree that knowing the Chinese language can lead to higher salaries, extra income, and more employment privileges. 71.5% agree, while 21% strongly agree. 93.5% agree that the Chinese language can boost professional development in one’s career. 42% believe it can help with future career advancement, 41% with high salaries, 12.5% with other fields, and 4.5% with high positions. 90.5% agree that speaking the Chinese language makes one capable in many works as shown in Table 3:

Table 3. Chinese Language and Future Career

Chinese language and future career
Salary
Agree (Yes) 91%
Disagree (No) 1.5%
Unclear 7.5%
Extra Income
Agree (Yes) 95%

Disagree (No) 1.5%
Unclear 7.5%
Privileges
Strongly Agree 21%
Agree 71.5%
Uncertain 6.5%
Strongly Disagree 1%
Development
Agree (Yes) 93.5%
Disagree (No) 1%
Unclear 5.5%

Source: Processed Data by Researchers

The study reveals that 51.5% of individuals have a monthly income under \$300, with 23.5% falling between 301 and 500. The remaining 12.5% fall between 501 and 700, with 5.5% between 701 and 900. The study also shows that 34% of individuals do not have extra income due to their Chinese language skills. The study also shows that 23.5% of individuals do not have any salary increase due to their Chinese language skills. The study also shows that 93% of individuals believe that learning Chinese can lead to a worthwhile income in actual work as shown in Table 4:

Table 4. Monthly Income

Monthly income range	
Income range	
Under 300	51.5
301-500	23.5
501-700	12.5
701-900	5.5
901-1200	3.5
1201-1500	3.5
Over 1500	3.0
Extra income range (USD) due to Chinese	
None	23.5
Under 300	16.0
301-500	23.5
501-700	18.5
701-900	5.0
901-1200	5.5
1201-1500	4.0
Over 1500	4.0
Salary increase compared to colleagues (USD)	
None	23.5
Under 300	16.0

301-500	23.5
501-700	18.5
701-900	5.0
901-1200	5.5
1201-1500	4.0
Over 1500	4.0
Salary increases by knowing Chinese (Same position)	
No improvement	13.5
Unclear	17.0
Up to 25%	29.5
26%-50%	23.0
51%- 75%	12.5
76%-100%	3.5
Over 100%	1.0
Return on investment	
Agree	93.0
Uncertain	6.5
Disagree	0.5

Source: Processed Data by Researchers

The study reveals that 31.5% of Chinese learners struggle with writing characters, 25.5% with listening, 25% with speaking, and 8% with reading articles. The remaining 2% find no difficulties. The study also reveals that 34.5% of Chinese learners are satisfied with their school, with 21.5% dissatisfied with the teaching syllabus and teachers, and 8.5% with hardware facilities. The remaining 34.5% have no deficiencies as shown in Table 5:

Table 5. Difficulty in Learning Chinese

Difficulty in Learning Chinese	
Biggest Difficulty	Valid Percentage
Writing Characters	31.5
Listening	25.5
Speaking	25.0
Reading Articles	8.0
Culture	3.5
Other Problems	4.5
No Difficulty	2.0
Shortcomings	
No Deficiencies	34.5
Teaching Syllabus	21.5
Teachers	15.5
Hardware Facilities	8.5
Textbook	7.0
Other Deficiencies	34.5
Learn More About	
Speaking	61.0
Listening	20.0

Writing Characters	6.0
Reading Articles	5.5
Chinese Culture	5.0
Other Aspect	2.5

Source: Processed Data by Researchers

Based on the study of whether Chinese language you have learned in school/institution could be well applied in actual work, it shows that 58.5% believe that they can effectively apply what they have learned in practical work. 11% they feel that the Chinese they have learned does not match what is needed in their actual work. 30.5% is uncertain as shown in Table 6:

Table 6. Applicability in Work

Applicability in Work	Valid Percentage
Effectively Applied	58.5
Does Not Match	11.0
Uncertain	30.5

Source: Processed Data by Researchers

Based on the study of if you think it is necessary to understand Chinese culture while learning Chinese or not, it shows that 84.5 % (Yes) agree with this viewpoint and 5% (No) disagree with it. The last 10.5% is uncertain.

Based on the study of you still want to continue learning Chinese language or not, it shows that 93.5% (Yes) would like to continue to learn and 1.5% (No) wouldn't like to continue. The last 5% is uncertain as shown in Table 7:

Table 7. Necessity of understanding Chinese Culture

Statement	Agree	Uncertain	Disagree
Importance of understanding Chinese culture while learning Chinese	84.50%	10.50%	5%
Desire to continue learning Chinese	93.50%	5%	1.50%

Source: Processed Data by Researchers

The survey results show that 78.5% of Cambodians have a Chinese language proficiency level below level 3, indicating basic vocabulary and basic understanding of grammar rules. They can handle everyday conversations, read and comprehend simple texts, and write basic sentences and paragraphs. 69% of respondents have studied for less than a year, indicating a relatively low level of Chinese proficiency. The current state of Chinese education in Cambodia is in its early stages, with 76.5% learning within the country as shown in Table 8:

Table 8. Aspects of Chinese Language Proficiency

Aspect	Key Finding	Valid Percentage
Chinese Proficiency	Below Level 3	78.50%
Description	Basic vocabulary, simple conversations, fundamental grammar	55.5%
Learning Time	Less than 1 year	69%
Learning Location	Within Cambodia	76.50%
Salary Level	Less than \$500 per month	75%

Source: Processed Data by Researchers

Table 9 reveals a positive correlation between educational level, Chinese proficiency, study time, and wages, with Chinese proficiency showing the strongest relationship. However, study location has a negative relationship. The study shows a positive relationship between an individual’s educational level, Chinese proficiency, study location, and study time. Educational level indicates the highest level of education, while Chinese proficiency indicates the level of language proficiency. Study location, which could be rural or urban, suggests a positive relationship with wages but a negative relationship with additional income. Study time, which includes the amount of time spent studying, has a strong positive relationship with wages.

Table 9. Result of Wage Income and Additional Income

Variables	Wage Income	Additional Income
Educational level	0.103	0.022
Chinese Proficiency	.323**	.150*
Study Location	0.137	-0.016
Study Time	.325**	0.099

Note: ***p<0.001; **p<0.01; *p<0.05

Source: Processed Data by Researchers

Interview Survey Results Compilation

In summary for interviewing questions HR of an audit and tax company, HR of an e-commerce company, HR of an IT company, HR of a property management company, HR of a catering company, HR of a travel agencies, HR of an Education Institute, HR of a Ban, HR of an insurance company, HR of a real estate company.

The real estate company in Cambodia is seeking Cambodian employees who can speak Chinese for various positions, including underwriting reinsurance, claims, administrative and HR assistant, government affairs department, and sales. The company values Chinese proficiency over academic level and is satisfied with existing Chinese-speaking employees, with most being Chinese undergraduates with fluent Chinese language skills. The bank is seeking Cambodian staff for positions in its middle office operations department, and the company values academic level or Chinese proficiency based on job requirements.

The company also requires Cambodian staff for positions such as Chinese teacher and teaching assistant, which are challenging to find but tend to receive higher salaries. The company is generally satisfied with its existing Chinese-speaking employees, but they need to improve their writing skills.

The company has many positions requiring Cambodian staff who can speak Chinese, but high employee turnover is the main challenge. The company hires Cambodian staff for marketing and customer service positions, with technical roles not requiring Chinese language proficiency, but those from mainland China generally receive higher salaries.

The company has Cambodian staff fluent in various roles, but recruitment faces challenges due to the late start of e-commerce in Cambodia and the scarcity of relevant talents. The company prioritizes Chinese proficiency over academic level and hopes that the e-commerce industry in Cambodia will expand the demand for Cambodian Chinese talent.

CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTION

Conclusion

Chinese language proficiency is crucial for workers in Cambodia, as it enhances job opportunities and wages. Chinese companies investing in Cambodia require workers with Chinese skills in management, human resources, marketing, and other roles. Chinese education in Cambodia is flourishing due to open policies, strong promotion by Chinese associations, and national sentiment. Despite a decrease in Chinese schools, the number of students is comparable to 30 years ago. However, challenges like lack of funds, basic facilities, and high-quality teaching staff hinder effective delivery. Collaborative efforts between educational institutions and stakeholders could improve the quality of Chinese language education in Cambodia.

Suggestion

The study suggests strategies to improve Chinese language programs and employability in Cambodia, including stable cooperation between Cambodia and China, a Chinese Education Project Team, and enhancing communication between Chinese language schools. Challenges include lack of qualified teachers, insufficient funding, and limited student numbers. The Cambodian government should support Chinese schools, provide financial support, and strengthen ties between educational institutions and enterprises. Continual improvement in Chinese language education is crucial for Cambodia's workforce competitiveness and student motivation.

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