

THE FEATURES OF TEACHING CHINESE IN UKRAINE: INTEGRATING UKRAINIAN AND ENGLISH RESOURCES

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Abstract. This article explores the evolving landscape of Chinese language education in Ukraine, with a particular focus on the integration of Ukrainian- and English-language resources. It examines historical developments, institutional challenges, and the evolving role of Confucius Institutes. Special attention is given to the shortage of qualified instructors, regional disparities, and shifting geopolitical dynamics. Drawing on scholarly literature and practical experience, the study proposes a comprehensive framework to strengthen Chinese language education in Ukraine through curriculum design, resource integration, teacher training, and interdisciplinary collaboration. The article highlights the strategic value of Chinese language proficiency as a cultural and economic asset in the context of global interconnectivity.

Keywords: Chinese language education, Ukraine, Confucius Institutes, curriculum development, educational resources integration.

1. INTRODUCTION

Foreign language education has long played a vital role in formal curricula worldwide. In today's interconnected global society, proficiency in a foreign language is not merely a tool for communication but a gateway to cognitive development and intercultural understanding. According to Orton and Scrimgeour (2019), language learning fosters critical thinking, enhances negotiation skills, and cultivates appreciation for diverse cultural paradigms.

With China's increasing global influence, Chinese language instruction has gained popularity across continents. Ukraine is no exception. However, Ukraine's unique geopolitical context, the ongoing war, and various structural limitations have created a specific set of challenges for the development of effective Chinese language programs. These include a shortage of qualified instructors, insufficient institutional support, regional inequalities, and a lack of localized materials. This article investigates these issues in depth and offers targeted recommendations based on the integration of Ukrainian- and English-language resources.

2. HISTORICAL CONTEXT OF CHINESE LANGUAGE EDUCATION IN UKRAINE

Chinese language instruction in Ukraine began to expand significantly in the early 2000s, coinciding with the global rise of China's political and economic influence. One of the key drivers of this expansion

was the establishment of Confucius Institutes, which facilitated language programs and cultural exchange across the country.

The first Confucius Institute in Ukraine was launched in 2007 in Luhansk. Subsequently, other institutes were opened in Kyiv, Kharkiv, Odesa, Vinnytsia, and Ternopil. Supplementary Confucius Classrooms also emerged in institutions such as Zaporizhzhia National University and the Ukrainian National Tchaikovsky Academy of Music.

A significant development in western Ukraine occurred on October 1, 2018, with the opening of the Center for Chinese Language and Culture at Vasyl Stefanyk Precarpathian National University—a date that symbolically coincides with China's National Day. The inauguration ceremony was attended by university rector Professor Ihor Tsependa, Associate Professor Shi Yajun (Director of the Confucius Institute at Kyiv National Linguistic University), university faculty and students, as well as Chinese language volunteers Li Wenzjun and Sun Hailin.

In his remarks, Professor Tsependa highlighted that the university had been developing Chinese studies for almost 20 years, with strong collaborations with Chinese institutions such as Tianshun Classical University and the Central Academy of Fine Arts. These partnerships led to the university's participation in the global academic alliance "One Belt, One Road."

The new center, established in cooperation with the Confucius Institute in Kyiv, was envisioned as a platform for both language and cultural exchange. Associate Professor Shi Yajun praised the university's commitment to Sinology and introduced the volunteer instructors who would support teaching efforts during the academic year.

The ceremony concluded with a cultural program featuring Chinese and Ukrainian songs, student performances, and a tea ceremony.

Currently, more than seventy students at Precarpathian National University are studying Chinese as a second foreign language. They actively participate in national language competitions and organize events dedicated to Chinese culture and society.

3. CURRENT CHALLENGES IN CHINESE LANGUAGE EDUCATION

3.1. Shortage of Qualified Teachers

Effective Chinese language instruction requires not only fluency in Mandarin but also pedagogical expertise and cultural competence. As Schön (1984) notes, teaching is a reflective practice responsive to learners' contexts. In Ukraine, a critical shortage of qualified Chinese teachers persists, exacerbated by the war, which has caused emigration and professional burnout.

Many instructors lack access to modern training in communicative or task-based teaching methods. Additionally, teaching Chinese requires unique skills, such as character recognition and tone production, which demand specialized preparation (Orton, 2016). These challenges often leave students struggling with foundational skills, diminishing their confidence and motivation (Orton & Scrimgeour, 2019).

Case Example: Vasyl Stefanyk Precarpathian National University

At this university, the Chinese language program is maintained by a single Ukrainian Sinologist. While student interest is high, the absence of native-speaking faculty and limited opportunities for immersion significantly hinder linguistic and cultural development. Institutional support, visiting scholars, and joint exchange programs are necessary to address these limitations.

3.2. Institutional and Financial Constraints

Ukrainian universities often lack the financial and technical resources required to sustain modern Chinese language programs. Most institutions do not have language labs, digital platforms, or access to high-quality localized materials. As Shevchenko and Fedorets (2004) note, the 21st-century language classroom must enable multimodal, interactive learning—something still largely missing in Chinese programs in Ukraine.

Although some funding is available through international grants, it is insufficient for long-term sustainability. Chinese language instruction is often offered only within humanities departments, excluding students from STEM and other fields.

3.3. Regional Disparities and Geopolitical Perceptions

Chinese language education in Ukraine is characterized by significant regional imbalances and complex sociopolitical influences. Most Chinese language programs are concentrated in western and central urban centers, leaving eastern and rural regions considerably underserved—particularly following the escalation of military conflict. The closure of Confucius Institutes in areas such as Luhansk and Kharkiv has exacerbated this divide, effectively eliminating access to Chinese language instruction for students in conflict-affected zones.

This geographic inequality not only restricts educational mobility but also undermines broader national efforts to expand linguistic and cultural competencies. Students in underserved regions are often left without qualified instructors, digital resources, or opportunities to engage with native speakers, creating a systemic gap in foreign language accessibility.

Moreover, the geopolitical context has altered societal perceptions of Chinese language education. China's ambiguous stance on the Russian invasion of Ukraine has led to skepticism among some Ukrainian students and educators regarding the long-term value of investing in Chinese language study. While Mandarin remains a globally strategic language, this diplomatic ambiguity has generated concerns about the stability and reliability of future partnerships, academic exchanges, and career prospects related to China.

3.5. Motivation and Pedagogical Innovation in the Ukrainian Context

One of the most decisive factors in second language acquisition is learner motivation (Dörnyei, 2001; Gardner, 2010).

Motivation not only determines the level of initial engagement but also influences the learner's resilience when facing cognitive or emotional challenges. For Ukrainian students, common motivational drivers include the desire to travel, the aspiration to speak a globally significant and complex language, career advancement, and the fascination with Chinese culture and philosophy.

Motivation is also closely tied to goal-setting. When beginning Chinese language studies, many Ukrainian students benefit from establishing clear learning objectives and timelines. Educational institutions typically support this through semester-based learning outcomes, though individual planning is equally important. Failure to set realistic and personalized goals can lead to early disengagement, as learners may feel overwhelmed by the perceived difficulty of the language.

Upon progressing beyond the beginner stage, Ukrainian learners frequently encounter significant phonetic and orthographic challenges. Mandarin's tonal system is often perceived as "alien" by European learners. Many students struggle to distinguish tones or reproduce them accurately. This is compounded by the limited availability of introductory materials in Ukrainian that explain the Pinyin

(拼音) system effectively. As a result, phonetic instruction often becomes monotonous and demotivating unless made interactive and engaging by the teacher.

In contrast to phonology, Chinese grammar is generally perceived as more approachable by Ukrainian learners due to its lack of inflection, cases, or complex tense structures. However, the writing system presents a far greater obstacle. Learners accustomed to alphabetic scripts often find it difficult to adapt to a logographic system where characters (汉字 hànzì) bear no transparent phonetic correlation. Moreover, learners are often frustrated by the complexity of idiomatic expressions such as 成语 (chéngyǔ), which are deeply embedded in historical and cultural references and whose meanings cannot be deduced from individual characters.

Cultural dissonance also poses substantial challenges. Ukrainian and Chinese cultures, though both rich and nuanced, differ significantly in their symbolic systems and social constructs. Students may struggle to understand concepts that have no direct equivalents in their own cultural framework. For example, the character 孝 (xiào)—central to Confucian ethics and signifying “filial piety”—represents a deeply rooted value in Chinese society that does not have a single-word equivalent in Ukrainian, despite conceptual similarities.

To maintain motivation in the face of these obstacles, instructors must implement pedagogical strategies that are both affective and effective. Innovative practices such as project-based learning (PBL), gamification, and visual storytelling have proven successful. At Vasyl Stefanyk Precarpathian National University, for example, the project “Voices from China” engaged students in intercultural exchanges, blog writing, and public presentations in Mandarin. Gamified vocabulary challenges and pronunciation contests, facilitated through apps like HelloChinese, have led to measurable improvements in retention and attendance.

Visual aids—such as simplified comics, illustrated idioms, and culturally authentic memes—are particularly effective in fostering cultural awareness and making abstract concepts more tangible. Additionally, instructors are encouraged to integrate reflective practices, such as learner journals and CEFR-aligned self-assessment rubrics, to help students monitor their progress and reinforce intrinsic motivation.

3.6. Cross-Disciplinary Integration and Curriculum Diversification

Integrating Chinese language instruction into interdisciplinary curricula has emerged as a promising strategy to increase the relevance and appeal of Chinese studies. Several Ukrainian institutions have launched pilot programs that combine Mandarin instruction with subjects such as international relations, business, and engineering.

At Taras Shevchenko National University of Kyiv, for example, students can take “Chinese for International Relations,” which includes diplomatic terminology, press release analysis, and mock negotiations in Mandarin. Similarly, Kharkiv Polytechnic Institute has introduced “Chinese for Engineering,” teaching students terms like 工程师 (gōngchéngshī – engineer) and 人工智能 (réngōng zhìngnéng – artificial intelligence). These courses provide learners with both language and professional vocabulary, preparing them for careers in global industries.

Vocational institutions and continuing education centers can also contribute by offering short-term courses such as “Chinese for Tourism” or “Mandarin for Ukrainian Exporters.” These efforts align with

Ukraine's broader economic and diplomatic goals, reinforcing the role of Chinese language proficiency as a strategic national skill.

4. RESOURCE INTEGRATION IN CHINESE LANGUAGE EDUCATION

4.1. UKRAINIAN-LANGUAGE MATERIALS

Ukrainian-language resources are essential for early-stage learners. They provide clarity, cultural relevance, and accessibility. Yet, the market for such materials is still underdeveloped. Most textbooks are outdated and do not align with international standards such as the HSK. Teacher-generated resources and institutional cooperation with Chinese partners could help bridge this gap.

4.2. English-Language Materials

English-language resources, including Duolingo, HelloChinese, and globally recognized grammar guides, provide multimedia support and access to international standards. However, these assume a high level of English proficiency, which can create additional challenges for students not fluent in English. Teachers must therefore mediate the use of such tools carefully.

4.3. Integrative Approaches

A blended approach—using Ukrainian for instruction and English-based tools for practice—can offer a comprehensive learning experience. For example, vocabulary can be taught in trilingual glossaries (Chinese–Ukrainian–English), and grammar explained in Ukrainian while reinforced through English apps. Formative assessment, student reflections, and project work can balance both sources effectively.

4.4. Open Educational Resources and Digital Infrastructure

Developing Open Educational Resources (OERs) in Ukrainian would ensure broader access to quality materials. Digital platforms and AI-driven apps tailored to Ukrainian learners can personalize learning experiences and address regional disparities. Partnerships between universities, government agencies, and private developers are key to such initiatives.

5. RECOMMENDATIONS

To address the multifaceted challenges of teaching Chinese in Ukraine and to enhance the sustainability of its programs, we propose the following strategic actions:

1. Develop High-Quality Ukrainian-Language Resources

- Invest in culturally adapted textbooks, glossaries, and teacher handbooks.
- Translate and localize international curricula such as HSK-based materials.
- Support collaborative publishing projects between Ukrainian and Chinese institutions.

2. Enhance Teacher Training and Professional Development

- Establish regular training workshops, both online and in-person, in modern methodologies such as task-based, communicative, and digital instruction.
- Offer scholarships and academic exchanges for Ukrainian teachers to study in China.
- Encourage mentorship networks among experienced and novice instructors.

3. Revitalize and Decentralize Confucius Institute Activities

- Reopen Confucius Classrooms in safe regions and expand their digital presence.
- Diversify offerings by incorporating language into STEM, business, and diplomatic tracks.
- Collaborate with national language institutions to ensure content quality and transparency.

4. Promote Public Awareness and Cultural Engagement

– Launch national and regional campaigns emphasizing the economic, cultural, and cognitive benefits of Chinese language acquisition.

– Share success stories of Ukrainian professionals using Chinese in international contexts.

– Organize public events, language festivals, and social media campaigns to attract new learners.

5. Expand Regional and Digital Access

– Implement satellite and online programs to serve rural and conflict-affected areas.

– Provide mobile-friendly learning platforms with offline access capabilities.

– Use public-private partnerships to fund infrastructure and materials development.

6. Leverage Digital Technologies and AI Tools

– Develop adaptive, bilingual platforms that tailor learning paths to student progress.

– Integrate AI for pronunciation analysis, grammar correction, and automated feedback.

– Use learning analytics to inform curriculum adjustments and teacher training priorities.

6. CONCLUSIONS

Chinese language education in Ukraine stands at a pivotal crossroads. While numerous challenges persist—ranging from geopolitical instability and teacher shortages to limited resource accessibility—the field is rich with potential. Rather than viewing these issues as insurmountable obstacles, they should be recognized as catalysts for systemic innovation.

This article has emphasized the importance of an integrative approach: combining Ukrainian and English-language resources, investing in teacher development, and embedding Chinese instruction within interdisciplinary and vocational contexts. Moreover, by cultivating learner motivation through engaging pedagogy and reflective practice, programs can foster long-term language retention and intercultural competence.

The development of Chinese studies in Ukraine is not merely a linguistic endeavor—it is a strategic initiative that strengthens Ukraine's cultural diplomacy, global academic partnerships, and international workforce competitiveness. Through collaborative policy, institutional reform, and digital innovation, Ukraine can shape a resilient and inclusive model of Chinese language education fit for the 21st century.

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Ірина Ілійчук, Валерія Корнута, Ван Ґуонен. Особливості викладання китайської мови в Україні: інтеграція україномовних та англомовних ресурсів. *Журнал Прикарпатського університету імені Василя Стефаника. Філологія*, 11 (2024), 136–142.

У статті проаналізовано сучасний стан і тенденції розвитку викладання китайської мови в Україні з особливим акцентом на інтеграцію україномовних та англомовних освітніх ресурсів. Розглянуто історичні передумови, інституційні виклики та трансформацію ролі Інститутів Конфуція. Особливу увагу приділено дефіциту кваліфікованих викладачів, регіональним диспропорціям і змінним геополітичним чинникам. Спираючись на наукові джерела та практичний досвід, у дослідженні запропоновано комплексну модель посилення системи навчання китайської мови в Україні шляхом удосконалення навчальних програм, інтеграції ресурсів, розвитку підготовки викладачів і міждисциплінарної співпраці. Наголошено на стратегічній цінності володіння китайською мовою як культурного й економічного ресурсу в умовах глобальної взаємопов'язаності.

Ключові слова: навчання китайської мови, Україна, Інститути Конфуція, розроблення навчальних програм, інтеграція освітніх ресурсів.