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Learning Strategies for Chinese as Foreign Language Learners in College: A Qualitative Study

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ABSTRACT

Embarking on the journey of learning Chinese as a foreign language in college entails grappling with a myriad of distinctive challenges, ranging from navigating its intricate writing system to mastering its tonal pronunciation and unraveling its rich cultural nuances. In this complex landscape of language acquisition, comprehending the nuanced learning strategies wielded by Chinese foreign language learners becomes paramount. These strategies not only illuminate the pathways to effective teaching but also hold the key to enhancing student outcomes. Despite the burgeoning interest in Chinese language education, there exists a conspicuous dearth of qualitative studies delving into the intricacies of learning strategies within college settings. To address this gap, this study adopts a qualitative research paradigm, employing semi-structured interviews as its methodological backbone. Through these interviews, the study endeavors to excavate profound insights into the diverse repertoire of learning strategies embraced by Chinese foreign language learners in the collegiate milieu. At its core, the study's primary objective is twofold: to meticulously explore and rigorously analyze the spectrum of learning strategies woven into the fabric of Chinese foreign language learning at the college level. By peering into the multifaceted approaches employed by students, the study aspires to engender a nuanced comprehension of effective pedagogical methodologies. Moreover, the findings are poised to serve as a compass, guiding the design and implementation of tailored language learning interventions tailored to the unique needs and aspirations of Chinese language learners in college environments.

Keywords: Chinese language acquisition; Foreign language learners; Learning strategies; College education; Qualitative study

1. Introduction

Learning Chinese as a foreign language has gained increasing attention and significance in recent years due to China's growing influence in the global arena, both economically and culturally. With the rise of China as a global power, proficiency in the Chinese language has become an asset for individuals pursuing careers in fields such as business, diplomacy, academia, and tourism (Zhang & Wan, 2019). For example, in Southeast Asia, countries like Singapore and Malaysia have long-standing cultural and economic connections with China, making Chinese language skills highly valuable in business and diplomatic circles. In Africa, nations such as Kenya and Ethiopia have seen significant Chinese investment in infrastructure projects, creating demand for Chinese-speaking professionals to facilitate these partnerships. In Europe, countries like Germany and the United Kingdom have robust trade relations with China, leading to increased opportunities for those proficient in Chinese within multinational corporations and diplomatic missions. Similarly, in North America, particularly in Canada and the United States, the growing presence of Chinese tourists and students has spurred demand for Chinese language skills in the tourism and academic sectors. As a result, many colleges and universities around the world offer Chinese language programs to cater to the growing demand for Chinese language education.

Despite the growing popularity of Chinese language learning programs in colleges, there remains a need to explore and understand effective learning strategies for Chinese foreign language learners. According to a report by the Modern Language Association (MLA), enrollment in Chinese language courses in U.S. higher education institutions increased by 51% from 2002 to 2013. The Confucius Institute, established by the Chinese government to promote Chinese language and culture worldwide, has set up over 500 institutes in more than 140 countries as of 2020, indicating the global demand for Chinese language education. While numerous studies have investigated language learning strategies in general, there is a noticeable gap in the literature specifically focusing on Chinese language learning strategies among college students. This research gap presents an opportunity to conduct a qualitative study that delves deeper into the unique challenges and strategies employed by Chinese foreign language learners in the college setting.

Understanding the learning strategies employed by Chinese foreign language learners in college is of paramount importance for several reasons. Firstly, identifying effective learning strategies can inform educators and curriculum developers in designing more targeted and impactful Chinese language programs that meet the diverse needs of students. Additionally, gaining insights into the challenges faced by Chinese language learners can help educators provide better support and resources to facilitate the language learning process. Furthermore, understanding the experiences and perspectives of Chinese foreign language learners can contribute to the broader discourse on language learning strategies and cross-cultural communication.

Therefore, this qualitative study aims to address the research gap by exploring the Chinese learning strategies employed by Chinese foreign language learners in the college context. By conducting in-depth interviews and analyzing the narratives of Chinese language learners, this study seeks to uncover the various strategies, tactics, and approaches used by students to navigate the complexities of learning Chinese as a foreign language in college. Ultimately, the findings of this research endeavor are expected to provide valuable insights that contribute to the enhancement of Chinese language education programs and the overall advancement of language learning scholarship.

2. Literature review

Learning strategies emerged after Bruna proposed cognitive strategies, which can be divided into general learning strategies and subject learning strategies according to their application scope, while language learning belongs to one kind of subject learning strategies, which can be specifically divided into first language learning strategies and second language learning strategies. Duffy (1982) and Rubin (2010) regard learning strategies as a learning rule system, which is formed by learners' own unconscious and automatic generalization without purpose in the learning process. The emphasis of the two is that learning strategies are implicit. Dansereau (2014) regards learning strategy as an indispensable process or step in learning. It holds that "learning strategy is a series of processes and steps of knowledge acquisition and storage and information utilization", and emphasizes

that learning strategy is a continuous process in learning, and learning strategy will exist as long as learners are in learning. Therefore, attention is paid to the influence of behaviors taken by learners in learning activities. Amiran and Katims (1985) regard learning as a kind of learning activity. They believe that "learning strategies are thinking steps used to encode, decode, analyze and extract information", so they focus on a series of thinking activities carried out by learners in the learning process. Chamot (1990) regards learning strategies as specific learning methods or skills, and believes that learning strategies are a way to guide learners to learn after certain thinking, which can improve learners' learning ability. Their research reveals the characteristics of learning strategies from different perspectives. Their main differences are as follows: First, whether learning strategies are invisible mental activities or explicit learning behaviors; second, whether learning strategies are macroscopic ideas guiding learning or microscopic methods adopted in the learning process. Their definitions all reveal the characteristics of learning strategies to a certain extent. However, they only define learning strategies as a part or process of learning activities, ignoring the definition of learning strategies from the whole of learning activities.

Chinese researchers have different views on the definition of learning strategy. Wen Qiufang (2023) believes that learning strategy is a learning method and a means to achieve learning goals, and the essence of language learning strategy is the action method taken by language learners. Liu Dianzhi (2021), Liu Rude (1997) believe that learning strategy refers to learners' planning for their own learning in a purposefully planned way and formulating corresponding learning plans. They propose that learning strategy refers to the procedures, rules, methods, skills, and regulation methods for learners to effectively learn in learning activities. They believe that learning strategies are not only the choice and use of learning methods but also the self-monitoring and self-management in the learning process, so learning strategies can be explicit or implicit.

The relevant research on Chinese learning strategies mainly focuses on the empirical research on Chinese learning strategies of specific groups, the factors that affect the choice of Chinese learning strategies, and the use of language learning strategies. The empirical research on specific Chinese learning strategies mainly targets learners from a certain country or a certain university. For example, Zhang LiRui and Wan Ying (2019) took overseas students from five Central Asian countries as the survey objects. They found that students from these countries primarily used metacognitive and social strategies to enhance their language proficiency, emphasizing the importance of self-regulation and peer interaction in learning Chinese. CAI Xia (2020) took Chinese learners from Laos as the survey objects, revealing that Laotian students relied heavily on memory and cognitive strategies, such as repetition and summarization, to cope with the challenges posed by the Chinese language's tonal and character-based system. This study highlighted the need for instructional approaches that strengthen these specific strategies to improve learning outcomes. And Zhou Min (2021) took Chinese learners from Thailand , discovering that Thai students preferred affective and compensation strategies, which help them manage their emotions and use contextual clues to understand and produce language. Zhou's research suggested incorporating more interactive and supportive learning environments to cater to the emotional and adaptive needs of Thai learners. Based on Oxford's Language Learning Strategies Scale, these researchers investigated and analyzed the learning strategies of international students and put forward corresponding teaching suggestions.

Learners' choice of learning strategies is influenced by a variety of factors. Wen Qiufang (2012) believes that learning background, learning tasks, learning conditions, gender and motivation will all affect learners' use of learning strategies. Zheng Binbing & Zhang Yining (2017) and Li Namei (2022) believe that the change of learning environment will cause learners to change their original learning strategies and affect their academic performance and acquisition level. For example, Chinese language learners who move from a traditional classroom setting to an immersive environment in China often shift from rote memorization to more interactive and communicative strategies to adapt to real-life language use. Xu Jian (2021) mainly discusses the influence of individual factors of learners on Chinese learning strategies, and believes that learners' age, Chinese learning time and Chinese level will affect the use of learning strategies. Younger learners rely more on memory strategies, while older or more advanced learners might prefer metacognitive strategies to manage their learning process. Bai and

Wang (2021) explored the selection of learning strategies by language learners from different backgrounds. It is generally believed that learners' use of learning strategies is influenced by language background and cultural background. Their research suggests that learners' use of learning strategies is influenced by their linguistic and cultural backgrounds. Students from tonal language backgrounds may find it easier to grasp Chinese tones and might use different strategies compared to students from non-tonal language backgrounds.

The study of Chinese learning strategies is also reflected in the investigation of learning strategies of different language elements. In terms of learning strategies for Chinese characters, it is generally believed that learners use more repetition strategies and less induction strategies when learning Chinese characters, and they rarely use phonological symbols to memorize them (Jiang Xin & Zhao Guo 2001). In terms of phonological learning strategies, the study found that learners with beautiful phonological features most often use cognitive strategies and affective strategies (Feng Yuting, 2023). In terms of vocabulary learning strategies, research suggests that cognitive strategies and metacognitive strategies are used more frequently by learners in vocabulary learning (Yan, 2020)

3. Materials and methods

This study adopts the exploratory qualitative research paradigm to deeply discuss the learning strategies of foreign students in Chinese universities. Participants were selected from different colleges and universities in China through purposeful sampling to ensure diversity in terms of language ability, academic background and learning experience (Creswell, 2021). This approach, recommended by Hancock et al. (2021), aims to generate an informed perspective on the problems identified.

To achieve qualitative saturation, it is expected that 8 to 10 sample sizes will be recruited (Creswell, 2021). Therefore, using the method of purposeful sampling, eight Chinese as a foreign Language (CFL) learner from Chinese higher education institutions were selected, and their demographic information was recorded in **Table 1**, in order to select participants who could provide rich and diverse data (Creswell, 2021). Consent was obtained from the participants, who were also informed of the nature of the study, its purposes,

and the confidentiality of their responses.

Data were collected from semi-structured interviews to answer the question "What learning strategies do students use in their Chinese language learning?" And "What factors influence the use of Chinese learning strategies?" An interview protocol was designed to explore participants' use of learning strategies as Chinese language learners, including their motivations, attitudes, and experiences. The collected data is subjected to thematic analysis in NVivo, a qualitative analysis software program that identifies patterns and themes in the data. To ensure the reliability of the survey results, the researchers conducted member assessment, peer report and reflection.

Students' Chinese language grades are based on the HSK Chinese Language Test, which is a core assessment of students' Chinese language ability and an important benchmark for their academic and professional pursuits. Examination boards have been reforming over the years. The Chinese Language Proficiency Test (HSK) is an international standardized Chinese proficiency test that is designed to evaluate the Chinese proficiency of nonnative speakers (including foreigners, overseas Chinese, and Chinese ethnic minorities). It is both a proficiency and criterion-referenced test, while being aligned with the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR). In the current HSK, listening, reading and writing skills are graded at six levels and the oral test is given separately. The maximum score for each module is 100 points and there is no writing test for Level 1 or Level 2, so the total score for these two levels is 200 points and the total score for the rest is 300 points. For Levels 1 to 4, 60% of the full mark is the passing line, while Level 5 and 6 do not have a designated passing score, in an attempt to continually encourage learners to pursue higher levels of language proficiency (Zhang & Zhang, 2014). HSK1, 2, 3 are generally considered to be low-level Chinese learners, HSK4, 5,6 are high-level Chinese learners.

4. Results and discussion

RQ1

Based on the interviews conducted with participants at various proficiency levels in Chinese language learning, several predominant learning strategies have emerged. Participant 1, at HSK1 level, predominantly relies on memory

Table 1. Participants' demographic information.

Participants	Native language	Gender	Years of college	HSK level	Major
P1	English	Female	2	HSK1	Chinese
P2	English	Male	2	HSK2	Chinese
P3	English	Female	2	HSK2	Chinese
P4	English	Male	2	HSK3	Chinese
P5	English	Female	2	HSK4	Chinese
P6	English	Male	2	HSK5	Chinese
P7	English	Female	2	HSK6	Chinese
P8	English	Male	2	HSK6	Chinese

strategies, utilizing methods such as flashcards and repetition exercises to reinforce vocabulary and basic grammar structures. Additionally, immersion through exposure to Chinese music and subtitled shows aids in enhancing listening skills. Participant 1 elaborated on her approach, stating, "In my Chinese language learning journey, I primarily rely on memory strategies... Flashcards and repetition exercises are my go-to methods." At the HSK2 level, Participant 2 adopts a combination of memory and cognitive strategies, emphasizing vocabulary acquisition through memorization techniques while actively engaging with Chinese texts to understand context. Furthermore, participation in language exchange groups facilitates speaking practice and peer feedback. Participant 2 expressed his approach, saying, "At my HSK2 level, I find myself using a combination of memory and cognitive strategies... I also actively engage with the language by reading Chinese texts." Participant 3, also at HSK2 proficiency, incorporates cognitive strategies by focusing on grammar rules and employing mnemonic devices to aid memorization and concept association. Participant 3 shared her strategy, noting, "Since reaching HSK2 proficiency, I've started incorporating more cognitive strategies into my learning routine... I also make use of mnemonic devices." As proficiency advances to HSK3 level, Participant 4 adopts a balanced approach, combining memory exercises with extensive reading for comprehension enhancement and actively seeking language output opportunities through conversation clubs and speaking practice with native speakers. Participant 4 described his strategy, stating, "As someone at an HSK3 level, I've found that a balanced approach to learning strategies works best for me... I also allocate time for extensive reading." At HSK4 proficiency, Participant 5 introduces metacognitive strategies, setting specific study goals, and utilizing self-testing techniques to monitor progress and adjust learning strategies accordingly. Participant 5 explained her

approach, mentioning, "Having reached HSK4 proficiency, I've become more intentional about incorporating metacognitive strategies into my learning process... I set specific goals for each study session." Moving to HSK5 level, Participant 6 integrates metacognitive and compensation strategies to address advanced language content, reflecting on learning progress and seeking additional resources to supplement learning. Participant 6 shared his strategy, stating, "At HSK5 level, I've found that a combination of metacognitive and compensation strategies is essential... When encountering challenging grammar concepts or vocabulary, I seek additional resources." Participant 7, proficient at HSK6 level, emphasizes authentic language input through media consumption and real-life conversations while focusing on refining writing skills through regular practice and feedback. Participant 7 discussed her approach, stating, "As someone proficient at HSK6 level, I've developed a more autonomous approach to learning strategies... Additionally, I focus on refining my writing skills." Finally, Participant 8, also at HSK6 proficiency, prioritizes language output skills by participating in immersion programs and seeking opportunities for professional use of Chinese, while engaging in reflective practices to ensure continual improvement. Participant 8 elaborated on his strategy, saying, "Now that I've reached HSK6 proficiency, I place a strong emphasis on refining my language output skills... I also engage in reflective practices." These findings demonstrate the dynamic and evolving nature of learning strategies adopted by students at different proficiency levels in their Chinese language learning journey.

RQ2

Figure 1 displays an interface from NVivo. The treemap visualization shows the relative frequency of coding references for each node, highlighting how various aspects influence Chinese learning strategies. The 'Motivation' node

appears to have the highest number of coding references, followed by 'Emotional aspect,' 'Culture aspect,' and 'Language input and output opportunities,' indicating the prominent themes in the project.
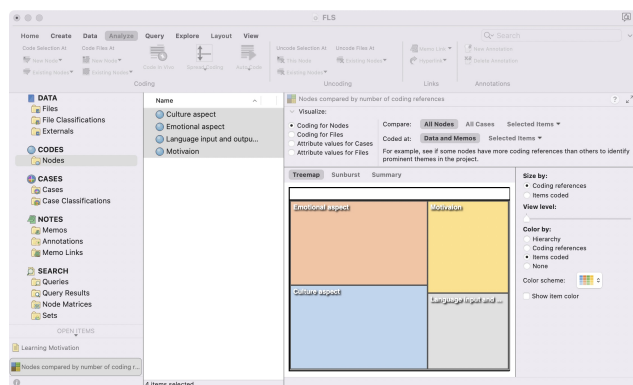

Figure 1. Data collection results from Nvivo.

4.1 Motivation

Learning motivation is one of the important factors that affect students' use of Chinese learning strategies. Learning motivation can be understood as learners' inner driving force and goal-oriented orientation to learning activities, which directly affects students' attitude, behavior, and effort level in the learning process. The results showed that highly motivated students may be more inclined to use cognitive strategies. The findings from the interviews with Participants 1, 4, 6, and 8 reveal diverse motivations for learning Chinese. The interviews with participants shed light on the influence of motivation on the use of Chinese learning strategies. Highly motivated students demonstrated a propensity towards employing cognitive and memory strategies in their language learning endeavors. Participant 1 exemplified this phenomenon through her strong intrinsic motivation, stating, "I've always had a strong drive to learn Chinese... I genuinely enjoy immersing myself in the language and culture." This proactive approach to seeking out new materials and opportunities for practice aligns with the utilization of cognitive and memory strategies to enhance learning efficiency.

Conversely, lowly motivated students exhibited a preference for memory strategies, compensation strategies, social strategies, and metacognitive strategies. Participant 4 highlighted the fluctuation in motivation over time, indicating a need for setting new goals to reignite motivation. This fluctuation in motivation could lead to a reliance on memory strategies, as observed in participants like P4, who may struggle to maintain focus without clear objectives. She mentioned that "I must admit, my motivation for learning Chinese has fluctuated a bit over the years. When I first started, I was really motivated to reach HSK3 level, but now that I've achieved that, I find it harder to stay focused. I think setting new goals could help reignite my motivation."

Moreover, participants like P6 and P8 illustrated the enduring impact of motivation on their learning journey. Participant 6 emphasized the significant role motivation played in her pursuit of Chinese proficiency, driven by aspirations for future career success. She claimed that "Motivation plays a huge role in my learning journey. I've always been driven to excel in Chinese, especially since I plan to pursue a career that requires fluency in the language. Knowing that my future success depends on my proficiency in Chinese keeps me motivated to push myself harder." Similarly, Participant 8 (P8) outlined the evolution of motivation, as she said "I think my motivation for learning Chinese has evolved over time. Initially, it was driven by external factors like academic requirements and career prospects. But as I've progressed, I've developed a genuine interest in the language and culture, which fuels my motivation to continue learning." transitioning from external factors like academic requirements to a genuine interest in language and culture.

4.2 Emotional aspect

The interviews with participants revealed significant insights into the influence of emotional aspects on the use of Chinese learning strategies. Participants demonstrated a nuanced understanding of how their emotional states affect their approach to learning, highlighting the dynamic interplay between emotions and strategy selection. Participant 2 emphasized the impact of stress and anxiety on strategy utilization, stating, "When I'm feeling stressed or anxious, I tend to rely more on social strategies, like seeking support from classmates or joining study groups." This suggests that emotional states can prompt learners to seek social support as a coping mechanism to alleviate pressure and enhance the learning experience.

Participant 3 articulated the role of emotions in shaping cognitive and emotional strategies, noting, "When I'm feeling motivated and positive, I find myself utilizing more cognitive strategies... But on days when I'm feeling down or discouraged, I rely more on emotional strategies." This

underscores the adaptive nature of strategy deployment in response to emotional fluctuations, highlighting the importance of emotional regulation in optimizing learning effectiveness.

Participant 5 highlighted the impact of emotional states on memory strategies, stating, "When I'm feeling overwhelmed or distracted, I struggle to retain information effectively." This suggests that emotional well-being directly influences memory consolidation, underscoring the need for strategies that promote relaxation and refocus to enhance retention.

Participant 7 discussed the role of emotions in monitoring and regulating the learning process, stating, "When I'm feeling frustrated with my progress, I tend to engage in metacognitive strategies." This indicates that emotional cues prompt learners to adopt metacognitive strategies to regain control and direction in their learning journey.

Furthermore, Participant 8 acknowledged the influence of emotional factors on compensation strategies, stating, "Emotional factors definitely influence my use of compensation strategies." This suggests that emotional states prompt learners to seek alternative resources or assistance to overcome learning obstacles, highlighting the adaptive nature of strategy selection in response to emotional cues.

4.3 Culture aspect

The interviews with participants provided valuable insights into the influence of emotional aspects on the use of Chinese learning strategies, particularly within the context of cultural norms and values.

Participant 1 highlighted the impact of cultural values on strategy selection, stating, "In Chinese culture, there's a strong emphasis on respect for authority and hierarchical relationships. So, when it comes to learning Chinese, I tend to rely more on memory strategies..." This suggests that cultural expectations regarding proper etiquette and formal interactions influence the preference for memory-based strategies in language learning.

Participant 3 underscored the role of cultural norms in shaping social strategies, noting, "In Chinese culture, group harmony is highly valued, so I often collaborate with classmates... It's not just about individual achievement; it's about contributing to the group's success." This indicates that collectivist cultural values foster collaboration and communal learning practices, driving the utilization of social strategies

for mutual benefit.

Participant 5 further emphasized the influence of collectivism on social strategies, stating, "Chinese culture places great importance on collectivism and cooperation... Learning Chinese is seen as a communal effort, and collaborating with others enhances both my understanding of the language and my sense of belonging." This suggests that cultural emphasis on collective goals fosters collaborative learning environments and motivates learners to seek social support.

Participant 6 highlighted the cultural emphasis on diligence and perseverance, stating, "In Chinese culture, there's a strong emphasis on diligence and perseverance... I rely on compensation strategies to overcome obstacles." This indicates that cultural values of persistence drive the adoption of compensation strategies to navigate challenges and achieve proficiency in Chinese learning.

Participant 7 discussed the influence of cultural values on metacognitive strategies, stating, "In Chinese culture, introspection and self-reflection are valued qualities... It's about continuous self-improvement and striving for excellence." This suggests that cultural norms promoting self-reflection and improvement motivate learners to engage in metacognitive strategies for enhanced learning outcomes.

Participant 8 addressed the cultural aspect of 'face' and its impact on emotional strategies, stating, "The cultural aspect of 'face' is significant in Chinese society... I tend to rely on emotional strategies to maintain confidence and save face." This indicates that cultural expectations regarding social status and reputation influence the use of emotional strategies to manage setbacks and maintain confidence in Chinese learning.

4.4 Language input and output opportunities

The interviews with participants provided valuable insights into the influence of emotional aspects on the use of Chinese learning strategies, particularly within the context of language input and output opportunities.

Participant 1 highlighted the significance of language input and output opportunities in shaping learning strategies, stating, "I've found that language input and output opportunities greatly influence my choice of learning strategies." This suggests that exposure to authentic language usage motivates learners to adopt memory strategies to retain new vocabulary and grammar patterns while actively seeking opportunities

for language input through various media platforms.

Participant 3 emphasized the importance of social strategies in maximizing language input and output opportunities, stating, "Language input and output opportunities are crucial for practicing and refining my Chinese skills." This indicates that engaging in social interactions, such as participating in language exchange groups or conversing with native speakers, facilitates language practice and provides opportunities for feedback, enhancing language proficiency.

Participant 5 discussed the role of cognitive strategies in optimizing language input and output opportunities, stating, "As I've progressed to a higher HSK level, I've realized the importance of cognitive strategies." This suggests that learners actively seek out challenging materials and engage in self-directed learning activities to tailor language input to their proficiency level and areas of improvement.

Participant 6 highlighted the use of compensation strategies to address gaps in language proficiency, stating, "Language input and output opportunities play a significant role in my use of compensation strategies." This indicates that learners leverage additional input sources, such as online tutorials or textbooks, to fill knowledge gaps and enhance overall language proficiency.

Participant 7 underscored the utility of metacognitive strategies in maximizing language input and output opportunities, stating, "I've found that metacognitive strategies are particularly useful." This suggests that setting specific learning goals and reflecting on progress enables learners to prioritize language input and output activities effectively, aligning with their language learning objectives.

Participant 8 discussed the role of emotional strategies in overcoming barriers to language input and output opportunities, stating, "Emotional strategies also play a role in how I approach language input and output opportunities." This indicates that adopting a positive mindset and embracing opportunities for language practice as avenues for growth enable learners to overcome emotional barriers, such as anxiety, and make the most of their learning experiences.

5. Discussion

The dynamic nature of learning strategies in language acquisition is a well-documented phenomenon. As learners progress in proficiency, they tend to shift from rote mem-orization towards more cognitively demanding strategies (Goh, 2008). This progression aligns with the findings of the current study, where participants at higher proficiency levels demonstrated a greater utilization of cognitive and metacognitive strategies (Zheng & Zhang, 2017). Moreover, the emphasis on authentic language input and output opportunities echoes the importance of communicative competence in language learning, as emphasized by scholars like Canale and Swain (1980). These opportunities not only enhance linguistic fluency but also contribute to cultural integration, reflecting the interconnected nature of language and culture (Byram, 1997). Additionally, the role of reflective practices and adaptive learning approaches in effective language learning is supported by research on learner autonomy and self-regulation (Little, 1991; Oxford, 2003). By fostering self-awareness and goal-setting, learners can take ownership of their learning process and make informed decisions to achieve their language learning objectives. Overall, the findings of this study resonate with existing literature on language learning strategies and contribute to a nuanced understanding of the dynamic interplay between proficiency levels, learning strategies, and learner autonomy in the context of Chinese language learning.

The research findings also shed light on the multifaceted nature of factors influencing the use of Chinese learning strategies, particularly focusing on motivation, emotional aspects, cultural influences, and language input and output opportunities. The findings highlight the pivotal role of motivation in shaping students' approach to Chinese language learning. Highly motivated learners demonstrate a proactive engagement with cognitive and memory strategies, driven by intrinsic interest and future career aspirations (P1, P6, P8). Conversely, fluctuations in motivation levels among lowly motivated learners lead to a reliance on memory, compensation, social, and metacognitive strategies (P4). These findings align with previous research emphasizing the significance of motivation as a key determinant of language learning success (Zhao & Jiang, 2001). However, while the study provides valuable insights into the impact of motivation on strategy selection, it primarily focuses on individual motivation levels and lacks a deeper exploration of external motivational factors, such as teacher support, parental expectations, or cultural influences (Yan, 2020).

The findings underscore the dynamic interaction be-

tween emotional states and strategy utilization in Chinese language learning. Participants demonstrate adaptive responses to emotional fluctuations, with stress and anxiety prompting a reliance on social strategies for support (P2), while positive emotions facilitate cognitive engagement (P3). These findings corroborate existing literature highlighting the interconnectedness of emotions and learning processes (Pekrun et al., 2002; Schutz & Lanehart, 2002). However, the study primarily focuses on learners' self-reported emotional experiences without considering potential cultural differences in emotional expression and regulation (Matsumoto et al., 2008).

The findings illuminate the profound impact of cultural values and norms on Chinese language learning strategies. Participants' reliance on memory, social, compensation, and metacognitive strategies reflects the influence of collectivist cultural values, respect for authority, and emphasis on diligence and perseverance. These findings resonate with previous research highlighting the role of culture in shaping learners' cognitive and behavioral tendencies (Yan, 2020). However, while the study provides valuable insights into the influence of culture on strategy selection, it overlooks potential variations in cultural orientations within the participant sample (Bai & Wang, 2021).

The findings underscore the importance of language input and output opportunities in facilitating effective Chinese language learning. Participants' engagement with social, cognitive, compensation, metacognitive, and emotional strategies reflects their proactive efforts to maximize exposure to authentic language usage and optimize learning outcomes. These findings align with the sociocultural perspective on language learning, emphasizing the central role of social interaction and meaningful communication in language acquisition (Wen, 2018). However, while the study highlights the significance of language input and output opportunities, it overlooks potential constraints, such as limited access to authentic language resources or lack of opportunities for real-world communication (Lantolf & Thorne, 2006).

6. Limitation

Despite the contributions of this study to understanding learning strategies among college students studying Chinese as a foreign language, several limitations need to be acknowledged. Firstly, the qualitative nature of the study, while providing in-depth insights, limits the generalizability of the findings. The sample size, though adequate for qualitative research, is relatively small and may not represent the broader population of Chinese language learners. Additionally, the participants were drawn from a single college, which may introduce institutional biases and limit the diversity of the learning experiences captured. Another limitation is the reliance on self-reported data, which may be subject to social desirability bias, recall bias, and personal interpretation. The lack of longitudinal data also restricts the ability to understand how learning strategies evolve over time and their long-term effectiveness. Finally, cultural factors influencing learning strategies were not deeply explored, which could provide a richer context for interpreting the findings.

7. Future work

Future research could address these limitations by adopting a mixed-methods approach, combining qualitative and quantitative data to enhance the robustness and generalizability of the findings. Expanding the sample size and including participants from multiple institutions would provide a more comprehensive understanding of learning strategies across different educational contexts. Longitudinal studies could offer insights into the development and sustainability of effective learning strategies over time. Additionally, future research should consider a more detailed exploration of cultural influences on learning strategies, potentially incorporating comparative studies between learners from different cultural backgrounds. Investigating the role of technological tools and digital resources in shaping learning strategies could also be a valuable area of exploration, given the increasing integration of technology in language education. By addressing these areas, future work can build on the current study's findings and contribute to more effective and inclusive educational practices for Chinese language learners.

8. Conclusions

In conclusion, the study has provided valuable insights into the dynamic nature of learning strategies and the multifaceted factors influencing the use of Chinese learning strategies among students at different proficiency levels. The findings underscore the importance of motivation as a driving

force behind strategy selection, with highly motivated learners demonstrating a proactive engagement with cognitive and memory strategies. Additionally, the study highlights the role of emotional states in shaping strategy utilization, emphasizing the need for emotional regulation to optimize learning effectiveness. Furthermore, the influence of cultural values and norms on strategy selection is evident, with participants' strategies reflecting the impact of collectivist cultural values, respect for authority, and perseverance. Finally, the study emphasizes the significance of language input and output opportunities in facilitating effective language learning, highlighting the importance of social interaction and authentic language exposure. Overall, the findings contribute to a deeper understanding of the complex interplay between proficiency levels, learning strategies, and contextual factors in Chinese language learning, pointing towards the need for tailored and holistic approaches to language education.

Author Contributions

P.Y.: Data collection, writing, editing, Conceptualization and Design, data analysis; H.H.: Literature Review, Supervision; N.E.M.S.: Literature Review, Supervision.

Conflict of Interest

The authors declare that there are no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper. The study was conducted independently, and the authors have no financial or personal relationships that could inappropriately influence or bias the work presented in this manuscript.

Data Availability Statement

The data supporting the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request. The questionnaire data were collected through the semi-structured interviews and include responses from 8 international students studying in China. Due to the confidential nature of the survey data and the consent agreements with participants, the data are not publicly available to protect the privacy of the participants. However, anonymized data that support the conclusions of this study can be made available to researchers who meet the criteria for access to confidential data. Interested parties can contact the corresponding author for further information and requests for data access.

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