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Saudi Students' Attitudes towards Chinese as a Foreign Language

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ABSTRACT

The present study explored Saudi Arab university students' attitudes toward learning Chinese as a Foreign Language. As part of Vision 2030, the integration of Mandarin aims to enhance Saudi Arabia's global engagement, particularly with China. Given that the Chinese language and culture are relatively unfamiliar to Saudi Arabs, this study aimed to explore the attitudes of Saudi youth toward them. Using a quantitative approach, the study surveyed 394 Preparatory Year Program students at Prince Sattam bin Abdulaziz University to assess their attitudes toward the Chinese language, its culture, and CFL learning methods. The findings indicated a neutral stance toward learning Chinese in general, with notable extrinsic motivation linked to economic and career opportunities. While students acknowledged the value of Chinese for professional advancement, they exhibited limited interest in cultural aspects such as Chinese festivals and media. Additionally, learners emphasized the importance of teacher support, interactive classroom engagement, and the use of Arabic as a facilitative tool in CFL instruction. Gender-based differences revealed that male students held slightly more positive attitudes toward Chinese, whereas female students demonstrated stronger preferences for structured learning environments. These results provided insights for educators and policymakers in designing effective CFL programs that align with student motivations and learning preferences.

Keywords: Chinese as a Foreign Language; Saudi Arabia; Language Attitudes; Motivation; Vision 2030; Second Language Learning and Teaching

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1. Introduction

The adoption of Chinese as a foreign language (CFL) in Saudi Arabia represents a recent and pivotal development aligned with the Kingdom's rapid advancements across multiple sectors. Saudi Arabia's determination to align itself with global scientific, technological, and intellectual progress has driven initiatives previously deemed unimaginable. Among these is the phased introduction of Mandarin, China's official language, at all educational levels. Mastering Mandarin can provide Saudi learners with valuable political, economic, and cognitive advantages.

The present study primarily investigated students' motivational factors and their influence on Saudi Arabia's vision to create innovative opportunities for global integration. This ambition aims to transcend biases favoring either the East or the West in an increasingly multipolar world.

In 2019, CFL was officially integrated into some primary and higher education institutions across Saudi Arabia^[1,2]. Analyzing Saudi students' perceptions of CFL unveils their acceptance of learning Mandarin, their appreciation for its cognitive benefits, and their motivation to overcome the complexities of this language. According to Pintrich^[3], motivated learners "tend to be engaged, persist longer, and achieve better learning outcomes" (p. 667). Motivation is crucial to success, along with supportive intellectual and material resources provided by educators and policymakers.

Sino-Saudi relations are described as "promising" and "complementary," with bilateral trade estimated at \$43 billion^[4]. Culturally, these ties have strengthened through agreements to incorporate Mandarin into public and university curricula^[5]. As reported by Al-Arabiya^[6], "(L)earning Chinese will serve as a bridge between the two peoples and contribute to increasing trade and cultural ties."

As a G20 member, Saudi Arabia seeks to establish itself as a global economic hub under Vision 2030. To strengthen communication with Eastern nations, fostering cultural connections through Mandarin, the most widely spoken language, is vital. University students' attitudes toward Mandarin and its associated culture will likely influence Saudi-Chinese relations.

This research explored Saudi students' attitudes towards learning Chinese, a language that poses unique

linguistic and cultural challenges for Arabic speakers. The findings aim to support the development of teaching strategies tailored to these challenges.

To the best of our knowledge, this current study is the first to assess young Saudi Arabs' attitudes toward an Asian language and culture. As noted by Aatif^[7], "Few studies have been undertaken to investigate attitudes and motivations in learning Chinese language as a foreign/second language among Arab learners outside of China" (p. 5).

This investigation aligned with Saudi Arabia's goal of enhancing communication with Eastern nations. Mandarin is not only one of the world's most spoken languages but also an official United Nations language. Recently, the Saudi Ministry of Education directed educational institutions to include Chinese in school and university curricula. Understanding Saudi youth's perceptions of Chinese language and culture is crucial to designing evidence-based programs and courses.

So, the primary research question addressed by this study was: What are the Saudi university students' attitudes toward Chinese as a Foreign Language (CFL) and its culture?

2. Literature Review

The attitude of students toward learning a foreign language plays a crucial role in successful language acquisition, leading to cognitive, professional, and other related benefits. Attitude can be described as the "overall, learned, core disposition that guides a person's thoughts, feelings, and actions toward specific others and objects." This is further simplified as "a general predisposition to respond to an object in either a favorable or an unfavorable way"^[8] (p. 111). Traditionally, attitudes are classified into three components: affective, cognitive, and behavioral^[9-12]. The affective dimension pertains to emotions, while the cognitive aspect involves beliefs or knowledge, and the behavioral component relates to the intention to act.

Gardner^[12] identified three key elements influencing success in second language learning: aptitude, motivation, and integrative orientation, the latter incorporating attitudes as a measure of how learners identify with the target language community. Gardner^[12] explained:

The concept of the integrative motive includes not only the orientation but also the motivation (i.e., attitudes toward learning the language plus desire plus motivational intensity) and a number of other attitude variables involving the other language community, out-groups in general and the language learning context. (p. 54)

The learner's willingness to associate with speakers of a second or third language significantly contributes to their success in acquiring a foreign language. This was supported by Liu ^[13] whose study on Chinese university students learning English revealed that "motivation to learn a second language is grounded in positive attitudes toward the second language community" (p. 126), and that the "more positive attitudes the students had towards learning English, the more motivated they were to learn English" (p. 138).

However, understanding language attitudes is complex, as attitudes differ from opinions, which are conscious expressions of beliefs and can be influenced by external factors. Attitudes are often subconscious, deeply rooted, and not easily measured ^[14] (p. 26).

The number of individuals learning and teaching Chinese as a Foreign Language (CFL) globally has risen sharply in recent years ^[15]. Within the Arab world, interest in Chinese has grown significantly, with many young Arabs pursuing the language. Countries such as Egypt, the United Arab Emirates, and Tunisia have integrated Chinese into their educational systems, and in Saudi Arabia, all secondary schools—both public and private—introduced twice-weekly Mandarin lessons in August 2024 ^[16]. While learning Chinese offers numerous benefits in political, economic, cultural, and cognitive domains, it also presents challenges. Learner-related factors such as perceived difficulty, motivation, aptitude, cultural differences, and pedagogy are key issues that can hinder the implementation of CFL programs ^[2] (p. 83).

Aatif ^[7] investigated Arab students' attitudes toward learning Chinese in China. While aligning with existing research emphasizing the critical role of positive attitudes and motivation in second language acquisition (SLA), Aatif stressed the importance of determining whether Arab

learners are motivated integratively or instrumentally. His findings revealed that Arab learners exhibited positive attitudes and high integrative motivation, which stems from an attraction to the target culture and identification with it.

This openness to other cultures and willingness to integrate are subconscious attitudes that foster foreign language learning. Personality traits within SLA are also relevant, as individuals with stable emotional tendencies may exhibit a stronger capacity for empathy, facilitating interactions with speakers of other languages ^[17] (p. 116).

Understanding students' attitudes is a foundational step in designing effective teaching methods and curricula for Arabic-speaking learners of Chinese. In their study of teaching Chinese to Western learners, Orton and Scrimgeour ^[18] emphasized the importance of considering learners' cultural backgrounds rather than directly applying Chinese teaching methods in foreign contexts. They found that failing to adapt these methods often left learners discouraged and likely to abandon their studies. Similarly, the Saudi Arab context requires localized research to explore the attitudes of Saudi students toward learning Chinese.

Al Roomy ^[1] highlighted that mandating CFL as a compulsory subject might negatively impact motivation due to limited opportunities for practical application. His remark was supported by Alshammari ^[2] who conducted a study on challenges in learning CFL by Saudi Arab English major students at a Saudi university. His findings revealed that most Saudi learners (80%) viewed Chinese as significantly difficult, with many feeling unmotivated or unwilling to engage more in CFL. Furthermore, some participants even expressed concerns about potential conflicts with their Islamic values due to exposure to Chinese culture and language ^[2].

Alnofaie ^[19] explored the attitudes of Saudi students toward Less Commonly Taught Languages (LCTLs) outside formal school contexts. Using quantitative methods, she surveyed female English majors and found that nearly one-third of the students were learning at least one LCTL. However, Chinese was not among these languages. Alnofaie ^[19] noted that the participants demonstrated pride in their cultural identity while remaining open to other cultures. She also identified key factors influencing foreign language learning, such as language preference, its perceived status, interest in visiting the language's country,

and career-related benefits. Extrinsic motivation towards CFL was also found in Khan, Aigerim, and Xueqing^[20].

In a study that examined Thai senior high students' attitudes toward Chinese language learning, Luo and Limpapath^[21] found that female students and those in the Chinese Language major held more positive attitudes than their male counterparts and those in the English–Math program with a minor in Chinese. In Ghana, Nkrumah and Darko^[22] explored Ghanaian university students' attitudes toward learning Chinese in two major universities, identifying factors such as reluctance, gender, peer pressure, social class, age, anxiety, encouragement, and motivation. They recommended increasing local Chinese teachers, scholarships, and native-speaking instructors, along with cultural events, to better support Chinese language acquisition. Likewise, Yin and Abdullah^[23] indicated that Malaysian undergraduates in a Mandarin foreign-language course generally showed positive attitudes and intentions to continue learning, despite experiencing some anxiety. They recommended group-learning strategies and targeted speaking skill development to boost engagement and mitigate anxiety. Other studies in Turkey and Mexico suggested that the inclusion of L1 benefited language acquisition process and may be broadly applicable to diverse EFL contexts and other target languages (Debreli and Oyman^[24] and Brooks-Lewis^[25]).

3. Methodology

This quantitative study employed a questionnaire to assess multiple aspects of students' attitudes toward the Chinese language and culture, as well as their preparedness to undertake the challenging process of learning Chinese as a foreign language.

3.1. Participants

A total of 394 Preparatory Year Program (PYP) students at Prince Sattam bin Abdulaziz University (106 male and 288 female students) responded to a questionnaire sent to them electronically. The students' native language is Arabic and the language of instruction for all science courses is English. The participants' ages range between 18 and 22 years old.

3.2. Instrument and Data Collection

The present study utilized a 5-point Likert scale survey to examine Saudi learners' attitudes toward the Chinese language, Chinese culture, the roles of teachers and learners in the classroom, and the use of Arabic in instruction. This survey was adapted from an instrument originally developed by Al Asmari^[26] to evaluate Saudi students' attitudes at the University of Taif toward English as a foreign language and its associated culture. The revised survey included 53 items categorized into six areas: (1) attitudes toward the Chinese language, (2) attitudes toward Chinese-speaking countries, (3) attitudes toward learning and teaching Chinese, (4) attitudes toward the teacher's role in the CFL classroom, (5) attitudes toward the learner's role in the CFL classroom, and (6) attitudes toward the use of Arabic in CFL classrooms.

To align the survey with the study's objectives, minor adjustments were made. For instance, references to the English language were replaced with the Chinese language, and cultural celebrations, such as Easter and Thanksgiving (item 9), were substituted with the Chinese New Year. To get a deeper insight, participants were also requested to add whatever comments they wanted. Such comments were thought to help shed some in-depth insights into learners' responses.

The survey's first section was dedicated to collecting demographic data about participants. The questionnaire was administered in Arabic to accommodate their needs effectively.

A pilot test was conducted to evaluate the reliability of the instrument. The internal consistency of the survey was measured using Cronbach's Alpha coefficient, yielding a value of 0.969, which indicates a very high level of reliability.

3.3. Data Analysis

Using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS), the data collected from the survey were computed and analyzed. To identify the attitude of the students towards the categories of the survey, descriptive statistics were calculated to determine means, standard deviations (SD), and frequency of the survey items. As can be seen in **Table 1**, the group's mean values were interpreted using

the following scale devised by Polit and Hungler^[27]:

Table 1. Scale for Means' Interpretations.

Mean Score	Level of Agreement
1.00–1.80	very low
1.81–2.61	low
2.62–3.42	neutral
3.43–4.23	high
4.24–5.00	very high

An independent sample *t*-test was used to detect any significant differences between the male and female participants.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1. Attitudes towards Chinese

The first category of the questionnaire attempted to identify the learners' attitudes toward the Chinese language as shown in **Table 2**. Results showed that the level of agreement to the items of the group is neutral ($M = 2.62$, $SD = 1.34$). All the items in the group exhibited the same neutral attitude towards Chinese except for items 5 ($M = 1.89$, $SD = 1.209$) and 7 ($M = 2.12$, $SD = 1.277$), which reflected a negative attitude towards Chinese. 214 participants (=54.3%) strongly disagreed to using Chinese as the

language of education in Saudi Arabia. Participants 33 and 247 justified that attitude by indicating that other European languages such as English and French were more important to them than Chinese.

Saudi students' attitude towards the CFL in general proved neutral in contrast to a study finding of Luo and Limpapath^[21] which indicated that Thai high school students had a different attitude towards learning Chinese. Not only did Thi students have a positive attitude towards Chinese, but they also highly agreed that "Chinese is as important as English" ($M = 3.58$, $SD = 1.075$) (p. 106). This is explained by the presence of Chinese language and culture in Thailand, and the similarities in the two cultures in addition to the proximity of the two cultures in contrast with the case in Saudi Arabia.

173 participants (=43.9%) strongly disagreed that learning Chinese would earn them the respect of their family, relatives and friends. Participant 33, 247 and 316 expressed that learning Chinese is independent of gaining the respect of family and friends. However, Participants 183 and 201 admitted that although learning Chinese does not have anything with earning family and friends' respect, the achievement of learning Chinese as a foreign language, in itself, can boost someone's self-respect.

Table 2. Attitude towards Chinese.

No	Item	N	Min	Max	Mean	SD
1.	I want to speak Chinese fluently and accurately.	394	1	5	2.95	1.46
2.	Proficiency in Chinese is one of the most important factors of success in KSA.	394	1	5	2.91	1.277
3.	It is good thing that Chinese has a high status in KSA.	394	1	5	2.94	1.292
4.	Proficiency in Chinese is evidence of a person's learning.	394	1	5	2.89	1.395
5.	I want the Chinese language to be the language of education in KSA	394	1	5	1.89	1.209
6.	I want to learn Chinese even if it is not a compulsory course at the university.	394	1	5	2.72	1.477
7.	I want to learn Chinese because it gains me the respect of my family, relatives and friends.	394	1	5	2.12	1.277

Conversely, other participants were more positive in their attitude towards Chinese and displayed in their comments both intrinsic and extrinsic motivation towards learning Chinese. Participant 292 indicated that Chinese should be the language of instruction in both schools and universities owing to the growing need of Chinese language to conduct commercial transaction. She also mentioned that learning Chinese would be highly valued by her family and friends, as it is indicative of her familiarity with another cul-

ture. Participant 168 added that the Chinese language could give the learner an advantage in the job market. In addition, Participant 170 was in favor of teaching Chinese in schools and universities and stated that it would enrich the learners' educational experience and help them become acquainted with another worthy culture. This positive attitude towards Chinese is in line with the findings of Nkrumah and Darko^[22] (p. 14) who studied the attitude of the Ghanaian learners studying Chinese at the University of Ghana and the Uni-

versity of Cape Coast and found that they had “positive attitudes towards the learning of the Chinese language” and to the findings of Khan, Aigerim, and Xueqing^[20] (p. 1053) which suggested that “positive and emotional attitude towards Chinese language acquisition” could be attributed to extrinsic motivation as learning Chinese helped the participants “find decent and high-paying jobs, such as interpreters, tour guides, foreign trade commissioners and even start their own business”^[20] (p. 1048).

4.2. Attitudes towards the Culture of Chinese-Speaking Countries

Table 3 shows that the attitude of the students towards learning the culture of the Chinese-speaking countries was neutral ($M = 2.89$, $SD = 1.44$). However, items 2 ($M = 2.43$, $SD = 1.45$) and 5 ($M = 2.36$, $SD = 1.39$) displayed a negative attitude towards the culture of the Chinese-speaking countries. The former item is related to celebrating the Chinese New Year, whereas the latter is about listening to Chinese music. Participants in the study expressed disinterest in knowing about these cultural aspects of the Chinese language. Participant 222 mentioned that Chinese music and celebrating the Chinese New Year seemed irrelevant to learning the Chinese language. Similarly, participant 308 stated that she is not interested in knowing about the Chinese New Year and Chinese music, and that she believed that they had no role to play in learning the language. A Similar finding was reported by Luo and Limpapath^[21] who found that the questionnaire item with the lowest level of agreement in their study was participants’ interest in listening to Chinese music.

On the other hand, the attitude of the students in the present study can be contrasted with the finding of Luo and Lim-

papath^[21] and Khan et al.^[20] where the participants exhibited highly positive attitudes towards the Chinese language community, with Luo and Limpapath^[21] (p. 106) reporting that the participants highly agreed that “the Chinese culture is attractive, interesting and worth to learn”. It is, however, worth mentioning that many of their participants admitted that their parents speak Chinese and rated their parents’ proficiency in Chinese as acceptable^[21]. Chinese has only been recently introduced to the Saudi educational system in 2020 following strategic agreements between the Saudi and Chinese governments. Therefore, the familiarity of the Saudis with the Chinese language and culture is little at best.

4.3. Attitudes towards the Teacher’s Role in Chinese Language Teaching Classroom

As can be seen in **Table 4**, the Participants highly agreed on the importance of the teacher’s role in learning Chinese ($M = 3.44$, $SD = 1.32$). The item with the highest level of agreement among the participants was item 7 ($M = 4.11$, $SD = 1.31$). It is indicative of the learners’ belief that creating a friendly and positive learning atmosphere is essential to learning a foreign language.

The teacher’s role received high agreement, but this can be interpreted as the teacher’s role in general not as pertaining to teaching Chinese. A similar response was noticed in the study conducted by AlAsmari^[26]. His study findings indicated that teachers’ friendliness was highly valued by Saudi learners studying English as a foreign language at Taif University. The second item with the highest mean value in this group is item 8 ($M = 4.07$, $SD = 1.261$). It emphasized the teacher-learner relationship and that the learner should be the focus of attention in the process of second language learning.

Table 3. Attitude towards the culture of the Chinese-speaking countries.

No	Item	N	Min	Max	Mean	SD
1.	I want to learn more about the Chinese language culture.	394	1	5	3.19	1.368
2.	I want to know more about events like Chinese New Year.	394	1	5	2.43	1.457
3.	I want to know more about people who speak Chinese because it will help me speak Chinese correctly.	394	1	5	3.13	1.477
4.	I want to watch Chinese movies.	394	1	5	2.78	1.453
5.	I want to listen to Chinese music.	394	1	5	2.36	1.397
6.	I want to learn Chinese to be able to get to know people who speak Chinese better.	394	1	5	2.98	1.492
7.	I want to learn Chinese in order to know more about the language culture.	394	1	5	2.96	1.47
8.	I want to study books about learning Chinese.	388	1	5	2.71	1.427

Table 4. Attitude towards the teacher's role.

No	Item	N	Min	Max	Mean	SD
1.	Learning Chinese is most effective if teachers give assignments frequently.	394	1	5	2.65	1.357
2.	Learning Chinese is most effective if teachers set learning goals.	394	1	5	3.65	1.295
3.	Learning Chinese is most effective if the teachers are in control of the classroom.	394	1	5	3.2	1.341
4.	Learning Chinese is most effective if teachers carefully follow textbooks.	394	1	5	2.99	1.333
5.	Learning Chinese is most effective if teachers frequently give quizzes.	394	1	5	3.05	1.331
6.	Learning Chinese is most effective if teachers correct mistakes instantaneously.	394	1	5	3.76	1.365
7.	Learning Chinese is effective if teachers are friendly.	394	1	5	4.11	1.31
8.	Learning Chinese is most effective if teachers give special attention to learners.	394	1	5	4.07	1.261

4.4. Attitudes towards the Learner's Role in Chinese Language Teaching Classroom

The fifth item group attempted to reveal the learners' attitude towards their role in the process of learning Chinese as a second language as shown in **Table 5**. Results show that the learners highly agreed that they should have an active role in learning Chinese ($M = 3.68$, $SD = 1.30$). The item with the highest level of agreement was item 6 ($M = 3.87$, $SD = 1.304$). It gives evidence to the learners' desire that learning Chinese should be a desirable and enjoyable activity that extends to the outside world and involves interaction with other Chinese speakers. The second item with the highest level of agreement was item 2 ($M = 3.85$, $SD = 1.303$). It positively reflects the participants' understanding of self-discipline and commitment in the process of language learning. Item 8 came third in

respect of students' agreement ($M = 3.81$, $SD = 1.348$). Learners highly agreed that educational audio and video resources have a positive influence on learning and should be incorporated in the foreign language classroom.

4.5. Attitudes towards Using Arabic in the Chinese Language Teaching Classroom

As can be seen in **Table 6**, The sixth item group in the questionnaire was related to the learners' attitude towards using their native language in the Chinese language class. There was a high agreement among the learners that using the learners' native language was helpful in CFL ($M = 3.68$, $SD = 1.31$). This includes using Arabic in explaining the meaning of the Chinese vocabulary, giving instructions, teaching Chinese grammar, and using Arabic – Chinese dictionaries in class.

Table 5. Attitude towards the learner's role.

No	Item	N	Min	Max	Mean	SD
1.	Learning Chinese is most effective if learners set learning goals for themselves.	394	1	5	3.8	1.289
2.	Learning Chinese is most effective if learners attend classes regularly.	394	1	5	3.85	1.303
3.	Learning Chinese is most effective if learners communicate in Chinese only.	394	1	5	3.35	1.377
4.	Learning Chinese is most effective if learners implement it in their own learning process.	394	1	5	3.46	1.274
5.	Learning Chinese is effective if learners use internet-based resources well.	394	1	5	3.54	1.262
6.	Learning Chinese will be effective if learners enjoy practicing Chinese with foreign friends who speak Chinese.	394	1	5	3.87	1.304
7.	Learning Chinese is most effective if learners reward themselves when they do well in Chinese.	394	1	5	3.78	1.276
8.	Learning Chinese is most effective if learners use the educational audio and video material frequently.	394	1	5	3.81	1.348

Other previous studies that investigated the use of the learners' native language in foreign language classes concurred with this finding. Debreli and Oyman ^[24] reported that Turkish EFL learners in Northern Cyprus favored the inclusion of Turkish in their EFL classroom and believed that using L1 would facilitate foreign language learning. Furthermore, Brooks-Lewis^[25] (p. 233) reported that adult Mexican L2 learners were "decidedly in favor of" the inclusion of their L1 in the second language classroom.

Likewise, Yin and Abdullah ^[22] maintained that more than half of the Malay students who participated in their study favored using their mother tongue in the Chinese language classroom.

4.6. Gender Differences

An independent sample *t*-test was conducted to detect differences between male and female participants as can be seen in **Table 7**.

Table 6. Attitude towards using the native language (Arabic).

No	Item	N	Min	Max	Mean	SD
1.	Learning Chinese is effective if Arabic is used to explain the meaning of vocabulary.	394	1	5	3.86	1.32
2.	Learning Chinese is effective if Arabic is used to explain the instructions.	394	1	5	3.82	1.329
3.	Learning Chinese is effective if Arabic is used to explain the grammar.	394	1	5	3.77	1.321
4.	Learning Chinese is most effective if Arabic is used to develop close relationships with learners.	394	1	5	3.57	1.362
5.	Learning Chinese is most effective if Arabic is used to give feedback.	394	1	5	3.47	1.29
6.	Learning Chinese is most effective if Arabic is used to maintain discipline.	394	1	5	3.46	1.26
7.	Learning Chinese is effective if (Arabic - Chinese) dictionaries are used.	394	1	5	3.82	1.318

Table 7. Gender differences.

Item	Statement	Gender	Mean	Std. Deviation	Sig.
1	I want to speak Chinese fluently and accurately.	male	3.09	1.451	0.005
		female	2.90	1.463	
2	Proficiency in Chinese is one of the most important factors of success in KSA.	male	3.08	1.388	0.004
		female	2.85	1.231	
7	I want to learn Chinese because it gains me the respect of my family, relatives and friends.	male	2.49	1.469	0.000
		female	1.98	1.171	
16	Not everyone has the same ability to learn a foreign language.	male	2.93	1.501	0.000
		female	2.30	1.288	
19	Females are better at learning Chinese.	male	2.71	1.179	0.000
		female	3.23	1.261	
34	Learning Chinese is most effective if teachers carefully follow textbooks.	male	3.26	1.375	0.013
		female	2.89	1.305	
37	Learning Chinese is effective if teachers are friendly.	male	3.88	1.497	0.033
		female	4.19	1.226	
45	Learning Chinese is most effective if learners reward themselves when they do well in Chinese.	male	3.56	1.374	0.038
		female	3.86	1.231	
46	Learning Chinese is most effective if learners use the educational audio and video material frequently.	male	3.58	1.400	0.042
		female	3.90	1.321	
48	Learning Chinese is effective if Arabic is used to explain the instructions.	male	3.57	1.448	0.021
		female	3.91	1.273	
53	Learning Chinese is effective if (Arabic - Chinese) dictionaries are used.	male	3.60	1.364	0.051
		female	3.90	1.294	

No statistically significant differences were found between male and female learners' responses to most of the items of this questionnaire. However, as shown in **Table 7**, statistically significant differences were detected between male and female learners in 11 items of the questionnaire. Male participants were significantly more positive than their female counterparts in their attitude towards Chinese as indicated by items 1, 2 and 7. This finding is in contradiction with the findings of Luo and Limpapath^[21] (p. 109) who reported that female learners showed significantly more positive attitudes towards CFL relative to their male counterparts.

On the other hand, as items 45 and 46 show, female learners were significantly different from male learners in their view of the role played by learners in learning Chinese. They assigned a more active and responsible role to the learners in contrast to their male counterparts. Furthermore, female learners were more in favor of using L1 in the Chinese language classroom to facilitate language learning (items 48 and 53).

5. Conclusion

The past five years have witnessed a surge of interest in learning Chinese as a second language, in the Arab World, especially in Saudi Arabia, which is gradually making CFL a compulsory subject of study as the second and foreign language at all levels of school. Towards the goal of accelerating the Kingdom's pace of advancement in political, economic, and cultural spheres, studies of Saudi students' attitudes towards teaching/learning Mandarin have become imperative.

The current study was an attempt to explore such attitudes, paving the way for a better understanding of the challenges or the conducive factors that are involved in this endeavor. It revealed a general lukewarm reception, which is understandable given the difficulty of the Chinese language and its total unfamiliarity in the local context. Saudi students' attitude towards Chinese as a language, culture, and study subject is generally neutral. Still, this finding is understandable and much better than a negative attitude. Nevertheless, Saudi students showed enthusiasm about learning CFL in general and perceived the teacher's role, when dynamic and interactive, as an encouraging factor. Furthermore, they believed that students' active

engagement in the learning/teaching process is what they desire and expect a positive attitude that is flexible, malleable, and promising in the context of learning foreign languages. The findings show that learners were in favor of the inclusion of their native language for a better learning experience. If CFL takes its chance to gain popularity in the local context, and if better knowledge about it is facilitated, the project of teaching/learning Chinese can find a fertile environment in Saudi Arabia. Having said this, more studies are needed to further explore the subject, and more advanced teaching technologies and materials may change the prevalent neutral attitudes.

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Institutional Review Board Statement

The investigation was carried out under the guidelines established by the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at Prince Sattam Bin Abdulaziz university reference number 2021/02/19211. The research received official approval, and written informed consent was obtained.

Informed Consent Statement

Informed consent was obtained from all subjects involved in the study.

Data Availability Statement

The datasets used and/or analysed during the current study are available from the author on a reasonable request.

Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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