

## Exploring the Landscape: A Scoping Review on the Dynamics of Learning and Teaching Chinese as a Foreign Language in Pakistan

Motia Zaman

Faculty of Languages, National University of Modern Languages, Islamabad,

### Abstract

This scoping review represents the dynamics of learning and teaching Chinese as a foreign language within Pakistan, a country whose landscape is increasingly influenced by the strategic partnership between the two nations following initiatives like the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor. Given the growing interest in acquiring Chinese language skills, this review synthesizes the available literature about the challenges, strategies, and associated outcomes accruable to CFL education in Pakistan. The key challenges are that Chinese is a very complex language, linguistically speaking, when compared to Urdu and English, which most Pakistanis are accustomed to, and the acute shortage of qualified CFL instructors. In the current context, reviewing these will also show that pedagogical approaches with interactive modes of teaching, technology, and culture will enhance learners' interest and better learning outcomes in studying tremendously. Governmental and institutional support to language centers, exchange programs, and curriculum integration have gone a long way to promote CFL education. Much more has to be done with regard to dissolving the language and cultural barriers, teacher education, and provision of authentic resources, as it is found in this research. The present review was undertaken to make a very important contribution to the overall enhancement of the knowledge base with regard to the CFL landscape in Pakistan and to provide some pragmatic implications for educators and policymakers who seek to improve and create more effective Chinese language programs. The main lines of future research involve the consequences of CFL learning processes over time, the effect of digital tools on the process of language acquisition, and how cultural immersion might enhance language proficiency. Focusing on these areas, will better place Pakistan in a position to prepare its citizens for the growing global relevance of Chinese and to further educational links between the two nations.

**Keywords:** Chinese as a Foreign Language (CFL), Pakistan, Language Learning, Language Teaching.

### Introduction

The enhanced global influence of China, in particular with its Belt and Road Initiative and the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor, has changed the geopolitical and economic scenario of South Asia dramatically. With Pakistan being a major partner for both projects, there is therefore a surge in demand for knowledge of the Chinese language, hence making CFL an integral part in its educational system. The growing need for linguistic and cultural competence in the Chinese language among Pakistanis has resulted in opening of institutions all over Pakistan that offer CFL programs. However, the learning-teaching dynamics of the Chinese in Pakistan present certain unique challenges and opportunities that need to be thoroughly investigated.

Research on CFL education in Pakistan involves factors interrelated at the levels of linguistics, culture, and pedagogy. Learning Chinese, a tonal and logographic language, presents a great many problems for Pakistani learners who are native speakers of Urdu and English (Zhao, 2019). Furthermore, the shortage of qualified CFL teachers and the insufficiency of authentic language teaching resources appear to have further complicated the teaching situation (Li & Khan, 2020). Despite these challenges, the government has been in the forefront in promoting Chinese language education through the establishment of Confucius Institutes and language centers (Hussain, 2021).

The proposed scoping review has the aim of synthesizing the available body of literature pertaining to CFL in Pakistan dynamics, challenges, strategies, and accomplishments involving teaching and learning Chinese. Such factors would be explored as a means of finding out what the literature says about the effectiveness of current pedagogical approaches and suggested improvements in CFL education in Pakistan. The review calls

to attention that there is a dire need for improvement in teacher training, use of technology in language teaching, and cultural exposure so that the Pakistani learners can be better equipped for future engagement with China (Liu et al., 2022).

## Background

The rise of China as an economic powerhouse in the world has brought about a visible change in international relations. Its influence extends to many fields, not least education. The China-Pakistan Economic Corridor is a flagship program within the large China-initiated Belt and Road Initiative, which connects China with Pakistan. It increased the bonding between the two nations in terms of economic cooperation and created an urge for learning Chinese in Pakistan. As a result, Chinese as a Foreign Language has gained precedence in Pakistan, and now it has become a necessity in the educational scenario for the state.

The history of language teaching in Pakistan has always been dominated by the study of English and Urdu, with other foreign languages receiving less attention. However, with the strategic considerations of the CPEC and the attention toward the Chinese language that it brings, the paradigm shifts as the public and private sectors start to realize the inbuilt benefits of economic and diplomatic gains for those stakeholders from attaining Chinese language skills (Hussain, 2018). Consequently, interest in CFL programs has grown all over Pakistan, from formal education institutions to language centers to online platforms.

There are many complications involved in the teaching and learning of Chinese in Pakistan. First of all, Chinese is greatly different from the Indo-European languages that the majority of Pakistani students are familiar with, thus creating several problems at the level of phonology, syntax, and the script. Second, there are very few opportunities for immersive environments and exposure that may help them learn the language better. These challenges are further deteriorated by a shortage of trained CFL teachers and culturally relevant teaching materials, hence leading to a disparity in outcomes with regard to language proficiency among learners.

This scoping review is conducted to map the available literature on CFL in Pakistan, outlining the dynamics of teaching and learning processes. The major factors influencing CFL education in the country ought to be indicated, showing challenges and opportunities in this growing field. The intended contribution of this research to more practical language education policy formulation in Pakistan is immense.

## Methods

This article has employed the scoping review method for an examination of the current scenario concerning the learning and teaching of Chinese as a Foreign Language in the setting of Pakistan. Scoping reviews are especially applied in mapping existent literature, identification of key concepts, and knowledge synthesis from diverse sources (Arksey & O'Malley, 2005). This method was developed as a way of taking stock of the current status of CFL education in Pakistan, pointing out problems, opportunities, and gaps in the existing body of research.

A systematic approach was adopted for the review, following a framework from Arksey and O'Malley with five stages: identification of the research question, identification of relevant studies, study selection, charting the data, and collation, summary, and reporting of results. The research question was hence formulated: "What are the dynamics of learning and teaching Chinese as a foreign language in Pakistan?" This broad question enabled the adoption of an inclusive search strategy that captured a range of aspects of CFL education in Pakistan, including pedagogical practices, learner experiences, institutional support, and policy implications.

An all-encompassing search of major academic databases, including JSTOR, Google Scholar, and ERIC, helped to identify relevant studies. Some of the keywords used in the search strategy were "Chinese language education in Pakistan," "CFL in Pakistan," "teaching Chinese in Pakistan," and "learning Chinese as a foreign language in Pakistan." The search was further streamlined because the nature of this research is one that requires data relevant and timely enough to address emerging developments; therefore, only those studies done within the last 15 years were considered.

Following the exclusion of irrelevant studies by screening titles and abstracts, a full-text review was conducted. The selection criteria revolved around the focus of the study on CFL in Pakistan, relevance to the research question, and the quality of the methodology in the research studies. It included empirical data, theoretical insights, and critical analyses pertaining to education in CFL in Pakistan.

Data were charted using a standardized form, capturing key information from the study's objectives, methods, findings, and conclusions, from which there was an emerging identification of recurrent themes, trends, and gaps in the literature. Such a process finally ended with the collation and summary of the findings, which gave a narrative synthesis highlighting the key dynamics in CFL education in Pakistan.

It contributed to a broad scoping review, inclusive in scope, of the CFL landscape in Pakistan and provided valuable insight for all interested educators, policymakers, and researchers in the development of Chinese language education in that very region.

## Key Findings

### 1. Challenges in Learning Chinese as a Foreign Language

This paper presents a review of the current state of dynamics in teaching and learning Chinese as a foreign language in Pakistan, with some challenges identified which a learner faces at large. This ranges from linguistic to pedagogical and cultural causes and to structural factors that combine to result in less effectiveness of CFL education in Pakistan.

This study has mentioned one major and important challenge of intrinsic linguistic difficulty that Chinese possesses for Pakistani learners. Chinese is a tonal language with a logographic writing system that is quite apart from the phonetic scripts of Urdu and English the two most spoken languages back in Pakistan (Hussain and Mahmood, 2019). The very basic difference causes the huge barrier for the learners to learn pronunciation, memorize characters, and understand sentence structure. Chinese tones are too complex to handle for foreign students; moreover, tones alone can change the meaning of the words, thus requiring a level of phonological awareness that proves difficult for most Pakistani students to develop.

Another problem is the non-availability of qualified Chinese language teachers in Pakistan. Most CFL teachers in the country, as pointed out in the review, are native speakers of Chinese who do not have any formal training either in pedagogical methods of teaching a language, especially Chinese, to non-native speakers in a Pakistani setting (Khan & Rahman, 2020). Consequently, this makes their teaching practices quite unsuitable for the learning abilities and needs of the students who come from Pakistan, with obvious difficulties in comprehension and engagement. Besides, there could be a language barrier between the teacher and the students, which might further exacerbate the challenges.

Problems created by cultural differences between China and Pakistan are inherent in CFL education. Many Pakistani students experience a cultural disconnection while learning Chinese since the teaching material and methods followed have their foundations in the Chinese cultural contexts to which the students could hardly relate themselves (Siddiqui, 2020). The disconnection will then affect the relating of students to the content, thereby affecting motivation and interest in learning the language. It also observes that in Pakistan, most of the CFL programs do not lay much emphasis on cultural literacy since they are basically language acquisition programs that do not integrate cultural understanding, which is in line with effective communication.

Moreover, these challenges are further confounded by the structural issues in which access to quality CFL education in rural areas is very limited. While the Chinese language institutes are increasing in number in major urban centers within Pakistan, the situation remains very different in the rural areas of the country, thus creating an educational divide (Ahmed & Nawaz, 2021). This urban-rural divide is then bound to restrict the accessibility of CFL education to students located in remote corners, further circumscribing their language learning attitudes and participation in resultant economic opportunities.

## **2. Teaching Strategies and Pedagogical Approaches**

This scoping review on the dynamics of teaching and learning Chinese as a foreign language in Pakistan indicated that the adopted teaching strategies and pedagogical approaches were important in surmounting the Pakistani learners' difficulties. These strategies are actually essential in enhancing the learning experience and ensuring that students rise above linguistic, cultural, and educational barriers inherent in acquiring a language as distinct as Chinese.

One of the key findings that come out in this research is the contextualization of teaching materials and methods in the light of Pakistani students' needs. Most CFL programs in Pakistan were initially based on instructional materials and resources developed in China. The curricular materials did not relate strongly to the students because of the huge difference between both cultures and educational systems of the two countries. For this purpose, educators have started to localize the content by increasing more familiar cultural references and examples, making the learning process relatively more relatable and interesting for students. This strategy not only serves to bridge the cultural gap but also enhances the motivation and interest of the students towards learning Chinese.

The interactive-communicative methodology is also one of the effective strategies in CFL education in Pakistan. The traditional and didactic methods of teaching, followed by almost every institution in the early stages of CFL programs in Pakistan, make students passive learners with limited opportunities for students to practice speaking and listening. Many instructors turned to more interactive methods of teaching, as role-plays, group discussions, and language games allow for the active participation of students and better language retention. These strategies are excellent at getting students to learn functional language skills needed in interactions related to the real world.

A more crucial pedagogical methodology that has evolved and emerged as a significant trend in the teaching of Chinese in Pakistan is technology enhanced learning tools. Computer-assisted platforms, mobile language learning applications, and online resources are fast gaining ground. They provide more interaction opportunities for students for practice and self-learning outside the formal classroom environment (Khan & Li, 2019). These tools provide flexibility and access for students to work through at their own pace, redoing those parts that prove difficult. Many also have interactive features such as pronunciation guides and real-time feedback that make learning the language easier.

Another pedagogical line emphasized by the review is the need for teacher education and training. Because of the shortage of qualified teachers in Pakistan, it is all the more necessary to arm teachers with the required competencies and knowledge for the teaching of Chinese to foreign nationals. The Professional development programs targeting modern methods of language teaching, intercultural communication skills, and using technology effectively in teaching enhanced the quality of CFL education. These programs also create a practice community that aids collaboration among teachers through which instructors can share resources, experiences, and best practices.

## **3. Role of Institutions and Government Support**

This scoping review on the dynamics of learning and teaching Chinese as a foreign language in Pakistan brings out how institutional and governmental support has gained tremendous influence in shaping the scene of



Chinese language education within the country. With the geopolitical and economic relations between Pakistan and China strengthening, especially under the umbrella of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor, interest in the Chinese language has surged. This demand has let both governmental and educational institutions play their part in further promoting and facilitating Chinese language learning in every nook and corner of the country.

The second important outcome which review brings to limelight is the proactive involvement of the Pakistani government in supporting Chinese language education. With full awareness of the strategic relevance of Chinese language skills in economic and especially in the sphere of diplomatic relations, the government has sought to implement a raft of policies and initiatives aimed at integrating Chinese language learning into the national education system (Abbas & Wu, 2020). These efforts include the creation of Chinese as an optional subject to be taught in schools, establishing Confucius Institutes in major universities, and extending scholarships to students to go and study in China. These efforts reflect the broader government strategy to invest in the linguistic capacity of the Pakistani workforce to effectively engage with China.

The educational institutes within Pakistan have also played a crucial role in furthering education in the Chinese language. The universities and colleges set up separate Chinese language departments and programs most of them in collaboration with the Chinese institutions (Khan & Li, 2019). These collaborations have helped to exchange teachers and other resources, which have enabled Pakistani institutions to impart quality CFL education. For instance, the opening of the Confucius Institutes, financed and patronized by the Chinese government, has increased the quantum of courses being taught in Pakistan about the Chinese language and culture. These institutes provide the language learning course and, together with that, cultural exchange programs to let students have a better understanding about Chinese society and values.

Review also provides participation of vocational and technical training institutions in provision of Chinese Language courses at specific professional needs. As several institutions have been noticing the growing trend of demand for Chinese-speaking professionals in the fields of trade, engineering, and tourism, these institutions designed special language programs that integrated language learning with vocation-based training (Rahman & Yang, 2021). Such a system ensures that the graduates are not only linguistically proficient but technically equipped to take up any career where the communication is to be carried out with a Chinese partner.

Support from the government has extended even to teacher training and capacity building. Aware of the shortage of qualified CFL teachers, the Pakistani government has introduced programs sometimes in collaboration with Chinese education authorities to train local teachers in Chinese language ability and techniques in teaching languages (Ahmed & Zhao, 2018). These programs are one important factor in the long-term viability of CFL education because they would provide a steady supply of qualified teachers who would be better placed to deliver language instruction effectively.

However, institutional and governmental support toward CFL education also translates into a number of challenges. One of them pertains to an uneven distribution of resources and opportunities across various parts of Pakistan. To this end, while a number of government initiatives and institutional support have contributed much to the progress of Chinese language education in urban centers, the same opportunity remains fairly inadequate for rural areas (Zafar & Li, 2020). This inequality must be addressed if all parts of the population are to benefit from possibilities created by Chinese language skills.

## Discussion

The dynamics of learning and teaching Chinese as a foreign language in Pakistan reflect a complicated cultural, economic, and educational interplay that shapes the landscape of CFL education. With China's growing influence on the world platform, the strategic relationship between Pakistan and China through large projects like the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor has moved the requirement of Chinese language ability for Pakistanis to the forefront. This discussion will synthesize major findings from the scoping review and place them within broader theoretical and practical frameworks.

One of the obvious findings coming out from the review is the role that governmental and institutional support has been found to play in the actual developing of CFL education in Pakistan. The fact that the Pakistani government is taking initiatives to introduce the Chinese language into mainstream education shows realization at large of the strategic role linguistic skills can play in global diplomacy and trade. The Confucius Institutes have played a vital role in functioning as cultural and educational bridges between China and Pakistan. These institutes offer language teaching as well as culture promotion, hence laying the foundation for a deeper bilateral relationship between the two countries (Khan & Li, 2019). In fact, it also applies to the theoretical framework of soft power, in which language and culture are instruments used to increase the influence of a country abroad (Nye, 2004).

The review has highlighted numerous challenges faced by CFL education in Pakistan, particularly against the backdrop of inefficient distribution of resources and regional imbalance. While many government initiatives have generally had a high degree of impact in urban centers, rural areas remain relatively underserved, therefore widening the urban-rural divide in educational opportunities. In educational inequality literature more broadly, this corresponds to a finding that access to quality education is often highly unevenly distributed, leading to persistent socioeconomic disparities. In view of these very noble objectives that this research intends to achieve, it becomes incumbent to consider the addressing of these disparities for ensuring an equitable sharing of benefits associated with Chinese language education amongst different segments in Pakistani society.

This review, at the same time, finds the tailoring of CFL education to address the needs of different sectors. For instance, some language courses combining learning Chinese language with professional skills have been specially designed by vocational and technical training institutions, aiming to prepare them for certain careers that involve interactions with their Chinese counterparts. Some ideas have been derived from the instrumental motivation of language learning, where learners are driven by some practical and career-related goals rather than having an intrinsic interest in the target language itself (Gardner, 1985). These programs demonstrate that CFL education in Pakistan works best when learning is contextually relevant and economically rewarding for the students.

When it comes to teaching methodology, the review points out a need for culturally responsive pedagogies in CFL education. Indeed, against the backdrop of distinctive cultural contexts characterizing Pakistan and China, language instruction has not only to be accurate on a linguistic level but also culturally sensitive. This involves the adoption of Chinese cultural aspects within the curriculum and adoption of instructional strategies that are closely related to the students' culture in Pakistan (Ahmed & Zhao, 2018). This will increase the motivation and encouragement of the students, resulting in effective language learning.

Moreover, it is identified from the scoping review that digital technologies play a significant role in increasing accessibility to CFL education. With the increasing number of online learning platforms, the gap between urban and rural learners may be bridged, and the opportunities for students to learn flexibly may increase in situations where they lack traditional classroom settings. On the other hand, this will also depend on closing the gap of the digital divide, whereby every student should be provided with the technological resources required in the process.

## Conclusion

This scoping review into the dynamics of teaching and learning Chinese as a foreign language in Pakistan provides an all-round understanding of the multidimensional set of challenges and opportunities that exist within this educational landscape. Given the increasing globalization of China, the strategic alignment of Pakistan with China, more particularly in projects such as the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor, has heightened the need for proficiency in the Chinese language among its citizens. This study has demonstrated that though CFL education is integrated into the educational system of Pakistan at a high level, particularly through government support and institutional partnerships, there are still considerable challenges to be addressed.

An important observation from the review under scrutiny is that governmental and institutional support plays a very vital role in promoting CFL education in Pakistan. The establishment of many Confucius Institutes across the country has been quite instrumental in language teaching and cultural exchange, thus retaining the bilateral relationship between the two countries: Pakistan and China. Despite such efforts, however, there is still a wide chasm in the question of access to quality Chinese language education, particularly between urban and rural areas. This urban-rural divide underlines the necessity of more focused initiatives for fairness in the distribution of educational resources.

The review further identifies the role of culturally responsive pedagogy in CFL education. Cultural components of the curriculum are thus a must to be adopted by the educators, seeing that Pakistan and China are two countries that boast rather far-from-similar cultural contexts, if the curriculum is to keep the interest and motivate students effectively. The introduction of digital technologies also holds some encouraging possibilities for expanding accessibility to CFL education, particularly in relatively disadvantaged areas. However, success in these digital initiatives shall have to depend on how best the digital divide is handled, making sure that students are all equipped with technological gadgets to tap from the online learning platforms.

Moreover, it follows from this research that the CFL education should be adjusted to suit the needs of different sectors. Indeed, vocational and technical training institutions have been able to successfully combine Chinese language programs with professional skills training. In such study programs, the students could prepare themselves for careers in which communication with Chinese counterparts is required. The approach would then be totally instrumental in the motivation toward language learning, since learners drive themselves by practical goals, such as career advancement.

## References

- Abbas, H., & Wu, L. (2020). Government initiatives in promoting Chinese language education in Pakistan. *Journal of Educational Policy and Development*, 12(3), 75-86.
- Ahmed, Z., & Nawaz, M. (2021). The urban-rural divide in access to Chinese language education in Pakistan. *Pakistan Journal of Languages and Cultures*, 12(3), 155-172.
- Ahmed, Z., & Zhao, Y. (2018). Training the next generation of CFL teachers in Pakistan: Government and institutional roles. *International Journal of Language Teacher Education*, 5(2), 134-145.
- Arksey, H., & O'Malley, L. (2005). Scoping studies: Towards a methodological framework. *International Journal of Social Research Methodology*, 8(1), 19-32.
- Azam, M. (2018). The impact of CPEC on the linguistic landscape of Pakistan. *Journal of Asian Studies*, 45(2), 233-247.
- Gardner, R. C. (1985). *Social psychology and second language learning: The role of attitudes and motivation*. Edward Arnold.
- Hussain, A. (2018). Chinese language education in Pakistan: A growing necessity. *International Journal of Asian Studies*, 10(2), 189-205.
- Hussain, A. (2021). The role of Confucius Institutes in promoting Chinese language education in Pakistan. *Asian Education Review*, 12(3), 145-162.
- Hussain, F., & Mahmood, A. (2019). Challenges in teaching Chinese as a foreign language in Pakistan: A case study of native Chinese instructors. *Asian Journal of Education and Training*, 5(4), 217-225.
- Hussain, F., & Zhao, L. (2020). Interactive methods in teaching Chinese as a foreign language: A case study from Pakistan. *Journal of Language Teaching and Research*, 11(2), 221-231.
- Khan, A., & Li, M. (2019). The role of digital tools in Chinese language education: Insights from Pakistani learners. *Asian Journal of Education and e-Learning*, 7(3), 50-60.
- Khan, A., & Li, M. (2019). The role of institutional partnerships in Chinese language education in Pakistan. *Asian Journal of Language and Culture*, 10(1), 22-33.
- Khan, A., & Rahman, S. (2020). Pedagogical challenges in teaching Chinese language in Pakistan: A critical review. *Journal of Chinese Language Teaching*, 15(1), 35-49.
- Khan, R., & Li, X. (2021). Cultural challenges in teaching Chinese in Pakistan. *Journal of Multicultural Education*, 15(3), 112-129.
- Li, X., & Khan, M. (2020). Challenges in teaching Chinese as a foreign language in Pakistan. *International Journal of Language Studies*, 14(4), 22-36.
- Liu, Y., & Ahmed, S. (2020). Addressing the teacher shortage in Chinese language education in Pakistan. *Asian Journal of Language Teaching*, 8(1), 45-58.
- Liu, Y., Wang, J., & Ahmad, Z. (2022). Enhancing Chinese language proficiency through technology: A case study in Pakistan. *Language and Technology*, 19(1), 89-102.
- Rahman, S., & Wang, Y. (2021). Professional development of CFL teachers in Pakistan: Challenges and opportunities. *International Journal of Language Teaching*, 8(4), 112-127.
- Rahman, S., & Yang, J. (2021). Vocational training and Chinese language education: A new model in Pakistan. *Journal of Technical Education and Training*, 7(4), 67-78.
- Rahman, T. (2019). The rise of Chinese language education in Pakistan: Implications and challenges. *Journal of Educational Development*, 23(4), 299-312.
- Shah, M., & Khan, M. (2020). The impact of CPEC on Chinese language learning in Pakistan. *South Asian Studies Journal*, 35(1), 67-82.
- Siddiqui, N. (2020). Cultural motivations behind learning Chinese: A study of Pakistani students. *International Journal of Cultural Studies*, 23(2), 240-255.
- Zafar, F., & Li, Z. (2020). Bridging the urban-rural gap in Chinese language education: Challenges and opportunities. *Journal of Rural Education*, 15(1), 98-109.
- Zhang, W., & Rahman, A. (2017). Linguistic difficulties in learning Chinese for Pakistani students. *International Journal of Language and Linguistics*, 15(2), 78-89.
- Zhang, X., & Ahmed, Z. (2018). Cultural adaptation in CFL textbooks: A comparative study between Chinese and Pakistani learners. *Journal of Chinese Language Studies*, 14(1), 45-59.
- Zhao, L. (2019). Linguistic challenges in learning Chinese for Pakistani students. *Chinese Language Education*, 8(1), 30-42.