Chinese as a LOTE in the Asian Century

A study of students’ attitudes to and practices in Chinese as a LOTE subject in Queensland primary schools

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Elizabeth
Abstract

This study aims to explore Australian primary school students’ attitudes towards learning Chinese as a LOTE (Language Other Than English). It is a case study of students who are learning Chinese in two Queensland primary schools (one public and one private) where Chinese is a compulsory course. Using a mixed-method approach, this study focuses on students’ attitudes to learning Chinese. As the Chinese language is becoming increasingly popular in Australian schools, it is essential to understand how students feel about learning the language and what their learning needs are. Knowing students’ language attitudes may also help language teachers to design more appropriate curricula and pedagogical practices to assist students with improving their Chinese language proficiency. Because most primary school children are beginning learners in LOTE Chinese, this study aimed to investigate students’ attitudes towards exploring the new language and culture at a young age.

This study focuses on the following research questions: 1) What are students’ attitudes to learning Chinese in Australian primary schools where Chinese is a compulsory course? 2) What are the factors that affect students’ attitudes to learning Chinese? 3) How do different experiences of Chinese curriculum and pedagogy affect students’ attitudes towards Chinese language learning? From an investigation into these research questions, the study’s outcomes include a detailed understanding of students’ attitudes to learning Chinese as a second language.

After analysing and comparing the data of the two schools, the main finding is that there was a big difference between the public school and the private school regarding resources, teaching methods and support from within the schools. All these factors influence students’ interest and attitudes towards learning Chinese language, and the findings have practical implications for future Chinese teaching and learning.
Statement of Originality

This work has not previously been submitted for a degree or diploma in any university. To the best of my knowledge and belief, the thesis contains no material previously published or written by another except where due reference is made in the thesis itself.

Elizabeth Fu

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List of Abbreviations

ICT: Information and Communication Technologies
LOTE: Languages Other Than English
RQ: Research Questions
GCI: Gold Crescent Independent
WPS: Westside Primary School
L2: Second language
LP: Language Perfect (an online language learning program)
CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Australians today live in an “Asian century” in which increasing numbers of Asian people choose to immigrate, study and work here. Asia is rapidly becoming the economic powerhouse of the world. The report “Australia in the Asian Century” notes that Australia’s proximity to Asia will promote Australia’s economic growth. Australia and Asia have a bilateral relationship, which is deeper and broader than before. Australian trade in agricultural products is strongly linked to Asian suppliers, and more than anytime previously, Australia is operating in and connecting to growing Asian markets. At the same time, what Asian people bring to Australia is their languages and cultures which have a great influence on the native Australian residents (Australia Government, 2012). Of all the foreign languages spoken and taught in Australia, Chinese is the one that is being learnt as a compulsory course in many primary and secondary schools. This study explores primary school students’ attitudes towards learning Chinese as a second language in Australian schools where Chinese is offered as a compulsory course. This study explores the attitude of primary school students towards learning Chinese as a second language in Australian schools where Chinese is offered as a compulsory course.

The study involves the collection and analysis of data obtained from two Queensland primary schools regarding students’ attitudes about learning Chinese as a second language. Data collection occurred through a student survey, student focus group interviews, interviews with Chinese teachers and classroom observations. By comparing the two sets of data the study aimed to determine the factors that affected student attitudes towards learning the Chinese language. The study used a mixed-methods approach. The aim was to provide insights into effective approaches to Chinese language teaching and learning. This introductory chapter provides the background to the study, a discussion of the significance of the study, the research questions, and an overview of the theoretical framework that informs this thesis.
Chinese as a LOTE in the Asian Century
A study of students’ language attitudes in Queensland primary schools

Background of the study

As international trade increases between Australia and China, the Chinese language is becoming more and more important in Australian schools as a LOTE (Languages Other Than English). According to Comoire, Matthews, and Polinsky (1997), Chinese is one of the languages becoming increasingly popular in Australia in preparation for future employment. Farrar (2012) reported that China’s job market has tightened for young foreigners, and if one wants to find a job in China other than teaching English, it is important that one has good Chinese language proficiency.

As a second language, Chinese is very different from English in its pronunciation, writing, grammar and sentence structure. Therefore, for some western students whose first language is English, learning Chinese is challenging (Wong, 2013, p.33-39). Berghom (2009) also noted that the reason that students find Chinese difficult is that its writing and pronunciation are quite different from European languages. It is important to know how children feel about learning Chinese and what contributes to their attitudes about learning Chinese. If language teachers can appreciate their students’ attitudes towards language learning, then this can be used to design appropriate lessons to help students to learn efficiently (Yin & Abdullah, 2014). According to Sanchez (2006), language attitudes are the various behaviours regarding how the language is learnt. These attitudes include not only how children think about the language, but also how they get along with people who speak that language. In addition, language attitudes include a wide range of children’s responses to using the language, such as their attitudes towards the culture that relates to the language, their attitudes to exploring the language following school, and their interest in continuously leaning the language after a certain period. Sanchez also found that language attitudes are a mental state of readiness and they cannot be observed directly; thus, study of attitudes needs to progress by examining students’ learning behaviours and interactions with the language as well as their reported motivations.

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The subjects of this research were primary school students of non-Chinese-background who learn Chinese as a compulsory course in their school. The research explores attitudes towards learning Chinese as a LOTE. It includes children’s feeling about Chinese, how they deal with the difficulties in learning the language, and their interest in learning it. It also explores the factors that affect children’s attitudes and how their attitudes link to their learning experience. It aims to provide teachers with suggestions and strategies for designing appropriate lessons in order to support successful student learning outcomes.

**Significance of the study**

As Chinese is becoming increasingly popular in Australian schools, it is essential to know how students think about learning the language (Yin & Abdullah, 2014). An increasing number of schools in Australia are now offering Chinese lessons, leading to what Scrimgeour (2014) terms “Chinese fever”. The Australian Government expects that by the end of 2020, at least 12% of Year 12 Australian students should be fluent in Chinese (Asia Education Foundation, 2008). In 2008, the number of students in Australia who were studying Chinese reached 92,931 (Sturak & Naughten, 2010).

Students’ language attitudes towards learning Chinese can be reflected in their interest, their way of dealing with Chinese homework, and their learning with information and communication technologies (ICT). By analysing different attitudes in two primary schools, this study builds on existing knowledge about learning Chinese as a second language. Most previous studies in this field focused on secondary school students’ Chinese learning, with fewer research projects undertaken in primary schools. To contribute to filling this research gap, this study investigated primary students’ learning attitudes to the Chinese language offered as a compulsory course. It specifically focuses on primary children who are in Grade 5 and Grade 6. It is hoped that studying students’ language attitudes may assist Chinese language teachers to make
appropriate pedagogical decisions to help their students improve their Chinese language proficiency. As a result, language educators may be able to conceptualize better strategies to assist their students’ Chinese learning.

**Statement of the research questions**

According to Sanchez (2006), language attitudes can be defined as all the behaviours that relate to the learning of a language. A body of research focusing on students’ learning of Chinese examines students’ interest, motivation, and desire for learning the language. However, this does not cover all aspects that relate to language attitudes. Attitudes affect other possible behaviours that students display in their interactions with the language, for example, their attitudes to Chinese assessment, willingness to continue learning Chinese in the future, and attitudes towards school-based experiences including events such as exposure to Chinese society and culture and the yearly Chinese speech competitions among Queensland schools.

To gain more detailed knowledge of these language attitudes, then, the research questions (RQ) that guide this research are:

**RQ1:** What are students’ attitudes to learning Chinese in Australian primary schools where Chinese is a compulsory course?

**RQ2:** What are the factors that affect students’ attitudes to learning Chinese?

**RQ3:** How do different experiences of Chinese curriculum and pedagogy affect students’ attitudes towards Chinese language learning?

**Theoretical framework**

This study investigates second language (L2) motivation and language attitudes using a sociolinguistic pragmatists’ framework. It is a mixed-method study focusing on students’ attitudes towards learning the Chinese language. Morgan (2007) emphasized the importance of focusing on
the research problem in social science research using mixed methods to derive knowledge about the research questions. According to Morgan, mixed-method research provides more detailed and deeper data for the researchers, compared to using a single method.

Van Herk (2012) pointed out that sociolinguistics is “the scientific study of the relationship(s) between language and society”. Within this field, attitudes towards language learning are one essential part of sociolinguistics studies. Garrett (2010) proposed that examination of language attitude is a sociolinguistic study of people’s behaviours that relate to using that language, such as their interest and motivation or their attitudes towards the relevant culture and society. Gardner and Lambert (1972) emphasized the importance of studying language attitudes, arguing that attitude is vital since it fuels motivation. Therefore, it is important to have good learning behaviours and attitudes when learning a second or foreign language as this is essential for effective learning (Lifrieri, 2005).

The model of second language acquisition presented in Figure 1 is taken from the work of Gardner and MacIntyre (1992, 1993). They pointed out that L2 learners who have a positive language attitude towards the language and culture can learn more effectively than those who do not have such positive attitudes, and language attitudes and motivation affect each other in the process of learning.
Figure 1. Representation of the socioeducational model of second language acquisition (Gardner & MacIntyre, 1992, 1993).

Figure 1 shows that individual difference variables interact with language acquisition in both formal and informal language acquisition contexts and affect linguistic and non-linguistic outcomes. Individual difference variables include cognitive and affective variables which may be affected by antecedent factors such as previous language training experience. Ushida used this model in his research and defined motivation as “the extent to which the individual works or strives to learn the language and the satisfaction experienced in this activity, and motivation mediates any relation between language attitudes and language achievement” (Ushida, 2005, p. 52).

As can be seen from Figure 1, the nonlinguistic factors include language attitudes, motivation, strategies, and language anxiety, of which language attitudes and motivation affect each other. Motivation and language anxiety also interact with each other, and language anxiety can affect the learning strategy.
Gardner and MacIntyre (1993, p. 9) pointed out that this model shows the importance of what happens in language learning contexts with respect to the complex interactions amongst various factors. Language teachers, curriculum, and learning environment all have an influence on students’ attitudes towards language learning. At the same time, this model illustrates the importance of motivation and language attitudes in learning a second language. Intelligence, language aptitude, strategies, motivation, and language attitudes interact with each other and influence the learning outcomes. With regard to the second research question, “What are the factors that affect students’ attitudes to learning Chinese?”, this study investigate the above factors and examines how these aspects affect students’ Chinese learning and how much relative importance these factors play in the learning process.

The research will use the framework depicted in Figure 1 and focus on attitudes towards Chinese learning and the factors that influence and underpin these attitudes. It is expected that this research may identify a range of factors that affect students’ Chinese learning. In addition, the study aims to illuminate how language attitudes and other factors interact with each other in Second language acquisition.

In summary, guided by the three research questions posed above, this study explores students’ language attitudes towards learning Chinese. The following chapter presents a review of the relevant research literature as a background to the study.
CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

Many studies have explored students’ attitudes towards learning a second language in secondary schools, and the factors that affect their language attitudes are various as discussed in these studies. However, there has been little mention of primary school students’ Chinese learning, except for a few previous studies. This research gap can be addressed through this research project. This chapter will review the findings from the literature in the following aspects: the role of Chinese in Australian schools, the definition of language attitudes, the factors that affect students’ language attitudes, and how students’ attitudes link to their perceived learning experience. The conclusion will review the key findings of the review indicating the gap in the literature that this study addresses.

Chinese as a LOTE in Australian schools

Chinese is becoming a popular LOTE in Australian schools, and many children are choosing it as their second language. In this context, different children come to the language with different attitudes to learning Chinese. Therefore, it is important for teachers to understand how children feel about learning Chinese and how they approach the language by studying their learning behaviours (Yin & Abdullah, 2014).

Lin (2013) believes that studying the Chinese language can help children meet their economic and academic goals. Trading and business between Australia and China have become more frequent in recent decades; therefore, ability to use the Chinese language is essential in communicating with Chinese people in these fields. By learning Chinese at school, children can build up their awareness of using the language in real contexts. Kearns (2000) argued that LOTE is not only a key learning area but also a bridge that connects communication of different cultures, because bilingualism enables students to understand how all languages work and to make wise choices about what kind of society they want to inhabit. As an increasing number of Chinese
people are immigrating to Australia, communication and business between China and Australia are frequent. Thus providing Chinese lessons for Australian children is growing in popularity (Prescott & Orton, 2014). As an Asian language, Chinese is very different from English in the aspects of pronunciation, writing, grammar, and sentence structure, and therefore, for some Western students whose first language is English, it is challenging (Wong, 2013, pp. 31-39). According to Rowe and Naicker (2004), Chinese is difficult, but more children are willing to learn it. Children are willing to be challenged by those difficulties, and some of them “invent” their own learning methods which suit their ability levels. During the learning process, it is important to know how children feel about learning the language and what caused these attitudes. Only after we know in depth their attitudes towards learning Chinese can teachers help them improve their learning effectively (Yin & Abdullah, 2014).

**Language attitudes. LOTE learning, and schooling**

Language attitudes refers to the attitudes of students towards learning another language. Wang (2006) demonstrated that language attitude is an important and sensitive topic, one which is worth being researched. Garret (2010) defined language attitudes as an issue that extends to all manner of sociolinguistic and social psychological phenomena. He also pointed out that language attitudes affect people’s social behaviours and experiences in all walks of life. According to Sanchez (2006), language attitudes are the range of behaviours associated with how the language is treated. This includes not only how children treat the language, but also how they treat the people who speak that language. Brown (2001) stated that positive attitude refers to a person’s favourable emotion towards something, thus positive language attitude can help establish the learner’s interest in learning that language. According to Spolsky (1989), attitude is an essential aspect that enables learning languages, and a positive attitude can help enhance learning outcomes while the lack of positive language attitude can slow down the process of acquiring a language. Gardner
and Lambert (1972) also demonstrated this point, suggesting that attitude is vital since it fuels motivation. Lifrieri (2005) proposed that it is necessary to have positive attitudes when learning a second or foreign language as this underpins effective learning.

During the learning of a second language, students’ attitudes should be monitored by language teachers regularly regardless of their daily performance and learning outcomes to ensure their students remain interested and motivated in learning. If students’ attitudes are left unchecked, they are more likely to fall behind when students find there is too much for them to catch up, which may, in turn, affect their interest in learning that language (Nair et al., 2014). Thang et al. (2011) studied attitudes towards learning English, and found that students who have a realization of the importance of that language tend to have positive attitudes which in turn spur the interest in learning that language. Holmes (2008) also pointed out that if people feel positive towards a language and those who use it, they are more motivated and are more likely to achieve success. Yin and Abdullah (2014) demonstrated the importance of studying students’ attitudes towards a second language. They used Mandarin learning as an example and studied how the Chinese language is approached by students. They noted that the study of children’s behaviour towards learning Chinese threw new light on teaching them effectively. They also found that language attitudes are a mental state of readiness that cannot be observed directly but through behaviours and reported motivations. By observing students’ behaviours in learning Chinese, it is possible to identify how students feel about learning the language (Yin & Abdullah, 2014). For instance, when students engage with the challenges of learning the Chinese language and are willing to give more time and effort to learning then students might be seen as having positive attitudes but where there is no effort to engage and behaviour becomes disruptive this might be seen as having negative attitudes. Emir (2010) argued that building up positive attitudes is essential in learning a second language and should be emphasized as a significant component of language learning pedagogy. Akbari (2008) noted that effective pedagogy and positive attitudes interact with each
other in language learning; to build a positive learning attitude, teachers’ pedagogy plays an essential role. Cadman (2005) applied critical pedagogy in an English class and noted that it brought positive influences to students’ learning outcomes by creating positive motivation and attitudes to learning English. Vygotsky (1978) also pointed out that effective pedagogy stimulates learning and motivation when children can work in their zone of proximal development on tasks that they cannot do alone but can do with the assistance from more capable adults. Hill (2001) studied the popularity of learning LOTE in a private school. In 2000, 73 of 109 Year 12 students were taking either French or Chinese lessons, and in 2001, 56 of 130 students were taking LOTE courses. Hill’s study found that in that school, French and Chinese were also spoken in other lessons such as home economics, art and IT classes. Furthermore, the LOTE teaching team observed in this study had a significant impact on the popularity of using the languages in a wide range of aspects such as daily communication and business negotiation. Moffat (2014) studied LOTE education in Queensland, and discussed learning LOTE in Year 5. She pointed out that from 2015, state schools in Queensland would start to offer LOTE for children at a younger age, such as Year 5, but she still argued that it should start at preparatory year. Moffat also demonstrated that learning LOTE at a young age can help students to gain employment and help them to be involved better in a multicultural society. In Queensland, currently most primary schools offer Chinese from Year 5. Only a few schools offer Chinese from Prep (preparatory year before Year 1) or Year 1. However, research suggests learning a second language in the early years of schooling is beneficial as it lays a stronger foundation for second language acquisition. Therefore, the preparatory year can be an appropriate point for children to learn Chinese, so that they can acquire a solid foundation in this foreign language. Compared to students who start to learn Chinese at Year 5, those who begin their Chinese learning at preparatory years seem to acquire the language more easily and be able to use the language more efficiently. Lin (2013) reports that learners of Chinese in Queensland are becoming younger and younger. Lin (2013)
suggested that many students wish to start learning Mandarin at an early age, and one of the participants in her study criticized the failure of accessing Mandarin lessons in an elementary public school.

**Students’ perceptions of the Chinese language**

*How children feel about learning Chinese: Difficult or different?*

Language attitudes are linked with the perception of students to that language. By discovering students’ perceptions, such as how they feel about the language and how much interest they have in exploring the language, their language attitudes can be understood in more depth. Many previous studies have pointed out that most students feel Chinese is hard to learn because it is too different from English. The following literature review focuses on which parts of Chinese are challenging to students and the possible reasons behind this.

Lin (2013) pointed out that Chinese is considered one of the most difficult languages for native English speakers to acquire. This can be accounted for in many aspects such as the complicated components of Chinese characters and tone changes. However, difficulty in learning does not mean that the learning process is not enjoyable (Bartram, 2010). Mohan and Huang (2002) compared the Chinese language with the English language and noted that students from a non-Chinese background tended to find it hard to read and comprehend Chinese texts because of the differences between the two languages. Zhao (2013) researched children’s feeling towards learning Chinese as a second language in two high schools. He found most of the participants felt Chinese was “a more difficult second language” in their school, where French and Japanese were also learned as a LOTE. During focus group interviews, many of the participants in Zhao’s study suggested that they were worried about learning the complicated Chinese characters at the beginning. Lin (2013) observed that due to the linguistic uniqueness of the Chinese language,
participants found it is difficult and all of them reported how different it was from learning English or other Indo-European languages such as French and Spanish.

Knich (2010) reported that a large part of the pressure on students’ Chinese learning is not because of the language itself but their “first impression of the language”, and their first impression of Chinese can be described as “tricky” and “hard”. Garrett (2010) described second language learning as “an intrinsically social process of socialization into specific communities of practice”. Lin (2013) found that this was a possible reason that one of her participants said that “Chinese learning took him out of his comfort zone when he communicates with Chinese-speaking strangers using his limited Chinese”. Using Chinese language in the classroom is quite different from using it in real-life contexts. Students who achieve high marks in Chinese classrooms may not be able to communicate smoothly with native Chinese speakers. This may in turn add pressure and challenge to children’s Chinese learning at school.

Berghom (2009) conducted interviews with a group of high school children and found that due to the differences between Chinese and English, many children whose first language is English found it hard to handle Asian languages which have completely different ways of writing and pronunciation. Among these Asian languages, Chinese seems to be a very challenging second language in these students’ minds. Berghom conducted observations in schools and interviewed several Chinese teachers about this issue, and found that one reason for some young leaners’ failure in learning Chinese was that they felt unconfident at the very beginning and had little motivation in exploring it.

Lin (2013) observed that compared to beginner learners, children who are in the senior year levels tend to believe Chinese is “different” rather than “difficult”, and their learning attitudes are more positive compared to primary school students who learn Chinese as a compulsory subject in their schools. Lin pointed out that sometimes, the difficulties of learning Chinese are overemphasized. Children get the impression that “Chinese is difficult” through chatting with
peers, parents, and other commentators. People who have never learned Chinese tend to believe that it is unachievable, and this opinion affects Chinese learners, especially young children. Rowe and Naicker (2004) pointed out that although Chinese is difficult to learn, many students still wanted to be challenged. They also suggested that language teachers motivate their students by stimulating their interest at the beginning, especially for primary learners.

**Children’s attitudes towards learning Chinese tones and characters**

Stanley (2007) studied how Chinese learning is felt by its learners and demonstrated that tones are the most difficult aspect for English-speaking students to handle in learning Chinese, as there are no tone changes in English. The participants in Stanley’s study included learners of all age groups from children to adult. His study suggested that tones can be difficult for learners of Chinese, irrespective of their year level. The study supports my own experience that primary students find it difficult to learn tones. For this reason, I was particularly interested to examine how tones were being taught in the two surveyed schools. Bourne (2012) conducted research focused on learning Chinese tones in a school and found it was challenging for Western children to speak Chinese using accurate tones. In his interviews, most of the participants demonstrated that they were able to hear the difference between the tones but could not distinguish the difference when they spoke Chinese by themselves. It is not easy for beginning learners to grasp the tiny differences among the tones unless they practise and get used to the differences.

Zhao (2013) conducted focus groups in his research in an American high school and found that most students learn Chinese without speaking accurate tones, and after a long period of learning, they no longer want to improve this aspect. He said students gave up fixing their tones in speaking Chinese because they felt the tones made them confused and it was too time consuming learning to distinguish the difference of the tones. Yang (2011) did a survey among a group of teachers of Chinese who taught in American high schools. He found that these teachers
of Chinese usually did not emphasize learning accurate tones in their assessment of students. His interviewees suggested that students were interested in knowing how to mark the tones although they did not have confidence in learning such complicated symbols. Yet Fraster (1978) argued that accurate tones are the key elements for speaking Chinese well. Tom (2007) demonstrated students’ attitudes to dealing with difficulties in tones. He interviewed several high school children about their Chinese speaking and asked them questions about how they deal with tones when they practise speaking Chinese. After analysing the data, Tom pointed out that most students would like to improve their tones at the beginning, and they usually turned to the teachers and online dictionaries for help, but after several attempts, some of them would choose to give up spending too much time on their tones due to little progress. As can be seen from the quoted research students felt tones and characters were difficult to learn. However, Tran (2013) conducted research in Asian countries such as Vietnam, Japanese and Malaysia regarding students’ Chinese learning and he found that due to the Asian background of these students and their different learning styles, Asian students did not find the Chinese language difficult to learn. This outcome is quite different from that of Australian and American students.

Xu and Padilla (2013) demonstrated that learning and retaining Chinese characters is regarded as the most difficult aspect of learning Chinese as a LOTE for those whose first language is English. This was because English is an alphabetic language and the writing system in English can closely represent the sound system, while the Chinese writing system and sound system seem to be two independent elements. Packard (1990) also found that the mastery of Chinese characters was challenging because of the large number of complex symbols that constitute the language writing system. Wu (1992) noted that many beginning learners regard Chinese characters as “random symbols” that are beyond mastery because they are too irregular. Lin (2013) argued that most of her students acknowledged that memorization of all the characters was not an easy job, and even Chinese native speakers spend a long time mastering the writing of Chinese symbols.
Although her participants found Chinese characters hard to learn, they still showed great interest in exploring them because they believed that Chinese characters are a reflection of people’s cultural interpretations. Shen and Xu (2015) argued that the lack of sufficient knowledge of Chinese characters directly leads to the difficulty in Chinese reading. Each Chinese character is combined with different parts which direct the whole character’s pronunciation. With insufficient knowledge of Chinese radicals and components, it is often hard for the learner to pronounce the words accurately by looking at the Chinese symbols. Chao (1997) conducted a survey on students’ attitudes to learning Chinese characters, using a questionnaire and asking students to choose their favourite way of learning Chinese characters. After analysing the data, he found that students no longer liked the traditional method of learning characters (writing, copying, or tracing the words). Instead, they turned to ICT to help them remember the characters. In the questionnaire, most students strongly agreed that even if they used online learning software, they could not remember the characters’ stroke orders. Most of the participants strongly disagreed that learning the stroke order of the characters was necessary when using Chinese in daily life.

Crouse (2007) interviewed high school children to discover their learning attitudes towards Chinese characters. He noted that almost all the participants reported they had no confidence in learning characters and they did not want to spend too much time on it. He also observed that students, especially beginner learners, liked writing characters for fun, and higher level leaners tended to rely too much on laptops when they had to use characters to write sentences because all they needed to do was to type the pinyin on the keyboard. Ngoc (2005) researched on secondary students’ Chinese writing skills, noting that compared to primary children who seldom use characters, secondary students’ attitudes towards learning the characters was more positive: they tried to use different software to type characters and used online grammar checking systems to correct the possible mistakes. Li (2004) investigated the methods of teaching Chinese characters and pointed out that most children dislike learning characters because of their complicated
structures and strokes, and most students believe they would never devote too much time to memorizing the stroke orders of the Chinese characters. He suggested that Chinese teachers could introduce more online materials to assist students in writing in characters and explain the characters by showing pictures and videos to stimulate the children’s interest and to encourage them.

Zhao (2013) noted that although students regard Chinese as a difficult language to learn, many of them were willing to give it a good try. One important motivation was the ability to speak and write Chinese outside the classroom situation. An ability to express greetings and gratitude was seen as important to these students. In his focus group, the participants said they often compared their Chinese learning results with students who were learning a different foreign language in their school. Also, they had a sense of achievement that they could succeed in learning Chinese when others thought it was a difficult language to learn.

In summary, it appears that students find Chinese characters and Chinese tones the most difficult to learn. However, much of the literature points out that students are still willing to engage with learning these aspects of the language.

**Students’ attitudes towards Chinese culture and Chinese speakers**

Learning Chinese as a foreign language currently gives significant recognition to goals of learning about Chinese culture, which is what interests many students (Byram et al., 1994). It is reported that in some high schools, some history classes include Chinese ancient history and culture, especially concerning the prosperous dynasties in ancient times (Lin, 2013). Lin reported that her student participants generally described Chinese culture as “interesting” and “unique”. She also observed that language and culture have a two-way relationship and that learning Chinese culture brings students lots of enjoyment, and this is a way to negate students’ frustration caused by the temporary difficulties encountered in the language-learning process. One of her participants remarked that learning Chinese culture, such as Chinese festivals, is interesting, and she would
like to learn more about Chinese culture which can be extended to cultural ideas. This can facilitate the development of deeper understanding of multiple perspectives. Lin (2013) found that even students who considered themselves “not good at speaking Mandarin”, Chinese speakers with whom students were in contact, were all very encouraging and positive. She observed that students like to make friends with Chinese speakers because they believe they can have more opportunities to practise speaking Chinese and understanding more Chinese culture.

Chen (2014) interviewed several Chinese teachers in a primary school in England. He found that primary school children are keen to ask questions after class to extend their knowledge, especially questions on new vocabulary and Chinese culture. Some students even used Chinese to make their own movies and cards, and they expanded their vocabulary through working out the Chinese expressions that they did not learn in class. He demonstrated that most students tended to use online tools to seek help when they did online Chinese writing, and they were willing to memorize the new words they used. As primary school learners, these pupils were at the early stages of learning Chinese but they were often motivated to spend extra time learning about Chinese culture. For example, they were motivated to research about the Chinese dragon boat festival, the Chinese new year and Chinese food.

School children’s interest in learning Chinese as a second language
Student interest in a subject certainly affects their attitude to learning. When pupils love a subject, they tend to be passionate in exploring more than what is learnt in class. However, when students have little interest in learning they can become unmotivated. This presents as a reluctance to learn and to solve problems and an appearance of discouragement. Barney (2002) demonstrated these ideas in the study “Factors that impact middle school students' attitudes and perceptions in physical education”. Lin (2013) found that all her participants enjoyed
learning at least one part (characters, pinyin, culture, tones, etc.) of Chinese language. Lin mentioned the significance of learning Chinese in U.S. schools in today’s changing world. He argued that people are paying attention to the education of Mandarin and Chinese culture in schools, and students’ interest in learning Chinese was affected by many factors of which age level was an important one. Because of the difference in ages, the learning methods and attitudes among students are also different. Older learners of a foreign language have a better ability to grasp the grammatical patterns than younger learners (Hawkins, 1984), and they tend to spend more time on practising the language than younger learners do (Scarcella & Higa, 1981). According to Sharpe and Driscoll (2000), pupils will achieve higher standards of proficiency if they spend more time on practice. Driscoll (1999) stated that secondary school education gives priority to developing language competence, while at primary school developing language learning skills and positive attitudes towards language learning may be foregrounded.

Prescott and Orton (2014) conducted research on secondary school students’ Chinese learning in Melbourne, Australia, using surveys, interviews, and observations. Through the interviews, they found that although students found Chinese difficult to learn, they described themselves as “engaged” by the learning. Also, students enjoyed the challenge of learning Chinese. Some of the participants said Chinese was a nice language and they would like to learn it and travel to China one day. Prescott and Orton also interviewed students who were in senior secondary school where Chinese was their elective course, and found that most of them were willing to continue their Chinese learning in the following year. These students had a strong desire to make friends with Chinese people and to socialize, travel, and work with the language. In this paper, the authors mentioned that few of the participants had the opportunity to learn Chinese in their primary years, and their interest in learning Chinese started from secondary school. These students were successful Chinese learners. When asked why they liked Chinese, the replies were varied ranging from the interesting Chinese lessons and help from their Chinese friends to Chinese
television. Through classroom observation, Prescott and Orton found that some students dropped Chinese in Year 10 when it became an elective course. These students said they could not manage the difficulty of the tones and characters, and some of them regarded the Chinese they were learning as a very different language compared to the street Chinese they heard. This was because daily conversations of ordinary Chinese people may include dialects and slang, and their speaking may be quite rapid. In comparison, in a classroom situation what students hear from their Chinese teachers and classmates is usually basic Chinese spoken at a slower speed, making it easier to understand.

Ren’s (2013) study is the only one to date that has focused on students’ Chinese learning in primary schools. Ren (2013) researched effective Chinese learning styles (teaching styles), and noted that for primary school students, teachers tended to use more songs and games in the classroom because most primary students show more interest in singing Chinese songs and doing role plays than reading and writing. Furthermore, students at this age level need to enhance their interest and passion at an early stage through motivating activities as a way of exploring a new language. Regarding students’ interest in learning Chinese,

The above literature reflects students’ different attitudes towards learning the Chinese language: some students do not believe that they can manage Chinese tones and characters, and some students are willing to overcome the difficulties in learning. In addition, students showed interest in learning Chinese culture and in using ICT to learn Chinese. The reasons leading to these attitudes varied and the following literature will explain the factors that affect students’ attitudes towards learning Chinese.

**The factors that affect students’ attitudes to learning Chinese**

The role of ICT and media
ICT plays an important role in assisting students to learn Chinese. Among all the software, on-screen pinyin can effectively stimulate students’ interest in Chinese reading and comprehension (Lee & Kalyuga, 2011). Shu and Liu (1994) also noted the advantage of using pinyin to help young children to comprehend Chinese reading. Shen (2015) focused on Chinese vocabulary learning in L2 classrooms and demonstrated the importance of online ICT in improving students’ interest in learning Chinese. She noticed that children use online learning tools frequently and that most of their vocabulary is learned and memorized with the assistance of those tools. Zhao (2011) also emphasized the essential role of ICT, observing that online tools make the complicated language structure simpler and the difficult character strokes clearer and easier to learn. Cai (2012) emphasized the role of online learning in motivating students’ interest in Chinese learning. She noted that online learning after class enabled many children to extend their vocabulary and grammar. One of her interviewees, demonstrating how important online learning software was to him, said he enjoyed extending his vocabulary by playing Chinese language games online, and in this process he memorized many vocabulary items easily, more than what they learnt in class.

Prescott and Orton (2014) pointed to the role of Chinese television and films in stimulating students’ interest in learning Chinese. Their research in secondary schools found that some students’ interest in learning Chinese comes from their experiences of watching Chinese movies and television programs, and they were willing to learn the language as well as being keen to socialize with Chinese people and to travel to China.

**School LOTE policy and parents’ influence**

Chen (2014) argued that LOTE should be taught at an early age; in the past in Australia, she noted, LOTE teaching was often poor in practice due to few resources and poorly trained teachers. More recently, the demand for learning LOTE is rapidly increasing and the beginning age for learners is becoming younger. According to Kearns (2000), however, there is much evidence showing that
students drop language courses if the language is no longer regarded as a core course in their school, so school policy regarding LOTE needs to be considered.

The important role of language policy and parents in motivating students to learn Chinese was noted by Chen (2014). Parents’ increasing expectations of including L2 study into the curriculum has a positive effect on motivating and supporting students to learn a second language (CILT, 1995). Lin (2013), observing that the lack of early childhood foreign language education in the US was criticized by many parents, proposed that including a foreign language in schools at a young age is necessary to ensure the development of children’s language proficiency.

Roth (2008) studied the importance of parental encouragement and support in shaping children’s language attitudes, and found that parental encouragement can shape students’ language attitudes positively, which may affect students’ motivational levels for learning that language. Lin (2013) noted that many parents have positive attitudes towards learning Chinese, and believe it is necessary to learn it for the sake of communicating effectively with Chinese speakers, potentially opening up more job opportunities. In Lin’s study, some parents considered their children’s learning Chinese as a way to foster their identity and help them to be outstanding among their peers. Norton (1995) argued that learning Chinese gives children access to “unattainable resources” and they are willing to invest in helping their children to learn Chinese well. Torres-Guzmán et al. (2011) noted that in their study, parents regarded utility as the main reason for motivating their children to learn Chinese effectively, and believed that learning Chinese had a range of benefits such as college applications and future job opportunities. Dagenais (2003) noted it was clear that parents played an essential role in encouraging their children to invest their time in acquiring Chinese language.

Mombourquette (2007), from a survey among 390 students on the role of their parents in affecting their attitudes to learning, found that parents’ attitudes greatly affected students’ attitudes. Yang (2011) also demonstrated the importance of schools and parents’ encouragement
in helping students to form a positive attitude in learning Chinese. In her research in an American school, she found that students were willing to learn Chinese and they devoted a lot of time to it. In her study, the school’s LOTE policy was that students should complete three lessons each week, and each of them should participate in cultural exploration activities at the end of each term. Yang argued that parents’ support not only helped improve students’ learning results but also helped them to build up positive learning attitudes, helping to form a concept that “learning Chinese is very important”.

Wu (2009) emphasized the importance of school LOTE policy in affecting students’ attitudes to learning Chinese. He argued that schools’ attitudes to learning Chinese can influence students’ attitudes, and encouragement from the school can not only contribute to students’ learning results but also stimulate students’ motivation and interest in learning a second language. Schools which encourage children to learn a second language from an early age tend to receive better learning results, and their students are more likely to be confident and diligent when they explore the language in depth.

Learning environment and peer influence

Chen (2014) focused on teaching Chinese in a school in England, and pointed out the importance of classroom management in affecting students’ interest. Through observations, she found that good behaviour management in a Chinese language classroom not only leads to good learning results but also affects how students feel about Chinese language. Gregory and Ripski (2008) also reported that teaching strategies and good behaviour management had a positive influence on students’ attitudes towards that subject.

Bartram (2010, p. 68) identified friends and peers as major influences on student attitudes. Partners can work together to improve their Chinese proficiency and can offer each other access to their linguistic and interactional resources. Also, high-achieving students can offer help to those
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whose Chinese needs to be enhanced. However, Lin (2013) found that in her study, peers’ influence was not reported as a primary reason for students’ attitudes towards learning a foreign language. Wu (2009) researched peer interaction in a Chinese language classroom, using focus groups with participants who were from either “gifted and talented” or “learning difficult” classes, and found that peer influence affected students’ attitudes. He also interviewed their Chinese teachers and found that students’ attitudes to Chinese learning were influenced by peers: students in gifted and talented classes demonstrated that they were willing to explore the language in depth and learn more knowledge beyond the lessons, because they did not want to fall behind each other in such a competitive class environment.

Gender and language attitudes

Zhao’s (2009) research focused on Chinese learning anxiety; data for this study were collected in universities in the US. Zhao noted that gender affected students’ attitudes to learning Chinese, which was reflected in their beliefs of Chinese language and how they treated the language in daily life. Females were more likely to grasp the opportunities to learn Chinese: they were more willing to ask questions and solve the problems promptly. Also, females were more willing to spend extra time on learning Chinese; therefore, they were more likely to show better results than males. Chen (2014) also noted the role of gender in Chinese learning, finding that female students spent more time on learning Chinese than male students did, and they tended to think more deeply than the boys did about learning it. She also demonstrated that usually in a mixed-gender group in a Chinese lesson, girls were more likely to lead the group activities because they seemed to be more confident in learning. However, Sung and Padilla (1998) found that gender differences were not an obvious reason for the language attitude differences in learning Mandarin in their study.
In summary, the use of ICT, school LOTE policy, parental influence, learning environment, and peer influence are among the factors that affect students’ attitudes towards learning Chinese. Understanding these factors can help Chinese teachers know their students and understand problems in students’ learning. For instance, to avoid boredom in classroom learning, teachers can use multiple ICT programs to interact with students in order to stimulate their interest in learning Chinese, a strategy particularly suitable for primary school children. Knowing and analysing how factors such as these affect students’ learning may ultimately lead to more effective teaching and learning outcomes.
How students’ attitudes link to their learning experience

Zhao (2013) pointed out that attitudes towards a second language affect students’ learning results. His research showed that those who had less interest in learning Chinese at the beginning of their studies tended to feel that Chinese learning was difficult and time consuming; therefore, their learning results were greatly affected.

Shen (2015) focused on children’s character learning in her research and demonstrated that students who were confident and willing to be challenged by the Chinese language tended to have more effective methods to assist their learning. Observing students’ character learning, she noticed that the advanced students had various ways to memorize the characters: they used pictures, online tools, and self-designed vocabulary learning cards to assist their learning. These methods and strategies were beyond what they learnt in a Chinese classroom and contributed greatly to their learning success.

Yang (2011) also demonstrated the importance of how positive learning attitudes were reflected in students’ willingness to learn. This positive attitude enabled students to make extra efforts in solving problems and to explore more about the language. She noted that students who were willing to learn Chinese practised more and asked more questions, and some students’ parents were also involved in the learning process to help them solve problems and seek assistance in order to guide their children to success. Yang proposed that students who treated Chinese learning seriously are more likely to create or grasp opportunities to enhance their Chinese communication skills.

Exploring these factors is significant as it has positive implications for Chinese teaching and learning. The following section therefore examines literature on effective pedagogy for students’ Chinese learning.
Effective pedagogy for teaching the Chinese language

Zhao (2013) argued that Chinese teachers, especially primary school Chinese teachers, should help students overcome the belief that “Chinese is difficult” and motivate them by introducing effective and interesting learning methods. Stanley (2007) suggested that Chinese teachers should give students more encouragement in learning tones because this was one of the most challenging areas in learning Chinese. Moreover, he argued that success with tones directly affected students’ attitudes and confidence towards learning other parts of the language. Chen (2014) demonstrated that for students whose first language was not Chinese, teachers should firstly focus on helping them to build up confidence and interest in learning it. She also suggested that Chinese teachers should organize activities and excursions to get students involved in the language and culture to stimulate their interest. Sun (2011) demonstrated the important role of teachers in affecting students’ attitudes to learning Chinese as a second language, noting that L2 teachers should discover students’ attitudes by observing and communicating with them. Once students’ language attitudes were known in depth, teachers could organize the lessons more effectively and guide the students to learning success.

Identifying gaps in the research

Summary

The literature review has indicated that the majority of studies have focused on secondary school students and their perceptions and attitudes towards learning Chinese. Only one study reviewed focused on the learning of Chinese by primary school children. Also, not many studies have compared Chinese learning in two different types of schools. Consequently, the current research project will provide new insights into primary school children’s perceptions of learning Chinese as a second language. It will also support teachers in focusing on primary students’ learning needs and interests when planning and designing the curriculum and lesson delivery.
In a society where the Chinese language is becoming increasingly popular, it is important for us to understand students’ attitudes towards learning Chinese, including how they engage with people who speak Chinese. Much research has been done about learning Chinese as a LOTE in different schools, generally finding that although many students think Chinese is a difficult language in which characters and tones are the most complicated aspects, they still want to be challenged by it. Students at different year levels appear to have different levels of interest and desire to learn Chinese, and their attitudes vary. As for the causes of these attitudes, the literature pointed to several factors including school LOTE policy, parents’ influence, and the learning environment. Also, the literature indicated effective strategies for teaching Chinese. While the literature reviewed covered many aspects of students’ attitudes to Chinese learning, it has not addressed several factors outside the immediate learning environment, for instance, how students treat their homework and assessment and how they treat the school organized Chinese activities such as Chinese speech competitions. These gaps are addressed in this research, which will also focus on how different pedagogical approaches to the teaching of Chinese impact on students’ attitudes and consequently their engagement with the language.
CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

The methodology adopted for this study was a sequential mixed-methods approach in two primary schools, one public and one private, located in south-east Queensland, Australia. The approach comprised student surveys, student focus groups, interviews with Chinese teachers, and classroom observations. The two schools used as case studies had differing student demographics, teaching approaches, and resource levels. To help identify what affects students’ perceptions of learning Chinese this study compares children’s attitudes, the resources available to both students and teachers, and the teaching methods used in the different schools. It shows how different learning environments and LOTE policies affect students’ attitudes.

The advantages of using mixed methodology in educational research were demonstrated by Morgan (2007), who argued that mixed methods help the research cover a wider range of aspects in detail, which can answer the research questions clearly and directly. Morgan stated that using mixed methods in research on language learning can provide more reliable data and evidence that supports or refutes the hypothesis being tested. In addition, this approach can better strengthen the theoretical framework.

Fetterman (1989), acknowledging that research of any kind is subject to bias, argued that using mixed methods is therefore preferable for certain studies to minimize such bias. Denzin (1978) and Greene et al. (1989) agreed that using mixed methods in educational research can minimize the bias inherent in the use of a single method.

Mark and Shotland (1987) likened mixed methodology research (MMR) to peeling the layers of an onion: different methods can be used to study different levels of a phenomenon, and educational issues are usually multilayered. Therefore, qualitative and quantitative methods of MMR study can focus on different research questions which relate to different layers of educational issues. For example, as language attitudes are mediated at different levels within an institution and reflected in many aspects, MMR study can examine language attitudes that are
mediated by school culture and policy, at the classroom level and by individuals learning Chinese at various year levels.

Further, MMR can be superior to a single method because certain types of questions are not amenable to a single method, either qualitative or quantitative alone (Creswell, 2014; Pole, 2007). By using MMR different methods can support one another in providing multiple perspectives on the same question (Pole, 2007). In this approach, quantitative data will be collected by doing a student survey. The analysis of the survey data will support the planning of the subsequent qualitative data collection for this project and possible unexpected results that may arise in the initial quantitative phase (Creswell, 2014). The purpose of this design is to use the responses from the survey to profile the target group and use the survey outcomes to aid the development of the explanatory qualitative phase (Creswell, 2014).

This chapter overviews the procedure for data collection and analysis used for the study, including research ethics, a description of the research sites, and selection of participants for the study. Following this, the procedure for the sequential mixed-method approach will be explained, as well as data-collection instruments used in each stage of the study (student survey, student focus group interviews, teacher interviews, and classroom observations).

**Griffith ethics**

The Griffith ethics number of this research is 2016/140, and the research proposal and methodology were examined by Griffith University and approved before data collection. The relevant information sheets which include this reference number are attached as Appendices A-F.
The research sites

In order to document language attitudes in different settings, two schools, one public and one private, were chosen to conduct the research to give me a wider data sample. Both schools are identified here by a pseudonym. The research was employed at various times at each school and there was some discretion about the choice of schools.

School 1 – Gold Crescent Independent (GCI)

Gold Crescent Independent (GCI) is an independent church school with more than 100 years’ history. It comprises primary and secondary departments. Student fees at GCI are costly and the school boasts state-of-the-art teaching and learning materials and facilities. The Chinese learners involved in this study are from Years 5 and 6 and Chinese is a compulsory course. Students have two Chinese lessons each week. From Year 7, students can choose a LOTE to learn, and Chinese becomes an elective course in their secondary years. With a fixed term-contract at this school, I was given the opportunity to teach Chinese in the primary school after being involved in GCI as a volunteer teacher for one year. By being involved in GCI and frequently attending the Chinese teachers’ conference with their Chinese teacher, many ideas and thoughts about GCI students’ Chinese learning had been shared and discussed; therefore, GCI was considered a suitable research site for this research project.

There are many advantages of being an insider researcher. Bonner and Tolhurst (2002) demonstrated that an insider researcher gains a greater understanding of the participants and their culture, and he or she knows the policy of the institution. Also, insider researchers have great knowledge of the target participants, which takes an outsider researcher a long time to acquire (Smyth & Holian, 2008). Ashworth (1995) and Wellington (1996) noted that the insider researcher is provided with rich information that might not otherwise be accessible to them, and they can spend adequate time on the culture of a school or an organization. As Field (1989) stated, when
doing educational research in schools, being part of the teaching team may increase the number of potential respondents. At the same time, bias cannot be avoided as an insider researcher, but I attempted to minimize bias by collecting data from a wide range of resources such as surveys, student interviews, and teacher interviews.

School 2 – Westside Primary School (WPS)

Westside Primary School (WPS) is a government school where Chinese is taught from Prep to Year 12. In primary school, students have one Chinese lesson each week. The secondary school has a large, established Chinese program while in the primary school the program was established in 2015. WPS has large campuses in two different locations and it has a very good reputation among parents and the wider community. Compared to GCI, where there is only one Chinese teacher teaching primary children, there are three primary teachers at WPS due to the large number of children who learn Chinese as a compulsory course. My role here was also as an insider researcher as I gained employment as a Chinese teacher at WPS in early 2016.

GCI has advanced learning facilities and opportunities such as advanced ICT and frequent China trips. The pedagogy at this school emphasizes students’ creativity such as Chinese movie making and story writing. WPS focuses more on traditional learning methods such as copying Chinese texts and doing in-class role-plays, and the assessment at WPS is usually paper based while at GCI the emphasis is creativity and innovation. The differences between the two schools may influence the children differently with respect to their motivation and attitudes towards learning the Chinese language; Therefore, it was hypothesized that comparing student responses across the two schools may lead to a deeper understanding of the reasons underpinning students’ differing attitudes. Table 1 presents the differences between the two schools in various aspects.

Table 1. Differences between the Two Schools in LOTE Policy, Resources, Curriculum and Teacher Workload
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Element</th>
<th>GCI</th>
<th>WPS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>LOTE policy</td>
<td>Compulsory in primary years; in Year 7, it becomes an elective course</td>
<td>Compulsory in primary years; in Year 10 it becomes an elective course</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Resources</td>
<td>iPads, laptops, “language perfect” online program, “nihao” games on student drive in each laptop</td>
<td>In primary school, Year 4-6 students have laptops</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Curriculum</td>
<td>Follows Australian national curriculum</td>
<td>Follows Australia national curriculum, but the teachers try to minimize the pressure on students and try to make the content easier</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher workload</td>
<td>Normal; the teacher has planning time, teaching 8 classes</td>
<td>The teacher teaches 24 classes; not much planning time at school</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Participants

The participants of this research project included both students and their Chinese teachers. The number of student participants was 202, of whom 102 came from GCI and 100 from WPS; all were in either Grade 5 or Grade 6. The Chinese teacher of GCI and one of the teachers from WPS were also participants. This helped provide more information from teachers’ point of view and also contributes to answering Research Question 3, “How do different experiences of Chinese curriculum and pedagogy affect students’ attitudes towards Chinese language learning?” As this was an opportunity sample of students, the results are not generalizable to the wider population of Chinese language learners. The participants all met the following criteria: they were current Chinese learning students, and they were from a non-Chinese background. As this research explores the language attitudes of students who do not have a Chinese speaking background, those with such a background were excluded, which was done easily due to my role as an insider researcher in both schools.

Student surveys
Conducting student surveys was the first step in collecting the data in this research. Hara (1995) states that quantitative research can provide precise, quantitative, and numerical data. In addition, it can test the hypotheses before collecting further data. Zientek, Capraro, and Capraro (2008) suggest that quantitative methods usually enable the collection of large volumes of data. Cohen, Manion, and Morrison pointed out the challenges of conducting surveys in research projects, such as low response rates, the possibility of losing the return questionnaire, or people’s refusal to answer the questionnaires, but these problems can be solved if the children are supervised.

A questionnaire (see Appendix A) was designed before doing the questionnaire. The questionnaire was firstly administered at GCI in their regular classrooms during the Chinese lesson. Students completed the printed questionnaires under my instruction. Those with a Chinese background were not included; instead, they were given some Chinese worksheets to complete while others were working on the questionnaire. At the same time, there was an opt-out option for the students, and those who were not willing to participate in the survey were excluded. Since students were from Grade 5 and Grade 6, the researcher considered that they might not understand the questions well. Therefore, each question was explained in detail and the children completed the questions one by one at the same time while listening to the teacher’s explanation. Students were not asked to write their names on the questionnaires.

The questionnaire is a well-established tool in investigating people’s behaviours, attitudes, and beliefs (Bulmer, 2004). In this questionnaire, students were asked about their interest in learning Chinese, how difficult they feel it is to learn, it and how they respond to homework, online learning, Chinese culture, the China study trip, and other activities they experienced in their Chinese school program. Responses were recorded on a 5-point Likert scale from Strongly Agree to Strongly Disagree with Unsure as a middle category. Many previous studies have included similar questions (see Table 2) relating to this topic, and some questions for this study were designed according to the identified themes that emerged from the research literature. These
questions covered a wide range of students’ behaviours in dealing with Chinese learning, and they contribute to answering Research Question 1: “What are Australian students’ attitudes towards learning Chinese?” Table 2 shows the connection between the questions and the research literature.

Table 2. The Connections between the Survey Questions and the Literature

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statements</th>
<th>The literature which focused on the questions</th>
<th>Themes identified</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I think Chinese is difficult to learn.</td>
<td>Wong, 2013, pp. 31-39</td>
<td>Perception of Chinese language</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I like making friends with Chinese people.</td>
<td>Prescott &amp; Orton, 2014</td>
<td>Interest in learning Chinese culture</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I have confidence in speaking Chinese.</td>
<td>Stanley, 2007</td>
<td>Perception and attitudes towards difficulties</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I like to speak Chinese in daily life.</td>
<td>Yang, 2011</td>
<td>Interest in learning Chinese</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I feel it is difficult to manage the tones in speaking Chinese.</td>
<td>Fraster, 1978</td>
<td>Perception of Chinese language</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I find Chinese online learning interesting.</td>
<td>Chao, 1997</td>
<td>How ICT affect students’ attitudes towards learning Chinese</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I am interested in learning to write Chinese characters.</td>
<td>Chao, 1997</td>
<td>Interest in learning Chinese</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I would like to continue learning Chinese in the next few years.</td>
<td>Prescott &amp; Orton, 2014</td>
<td>Interest and perception</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Interviews

Student focus group interviews
Focus group interviews were completed in both schools to understand students’ perspectives in depth. As Creswell (2007) stated, the benefit of qualitative research is that it can be used to explain the findings of quantitative research and develop theories whereas quantitative enquiry is often limited in its ability to capture the complexity of the problems that are examined. Prescott and Orton (2014) used interviews as their research method in studying students’ Chinese learning, and demonstrated that interviews enabled them to examine students’ learning in depth because they allowed them to know students’ feelings about the language in detail. Lin (2013) conducted a study on attitudes towards Chinese learning using interviews. She noted that interviews can provide more explicit and detailed understanding of students’ attitudes towards Mandarin learning. One disadvantage of using interviews is that the information is subjective, which cannot be fully avoided in interviews, but as a whole, the advantages of using qualitative methods surpass the disadvantages.

This research involved two focus group interviews in each school (four focus groups in total). Each group had five students. As students’ after-class time is limited, I limited the number of students, otherwise there would not be enough time for each of them to share their ideas for each question. As for the selection of the focus group students, the Chinese teachers and I put all the students’ names in a drawer and picked them at random to avoid bias in choosing participants. After checking the students and their parents’ permission, we finally confirmed 10 students in each school who wanted to participate in the interview. At GCI, the interviews were done during lunch times in the LOTE room. The research allowed students to bring their lunch to the LOTE room while participating in the interview. Each interview lasted 20-30 minutes.

At WPS, the interviews were done after school and the procedure for selecting participants was the same as at GCI, and the interview questions (see Appendix B) were designed based on the survey. The interview questions were the same as those used at GCI. Students talked about their attitudes of learning Chinese in detail, including the difficulties they came across, their
interest in learning Chinese, their feelings about different Chinese learning activities, and their views on approaches to Chinese teaching. All were recorded and later transcribed into a Microsoft Word document.

Teacher interviews
Two Chinese teachers, one from GCI and the other from WPS, were interviewed in this research project in order to gain insights for Research Question 3 (how pedagogy and curriculum affect students’ attitudes). The Chinese teacher at GCI had been working in the school for almost 20 years and the one at WPS had approximately 10 years’ teaching experience. They were interviewed about their experience in teaching and their opinions on how curriculum affects students’ attitudes towards Chinese learning. One of the purposes of the interviews was to ask them about certain aspects of their classroom practices based on the observations. The interviews were conducted after school in the teachers’ offices and each interview lasted for about 30 minutes. All interviews were recorded and transcribed into a Microsoft Word document.

Observations
Classroom observations were conducted in each school. There are many advantages of doing observations in educational research: it allows the researchers to observe and record an authentic educational environment rather than relying on second-hand reports or handouts. Also, there are drawbacks of observations, of which bias is an unavoidable one.

Fox (1998) suggests that for classroom observations to be used effectively in a research project the researcher needs to be involved in the research environment for a considerable period of time. In this case, the researcher’s employment as a teacher at GCI and WPS provided a good opportunity to conduct classroom observations for research purposes with minimal disruption to the classroom environment. To conduct observations, a detailed plan must be considered;
therefore, in this study, a classroom observation checklist was compiled (see Appendix C) and recording field notes were taken while observing students’ behaviour towards learning Chinese.

The observation data complemented the survey and interview data. They specifically addressed to the third research question: “How do different experiences of Chinese curriculum and pedagogy affect students’ attitudes towards Chinese language learning?” It was anticipated that observing the differences in teachers’ pedagogical approaches might suggest reasons for differences in students’ motivation levels and engagement in learning Chinese across the two schools.

Whilst there are many advantages to using observations in educational research – such as allowing the researchers to observe and record an authentic educational environment rather than relying on second-hand reports - other researchers have noted the drawback of using observations, bias being one of them (Adler & Adler, 1998; Patton, 1990; Rossi, Freeman, & Lipsey, 1999; Vierra & Pollock, 1992). However, as discussed at the beginning of this chapter, the use of several data gathering tools allows me to minimise bias.

The connection between the methodology and the research questions
The survey, interviews, and observations directly addressed the research questions. For each research question, mixed methods were used. Table 3 illustrates this by using different examples:
Table 3. Links between the Methodology and the Research Questions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research questions</th>
<th>Methods</th>
<th>Examples</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| 1. What are students’ attitudes to learning Chinese in Australian primary schools where Chinese is a compulsory course? | Survey, interviews                   | 1. The questions in the survey covered a wide range of behaviour about how children responded to homework, Chinese culture, Chinese friends, online learning, and activities.  
2. In the interviews, students were asked about these questions in depth, and the answers were more detailed compared to the survey responses. |
| 2. What are the factors that affect students’ attitudes to learning Chinese?       | Interviews                           | In the interviews, students were asked about why they were interested or not interested in learning Chinese. For instance, “Why do you feel it is difficult to learn Chinese?” and “Why do you like to make friends with Chinese people?” Their answers explained the reasons to these attitudes and directly support Research Question 2. |
| 3. How do different experiences of Chinese curriculum and pedagogy affect students’ attitudes towards Chinese language learning? | Interviews with the two teachers and observation | 1. In the interviews, the teachers were asked about their teaching experience, and how their pedagogy and curriculum affect students’ learning attitudes.  
2. During the observation, different learning and teaching styles in the two schools were observed, and a comparison was made between the two schools concerning curriculum and pedagogy. |

Date collection procedure

The procedure of the data collection was that the surveys, interviews, and classroom observations were completed at GCI first. The survey was done first, followed by the students’ focus group interviews. After these two stages, I interviewed their Chinese teacher. During the whole process, I did classroom observations on three occasions. This process lasted for about one month due to
the fact that GCI has 8 classes in Grade 5 and Grade 6, and I arranged in-class time for each class to complete the survey. The same process was followed at WPS after completing the data collection at GCI. The flowchart in Figure 2 shows the procedure of the data collection.

![Flowchart showing data collection procedure at GCI and WPS]

*Figure 2. Data-collection procedure.*

**Data analysis**

The data collected from the surveys was analysed through SPSS (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences) using descriptive statistics, and presenting in tables for discussion and comparison. SPSS can compare and connect the data to effective action by drawing reliable conclusions. By using this tool, different aspects can be compared clearly. While analysing the data, I mapped the differences between the two schools in terms of teacher pedagogy; this comparison is presented in Chapter 4.

Interview data was analysed by Nvivo software. This software supports qualitative and mixed methods research analysis. The coding in Nvivo revealed the themes which then served as headings for the data analysis. For example, when analysing the factors that affect students’
attitudes to learning Chinese, the themes were “the role of ICT”, “school’s influence”, “parents’ influence”, etc, which were used as subheadings for data analysis in Chapter 4.

CHAPTER 4: DATA FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS

This chapter focuses on the data collected through the surveys and interviews. It presents themes that emerged from the data analysis regarding factors that affect students’ language attitudes and how their attitudes in turn influence their Chinese learning. Data from the two different schools are shown in tables and charts, followed by detailed description and interpretation of the results. The findings in relation to each research question are then discussed. The research questions were:

RQ1: What are students’ attitudes to learning Chinese in Australian primary schools where Chinese is a compulsory course?

RQ2: What are the factors that affect students’ attitudes to learning Chinese?

RQ3: How do different experiences of Chinese curriculum and pedagogy affect students’ attitudes towards Chinese language learning?

Students’ attitudes to learning Chinese in Australian primary schools

How difficult is Chinese language in students’ minds?

In this section I discuss the results of the survey conducted in both schools. 102 students from GCI and 100 students from WPS participated in the survey, and in each school focus group interviews were conducted as well. Because students answered the questionnaire in class under the teacher’s supervision, the response rate for each survey was 100% in both schools.

During my teaching experience, many students have used the word “difficult” when talking about learning Chinese. To explore how students in the two Australian schools felt about
learning Chinese, the question “Do you think Chinese is difficult to learn?” was included in both the surveys and interviews. It aimed to find out what “difficult” means to the students.

In the survey, students were asked to rate the degree of difficulty they felt when learning Chinese. They were given five choices: very easy, easy, partly difficult, hard and very hard. The data are summarized in Table 4. As the data show, students in the two schools expressed different feelings about the difficulty they felt in learning Chinese.

Table 4. School, and degree of difficulty

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School site</th>
<th>Very easy</th>
<th>Easy</th>
<th>Partly difficult</th>
<th>Hard</th>
<th>Very hard</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>GCI</td>
<td>12.7%</td>
<td>20.6%</td>
<td>45.1%</td>
<td>18.6%</td>
<td>2.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WPS</td>
<td>10.0%</td>
<td>11.0%</td>
<td>25.0%</td>
<td>41.0%</td>
<td>13.0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4 shows that 45.1% of the students at GCI felt that Chinese was partly difficult while 20.6% of them felt it was easy. Only 2.9% thought Chinese was very hard. The results in WPS recorded a different set of responses, where 41% of the 100 participants felt Chinese was hard and 13% regarded it as very hard. Compared with GCI, fewer students from WPS felt Chinese was easy, very easy, or partly difficult; instead, more students from WPS thought learning Chinese was hard or very hard.

At the same time, students were asked to rate their responses to the statement “I think Chinese is difficult to learn” by checking Strongly agree (SA), Agree (A), Uncertain (U), Disagree (D) or Strongly disagree (SD). Table 5 presents the responses from the participants at both schools.
Table 5. How do Students Feel about Learning Chinese?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>“I think Chinese is difficult to learn”</th>
<th>SA</th>
<th>A</th>
<th>U</th>
<th>D</th>
<th>SD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Response rate</td>
<td>GCI</td>
<td>13.7%</td>
<td>27.5%</td>
<td>27.5%</td>
<td>17.6%</td>
<td>13.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>WPS</td>
<td>51%</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>16%</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The data in Table 5 show that the proportions of participants who chose Agree or Uncertain are the same at GCI, which were both 27.5%. However, more than half of the participants at WPS indicated Strongly agree and 25% indicated Agree. Only 4% of the participants expressed Strongly disagree at GCI compared with 13.7% at WPS.

These initial students’ responses were explored in depth during the focus group interviews. Asked if they thought Chinese was difficult to learn, students expressed a range of responses. Table 6 records the participants’ responses.

Table 6. Students’ Responses to “Do you think Chinese is difficult to learn?”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Codes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>GCI</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do you think Chinese is</td>
<td>It is easy because it is just a language and the teacher played lots</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>difficult to learn?</td>
<td>of fun games.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>It is not hard if you practice it every day on LP.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>It is not that hard but it is not easy.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>It is hard because you spend lots of time trying to pronounce it</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>in the right way and many sounds are too similar and it is too</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>different from English, especially the tones and characters.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>WPS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>It is partly difficult.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>It is hard because speaking Chinese is like singing (tone difficulties).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>It is hard because it is too different from English and the Chinese</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>symbols are too hard to write.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>It is hard because there are too many things to remember and it</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>takes ages to manage.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 6 illustrates that participants in both schools felt Chinese was hard to pronounce, and the main reasons cited were that “it is too different from learning English” and “it takes a long
time to manage the tones and characters”. At GCI, a few participants expressed that they did not feel it was difficult to learn Chinese due to the teacher’s interesting teaching method and the Chinese learning program (Language Perfect) they were using. Participants at WPS felt Chinese learning was either partly difficult or difficult. During the interview, a WPS student indicated:

*Chinese is so hard for me. In English we have 26 letters and you just need to remember the letters, the words. But Chinese has too many things, the pinyin, for example, even have a little dot on the top, I don’t know what that dot is but I know I shall never manage every dot ... My teacher said it is the tones, it is so different, we never heard of that before ... and the symbols, so hard to draw them, even you can draw them, you cannot remember them, even you can remember it now, tomorrow I bet you will forget it ...*

As reflected in the above data, most students from both GCI and WPS felt Chinese was difficult to learn, and students mentioned that one of the reasons for that is “It is too different from English”. As a second language, Chinese has some special aspects that English does not have, such as tone marks and characters which are like pictures. Also, its grammar is quite different from that in English. The following section presents data on aspects of Chinese language that students considered the most difficult and why.

**Students’ attitudes towards learning tones and characters**

To identify the most difficult aspect of learning Chinese, participants were asked to choose one aspect from pinyin, characters, grammar, and tones. During data collection, students answered the questionnaire step by step under the teacher’s guidance, and when it came to this question, many children asked if they could tick more than one option, which indicated that they might feel that there are several aspects in Chinese which are difficult to learn. After being given the instruction that they needed to tick only one item, students gave their answers on the questionnaire; Table 7 shows the responses from the participants.
Table 7. Students’ Responses to “What is the most difficult aspect in Chinese do you feel?”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Which aspect do you think is the most difficult to learn?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Pinyin</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rate (GCI)</td>
<td>5.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rate (WPS)</td>
<td>7.0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As shown in Table 7, the percentages of students who found characters difficult are 64.7% and 60% at GCI and WPS respectively. At the same time, 14.7% of the students at GCI and 20% of the students at WPS thought tones was the most difficult aspect. By contrast, the percentages of students rating pinyin as the most difficult were only 5.9% and 7%, respectively. To explore why most students at GCI felt characters and tones were difficult, this issue was explored during the focus group interviews. A boy who found tones are difficult said:

_Compared to learning Chinese characters I think tones are hard. Because if you cannot remember how to do the characters correctly, or, if you write part of the character wrong, people can still guess your meaning according to what you write. But tones are different, once you pronounce a word wrong, I mean, the wrong tones, the whole meaning will change, so I think leaning tones is more stressful._

This view was shared by other participants during the interview. As there are no tone changes in English, most students felt this aspect was hard to manage in Chinese. During the survey, students were asked to indicate their responses to the statement “I feel it is difficult to manage the tones in speaking Chinese” on a scale from Strongly agree to Strongly disagree. Table 8 is a summary of their responses.

Table 8. Students’ Views on Managing the Tones in Chinese
In relation to learning Chinese tones, 29.4% of the participants at GCI agreed that they felt it was difficult to manage the tones when they speak Chinese, and at WPS, almost half of the students (45%) strongly agreed that they felt tones are difficult to learn.

For this issue, participants shared their thoughts during the focus group interviews, where they commented that characters and tones are the most difficult aspects in Chinese. Students also talked about the possible reasons leading to it, and these are shown in Table 9.

Table 9. The Most Difficult Aspects in Learning Chinese and the Reasons

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Codes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>**Which aspect do you think is the most difficult to learn? **</td>
<td>GCI</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Why?</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Characters – because there are too much strokes, easy to forget, complicated, hard to write them in the correct stroke order.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Characters – Hard but interesting, willing to be challenged by them.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tones – hard to manage because it is different from English, too many similar sounds, the meaning changes when the tones are changed, hard to memorize the tone for each character.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 9 shows students’ responses concerning which aspects they think are the most difficult to learn. The data from both schools show that the most difficult parts in learning Chinese are characters and tones. The reasons listed by the children were similar at the two schools: “learning characters are too complicated and time-consuming” and “there are too many characters
under the same pronunciation”. Students also felt tones were difficult, and this was mainly because students considered Chinese very different from their first language, which has no tone differences. Also, at GCI, students mentioned that they liked to be challenged by those difficulties. This can also be ascertained from their responses in the questionnaires (see Table 10). From Table 10, it can be seen that the number of students who strongly agreed that they were interested in learning characters (27.5%) is more than those who gave other responses.

Table 10. Students’ Interest in Learning to Write Chinese Characters

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>“I am interested in learning to write Chinese characters”.</th>
<th>SA</th>
<th>A</th>
<th>U</th>
<th>D</th>
<th>SD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>GCI</td>
<td>Percent</td>
<td>27.5%</td>
<td>19.6%</td>
<td>19.6%</td>
<td>17.6%</td>
<td>15.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Frequency</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Overall, from the above responses, it is evident that tones and characters were regarded as the most difficult aspects in learning Chinese. However, some students were interested in learning these difficult aspects of the language. Besides managing these two aspects in Chinese, students reported other difficulties during their learning, such as the difficulties they come across when they do their homework outside school without guidance from teachers. The following findings present students’ views on dealing with these difficulties.
Students’ views on dealing with these difficulties and language challenges

Students’ attitudes towards the difficulties of learning Chinese language varied, and was reflected in issues related to solving problems in and out of class. In the questionnaire, students were asked to indicate their level of agreement with the statement, “I can complete my Chinese homework on time”. Table 11 shows their responses.

Table 11. Students’ Responses to Whether they can Complete their Chinese Homework on Time

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>SA</th>
<th>A</th>
<th>U</th>
<th>D</th>
<th>SD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Rate</td>
<td>GCI</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>23%</td>
<td>31%</td>
<td>16%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WPS</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>59%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 11 indicates that GCI responses were fairly distributed across response categories with around one third of students unsure as to whether they could complete their homework on time. This is in contrast to students at WPS, where 59% of the participants strongly disagreed that they could finish their homework on time. Reflecting the general opinions provided by students during the focus group interviews, a WPS student said:

Normally we don’t have Chinese homework. Last time our teacher gave us a task to do after school, to prepare a PowerPoint about ourselves in Chinese. She asked us to type Chinese characters in the PPT and present it in front of the class next week. It was so difficult, we didn’t even know how to write characters and we couldn’t do anything to it. So I didn’t do it at all.

Table 12 presents the data from the focus group interview. GCI students had homework frequently and the teacher and their parents supervised them, but there were students who could not always finish it due to the large amount of homework from other subjects and other learning activities. However, at WPS, students presented a contrasting view about the homework that was
set. They reported that homework was seldom given and, when it was set, students tended to spend less time completing it. Moreover, because it was focused generally on completing assessment items, students tended to find it difficult to complete without the guidance of the teacher.

Table 12. Students’ Responses to Whether they can Finish their Homework on Time and the Reasons

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Codes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Can you finish your homework on time? Why?</td>
<td>GCI: Not always, because there are too many learning activities after school, too much homework from other subjects. Yes, because my parents will check it each time and the teacher can receive the homework report automatically from LP and will talk to those who cannot finish it. Always trying to make it.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

During the interview with the GCI teacher, the teacher noted the data from the questionnaire showing that 31% of the GCI boys were uncertain about whether they could complete their homework on time. The teacher responded:

*I used to talk with our Year 5 coordinator about a boy’s homework, and she told me both the boy and his parents felt the homework was a little difficult as the boy’s Chinese level is still very basic. Later I assigned a different homework for him, an easy one, and he could complete it on time! Our school’s music and sports programs are very big and many boys need to do sports training and music training after school. I think that is why they felt they were uncertain about whether they could finish the homework or not.*

According to the above GCI teacher’s statement, two reasons were mentioned for the students’ not being able to finish the homework: some students found the homework was too hard, and there were competing priorities such after-school sports and music.
In order to know more about the homework completion in both schools, the teachers were interviewed about it, and the answers are recorded in Table 13.

Table 13. The Teachers’ Views on their Students’ Homework Completion Issue

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Codes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>GCI Teacher</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Can your students finish the homework on time? Why?</td>
<td>Most of them can – they are usually given 1 week’s time to complete the homework on LP. Many parents supervise them doing the homework and keep in touch with the teacher. The homework is fun as it is on LP program; the system will tell them whether their answer is right or wrong. They can learn while doing it. There are those who never do the homework due to their low level and reluctance of doing it.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 13 shows a key difference between the two schools as reported by the Chinese teachers. At GCI, homework was done on LP (an online program) and the answers from students could be checked automatically. Also, parents were involved supervising the children and communicating with the teacher. At WPS, students did not have online Chinese programs and they seldom had homework. The teachers reported that students found it hard to solve problems at home by themselves and some of them were not interested.

Students’ attitudes towards solving Chinese language problems varied between the schools. Table 14 presents the data for the statement “I try hard to solve Chinese language problems that I come across during my study”.

Table 14. Do Students Try Hard to Solve the Problems they Come Across?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Codes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>“I try hard to solve Chinese language problems that I come across during my study”.</td>
<td>SA/A</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 14 shows a big difference between children in the two schools regarding their attitudes of solving problems they come across during learning Chinese. Almost half of the participants disagreed that they try hard to solve Chinese language problems. At GCI, nearly 60% of students reported that they either agreed or strongly agreed with the statement, “I try hard to solve Chinese language problems that I come across during my study”. By contrast, 62% of students from WPS reported that they either disagreed or strongly disagreed with the statement. During focus group interviews, students were asked to elaborate concerning what they would do when they came across problems during the learning process. Students’ answers are summarized in Table 15.

Table 15. How Students Solve Chinese Problems during the Learning Process

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Codes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>What will you do when you come across difficulties?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GCI</td>
<td>WPS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ask a teacher.</td>
<td>Ask a teacher.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Google Translate.</td>
<td>Use Google Translate.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LP system.</td>
<td>Leave it if there is no way to solve it.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ask a schoolmate who has Chinese background.</td>
<td>Ask someone beside me.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ask an adult (parents) who knows Chinese.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

From Table 15, it is evident that GCI students mentioned a wider range of solutions they used than WPS students. Solutions among GCI students were “ask a teacher”, “use Google Translate”, “check Language Perfect system”, and “ask a schoolmate or an adult who knows Chinese”. Besides “ask a teacher or someone else” and “use Google Translate”, students at WPS also mentioned that they would “leave the problem if there is no way to solve it”.

51
As is shown in the above data, not all students were keen to solve problems they came across during the Chinese learning process. However, Chinese learning is not restricted to learning the language itself, but includes learning the Chinese culture as well. Students’ attitudes towards learning Chinese culture are more positive than learning the complicated language, and this will be described in the following findings. With respect to homework, students in each school had different types of homework. For instance, GCI students did homework on the LP system, which provided students with rich resources to learn by themselves. In WPS school no such system was provided and students found homework difficult to do without teacher support. However, students from both schools generally found that Chinese was not easy to study when the teacher was not present. Chinese culture is an essential part in learning the Chinese language due to the reason that learning a language cannot be separated from learning its culture (Berghom, 2009). Students showed interest in learning about Chinese culture, which is reflected in both the survey and the focus group interviews for both schools. Tables 16, 17, and 18 present the level of interest in these aspects and their reasons.

Table 16. Students’ Interest in Learning Chinese Culture

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>SA</th>
<th>A</th>
<th>U</th>
<th>D</th>
<th>SD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>“I am interested in learning about Chinese culture”</td>
<td>35.3%</td>
<td>24.5%</td>
<td>19.6%</td>
<td>7.8%</td>
<td>12.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rate GCI</td>
<td>59.8%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rate WPS</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>34%</td>
<td>24%</td>
<td>16%</td>
<td>16%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>44%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 17. Students’ Interest in Making Friends with Chinese People

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>SA</th>
<th>A</th>
<th>U</th>
<th>D</th>
<th>SD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>“I like making friends with Chinese people”</td>
<td>26.5%</td>
<td>30.4%</td>
<td>32.4%</td>
<td>6.9%</td>
<td>3.9%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Focusing on students’ responses on their interest in learning about Chinese culture, 35.3% of the participants at GCI strongly agreed that they were interested in learning Chinese culture, and 34% of WPS students agreed with the statement.

Turning to the data concerning making friends with Chinese people, as can be seen from Table 17, 32.4% of the participants at GCI were uncertain about it, and 26.5% of them strongly agreed with it. Also, 30.4% of the students agreed with it. Similarly with GCI, the proportion of students at WPS who were uncertain was 27%, which is the same as the percentage of students who strongly agreed with the statement. The percentage of students who chose strongly agree at GCI is just 0.5% less than that at WPS (26.5%).

During the interviews, students expressed their interest in making friends with Chinese people, and one of the reasons is that they enjoy learning a culture that is different from their own. As recorded in Table 18, other reasons leading to their interest in making friends with Chinese

Table 18. *Why Students are Interested in Making Friends with Chinese People*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Codes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Do you like to make friends with Chinese people? Why?</strong></td>
<td><strong>GCI</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes.</td>
<td>Yes.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reasons:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• It is fun to explore a different culture.</td>
<td>• They are friendly.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• They can offer help in our Chinese learning.</td>
<td>• We can exchange the knowledge of the language and culture.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Chinese people are very friendly.</td>
<td>• We can practise speaking Chinese with them.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
people was that they perceived Chinese people as very friendly and they believed Chinese friends could help their learning of Chinese.

One GCI student indicated:

*We like learning Chinese culture because it is so different from our culture. I like the Chinese food and I would like to explore how they made it. And, at the beginning of the year, we learned how to make a paper dragon and Chinese fan, and, we like the dragon story.*

At the same time, students expressed their interest in exploring Chinese culture in a real context. Students’ interest in travelling to China is shown in Table 19, and their interest in learning Chinese is shown in Table 20.

**Table 19. Students’ Interest in Travelling to China**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>“I would like to travel to China”.</th>
<th>SA</th>
<th>A</th>
<th>U</th>
<th>D</th>
<th>SD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Rate</td>
<td>GCI</td>
<td>46%</td>
<td>23%</td>
<td>16%</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>WPS</td>
<td>47%</td>
<td>21%</td>
<td>16%</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

From the data presented in Table 19, it appears that a majority of students from both schools were interested in traveling to China: 69% of the participants at GCI and 68% of the students at WPS either strongly agreed or agreed that they would like to travel to China. The percentage of students who indicated agreement with it are 23% a(GCI) and 21% (WPS) respectively.

While learning about Chinese is interesting for students and provides motivation, the language itself is still the most important part in learning Chinese. The following findings are about students’ interest in learning Chinese language.
**Students’ interest in learning Chinese language**

In the questionnaire, students were asked about how interested they were in learning Chinese. They were given five answers from which to choose: very interested, interested, a little/somewhat interested, not interested, or not interested at all. Table 20 shows the responses of participants from the two schools.

Table 20. *Students’ Interest in Learning Chinese*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>“How interested are you in learning Chinese?”</th>
<th>Very interested</th>
<th>Interested</th>
<th>A little/somewhat interested</th>
<th>Not interested</th>
<th>Not interested at all</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Rate</td>
<td>GCI</td>
<td>25.5%</td>
<td>22.5%</td>
<td>31.4%</td>
<td>7.8%</td>
<td>12.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>WPS</td>
<td>6.0%</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>61%</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

From Table 20 it can be seen that at GCI, most students were interested in learning Chinese: only 7.8% of them were not interested and 12.7% of them were not interested at all. For the remainder, 25.5% indicated they were very interested, and 22.5% were interested. There were 31.4% of the students who felt that they were a little or somewhat interested in learning the language. At WPS, more than half (61%) of the participants indicated that they were a little or somewhat interested, and 12% ticked “interested”. Only 6% of them indicated they were very interested in it.

During the focus group interviews, students expressed their views concerning their interest in learning Chinese, and the reasons leading to this interest were also explored. Participants shared their different ideas on this issue, and the results from the two schools were found to be significantly different, as summarized in Table 21.

Table 21. *Students’ Interest in Learning Chinese and the Reasons for their Responses*
Table 21 shows the reasons students gave for their interest (or lack thereof) in learning Chinese. When asked this question (Are you interested in learning Chinese?) during the interviews at GCI, students answered “Yes!” loudly, without any hesitation. No one in the focus groups at GCI said they did not like learning Chinese. When asked about the reasons why they liked learning Chinese, students mentioned that their Chinese lessons had lots of fun, and that was the main reason leading to their interest. One student mentioned that they enjoyed the online games used in class. Others emphasized that the diverse Chinese learning materials made their Chinese learning interesting. One boy pointed to the flexibility afforded by the integration of technology for Chinese language learning, noting that he often did the online homework by using his iPad on the bus on the way home after school. In this focus group, there was a boy who travelled to Hong Kong, and he said Chinese people were so friendly and he found it an exciting experience to use simple Chinese words to greet them:

*I went to Hong Kong and say ‘ni hao’ to greet people on the street, and they seem to be so happy to hear it and some of them said ‘your Chinese is good’ or simply said ‘wow’, I was so excited and feeling cool to speak another language, so I like learning Chinese.*
As can be seen from Table 21, at WPS, besides expressing their interest in learning Chinese, there were a few students who mentioned that they were not motivated to learn it because they thought that Chinese was too difficult and sometimes boring. One student said she sometimes couldn’t understand why the in-class tasks were so difficult, and she usually forgot what she learned in the last lesson because they have only one Chinese lesson each week. She reported that the teacher gave her difficult assessment tasks and she did not have the confidence to complete them. As for those at WPS who reported they were interested in learning Chinese, they were very impressed with the Chinese culture lessons because they had the chance to experience traditional Chinese calligraphy, paper-cutting, paper folding, lion dance, and so on. Also, at WPS there are many children from Chinese families, and one participant said they were keen to learn to speak Chinese so that they could make friends with more Chinese people on campus.

As Chinese is offered to the secondary school as an elective course in both GCI and WPS, students were questioned about their wish to continue learning the language when they went to high school. In the questionnaire, students were asked to rate their feelings on the statement, “I would like to continue leaning Chinese in the next few years”, and their response rates are presented in Table 22, from Strongly agree (SA) to Strongly disagree (SD).
Table 22. Students’ Interest in Continuing Learning Chinese in the Next Few Years

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>“I would like to continue learning Chinese in the next few years”</th>
<th>SA</th>
<th>A</th>
<th>U</th>
<th>D</th>
<th>SD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Rate</td>
<td>GCI</td>
<td>28.4%</td>
<td>18.6%</td>
<td>19.6%</td>
<td>15.7%</td>
<td>17.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>47%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>33.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>WPS</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>44%</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>23%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>33%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As can be seen from Table 22, at GCI, 28.4% of the participants strongly agreed that they would like to continue learning Chinese in the next few years. At WPS, most of the participants (44%) were not sure about whether they would like to continue learning Chinese in the next few years. There were 12% of students who strongly agreed that they would like to continue it, which was 16.4% less than at GCI. Also, at WPS, the number of students who did not feel like continuing learning Chinese (33%) was more than that of students who would like to continue (23%).

Therefore, although the GCI participants expressed their great interest of learning Chinese during the focus group interviews, there were still 15.7% who disagreed and 17.6% who strongly disagreed with the statement.

Student focus group interviews explored this issue in order to determine why students were either wanting or not wanting to continue with Chinese. Their responses are summarized in Table 23.
Table 23. Students’ Attitudes Towards Continuing to Learn Chinese in the Next Few Years

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Codes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Would you like to continue learning Chinese during the next few years? Why?</td>
<td>GCI</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes.</td>
<td>Reasons:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• We have already got the basic knowledge, so would like to learn it in depth.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• It is helpful for us to do business with advanced vocabulary and expressions in Chinese.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• It is helpful when travelling to China.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No.</td>
<td>Reasons:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Maybe experience another second language.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• I may travel to France one day, so learning a bit French may be helpful.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes.</td>
<td>Reasons:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• It is helpful to use more vocabulary to talk with Chinese people.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• We will have China Trip in secondary school if learn Chinese.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No.</td>
<td>Reason:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Didn’t form a good basis in primary school, so do not want to continue – the more, the harder.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

From Table 23, it can be seen that the reasons for students’ wishing to continue are that Chinese is helpful with their future travelling and business, while for those who did not want to continue, the reasons vary. In contrast to the GCI primary campus, the senior campus of GCI offers both French and Chinese from Year 7 to Year 12, and students can choose one of these languages. A boy from GCI said his brother was learning French as an elective second language at the senior school because their family may travel to France one day, and learning some basic French would be helpful. However he emphasized that it did not mean that he was not interested in learning Chinese. Another boy said he wanted to experience learning French because it is a new language for him and he would like to explore as many different languages as he can.

At WPS, there were also a few participants in the focus groups who mentioned that they did not want to continue. One participant said it was because he did not form a good foundation.
of Chinese at primary school, and continuing learning it would mean he had to make up knowledge which should have been learnt at primary campus; that would take a long time and involve considerable difficulty.

As a whole, students’ attitudes towards learning Chinese varied, with different reasons within the two schools. The data from the two schools also shows a few discrepancies, with more students from GCI being greatly interested in learning the language and fewer participants from WPS feeling so. The following section presents an analysis of these data about students’ language attitudes towards learning Chinese.

**Chinese is difficult, but many children are willing to be challenged**

*I find Chinese difficult, because it is different from English; I find Chinese interesting, also because it is different from English.* (GCI student)

As an Asian language that has experienced thousands of years’ transmission from generation to generation, Chinese differs from English in many ways (Chan, 2013). Besides using different and complicated strokes to write words, Chinese has a unique component that makes it different from English: the tone changes. As a teacher of Chinese, I saw many students from GCI and WPS struggling with the tone changes while trying to pronounce a Chinese word, and not many of them were able to manage tones accurately. According to the findings, most children at GCI considered learning Chinese was “partly difficult” and most children at WPS felt learning Chinese was “hard”. The main reason for this result as noted by the students is that Chinese has too many differences from English (Wan, 2001). For primary school children who are beginning learners of the Chinese language, Chinese is both new and complicated, and it is quite challenging for them to handle the differences from English since some of them do not even have a good proficiency of using their first language (Hoosain, 1992). The teacher from GCI said:
In our school, we don’t have Chinese offered to Grade 1 to Grade 4 because our principal said they are still too young to learn a second language, and the school wants them to strengthen their English ability before coming to know a second language. For me, I think even some Grade 5 children have low English ability, let alone asking them to manage such a different language. It is normal that they felt (it was) hard.

Of all the aspects in Chinese, students find tones and characters are the most difficult parts to manage (Howell, Jiang, Peng, & Lu, 2012). During the focus group interviews, many students mentioned that they could easily notice that there are tone changes in Chinese speaking, but they found it hard to tell the differences. The difficulty in mastering tones is the main reason why students find they are not confident in speaking Chinese, and many students described the tone changes as “something like singing”.

To help the children memorize the four tones in Chinese, the GCI teacher compared the tones with English by telling the students an interesting story:

Tom went to see a dentist, and the dentist said: “open your mouth.”
Tom said “Ahh...” (The “Ahh” is similar to the first tone in Chinese - plain tone)
The dentist checked Tom’s teeth and said “one of the teeth is broken, I need to pull it out!”
Tom was surprised and said: “What??” (The “what??” is similar to the Chinese second tone - rising tone)
The dentist said: “You can think about it.”
Tom said: “Well...” (The “well” is similar to the Chinese third tone - falling and rising tone)
At last Tom made a decision and said: “No!!” (The “No” is similar to the Chinese fourth tone - falling tone).

This story was widely known among students, and it was helpful for them to correct their tone mistakes when speaking Chinese, but it did not mean that student found tones easy to learn. One participant said: “if the tones are changed during the speaking, the meaning of the word can
be changed”, and students found it stressful to learn the tones. During the classroom observation at GCI, the teacher gave the students a sentence to read:

“mā ma qí mā, mā màn, mā ma mā mà.”

This sentence means “Mum was riding a horse, the horse was slow, and mum scolded the horse”. In this sentence, “mum”, “horse” and “scold” all have the “ma” sound but with different tones, and students struggled for a long time trying to pronounce it; not many students managed to do so. This difficulty students experience with tones was reflected in the following statement from the Chinese teacher at WPS:

*Tones are not included in our assessment because it is too hard for young learners to pronounce accurately; we teach the children tones but we told them not to worry too much about it, just do what they can ... but, if a student can pronounce a Chinese word with accurate tones, or with partly accurate tones, I would be quite happy to see it as it means they must have spent lots of time on it.*

Since there are no tone changes in English, tones is a new element for Chinese (as an L2) beginning learners whose first language is English. In addition to the problem of tones, Chinese characters are another aspect that children find hard to learn due to their complicated structure. As primary school children, the participants found it hard to manage something whose structure was very different from English. Combined with pinyin, characters, and tone marks, a Chinese word has more components than English, and to write those characters, students need to follow the exact stroke order. The Chinese teachers at both schools noted in different ways the difficulties students have with reproducing Chinese characters. The WPS teacher indicated:
I do not ask my students to write the Chinese characters with right stroke orders, my aim is to let them know the meaning of the Chinese characters when they see them.

The GCI teacher said similar words:

It’s gonna take ages for them to remember how to write the characters, I don’t expect them to write characters, but I expect them to know the meaning of some simple ones. Usually they wrote pinyin instead of characters when writing sentences, and “character writing” is not included in the assessments.

In both GCI and WPS, character writing was not part of the assessment since it posed too many difficulties for young children. I spent a large amount of time learning to write the Chinese characters when studying Chinese. I spent time copying, memorizing, comparing one character with other similar ones, but mistakes in writing often happened.

During the student interviews, I asked the children: “Chinese tones and characters are so difficult as you described, do you still want to learn it?” The participants answered “Yes!” loudly, without any hesitation except that a few participants from WPS said “Maybe”. I observed students’ attitudes and behaviours when they were learning Chinese tones and characters, and found that they were interested to explore these two difficult parts. Taking learning characters as an example, students were told that Chinese characters are like pictures, and each word originates from an object. At GCI, the teacher wrote down some characters and asked the children to guess the meaning, and students were very excited to share their ideas. The teacher wrote “田” and asked them the meaning; students gave different answers including “window”, “mouth” and even “chocolate bar”. When the teacher told them “田” means “farm” and drew some grass in the word, the students were so excited to find the connection between the pictures and Chinese words, and some of them use the phrase “draw a Chinese character” instead of “write a Chinese character”.

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Students were willing to be challenged by the difficulties, which can be seen in their learning methods and learning behaviours. At GCI, some children made tone cards and character cards to assist their learning. The students used cards of four colours, and divided the Chinese words into four groups according to their tones; once they learnt a word, they would put the word in the correct “group”. Those colours reminded them of the correct pronunciation. For characters, they had the same type of learning cards which were divided into several groups according to the words’ structures. Student drew pictures of the word on that card and compared the pictures with the Chinese characters. The children from WPS did not have this learning card, but they were exploring possible methods to overcome the difficulties of learning tones and characters. During the interview, a Grade 5 girl said:

I ask my Chinese friend in my class to help me to read the tones correctly, in our class, like Amy, Tim ... they can speak Chinese and they are so nice and want to help us.

Another participant agreed, stating:

We can also use Google to get right pronunciation, you type the word in, and press the little speaker at the right corner, and you can hear the right sound.

In contrast to Western languages, the Chinese language is not composed of letters but strokes, which makes students feel they are “hard to manage and remember” (Lo & Hue, 2008). Students found it interesting to compare the Chinese words with their original pictures. During the process, they used their imagination to connect the characters with a vivid picture, and they tried different learning methods to overcome the difficulties and explore the differences between English and Chinese although they felt Chinese was difficult to learn. As one participant from
GCI indicated: “I find Chinese difficult, because it is different from English; I find Chinese interesting, also because it is different from English”.

While students found the Chinese language difficult to learn, learning Chinese culture was appealing, and students in both GCI and WPS showed great interest in learning about Chinese culture. In the next section, students’ attitudes and behaviours in learning about Chinese culture are discussed.

**Students are interested in exploring a different culture**

Second language learning cannot be separated from learning its culture, and learning Chinese is no exception (Tran, 2010). As an Asian language, the Chinese language and its culture differ from English and Western culture in many ways (Hoosain, 1992). In primary schools, students learn Chinese culture such as Chinese festivals, food, clothing, history, and manners. As students are curious about what a different culture is like, they often find it interesting to learn and experience the Chinese way of life and they enjoy exploring the stories behind aspects of Chinese culture.

As this chapter has shown, part of the reason that students like to make friends with Chinese people is to exchange cultural knowledge with them. Unlike learning the Chinese language, learning about the culture is much easier for primary school students because there is less emphasis on reading and writing, and more on practice (Zhu, 2012). As one participant from WPS said: “We hope to have culture lessons every week because it has so much fun, we can make Chinese lanterns, play games and try some Chinese food instead of reading the words and quizzes.

In the course of the focus group interviews, students noted that there were many interesting activities to do when learning about Chinese culture. They reported that usually the teacher would give them opportunities to experience the culture, such as doing traditional paper-cutting or designing a mooncake for Chinese Mid-Autumn Festival. As the data collection at GCI was done in June, students were learning about the dragon boat festival which is celebrated by Chinese
people every year in May of the lunar calendar. I observed how students were learning Chinese culture in one lesson, and the following are the notes taken during classroom observation:

1) The teacher showed students a video about the background of Dragon Boat Festival.
2) The teacher taught the students to read “duan wu jie” (dragon boast festival) and “zong zi” (rice dumpling) and practised the two words by playing a game.
3) Students made a paper boat.
4) The teacher prepared rice dumplings and put them on small plates for the children to taste.

For many of the students, a rice dumpling was something that they had never heard of previously. Wrapped with bamboo leaves, rice dumplings are made to remember a very famous Chinese writer, Quyuan. Students were curious about the story behind the rice dumplings and they showed great interest during the lesson. One boy said to me: “I though rice dumplings are a type of Chinese traditional dumpling, but when I saw it, it was so different from my imagination, at first I even didn’t know that I should peel off the bamboo before eating it, it is so interesting to know something special.”

At WPS, students had culture lessons focusing on Chinese New Year, Chinese food, and Chinese kites, and there were many practical activities in these culture lessons such as making a kite, decorating a kitek and making a Chinese lantern. The WPS teacher put all students’ lanterns and kites on the wall of the Chinese classroom to make the learning environment look “real”, and students felt excited to see their work hanging in the classroom. The teacher noted: “I try to give them as many culture lessons as I can. The school expects us to make the Chinese lessons interesting, and culture lessons are what stimulate students’ interest in learning the language because instead of doing reading and writing, they are more into making Chinese crafts and doing something different.”

Learning the culture can help students understand the corresponding language better (Friedman, 1997). Also, learning Chinese culture can bring a lot of enjoyment for students and
motivation for learning the language. To give students more chance to be exposed to Chinese culture, schools support students’ learning in many ways. At GCI, the boys have an excursion to Chinese temples and Chinese restaurants every year while at WPS, the school holds Chinese clubs sometimes on Friday afternoon for children to learn more about Chinese culture from the teachers. As the GCI teacher indicated in the interview:

_The boys are so excited in the morning on the excursion day, they couldn’t stop talking on the way and they felt excited to sit in a Chinese restaurant and use chopsticks to grab food. They tried to tell the names of the food in Chinese and speak with the waitress in Chinese ... they might think it is funny to test whether the waitress could understand their non-standard Chinese speaking ... when they arrived at the temple, they experienced the Chinese manner of serving the tea and started to know the traditional Chinese manner in a family or community. And, they learned to use brush to write characters in the temple and learned a few Chinese words._

Students’ interest in learning Chinese culture was also reflected in their attitudes towards making friends with Chinese people. At WPS there are many children from Chinese families, and one of the reasons that the WPS students were interested in making friends with them is that they wanted to learn more about Chinese culture from them. Both GCI children and WPS children were interested in making friends with Chinese people in or outside the schools, so that they could come to know more about the different culture and perhaps have more opportunities to experience the culture in a realistic context.

While learning Chinese culture gave the children lots of opportunities to have fun, learning the language was different. Students’ responses to whether they are interested in the Chinese language varied between the two schools, and their interest tended to influence their desire to continue learning Chinese in the next few years.
The desire to continue learning Chinese after primary school education

When students were asked about whether they wished to continue learning Chinese in the next few years, the responses varied between the two schools, with most students from WPS expressing that they were uncertain about it and more children at GCI indicated they wished to continue learning Chinese.

At primary school level, students’ understanding about the Chinese language is still at a basic level due to their lack of vocabulary and reading (Wan, 2001). With only one or two years’ learning experience, the children do not get the chance to explore the use of the language in literature or daily communications. Therefore, at this age, they do not have enough understanding about how the language works and how it conveys meanings in different ways (Zhu, 2012).

In their focus group interview, one WPS student who wished to continue learning Chinese in secondary years told me: “When we go to secondary school, we will have the chance to travel to China with our school, so I want to continue learning it after Year 6.” Another participant said: “I want to continue because I can make more friends with Chinese people and learning more about Chinese culture.”

At this level, the reasons students generally gave for wanting to continue exploring the language were “travelling”, “making friends”, or “learning about culture”. Coming from a business family, one participant from GCI indicated that the reason he wished to explore the Chinese language in the next few years was that Chinese may help him to do business with Chinese people in the future. The boy mentioned that his father works in an international company and he does business with Chinese people.

At the same time, there were a few students who did not want to continue learning Chinese. A boy from GCI said:
I do not wish to continue, because I want to learn French when I go to the secondary school and be able to speak more foreign languages.

However, the participants from WPS gave different reasons for not wanting to continue learning Chinese. Compared to the responses given by the GCI boys, the WPS students were more critical concerning the Chinese language and the Chinese lessons. During the interviews, a girl said that she thought Chinese was too difficult, and she did not want to study it again in her secondary school. Another girl stated that she felt the Chinese lessons were a little boring, and that was why she did not wish to continue.

At this age level, students’ comments relating to their desire to continue learning Chinese still contained some personal and emotional elements, such as “My father hopes me to continue learning Chinese” or “The Chinese lessons are so boring”, and their different attitudes towards learning the language are affected by various reasons. In the next section, the possible factors that affect their language attitudes will be discussed.

**The factors that affect students' language attitudes**

**The role of school and parents in Chinese teaching and learning**

The factors that affect students’ attitudes towards language learning can be multiple, and according to the literature, school is one of the factors that influences students’ interests in learning a second language. Chen (2014) mentioned that both schools and parents play important roles in supporting and motivating students’ language learning. During data collection for this research project, the influences from both schools and parents were investigated in the interviews.

During the interviews, teachers at both schools were asked about how their schools influence their LOTE programs, and the Table 24 is a summary of the teachers’ responses.
Table 24. Teachers’ Descriptions of the Schools’ LOTE Program and Schools’ Attitudes Towards It

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Codes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Can you introduce your school’s LOTE program?</strong></td>
<td>• Chinese is a compulsory LOTE in Primary campus (Year 5 &amp; 6).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• The teacher teaches 8 classes each week (including 2 gifted and talented classes).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Students have 2 Chinese lessons each week (30 mins + 45 mins).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Year 6 and Year 5 students learn different things according to the Australian curriculum.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• The school has LOTE exploration week each term.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Students participate in many Chinese competition can bring them 10 points to add to their academic award points.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• The school paid for LP to support students’ language learning.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• The school presents the student of the week (SOTW) at assembly, including Chinese class SOTW.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• The school has a China Trip offered to Primary LOTE students.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Class teachers well support the Chinese teacher’s behaviour management in class.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• The school offers the teacher “LOTE curriculum planning day” and “curriculum validation” day.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• The school has a sister school in Wuhan, China for language and culture exchange.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Does your school support the LOTE program?</strong></td>
<td>• Chinese is a compulsory LOTE in Primary campus (Prep – Year 6).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• The teacher teaches 24 classes each week.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Students have only 1 Chinese lesson each week (1 hour).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Year 5 and Year 6 learn the same thing.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• The Chinese teacher has to cover some class teachers’ work (mark the roll/go to classroom to collect students before each lesson).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• The school primary campus does not have online Chinese learning programs.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Some Chinese teachers leave frequently and school has many replacement Chinese teachers.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Students explore the culture in class only.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 24 summarizes the teachers’ descriptions about their schools’ LOTE program and how their schools influence their Chinese teaching and students’ Chinese learning. As can be seen, the teacher from GCI described the many ways the school supported the Chinese program while the teacher from WPS expressed both positive and negative influences at the school level. At GCI primary campus, Chinese is offered to Year 5 and Year 6, and the Chinese teacher taught eight classes in total, including two gifted and talented classes. Compared to GCI, WPS primary campus
offers Chinese to more year levels (Prep to Year 6), and the teacher had a heavy workload with 24 classes each week.

During the interview, the WPS teacher said she did not have much non-contact time to plan lessons: sometimes she had two playground duties to do each day during lunch time, and because of the lack of planning time, her Year 4, Year 5, and Year 6 students were learning the same contents and using the same lesson plans. Students from WPS had only one Chinese lesson each week and each lesson was 1 hour. According to the teacher’s description during the interview, the lesson usually was less than one hour because she had to walk to the students’ classrooms and collect them and take them to the LOTE room before each lesson and finish the lesson 5 minutes early, because she had to walk the students back to their classrooms and go to another classroom to collect another group. If the Chinese lesson was the first lesson of the day, she had to mark the roll before collecting the students, and that usually took more time. During the process, she also spent time on asking them to line up and settling them down. The teacher said most of her students’ class teachers were not so happy to supervise the children during their non-contact time, meaning that the Chinese teacher needed to cover all the work without additional backup through other lessons. She also mentioned that there was a high teacher turnover at the school and the school has many replacement teachers.

*I teach 24 classes; I see them once a week. But collecting them and walking them back really wasted lots of time. Sometimes when I walked them back to their classroom, their class teacher was not there, I don’t know where they went, but there is nobody in their classroom. Students were standing outside their classroom talking and running around while waiting for their teachers to come back … I cannot just leave them there, but you know, but I have another class to teach and I have to go to collect them and walk them to the LOTE room. You know my Grade 3? They have 30 minutes’ Chinese lesson each week, I spent 5 minutes to collect them, 5 minutes to mark the roll, and I have to finish the lesson 5 minutes early to ask*
them to line up and take them to their next lesson ... so how many minutes left for my teaching? Less than 15 minutes because I also need 5 minutes to settle them down when they arrive in my LOTE room ...

The situation at GCI was quite different. The teacher said her Year 5 and Year 6 curriculum were different and she planned different lessons according to students’ achievement levels. Usually she gave the gifted and talented group more advanced lessons to strengthen their ability and broaden their knowledge. Students had two Chinese lessons each week and the school paid for their “Language Perfect”, a very popular online language learning program through which students can do quizzes, homework, and assessments and compete with children of other schools in Language Perfect Championship competitions. The school gave the teachers enough time to plan lessons and even offered them a curriculum planning day and a curriculum validation day to plan and discuss their planning with other colleagues. According to the description of the GCI teacher, students’ class teachers were quite supportive of the Chinese LOTE program, and for some disruptive classes, their class teachers often assisted with behaviour management. Besides, GCI had a good system to motivate students’ Chinese learning by rewarding those who were selected with student of the week awards and rewarding those who attended the Chinese competitions in or outside the school. In addition, GCI offered students China trips and culture exchanges with their sister school in China.

Besides teachers, parents also play an important role in students’ learning processes, as noted above. During the interviews, the teachers were asked about their connection with the parents, and Table 25 shows the teachers’ responses about their communications with the parents.

Table 25. Teachers’ Communication with Parents

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<th>Theme</th>
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<td>GCI</td>
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As can be seen from Table 25, the teachers from both of the schools maintained contact with students’ parents either by email or face-to-face. The teacher from GCI had more contact with students’ parents about their children’s Chinese learning while at WPS the teacher had less contact with parents. According to the teacher’s description, at GCI, parents talked to the teachers frequently. As the homework was done through LP, students might come across IT problems such as submission, and the parents contacted the teacher once their sons came across such problems. Also, the GCI teacher said that before each year’s Chinese speech competitions, numerous parents came to school to see her and try to persuade the teacher to recommend their children to attend the speech competition, which was quite stressful as the rule of the speech competition is that each school can select only five students in each year level to compete with students from other schools. The GCI teacher explained the above problem as follows:

Too many parents came to see me and ask me why their sons are not selected to go to the competition. One mother even went to see the principal and complain about it. She said her son got an A last term and he should go to the competition, but you know, I have so many students who got A, and I can only select five of them. The parents always feel their children are the best. During that period, the first thing in the morning for me is to pray ... I pray, please, there are no more parents coming to school and asking about the selection ... I wanted to tell them that as a teacher, I think I have the right to select students, but I didn’t say it, I know the parents, they are so keen.
Some parents from GCI also talked to the Chinese teacher about finding private Chinese tutors after school, and some parents even asked the teacher to give their children some extra lessons during weekends. However, this was not the case at WPS, where the Chinese teacher sometimes had parents visiting her at school talking about their children’s report cards, especially when they found the grades were lower than previously. This happened occasionally, and according to the WPS teacher, as they did not give the children Chinese homework, parents seldom supervised their children’s learning Chinese at home; therefore, many parents did not have the awareness that “Chinese is an important subject”. While talking about the Queensland Chinese speech competition, the teacher mentioned that there were parents visiting her and enquiring about it, but what they asked most was the time and location of the competition as well as how to arrange their time on the competition day. As this was different from the situation at GCI, I asked the WPS teacher about selecting participants before the competition, and she told me that students were not very keen to participate in the competition. To select students, she had to encourage students by telling them every participant can get a certificate as a reward. However, each year, before the competition, there were students who withdrew for a variety of reasons. Compared to GCI where students and parents were keen, the students at WPS did not show much desire of exploring the language in depth.

The role of ICT in students’ language learning

During the surveys and interviews, the use of ICT was mentioned frequently in both schools. Students had great fun in using ICT and they expected the teachers to play online games with them every lesson. In both schools, an online game called “Kahoot” was so popular that students found it hard to resist, and at the same time, they learnt and remembered lots of vocabulary, sentences, and cultural knowledge from this game.
According to the classroom observation, the “Kahoot” game was expected at the beginning of each lesson. Students asked their teachers, “Can we play Kahoot?” almost every lesson. “Kahoot” is an online learning program where the teachers can create their quizzes online. The teachers are completely in control of the game by watching all students’ activity on the screen. Once the teacher opens a game, there will be a game pin created automatically, and students login by typing in the game pin. Once this has been done, all the students’ names (nicknames or group names) will appear on the teacher’s screen. Students’ laptop screens change automatically according to the teacher’s controlling, and they type or choose a correct answer for each question, which will appear on the teacher’s screen where everyone is able to see it. The “Kahoot” system can automatically tell everyone whether their answers are correct or incorrect and at the same time tell them their places among their classmates. The game is fun, competitive, and beneficial for learning. The GCI teacher indicated that:

I got to know the game during a Chinese language teachers’ conference, and when I first introduced the game to my students, they were so excited to experience it! When they saw their names appearing on the screen, they were so happy … also, some people used very naughty names to attract other students’ attention, and when those naughty names appeared on the screen, of course, everyone laughed loudly … and others will change their first names into naughty names as well! Yes, you know, you can imagine how challenging it was to manage their behaviour at that time … but they love it! They can remember many vocabulary from the games although it may be a little loud during the games …

To win the game, students had to be fast and accurate in answering the questions; therefore, they tried their best to memorize vocabulary and sentences before the game. The same benefit of playing was seen during the classroom observation at WPS. Students at WPS asked the same question when they walked into the LOTE room each time: “Can we play Kahoot?” One student said:
We really, really love Kahoot! We can learn something through playing and competing with our classmates and we can form groups and play the team mode. You know, the team mode allow us 5 second to have team talk before answering that question ... and ... yes, we sometimes quickly check our books to find the answer, and ... I guess, we learnt a lot ... er ... we learnt a lot by looking at the books and discussing the questions with our group members. Yes, it is cool.

In addition to “Kahoot”, the learning program LP was also mentioned frequently during the interviews at GCI. Different from “Kahoot”, LP is not a game but a very well organized online learning system. The teachers set homework on LP and set a submission date, and at the same time, students and their parents received an email regarding the contents of the homework and deadline of submission. According to my classroom observations, LP was the main practice tool students used at GCI. They practised the language on it by doing quizzes of reading, writing, and listening. Students’ answers could be checked by the system immediately, and they could not proceed to the next question until they corrected their answers. The teacher received a report after the submission date which told them all the students’ activities on LP, including each student’s percentage of completion and the questions that were answered correctly. Also, according to the teacher’s description, she could see each student’s progress online before submission and she could cheer them up online. In addition, as many schools have registered LP, the program arranges a World Championship competition each year, which gives students 10 days to compete with children from other schools online and get awards after it. Students at GCI showed great interest in practising their Chinese through LP. The GCI teacher indicated:

During the World Championship days, my students are crazily doing the LP and trying to win the award by getting more credits from answering the questions online. I give them some in-class time to do it and some of the children are addicted to it. They come to see me during lunch time and said “Can I stay here
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“... Once I logged in my LP before going to sleep at night and I saw so many of them online! I was so surprised that students were so crazily practising the language on it to win the prizes. Yes, this is a real success, and our school achieved a high score that time and we were ranked the 4th place among all Queensland schools who have Language Perfect, I was so happy ...

From the interview data, it is obvious to see that the use of ICT was popular among students and teachers, and it brought lots of fun to students at both schools. While ICT and games were welcomed by students, they could also be challenging for the teachers because of the associated behaviour management problems. As mentioned by the GCI teacher, when she first introduced “Kahoot” to students, they were too loud because of being curious and excited about the game. Behaviour management, to some extent, does affect the quality of teaching and learning. The WPS teacher indicated:

Behaviour management is quite challenging in our school ... Kahoot is popular, and we do it sometimes, but for other games, so hard ... they are too loud. I try to minimize the use of games, I don’t want to let the principal hear that students are yelling and running around the classroom ... And, the class teachers around us might complain if we are loud. But, without games, students feel the lessons are boring. It is hard to balance it. The school worries that the children are not interested in Chinese and ask us to make the lessons fun, but their behaviours ... Err ... only one or two games can be used, I mean, those quieter ones.

What the teacher said shows that at WPS, the teacher tried to make the lessons fun, but students’ behaviour was something that might affect the quality and effect of playing games, either online or other types of games. According to the classroom observation at WPS, while the teacher was explaining the instructions of online games, students were talking. After the online games began, they started to ask what the instruction was. Also, during classroom observation, I walked
around while students were doing online quizzes and online games, and I noticed that some students at the back were browsing other websites. While the teacher was busy supervising and leading students to do the online practices, those people sitting at the back might feel it was a good time to have some free activities online, and those websites they browsed could possibly contain complex information which might not be suitable for young children. Therefore, behaviour management is always an important factor that relates to the quality of teaching and learning.

The reasons for these differences between the two schools are not solely due to the many differences of organizing the LOTE programs, and these data are analysed in the following section.

**How schools, parents, and ICT affect students’ language attitudes**

*I am so glad that my school supports our LOTE program as well as my teaching – this contributes a lot to shape my students’ behaviours and attitudes.* (GCI Chinese teacher)

As can be seen from the results, students at the two schools had different attitudes towards learning Chinese, reflected in a range of learning behaviours. At the same time, students demonstrated different attitudes towards learning Chinese, caused by various factors which do not exist alone. The findings showed many differences between the two schools, including the school LOTE programs and the interactions between the teachers and the parents. The following analyses the findings concerning the role of schools and parents in affecting students’ attitudes and behaviours towards learning the Chinese language.

Studying in primary schools, the children are still at a young age and it is normal to see their lack of self-control (Reid & Morgan, 2012). Accordingly, at this age level (Grade 5 and Grade 6) most behaviours and attitudes to learning are still greatly influenced by the learning environment, including schools, parents, and peers (Sprenger, 2011). A child’s academic success
cannot be separated from the positive influence of the learning environment, and the supports from schools and parents are important (Lee, 2008).

From the above data, it is evident that the percentage of students at GCI who were interested in learning Chinese was significantly greater than at WPS; at the same time, more children at GCI than at WPS noted that they put efforts into solving Chinese problems that they came across. In addition, at the beginning of the survey, students were asked to rate their feeling on how difficult Chinese learning is. It is evident from the results that the percentage of WPS students who found Chinese difficult was greater than at GCI. Similar trends can be seen in their attitudes towards doing the homework and their attitudes towards continuing to learn Chinese in the next few years. While differences between student responses across the two schools are evident, it is important to establish how the school environment and parents influenced students’ language attitudes.
Schools’ influences

Schools play an important role in both teaching and learning, and with support of the school, the teaching can occur smoothly and successfully. This in turn affects the quality of learning, whereby students benefit and achieve their academic success (Wu, 2004).

From the findings, it is evident that at GCI the school offered the LOTE program lots of support, reflected in the school’s commitment to purchasing the popular LP learning program and supporting Chinese excursions and the China Trip.

Students’ interest and motivation for learning Chinese at GCI cannot be separated from these supports from their school. With more opportunities to explore Chinese culture and the advanced online learning program, the GCI students were able to access more learning resources than WPS students who did not use the LP system and do not have China trips or Chinese excursions. The motivation resulting from experiencing Chinese culture in a real context can stimulate students’ interest and desire to know more about the culture and language, and the knowledge gained from the online learning program can help consolidate students’ basic skills of using Chinese, such as spelling Chinese words (using pinyin), pronouncing the words, and developing listening comprehension (Chauhan, Ying, & Zhenfang, 2013). I inquired about the LP program during the interview with the WPS teacher, asking whether the school has or will have the LP program for the primary children. The WPS teacher responded:

*I know Language Perfect, it is such a useful tool. Currently our school does not have the program. We have so many kids. I once asked the school during a meeting and would like to see if they can consider to register our students in LP, but the school said no, and they said we have so many children and it will be a big amount of budget.*

Without an online learning resource which can act as a tutor for students’ Chinese learning (correcting students’ mistakes automatically), the children from WPS have to depend on other
resources such as paper-based vocabulary sheets and quizzes and the teachers’ PowerPoints. For this reason, it appears that more students from WPS find Chinese learning difficult and it is part of the reason that some participants said they would “just leave it there” when they came across problems when learning Chinese.

Besides providing students with useful learning resources, the influence of school factors is also reflected in the support provided to teachers’ teaching. It is clear that the GCI teacher was very proud of teaching in her school because of the well-organized LOTE program and the supportive teaching environment where the policies were beneficial for the Chinese teacher’s teaching and for colleagues to cooperate with each other in a supportive way. The WPS teacher did not deny that WPS is a big school where there is a “big” LOTE program (the number of learners is large), but at the same time, she mentioned several obstacles to her teaching, such as “having to walk students to the classroom”, “heavy workload” and “low level of support from the class teachers”. These issues affected program delivery which indirectly affected students’ learning attitudes, behaviours, and outcomes. Besides these concerns, the WPS teacher also mentioned:

*Our school is a big school with many people, I can’t deny ... but it seems that students do not think Chinese is an important subject because for some classes, they have only 30 minutes each week for LOTE and as I mentioned before, almost 10-15 minutes are wasted on the way to the classroom, lining up and settling them down, and the next week, students cannot remember what they learnt last time.*

The WPS teacher was concerned about the 30-minute lesson each week (or effectively less than 30 minutes) as there was not enough time for students to practise and consolidate what they had learnt. Also, she mentioned that the heavy workload did not allow her enough time to plan lessons and prepare the teaching materials for the children. She stated:
I usually teach consecutive lessons, and during the break times, I have duty to do on the playground, sometimes I have three duties to do during one-day’s time. I sometimes have to take the planning work back home, it is exhausting. For some interesting learning materials, you need time to prepare it, I know some teachers in other schools combine three coloured-paper together and draw lines to each paper to indicate the “month”, “year” and “days” to allow students fill in the blank spaces with Chinese numbers, it is like a little Chinese calendar, but you need to draw, cut, prepare the pins and bring colored paper to the printer and print them out, but I have so many students and such a heavy load, and preparing this kind of materials would cost me a few days.

The organization of the LOTE program definitely affects students’ learning outcomes. With only 30-60 minutes each week to learn Chinese, it is not surprising that students found it difficult to absorb and digest what they learnt in class within a short time. To manage a second language and accumulate the vocabulary, time and effort are essential (Cheng, 1967). During the classroom observation, it was noted that students at WPS could not say simple words such as “Mum” and “Dad” in Chinese when the teacher asked them; according to the teacher, students had learnt “family members” not long ago but no one could remember the words when asked. The lack of studying time was part of the reason that the WPS students felt that they were not confident in speaking Chinese. As one participate indicated:

I don’t want to attend the Chinese speech competition and compete with other schools, I don’t want to be laughed at, they are so good, but for me, I have to take a palm card with me, even with a palm card, I find it hard to speak in Chinese because I don’t have enough time to practise it at school, and at home, I cannot practise as no one knows Chinese in my family.

Compared with the situation at WPS, the GCI children found learning Chinese interesting and “less hard”, mainly due to the well-organized LOTE program. The results of classroom
observation and the teacher interview revealed that the teacher received strong support from the school and colleagues. Compared to WPS, the GCI teacher did not have a heavy workload: instead, she had only eight classes to teach compared to the WPS teacher who had 24 classes each week, enabling her to do more lesson planning. Students at GCI have two Chinese lessons each week, which allowed them more time to practise their Chinese at school. After school, students had Chinese homework on LP, and the total time for students to allocate to learning Chinese was considerably more than the WPS children. The following notes taken by me during the observation support this assertion:

*Mr. Hamilton (a Year 6 class teacher) took the children to the LOTE room, standing outside the classroom and watched for a while until the children settled down. Mr. Hamilton came again during the class time and check if the children are well-behaved, and James (a boy who was talking in class) was warned by Mr. Hamilton. The lesson went well. Before the lesson finished, Mr. Hamilton came and collected the children and walked them back to their classroom.*

In contrast to WPS, at GCI it is the class teacher’s responsibility to take the children to the LOTE room, mark the roll, and settle the students down before the Chinese lesson. The LOTE teacher’s job does not include these organizational tasks. In addition, with the curriculum planning and curriculum validation activities at GCI, the teacher was able to get advice from other teachers about the LOTE lesson plans and assessment plans, which allowed the teacher to continuously improve the quality of teaching.

With the school and colleague’s support, the Chinese lessons ran relatively smoothly at GCI, which in turn benefitted students’ learning. With the class teacher’s support for behaviour management, the GCI students experienced a healthy and supportive learning environment where most could be involved in the learning activities and showed their best manners to the teacher and classmates. Behaviour issues can be significant, and a teacher’s behaviour management skills can
directly affect the quality of teaching and learning (Dorji, 2002). According to the seven standards of teaching in Queensland schools, “creating a good learning environment for the children” is critically important. For specialist teachers, especially for L2 teachers, behaviour management can be more challenging than for classroom teachers in primary school, (Dorji, 2002). Therefore it was advantageous to students that the GCI colleagues cooperated well to make sure students behaved well in class and maintained a supportive learning environment during the Chinese lessons. From my observation, I noticed that the behaviour management was more challenging for the WPS teacher, and the teacher sometimes was very stressed due to the lack of support from the school. She elaborated the problems she encountered when she first came to the school:

*When I first came to our school, I was not familiar with all the students’ names, some class teachers just let me to mark the roll in the morning and in the afternoon. While I was marking it, the students are yelling, laughing and talking, and they couldn’t hear their names once being called. The process usually lasted longer than I expected. Some class teachers are quite nice and they mark the roll in the morning, it is easier for them to do that, isn’t it? They teach only one class and know the students well, and it takes them 1-2 minutes to do that, easy! You know, there are a few students in each class who have mental problems, these few people would disturb others in class … our school is a public school and cannot refuse these students to study here, and the school’s support teachers are not so ‘supportive’ at all, each time when I called them to come, they would just warn the naughty ones, but when the teachers left, the children start yelling again … I am stressful because I heard that some class teachers next door reported some specialist teachers to the school because they felt the lessons are noisy …*

As a public school, WPS cannot refuse admission to any students who live in its catchment area unless there are very special reasons. Therefore, it is not unusual to see many children with poor behaviour who study together with students who are well behaved. Behaviour management challenges are often experienced in LOTE settings: Compared to other specialist lessons such as art, music, and drama in which students are actively completing crafts, singing, or performing,
doing reading and writing in an L2 classroom and staying quiet can be a real challenge for students who are disruptive (Leflot, van Lier, Onghena, & Colpin, 2010). At this time, support from the school is necessary to deal with behaviour issues in order to maintain a good learning environment (Williamson, 2008).

All in all, by comparing the two schools, it is evident that schools’ influence on students’ language attitudes can be reflected in how they organize the LOTE program, and the resources, both material and human, that they offer to the LOTE program (online learning resources, China trips, excursions, and other activities). Also important is the cooperation of colleagues to create a good learning environment in a Chinese classroom. GCI has many activities offered to the students beyond learning Chinese in the classroom, and the LOTE policy and support are different from what is offered at WPS. All these factors can be seen to impact students’ attitudes towards language learning, their learning behaviours, and learning outcomes.

**Parents’ influence on students’ language attitudes**

Parents play the main role in students’ after-school life. At primary school age, children’s thoughts and learning attitudes can easily be affected by parents’ words and behaviours (Cassidy, 2006). Parents’ encouragement and support for language learning at home can help build students’ confidence in learning that language (Gan, 2014). In addition, parents’ supervision of their children’s language learning helps them to develop good attitudes to learning and influences them to establish the awareness that learning the language is important and efforts and good attitudes to learning are essential (McKenzie, 2014).

The findings reported in the previous section relate to the differences between the two schools in parental involvement in students’ Chinese learning. The interview data indicate that there was considerable communication between the Chinese teacher and students’ parents at GCI, and both of the teachers mentioned the parents’ involvement in students’ preparation for the
Chinese speech competition. Being held on a yearly basis, the competition has become a very stressful event according to the GCI teacher due to the fact that many parents pressure the Chinese teacher to select their children to participate. The GCI teacher mentioned that each year, she has students getting medals or highly commended places during the competition, and those students’ parents are usually highly involved in their children’s learning of Chinese speaking. At WPS, although parents are not as keen to be involved as those at GCI, those students whose parents support and encourage them for the speech competitions are keen to study the language and fight for the medals during the contest. As the WPS teacher indicated:

I had a student, she got the third place in the speech competition many years ago, after she got her bronze medal on the stage, she was interviewed by the speech contest holder about how she studied Chinese. She said her parents did not know Chinese, but they asked her every day about what she learnt at school and encouraged her to practise reading the Chinese words according to the online videos. Compared to my other students in that year, she came to be my top student who behaved well in class and got good marks in every exam.

From the WPS teacher’s words, it is clear that she regarded parents’ involvement in students’ Chinese study as important for the children to achieve their academic success. Although GCI is an elite school where many parents find tutors and give extra lessons to their children after school, there still exists some children whose achievement in Chinese is low, and one of the reasons for this may be a lack of parental support for their Chinese study. The GCI teacher said:

My school is the most expensive school in this area, the parents paid so much for their sons and they have high expectations on them, many of my students have Chinese tutors after school, also, there are some people whose parents do not care about their Chinese study. My student J was very slow in learning, and he can be a little problematic at school, his parents changed a few schools for him and told me not to worry
too much if I doesn’t do the homework … and his class teacher said his parents don’t care about what grade he gets as long as their son doesn’t bring trouble to the school and himself.

Parents’ involvement and support in students’ language learning helps children to shape a positive attitude towards the language. As it is a specialist subject, the importance of learning Chinese can be neglected by students sometimes. As one GCI boy said: “I don’t want to continue learning Chinese because my family will take me to France and I don’t need to speak Chinese there.” In that situation, parents’ perspectives about learning Chinese can affect the children’s attitudes to some extent. Parents who regard Chinese as an important subject will talk about it at home and encourage their children to put effort into it, while parents who do not emphasize the importance of the subject may also influence their children’s views and behaviours.

One participant (coded with the initial O) from GCI is a boy who often got an A result in Chinese. He is a good language learner who is keen to participate in any Chinese activities and keen to learn more about Chinese. O said during the interview: “Miss, my Mum is applying for a Chinese visa for me … she wants me to learn Chinese in Beijing for two weeks during the school holiday, I wonder if it worth so much money and energy, but anyway, travelling is exciting.” I mentioned the boy O during the GCI teacher’s interview, and was told that O’s classmate C is another keen Chinese learner, and last year they were both selected to attend the Chinese competition; after the competition, C’s mother came to check the result and was very unhappy to find the first place winner was O with C achieving a third place. The GCI teacher said: “Among 30 candidates who competed with each other, these two boys were excellent, but C’s mother did not seem to be satisfied, I heard that after the speech competition, the mother found a Chinese tutor to C immediately as she knows that O has a good language tutor.”

As can be seen from the data, although parents’ involvements in students’ Chinese learning is different in the two schools, students whose parents are involved tend to be more
motivated to learn Chinese. At the same time, parents’ assistance and encouragement helps the children establish an awareness that learning Chinese is important.

The influences of ICT on students’ attitudes towards learning Chinese

Living in a digital society, the incorporation of ICT also affects students’ language attitudes besides the influences from schools and parents. In Queensland, many schools offer laptops to both secondary students and primary students to provide them a wide range of learning resources. GCI provides students and staff with access to advanced technology such as the “ni hao” Chinese learning program, the LP learning program, and laptops, iPads, and computer rooms. At WPS, although the school had not registered for the “ni hao” or LP programs, they did offer laptops to students from Grade 4 onwards, to support their Chinese learning.

ICT, as an advanced tool in learning, can be very effective in assisting students’ learning when used wisely (Chauhan et al., 2013). ICT can make learning lots of fun and make teaching and learning easier (Tay, Lim, Lim, & Koh, 2012). Compared to more traditional ways of learning (without the use of technology), ICT (such as videos) allows students to explore the novel language and culture, and by competing and communicating with other online users, students’ interest in learning can be stimulated. As reflected in the data, students from both schools were interested in the “Kahoot” game, and for some children, it seemed to be a motivation for them to learn Chinese. At GCI, during the 10-day LP world championship, students even did the quizzes on the bus in order to get a good place. ICT can make language learning easier: With online dictionaries, students can learn the words right at their fingertips and listen to the correct pronunciation. ICT saves students’ time and acts like a teacher in some contexts. The use of ICT for some students made homework engaging and interesting. One boy reported:
I like homework that can be done on our laptops such as project making. If you give us a paper quiz to do, we will feel it is too boring and somehow a little stressful. If we make online digital stories using Chinese or make a PowerPoint to introduce ourselves in Chinese, things are much better because we can search and add our favourite pictures and show it to the class.

At WPS, some shy students did not like to speak Chinese in front of the class, and one girl asked the teacher before the speaking test if she could record her voice and send it to the teacher after class. By creating a PowerPoint of “self-introduction in Chinese”, students could show the audience many things they enjoyed in life, such as their favourite pets and pictures of their parents and birthday parties. Compared to traditional way of introducing themselves (presenting a speech or writing an essay), the children were more engaged in using technology and mixing the audio and texts together. Some children reported even preferring to make a short video about themselves and adding it into their self-introduction PowerPoint. ICT, to some extent, stimulates students’ creativity by multitasking.

The influence of ICT can be double edged. While it can have a positive influence on students’ language attitudes for most of the time, its impact can be negative (Yunus, 2007). The misuse of ICT can result in students’ engagement with online games and other activities, which in turn affects students’ learning in-class. At GCI, students had a lot of opportunity to use ICT in class due to a wide range of online programs in the school. At these ages (Grade 5 and Grade 6), primary school students are still playful. During a Chinese lesson, if students are with laptops or iPads in their hands, it is easy for them to turn to games and other programs that have nothing to do with learning Chinese. During the classroom observation at GCI, I saw many students use the opportunity for online learning time to engage in off-task activities:

Students used their iPads to make a digital story to describe their favourite sports in Chinese. A few boys at the back were talking and playing gun games on their laptops. The Chinese teacher was busy
tutoring a boy and didn’t notice it. When the teacher finished tutoring the boy, she started walking around, and the boys at the back quickly went to the “imovie” to make their stories and pretended they were focusing on it.

The situation was similar at WPS, where there were some students who were problematic and out of control in the Chinese classroom. Each time the teacher asked them to make PowerPoints on their laptops, these children would be very quiet and seemed to be well behaved, perhaps because they were using the laptops to concentrate on their favourite gun games. As students at WPS had many questions about selecting the correct Chinese characters online when making their PowerPoints, the teacher was quite busy answering each student’s questions by talking to them individually, which gave the problematic children a good chance to play gun games on their laptops without the teacher’s supervision.

Although students can find many useful learning resources online while learning Chinese, at the same time students can browse for information that is beyond the teachers’ expectation. As the WPS teacher indicated:

*Once I asked students to look for some Chinese food pictures online and one girl found some roasted bugs on Google and asked me if Chinese people eat everything such as cats and dogs … Later she found lots of information about Chinese food online and made some comments on Chinese food which is not so nice, she wondered why Chinese people eat chicken feet and fish eyes … Yes, some Chinese people do that, but not too many nowadays, I didn’t expect them to learn these information online, what I want them to see is the bright side of Chinese culture, but with a laptop, they got all the information and it is unavoidable.*

Therefore, the use of ICT in primary schools must be appropriate and it is important that it is supervised by the teachers. Using ICT to learn Chinese can be interesting, but at the same
time it has both advantages and drawbacks. It is essential that teachers think about how to make the best use of ICT to support intended curriculum outcomes.

In summary, schools, parents, and ICT can all influence students’ attitudes towards learning the Chinese language. Schools’ support for the LOTE program can directly support students’ learning outcomes and motivate students by telling them that learning Chinese is important. Parents’ influence on students’ language attitudes can be through supervising students’ Chinese learning at home, keeping in touch with the Chinese teachers at the school, and encouraging students throughout the learning process. With parents’ involvement, students’ learning behaviours can be supported and supervised, and with the appropriate use of ICT, students can access a wide range of learning resources. Comparing the data of the two schools, it was evident that there were significant differences between them such as the level of parental involvement and commitment to ICT resources. These differences led to the differences between learning behaviours and learning attitudes of students across the two schools as reported by the students. Besides all these factors that affect students’ language attitudes, key inputs for achieving student learning outcomes are curriculum and pedagogy in the language learning context. The following section presents results that illustrate how curriculum and pedagogy influenced students’ language attitudes and outcomes.

**The influence of different Chinese curriculum and pedagogy**

Although schools in Queensland are required to teach Chinese according to the Australian Curriculum, GCI and WPS had slight differences in their approaches to teaching the subject. These differences were further reflected in the pedagogical approaches adopted by teachers in the two schools. Table 26 summarizes the interview data relating to Chinese pedagogy in the two schools.
Table 26. Different Pedagogy and Teaching Methods in the Two Schools

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Codes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>GCI</td>
<td>WPS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Can you talk about the Chinese pedagogy/frequently used teaching methods at your school?</strong></td>
<td><strong>The school focuses on stimulating students’ interest of learning at the moment.</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teaching methods/activities:</td>
<td>Teaching methods/activities:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• The school focuses on students’ language ability / improvement/ability to use the language in daily life.</td>
<td>• Worksheets of colouring.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• ICT plays an essential role.</td>
<td>• Videos.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Classroom games bring the students lots of fun.</td>
<td>• Classroom games.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Paper-based quizzes are used.</td>
<td>• Paper-based quizzes.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Excursion to Chinese temples and restaurants.</td>
<td>• Various teaching materials on Chinese culture.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• China Trips during school holidays.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Chinese exploration week.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Various teaching materials.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Role-play/gesture play.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The summary of teacher responses presented in Table 26 suggests that the teaching methods used in GCI were slightly more diverse than those in WPS. During the interview at GCI, the Chinese teacher indicated a focus in her program on students’ ability to use the language in real life. To achieve this outcome, the teacher used mixed teaching methods including ICT, games, paper-based quizzes, excursion, role-play, gesture play, and culture exploration, as well as China Trips. Students had the chance to experience Chinese culture through China Trips and dining in Chinese restaurants, and they could also learn the language through the very popular program Language Perfect, which gave them instant feedback on their responses. As for the gesture play mentioned above, it is regarded as an effective teaching technique which belongs to AIM (Accelerative Integrated Method): The teacher translated the Chinese words into gestures, and students used gestures to match their speaking. At GCI, the teacher translated the simple Chinese songs into gestures, and students used gestures while singing, which introduced an element of fun to learning the language. In addition, this helped students to memorize the meaning of each word.
because once students forgot the meaning of the vocabulary, the gestures relating to the lyrics could remind them.

At WPS, students also had various learning materials, but not as diverse as at GCI. According to the teachers during the interviews, at WPS students watched videos about Chinese culture. They also experienced Chinese culture by doing some paper-cutting or making kites in the classroom. Compared to GCI students who had many chances to experience the culture within Australia or by traveling to China, the WPS children’s activities were somewhat limited.

At WPS, the children did many colouring sheets and paper-based quizzes. When asked about the quizzes, their teacher noted that most of the quizzes were colouring sheets or some simple “matching questions”. This reflected the class teacher’s priority which was focused more on stimulating students’ interest in Chinese rather than developing proficiency with the language.

In summary, the data presented above dealt with factors impacting students’ interest in learning Chinese as well as students’ attitudes towards learning Chinese tones, characters, and culture. Comparing the data across the two schools revealed some significant differences between them with respect to curriculum, pedagogy, and the integration of ICT for language learning. There were also significant differences reflected in school environment and policy for language teaching and parental engagement around the teaching of Chinese.

Teaching, behaviour management, curriculum, and pedagogy affect students’ attitudes towards learning Chinese

How teaching affects students’ language attitudes
Teaching methods affect students’ interest in learning a subject, and students’ interest in learning a subject affects, in turn, their learning behaviours and learning attitudes (Lee, 2009). Interesting lessons contribute to students’ good behaviour and good learning outcomes, and the use of
multiple methods in teaching can avoid boredom and behaviour problems in an L2 classroom (Yu-yuan, 2008). This relationship can be seen in the data from the two schools, with GCI focusing on improving students’ ability to use the language and WPS focusing on stimulating students’ interest in learning Chinese. With different teaching aims, the two schools used different teaching methods and plans. I compared the teaching materials of GCI and WPS and found the curriculum content for Chinese at WPS was less demanding and simpler than that of GCI, partly due to the lower level of interest and engagement of students in learning Chinese. The following presents interview data from Chinese teachers that illustrate their views on the different teaching methods and teaching strategies they used, and I will discuss how these methods influenced students’ language attitudes.

The use of in-class games

A game is a very effective way to stimulate students’ interest and assist them to learn through playing and cooperating (Lee, 2009). Both schools used games in class, and according to the data from the student interviews, students thought games helped them to learn and memorize the Chinese words. However, the impact of playing games does not always produce good learning results. When a game is well organized and well conducted, it can be fun and effective; but when a game is not played appropriately, many problems may arise at the same time (Yu-yuan, 2008). As a GCI boy said during the interview:

*I like the games, but have you noticed that sometimes when we played games, Michael and Jackson [pseudonyms] always kept talking and yelling. The problem is, when the teacher asked us to form groups, it is sure that we want to be with our friends, so the class is so loud. If the class is too loud, I can’t focus on it, everyone is shouting and screaming ... or, walking around. So sometimes I just don’t join the games but sit there and watch, or do my Language Perfect...*
Games can involve students in an interesting learning environment in which they learn, play, and cooperate with each other (Lee, 2009). As interactive activities, however, games may cause behaviour management challenge for the teachers, so an important consideration for Chinese teachers who wish to use games in class is how to use games effectively (Lee, 2009).

At GCI, students play many types of games, and the following notes illustrate the use of games during classroom teaching:

Whiteboard game: The teacher wrote several Chinese words on the board and divide students into two groups. The teacher chose one person from each group and asked them to come to the board with a whiteboard marker. The teacher said a word in English, and the two students needed to circle the corresponding Chinese word on the board, the one who circled the word correctly and faster was the winner.

Up and down game: Students were sitting in different rows, the teacher gave each row a role (mum, dad, big brother, little sister...), then the teacher spoke different “family member” titles in Chinese, and the corresponding row must stand up and then sit down. This helps students to memorize the family titles in Chinese by listening carefully and giving the correct reaction.

Numbers game: All the students formed a big circle and started walking in a “clockwise” direction, at the same time, the teacher gave a number in Chinese, if the teacher said “san (3)”, then they must find 3 people to form a group, those who cannot join a group will be out of the game.

The GCI boys were quite interested in these games, and before playing them the teacher usually led them to review the relevant knowledge such as Chinese numbers, Chinese family members’ vocabulary, or how to describe their birthdays. Students were quite motivated during the revision time due to their desire to win the game, and at the same time they could memorize lots of vocabulary and sentences. The GCI teacher would stop the game immediately if she found the children were not following the instructions or being too loud. She said:
There is no point to continue a game if the background of the game is too noisy or if they don’t follow my leading, because at that time, they are not learning, they are just playing it for fun.

Playing games is an active way to help students to remember the vocabulary in an L2 classroom, and it is effective if directed well. At WPS, the Chinese teacher also used games in class; one such game used during a classroom observation was called “the ball game” which was used to help students memorize Chinese words and sentences as a group. In this game, the teacher asked one person to go outside the classroom to wait for another student to hide a ball somewhere in the classroom. After this was done, the person outside came in and started looking for the ball. At the same time, all the other students read a Chinese sentence together and used their voices to remind the seeker. Students’ voices got louder and louder when the seeker got closer and closer to the ball, and their voices were softer and softer when the seeker got further and further from the ball. This game appeared to be very effective to help students remember the Chinese words and sentences. At WPS, because everyone participated in the game and read the Chinese sentences at the same time, there were not too many behaviour problems. However, at WPS, other games which are similar to “whiteboard games” or “up and down games” could not be played because of the serious behaviour problems during the games. The WPS teacher explained:

I cannot play those games with them, they talk too much and some people scream on purpose just for fun. Our school wants me to stimulate their interest of learning Chinese by all means, but I cannot use too many games and it is a pity, usually they are out of control, so we can do some other activities such as drawing and colouring to make the lesson less boring.

Without the diverse games, the WPS teacher could only lead students to do some other activities such as drawing or colouring to make the lessons “interesting”. I asked the Chinese teacher how much students could learn through the simple drawings and colourings; she said:
“Actually the school does not care too much about how much they can learn, as long as they do not feel bored in Chinese lessons, so I try to give them simple and fun tasks to avoid putting on too much pressure to them.”

It was hard for the WPS teacher to use games because she found it difficult to manage the behaviour of students in class. The situation for the WPS Chinese teacher was therefore very challenging as behaviour management issues made it difficult to introduce interesting lesson content and alternative pedagogy such as games to assist students in learning Chinese. As a result, students’ Chinese levels at WPS were still basic and as a whole, their ability to use the Chinese language was generally lower than for GCI students. Their limited abilities in Chinese language presented obstacles for the WPS students engaging in other learning activities such as advanced role-plays or simple Chinese story writing.

Other classroom activities and curriculum planning of the two schools

The design of lessons is important for L2 teachers to deliver a lesson effectively to the students (Reilly, Russell, Chehayl, & McDermott, 2011). Children’s success in learning Chinese not only relates to pedagogy and school resources but is also influenced by curriculum planning and delivery. A suitable unit plan gives the teacher a good overview of what will be taught and what activities will be used, and it allows the teacher to adjust the teaching within a planned topic. I have read the curriculum plans of both GCI and WPS. The teaching topics for Grade 5 and Grade 6 were the same in the two schools in accordance with the national Australian Curriculum, but the contents, activities, and assessments were quite different across the two schools, with GCI’s plan aimed at teaching more advanced vocabulary and sentence structures than at WPS. In the GCI Chinese curriculum plan, there were multiple activities such as gesture play, role play, performance according to Chinese songs, story writing, and games, while in the WPS planning, there were fewer types of activities, and the activities were about drawing, poster making,
colouring, and singing together. During the focus group interviews one student reported how role play and Chinese story writing affected their attitudes to learning Chinese:

*We like the role plays because we are allowed to write down our own conversations. We can learn a lot of things that we haven’t learnt in class and then we remember it and perform it. I can still remember the conversation we wrote last time ... we looked up so many unfamiliar words in the dictionary and recited them, and it is hard to forget the new words because we rehearsed it for several times before showing it to the class. Story writing is also very interesting, I like that I can write whatever I like in life, the teacher gave us a topic but she didn’t ask us to limit the content so we can write down our favourite things and we can look up the words if we don’t know it. I feel proud of myself after finishing the Chinese story.*

These activities allowed students to create, imagine, and cooperate with their fellow peers in learning Chinese and were useful for extending their knowledge of the language beyond what was learnt in class. As the GCI students had a strong foundation in the Chinese language, these activities greatly helped them to strengthen what they had learnt and motivated them to explore new Chinese words. Students therefore benefited from the appropriate and interesting curriculum and activities that catered to each student’s language proficiency.

Due to the limited time allocated for learning Chinese at school, the WPS students’ basic language proficiency only enabled them to acquire simple knowledge of the Chinese language. Nevertheless, it appeared that students at WPS were happy with the level of challenge in the Chinese curriculum. One student noted:

*We learn very easy things, if the teacher gives us hard sentences to recite, we can’t do it. I think it is good that we learn the basic things first, after that we can improve it. If the content is too hard, I will feel very stressful.*
Therefore, the planning of the Chinese curriculum should be based on students’ ability levels and needs. Although the teaching plans of the two schools differ, students were happy about what they were learning. From the data, it is evident that the GCI students were keen to put effort into learning Chinese, and this is enhanced by the school LOTE program and the well-designed Chinese curriculum planning which brings them fun times and opportunities to develop their abilities.

**Behaviour management affects students’ language attitudes**

Behaviour management plays a vital role in delivering lessons. For Chinese teachers who meet the students once or twice a week, behaviour management is the first thing that a teacher attends to during the teaching process (Sprenger, 2011). Without firm behaviour management skills, students do not have a safe and comfortable learning environment and the teachers’ lessons cannot be taught effectively (Dorji, 2002). WPS exemplifies this, as students’ learning behaviours and attitudes greatly depended on the teacher’s behaviour management ability.

When asked about behaviour problems in the LOTE classroom, the WPS teacher said:

*I have many problematic students, as our school is a public school, we cannot refuse anyone who come to study. But these problematic children often ruin my lessons, and at the same time my other students felt it was too noisy and too much problems because during a lesson they had to stop again and again to wait for me to discipline those naughty children. Sometimes the naughty children run away from class, and I have to send other children to go and look for them. For those naughty ones, they were happy to do so because they can get everyone’s attention …*

At WPS, according to the teacher’s description, many good language learners felt quite annoyed by the children who misbehaved in class, because they thought “it makes them headache” and “they would rather go outside the classroom and do self-study”. Students’ interest of learning
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Chinese can be affected by these behaviour problems in a Chinese classroom since these problems are obstacles to the delivery of lessons.

The situation at GCI was quite different. As mentioned above, due to her good behaviour management as well as the support from her colleagues, the GCI teacher was able to use many diverse in-class activities to help students’ Chinese language learning. In this context, motivating pedagogy enhanced the quality of the learning environment while at the same time enhancing students’ learning of Chinese.

All in all, different curriculum and pedagogy affect students’ attitudes towards learning Chinese, and it is important for Chinese language teachers to plan appropriate lessons and use multiple methods for behaviour management to provide students with a good learning environment and encourage them to form good language attitudes.

In summary, the main findings of the project were that students were willing to be challenged by leaning Chinese although they felt Chinese was difficult to learn. Also, students were interested in exploring Chinese culture and making friends with Chinese people. As for the factors that affected students’ attitudes towards learning Chinese, ICT, parental involvement, and schools play important roles. At the same time, curriculum and pedagogy influence students’ language attitudes. These findings have positive implications for Chinese teaching and learning in Australian primary schools.
CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSION

This project explored Australian primary school students’ attitudes towards learning the Chinese language as a compulsory course at two schools. The research questions guiding this investigation were: 1) What are students’ attitudes to learning Chinese in Australian primary schools where Chinese is a compulsory course? 2) What are the factors that affect students’ attitudes to learning Chinese? 3) How do different experiences of Chinese curriculum and pedagogy affect students’ attitudes towards Chinese language learning? These questions were investigated by using surveys, classroom observations, and focus group interviews at two schools. This concluding chapter summarises the main findings of the data analysis presented in Chapter 4. It reviews the findings related to the research questions that guided the study. It then discusses the importance of the study to the field of Chinese language learning and teaching. Finally, the chapter discusses the limitations of the study and indicates where further research needs to be undertaken in the field.

**Australian primary school students’ attitudes towards learning Chinese**

The conclusion reached in this study was that in the Australian primary school where Chinese is a compulsory course, the children found the most difficulty with learning Chinese tones and characters. However, the findings of this study show that learning was assisted by using ICT to overcome many of the difficulties with these language elements that students encountered. Further, the study found that learning about Chinese culture clearly assisted students to develop their interest in language learning. Although Chinese is difficult to learn for primary school children (Lin, 2013), this study demonstrated that students were willing to be challenged. In addition, the study found that many students liked the idea of making friends with Chinese people as some saw this as an opportunity for them to learn about the Chinese language and culture.
Factors that affect students’ attitudes towards learning Chinese

According to Gardner and Lambert (1972), motivation, behaviours, and language attitudes interact with each other, and positive attitudes are the result of positive motivation and learning behaviours. In this study, these factors included the influence of school, support and interest on the part of parents, and the use of ICT.

The factors that may have had an impact on students’ motivation to learn Chinese were investigated by comparing how the Chinese language curriculum was delivered in the two schools and examining how these differences may have impacted on students’ reported motivation to learn Chinese.

According to the research results gathered from the survey, interviews and classroom observations, there are many observable differences between the two schools with respect to how they deliver their Chinese programs. As a school where ICT plays a vital role in the language program, GCI provided students more advanced resources such as the LP learning program. These tools greatly stimulated students’ interest in learning Chinese and provided them with the flexibility to deal with difficulties in learning the language and to explore new ideas about learning Chinese. Appropriate use of ICT in Chinese learning seemed to make language learning more enjoyable for children and stimulated their interest in exploring the language in depth. Compared to GCI, WPS did not have strong ICT support in their Chinese program for students.

As noted in Chapter 4, GCI arranged various activities for children to learn Chinese and explore Chinese culture, such as exploration week, China Trip, and the LP world championship. All these activities lent strong support to the Chinese program and demonstrated to students that the school regarded Chinese as an important subject. However, at WPS, students had fewer opportunities to experience Chinese culture and activities in real contexts, with most of their Chinese learning activities limited to the classroom.
Also, more parents from GCI were supporting their children’s Chinese learning through opportunities for regularly communicating with the teachers and paying for after-class Chinese tutors. These differences contributed to the differences in students’ language attitudes, with GCI children being generally more positive than WPS students. Parents’ involvement in students’ Chinese learning may have helped children form awareness that learning Chinese is “important”. Parental engagement in the WPS program did not appear as strong as that in the case of GCI.

Finally, it was found that good behaviour management in a Chinese lesson can improve students’ learning outcomes whereas learning may be compromised in contexts in which the teachers spend a large amount of instructional time on discipline and classroom management issues.

All of these factors may have accounted for the differences in students’ interest in learning Chinese recorded between the two schools and their willingness to participate in various language-focused activities such as Chinese speech competitions.

**Different experiences of Chinese curriculum and pedagogy affect students’ language attitudes**

These findings have significant implications for Chinese teaching and learning. Once students’ attitudes towards learning Chinese are understood, Chinese teachers can better understand students’ needs, and at the same time they can plan appropriate lessons according to those needs and students’ interests. For example, in the case of the difficult tones and characters, it is necessary for teachers to think about how to assist students to overcome the difficulties with these elements and how to provide effective learning materials for them. The findings of this study suggest that teachers should refer to a wide range of teaching materials to provide students with more
opportunities to understand the language in different ways. The work of Lee and Kalyuga (2011) also supports this finding.

As an insider researcher, my teaching experiences did not prepare me to see in detail the large differences between the two schools. It was not until I conducted the surveys and interviews that I came to understand these differences in some depth. An analysis of the data revealed that there were significant differences between the schools, especially with respect to teaching pedagogies and Chinese curriculum. Some of these have been noted in the section above. However, the teacher interviews suggested that the school’s LOTE policy and the philosophical approach to language teaching may have been a key driver underpinning differences in enacted Chinese curriculum and pedagogy across the two schools. Based on the teacher interviews and classroom observations, GCI clearly placed more emphasis on students’ Chinese proficiency while WPS focused more on stimulating students’ general interest in learning Chinese.

Understanding this point, many people’s impression of WPS is that the school’s large Chinese program suggested that students might be very interested and motivated to learn Chinese. However, the data did not match that assumption. As reported in Chapter 4, at WPS the main activities in a Chinese classroom were colouring, completing quizzes, and watching videos, while at GCI, more activities were designed and a variety of cultural materials were prepared for students to experience Chinese culture, such as making dumplings, practising Chinese calligraphy, and visiting Chinese temples. These activities, while providing students with exposure to Chinese culture, were focused on and supported students’ learning of the language. At GCI, technology was integrated and there were more cultural experiences that were focused on language learning and games and diverse learning strategies were employed. This may have made learning more individualized and more motivating and students may have seen better progress with Chinese language at GCI compared to those at WPS. Moreover, these differences may have influenced children’s motivation and interest in learning Chinese.
The findings from this study may help Chinese teachers to understand the reasons behind different attitudes held by students towards language learning. In the Asian century, where Asian languages are becoming more and more popular, it is the Chinese language teachers’ task to assist and encourage children to shape good language attitudes and achieve their academic success.

Practical implications of the project

The Chinese language, which is becoming very popular in Australian schools, is regarded as a very difficult language to learn. Of all the aspects of learning Chinese, primary school children feel that characters and tones are the most difficult to learn. Although the Chinese language is difficult due to its differences from English, students are willing to be challenged by it.

By comparing students’ language attitudes between the two schools, it is evident that there are many factors that affect students’ attitudes towards learning Chinese; these can be summarized as schools, parents’ involvement, and the use of ICT. With a supportive LOTE program (with advanced technology and the LP learning program), GCI provides students with a good learning environment, which helped the children shape good language attitudes and learning behaviours. Students from GCI were keen to learn Chinese and their parents were heavily involved in their Chinese learning, providing them with much support, such as encouraging them to participate in Chinese activities and supervising them to complete homework tasks.

Students at the two schools studied the same topics in Chinese language; however, these were taught in different ways. Chinese lessons at WPS were disrupted due to students’ behaviour problems and students’ restricted language abilities, but nevertheless, many students were interested in learning Chinese language and learning about Chinese culture and were willing to make efforts to improve. At the same time, different curriculum and pedagogy affect students’
attitudes towards learning Chinese, and this requires the Chinese teachers to plan appropriate lessons to suit students’ learning needs.

According to the theoretical framework used for the study, language attitudes are influenced by motivation. The evidence suggests that student motivation was strong at GCI due to encouragement and support from the school, teacher, and parents. This is in turn influenced students’ attitudes towards learning Chinese.

From the findings of this study, the following recommendations are made for schools to promote their students’ Chinese learning:

- Have high expectations for students’ success in learning Chinese language, reflected in LOTE policy and teaching approach.
- Adopt strategies for engaging parents in students’ learning of Chinese language.
- Support students with opportunities to use ICT in learning Chinese.
- Present students with more opportunities to learn Chinese culture in real contexts, such as by organizing activities outside the classrooms.

**Limitations and the influence on future research**

This research was a case study of students’ language attitudes in two Queensland schools. As GCI and WPS are two different types of schools, one being an elite private school with substantial resources and the other being a large state school with limited resources, many differences were evident between the two schools, including LOTE policy, behaviour management policy, and teachers’ responsibilities. Moreover, it is likely that there were some differences between populations of students compared in this study. Therefore, the data and results of this study are proposed tentatively and no suggestion is made that the results are generalizable to student cohorts in other Chinese language-learning contexts.
Future research after the completion of this study may provide greater insight into effective methods for Chinese teaching and learning and how language attitudes affect learning behaviour. Learning attitudes can be reflected in students’ learning behaviours, such as the way they use ICT to assist their learning, or how they engage in learning Chinese culture and its impact on Chinese language learning. Research on specific dimensions of learning and teaching of Chinese for primary students may provide more robust, evidence-based approaches to guide teachers of the Chinese language.
References


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433.


Appendix A: The questionnaire
Your Views on Learning Chinese

This survey seeks to capture the views of students with regard to Chinese. Do you feel interested in learning Chinese? Do you find it stressful? We would really appreciate your views on this.

There is opportunity at the end of the survey to add any details you feel are important, but have been missed in earlier questions. Your responses are valued. Thank you for agreeing to complete the survey.

This section seeks information about you, your background, and your experience

Do you have a Chinese speaking background? ☐ YES ☐ NO

Your Class Number: ____________________

Year Level

☐ Year 5 – Year 6 (primary)

☐ Year 10-Year 12 (secondary)

We would like to know about how difficult you feel learning Chinese is. Could you rate yourself on a 1-5 scale:


Note: This is just a personal assessment to provide a number for use in the analysis to compare to your rating of your feelings about Chinese. There is no other interest in this response.

Which section of Chinese do you think is the most difficult to learn?

Pinyin

Characters

Grammar
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☐ Tones

**How interested are you in learning Chinese?**

☐ quite interested  ☐ interested  ☐ just so-so  ☐ not interested  ☐ detest learning Chinese

**Your feelings about Chinese?**

Could you please indicate how you feel about each of the following statements by ticking the appropriate circle:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Uncertain</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I think Chinese is difficult to learn.</td>
<td>SA</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>U</td>
<td>D</td>
<td>SD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I am interested in learning Chinese culture.</td>
<td>SA</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>U</td>
<td>D</td>
<td>SD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I can complete my Chinese homework on time.</td>
<td>SA</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>U</td>
<td>D</td>
<td>SD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I like making friends with Chinese people.</td>
<td>SA</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>U</td>
<td>D</td>
<td>SD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I have confidence in speaking Chinese.</td>
<td>SA</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>U</td>
<td>D</td>
<td>SD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I give efforts to solve the Chinese language problems that I come across during the learning.</td>
<td>SA</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>U</td>
<td>D</td>
<td>SD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I like to speak Chinese in daily life.</td>
<td>SA</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>U</td>
<td>D</td>
<td>SD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I feel it is difficult to manage the tones in speaking Chinese.</td>
<td>SA</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>U</td>
<td>D</td>
<td>SD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I find Chinese online learning interesting.</td>
<td>SA</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>U</td>
<td>D</td>
<td>SD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I am interested in learning to write Chinese characters.</td>
<td>SA</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>U</td>
<td>D</td>
<td>SD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I would like to continue learning Chinese in the next few years.</td>
<td>SA</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>U</td>
<td>D</td>
<td>SD</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Are there any other comments you would like to make about this**
issue?

Thank you for completing the survey!

Appendix B: The interview questions

Your feeling about Chinese language
Do you feel Chinese difficult to learn? Which aspect do you think is the most difficult?
How do you deal with the difficulties if you come across one?

Your interest in learning Chinese?
Will you choose Chinese as your LOTE in Year 7 (for primary students)? Will you continue learning Chinese after graduation from your school (for secondary students)?
Are you interested in learning Chinese? If so, what makes you interested? Which aspect (characters, pinyin, culture, etc.) do you think is the most interesting one?
Do you like to explore more Chinese knowledge after class? Why or why not?
Have you been to the China trip? Did your parents encourage you to go there?

Use Chinese in daily life
Do you often speak Chinese after class? When and to whom do you speak? Any examples?
Are there many Chinese people around you? Do you like spending time with them? If so, what do you do together?

Your learning methods
Do you have your own way of learning Chinese? What methods do you use in learning it?

Are you confident in learning Chinese? Have you done anything to improve your Chinese?
Appendix C: The classroom observation questions

How do students react to the teachers’ questions?

How do they treat the in-class activities and quizzes?

What do students like in learning Chinese and what do they find confused and difficult to learn? How can they solve the difficulties?

How do they interact with their teachers in a Chinese lesson?

What else do they do to improve their Chinese learning?

What is my feeling when observing each of their behaviours?

Observation Checklist

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Class Number</th>
<th>Number of students</th>
<th>Lesson topic/content</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>How do students react to the teacher’s questions? How many questions do they answer correctly?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Do they listen to the teacher carefully? How are their behavior?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>How about the in-class writing tasks? What do they do when they come across difficulties?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>What do they find confused to learn in this lesson?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Do they enjoy this lesson? Are they excited or feeling bored?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>How is the in-class worksheet? Has everyone finished it? How is the result?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Anything else from the observation?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix D: Interview questions for the teachers

Interview Questions (for teachers)

Your students’ interest in learning Chinese.
1) Do you think your students are interested in learning Chinese? Any examples? In what ways do they let you know that they are interested in this language? What are they?

2) Which aspect of Chinese do you think they are most interested to learn? character, Pinyin or others? Why? What methods did you use in your teaching to improve their interest in learning Chinese? Are these methods effective?

3) Do your students often complain that Chinese is difficult to learn? In what situation do they say it? How will you response to them?

4) Which aspect do your students find is the most difficult to learn? How do they cope with the difficulties? How did you help them with the difficulties and any examples?

The facts that affect students’ Chinese learning.
1) Do you think your school LOTE policy influences students’ attitudes in learning Chinese? Why?

2) Do you often use ICT in classroom, is it effective in improving their learning result? What are students’ comment on using ICT?

3) Do your students often participant in school Chinese activities? Could you describe your activities?

Teaching and learning
1) Do you think different teaching methods affect students’ interest in learning Chinese? Can you please tell something about your own teaching experience on it?

2) How do you deal with students who have negative attitudes to learning Chinese?
Appendix E: Information Sheet (for students)

Chinese as a LOTE in the Asian Century
A study of students’ language attitudes in Queensland primary schools

Information Sheet (for student participants)

GU Human Research Ethics reference number: 2016/140

The Research Team

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Why is the research being conducted?

This research is being conducted for a dissertation of Program code 5608 Master of Education and Professional Studies Research at Griffith University under the supervision of Dr. Stephen Hay, Dr. Sue Monk and Dr. Sue Trevaskes. This research examines the language attitudes of primary school students who are learning Chinese as a LOTE in Queensland schools.

What will you be asked to do

There are three ways in which you may be asked to be involved in this research:

Survey - a survey of your feeling about learning Chinese will be conducted at the beginning of the project. In the survey, we seek your views and experiences with learning Chinese. It is expected that the survey will take around 10 minutes to complete.

Focus Group Interviews - In addition to the survey, it is planned to interview 5 students in each group (2 groups in total in your school), one is Year 5 group and the other one is Year 6 group. We would like to obtain a deeper understanding of your experience as a Chinese language learner in your school. Focus groups will last about 30 minutes.

The expected benefits of the research
As Chinese is becoming more and more popular in Australia, it is beneficial to understand how young learners of Chinese feel about learning the language and their attitudes towards learning it. Also, it is helpful for language educators to make appropriate curriculum and lesson plans to best fit students’ learning needs and lead them to academic success.

**Risks to you**

There are no foreseeable risks associated with being involved with this research project.

**Your confidentiality**

All data collected within this research will be DE-identified, with the survey collection process explicitly not seeking to identify you. While we will interview groups of students, the focus of such interviews is in the understanding of how students feel about learning Chinese. Therefore, in reporting then finding individuals will not be identified. It will be maintained for reporting, publication, and presentation of this research, where all data will be completely unidentifiable.

Digital and hard copy data will be stored securely by the research team.

Interview recordings, transcripts, and any related data will be stored in locked filling cabinets and/or password restricted computer files accessible only to the students researcher.

**Your participation is voluntary**

Participation for all is voluntary. All participants have the ability to withdraw from this research project at any stage without explanation or consequence. Participation will not impact upon the relationship that any participant has with another participant or with Griffith Uni.

**Questions/ further information**

If you require additional information or have any questions in regard to this research to this research project, please contact Elizabeth Fu (xiaoqian.fu@griffithuni.edu.au).

**The ethical conduct of this research**

Griffith University conducts research in accordance with the National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research. If potential participants have any concerns or complaints about the ethical conduct of the research project they should contact the Manager, Research Ethics on 373554375 or research-ethics@griffith.edu.au.

**Feedback to you**

You will be provided with a summary of the final study if requested.

**Privacy Statement**

The conduct of this research involves the collection, access and /or use of your identified personal information. The information collected is collected is confidential and will nor be disclosed to third parties without your consent, except to meet government, legal or other regulatory authority requirements. A de-identified copy of this data may be used for other research purposes. However, your anonymity will at all times be safeguarded. For further information consult the University’s Privacy Plan at www.griffith.edu.au/ua/aa/vc/pp pr telephone (07) 37358043.
Appendix F: Information Sheet (for the Chinese teachers)

Chinese as a LOTE in the Asian Century
A study of students’ language attitudes in Queensland schools

Information Sheet (for the teachers)

GU Human Research Ethics reference number: 2016/140

The Research Team

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0450706069

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What will you be asked to do

There is one ways in which you may be asked to be involved in this research:
Interview – You are asked to do a one-to-one interview about your teaching experiences and your views on your students’ attitudes towards learning Chinese. The interview will last about 45 minutes.

The expected benefits of the research

As Chinese is becoming more and more popular in Australia, it is beneficial to understand how young learners of Chinese feel about learning the language and their attitudes towards learning it. Also, it is helpful for language educators to make appropriate curriculum and lesson plans to best fit students’ learning needs and lead them to academic success.

Risks to you

There are no foreseeable risks associated with being involved with this research project.

Your confidentiality

All data collected within this research will be DE-identified, digital and hard copy data will be stored securely by the research team.

Interview recordings, transcripts, and any related data will be stored in locked filling cabinets and/or password restricted computer files accessible only to the student researcher.

Your participation is voluntary

Participation for all is voluntary. All participants have the ability to withdraw from this research project at any stage without explanation or consequence. Participation will not impact upon the relationship that any participant has with another participant or with Griffith Uni.

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Chinese as a LOTE in the Asian Century
A study of students’ language attitudes in Queensland primary schools