

THE CONFUCIUS INSTITUTE AT NNAMDI AZIKIWE UNIVERSITY, AWKA: CHALLENGES, PROSPECTS, AND THE PROMOTION OF CHINESE LANGUAGE AND CULTURE IN NIGERIA

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Abstract

It is evident that several factors can influence the teaching and learning of a language within any linguistic establishment. This paper focuses on the challenges Nigeria currently faces regarding the effective teaching and accessible learning of the Chinese language at the Confucius Institute, Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka, Anambra State. The research employed a descriptive survey design and utilized questionnaires and interviews for data collection. During the second semester of the 2023/2024 academic session, the researcher designed, distributed, and retrieved questionnaires, and conducted interviews. The data obtained from both instruments were analyzed and revealed several challenges, including a shortage of native Chinese teachers, irregular electricity supply, and the absence of an informative online presence. The study also found that learning the Chinese language is of great importance to Nigeria's economic development, particularly in the international arena, and that there is growing interest among students in learning the language. The paper concludes with recommendations such as recruiting and training more teachers, developing a learning website, and exploring alternative energy sources.

Keywords: Confucius Institute, Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Chinese language, Nigeria-China relations

INTRODUCTION

Studying Chinese as a foreign or second language is undertaken by individuals who are not native speakers of the language. The study of Mandarin (Standard Chinese), the official language of mainland China and Taiwan, has gained popularity alongside the growing global interest in China. However, the teaching and learning of Chinese is not a recent development, either within or outside China. Westerners began studying various Chinese dialects as early as the 16th century. In 1924, Mandarin was officially recognized as the national language of China. Following World War II, the Kuomintang adopted Mandarin as the official language of Taiwan.

Chinese is often regarded as one of the most difficult languages for native English speakers to learn. According to a study conducted in the 1970s by the Defense Language Institute in Monterey, California (as cited by William Baxter), learning Chinese requires exceptional dedication. William (1997) described it vividly, stating that mastering Chinese is “a task for men with bodies of brass, lungs of steel, heads of oak, hands of spring steel, hearts of apostles, memories of angels, and lives of Methuselah.”

The roots of modern language education can be traced to the study and teaching of Latin in the 17th century, although the human desire to learn other languages dates back thousands of years. For centuries, Latin dominated education, trade, religion, and governance throughout much of the Western world. By the late 1700s, however, French, Italian, and English had replaced Latin in these roles. Modern language instruction entered European curricula in the 18th century, yet early teaching methods—emphasizing grammar rules and translation—remained largely academic, with minimal oral practice. This approach became known as the grammar-translation method (Richards & Rodgers, 2001).

Jim Rogers of *Worth Magazine* once observed that if the 19th century belonged to Britain and the 20th to the United States, then the 21st century would belong to China. Similarly, American investor Warren Buffett, one of the most successful investors of the 20th century, echoed this sentiment, advising people to “make appropriate investments” and encouraging the younger generation to learn Chinese.

Language, as the most fundamental tool of human communication, plays an indispensable role in today's increasingly interconnected world. Historically, languages such as Latin, French, and English dominated global exchange, but Mandarin is now rapidly rising in prominence. The growing number of Chinese learners worldwide signifies the persistence of “Chinese fever.” Although Hanban estimates 100 million learners, approximately 40 million foreigners are currently studying Chinese outside China. With China's rapid economic growth and expanding global influence, interest in learning the language continues to rise both domestically and internationally. The establishment of the Confucius Institute is a direct response to this growing demand for Chinese language education.

According to Li (2023), the establishment of Confucius Institutes can be traced to the reform and opening-up policies initiated in 1978, under which China began promoting Chinese language teaching abroad through scholarship programs. The first Chinese cultural center was established in Mauritius in 1989. Subsequently, with State Council approval, Hanban launched the “Chinese Bridge Project,” leading to the establishment of the first Confucius Institute in Seoul, South Korea, in November 2004. In 2005, the first Confucius Institute in Africa was

founded in Nairobi, Kenya. In Nigeria, the Confucius Institute was established in 2008 at Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka.

Named after the renowned Chinese philosopher Confucius, the Institute operates as a non-profit organization affiliated with the Chinese Ministry of Education. Its primary aim is to promote Chinese language and culture worldwide. In addition to developing language curricula and training teachers, the Institute administers the *Hanyu Shuiping Kaoshi* (HSK) — the official Chinese proficiency test — and organizes cultural and artistic programs. Nigeria currently hosts two Confucius Institutes, one at Nnamdi Azikiwe University (UNIZIK) and another at the University of Lagos (UNILAG). In contrast, South Africa hosts six, the highest number in Africa. Given China's post-1978 economic reforms and its growing prominence in global manufacturing, proficiency in the Chinese language has become increasingly vital for Nigerians seeking to engage in international trade and cooperation.

The Confucius Institute initiative forms part of China's broader "Chinese Bridge Project" (*Hanyuqiao Gongcheng*), aimed at strengthening Chinese language education globally. Hanban, the overseeing body, comprises representatives from twelve Chinese ministries and commissions, including the Ministry of Education, the Ministry of Commerce, and the State Council Information Office. Hanban's functions include:

1. Formulating policies and development plans for international Chinese language promotion.
2. Supporting Chinese language programs at educational institutions worldwide.
3. Developing international teaching standards and instructional materials.

In essence, Hanban controls the broader ecosystem of Chinese language promotion abroad — including education policy, teacher training, teaching materials, and proficiency testing. The Confucius Institutes represent one of its most significant initiatives. Established in April 2007, the Confucius Institute Headquarters in Beijing serves as the administrative center for these operations. Although formally registered as a non-profit organization, it functions as a quasi-governmental body reflecting state priorities and policies.

According to Okafor and Enuka (2022), the idea of establishing a Confucius Institute at Nnamdi Azikiwe University originated in 2005 when the late Mr. Ike Mbonu, then Deputy Editor-in-Chief of the News Agency of Nigeria (NAN), discussed the proposal with Prof. Ilochi Okafor (SAN), the Vice-Chancellor of the university. Mr. Mbonu believed that such an affiliation would strengthen Nigeria-China relations and create economic opportunities for traders in southeastern Nigeria—particularly in Onitsha, Nnewi, and Aba—by fostering international trade and cultural exchange. Given that China is the world's most populous country and Nigeria is Africa's most populous nation and economic hub, the collaboration was seen as mutually beneficial. The key figures who played instrumental roles in establishing the Institute were Prof. Ilochi Okafor and Mr. Jiang from the Chinese Embassy.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

The establishment of the Confucius Institute at Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka, has not been without challenges. Chief among these are issues concerning the recruitment and consistency of native Chinese volunteer teachers, whose numbers have declined over the years. The limited number of Chinese instructors compared to the increasing number of interested learners in southeastern Nigeria has created a significant instructional imbalance. Furthermore, the reliance on non-native teachers limits learners' exposure to authentic linguistic and cultural experiences. The number of scholarships available for students to participate in the Year-Abroad Language Immersion Programme is also inadequate.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The study employed a descriptive survey design. A total of 110 questionnaires were distributed to students and teachers—at the Confucius Institute, Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka, during the second semester of the 2022/2023 academic session. All 100 questionnaires were retrieved and analyzed. The study adopted the Opportunity Sampling Technique, selecting students who were present on the day of data collection. Respondents were asked to express their views on the challenges facing the Confucius Institute. In addition to the questionnaires, scheduled interviews were conducted with selected staff members of the Institute to provide further insight into the issues under investigation.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The Office of Chinese Language Council International, known as Hanban, is an agency affiliated with the Chinese Ministry of Education that supports Confucius Institutes worldwide. These institutes promote educational and cultural exchanges across the globe. Currently, more than 2,500 universities offer Chinese language programs, and over 40 million students are studying the language. Each year, several million more learners take up Chinese

studies. The number of people sitting for the Chinese Proficiency Test (*Hanyu Shuiping Kaoshi*, HSK) abroad has also risen sharply; in 2007 alone, over 130,000 candidates took the exam.

The global surge in interest in studying Chinese can be attributed to several factors: three decades of continuous economic growth in China, the expansion of Chinese corporations around the world, increasing business opportunities within China, and the country's growing influence in international politics. One major reason for establishing Confucius Institutes is to provide Mandarin Chinese instruction to students and the general public, with the ultimate goal of facilitating language acquisition and intercultural understanding. Furthermore, the Institutes aim to foster cooperation and partnerships between Chinese and foreign academic institutions through collaborative research projects and academic exchanges.

In addition to offering language instruction, Confucius Institutes organize exchange programs that serve as invaluable intercultural experiences. They also plan exhibitions, seminars, and cultural performances that showcase various aspects of Chinese life, including art, music, and traditional customs—all of which enrich the learning experience. These initiatives, coupled with the business opportunities the Institutes help facilitate, provide a strong historical rationale for the establishment of the Confucius Institute at Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka, Anambra State.

However, despite their significant contributions to language education and cultural exchange in Nigeria, the Confucius Institutes face notable challenges. One of the major issues concerns the quality and adequacy of teaching staff. The performance of these Institutes largely depends on both the number and the competence of their teachers, which include native Chinese educators and locally trained instructors. Typically, the Chinese teachers assigned to Confucius Institutes are either trained specialists in Chinese language pedagogy or volunteer instructors sent from China. While the Chinese government provides considerable financial support for the Institutes, this has raised concerns about dependency and potential influence over the academic programs of host institutions. Furthermore, teaching Chinese language and culture in a non-Chinese environment presents inherent challenges. Linguistic and cultural barriers often affect both the reception and the effectiveness of educational programs.

Teaching itself is a complex profession, and teaching a language—particularly to non-native speakers—is even more demanding. As Shulman (1987, cited in Erbay et al., 2014) observed, teaching requires mastery of diverse knowledge domains. Harmer (2007, cited in Erbay et al., 2014) described language teaching as both a science and an art, emphasizing that teacher qualifications are crucial to instructional success. Dincer et al. (2013) also note a strong correlation between teacher competence and educational quality. Yet globally, there is a shortage of qualified language instructors, and Chinese is no exception.

In Nigeria, while interest in learning Chinese has grown substantially, there remains a critical shortage of qualified teachers. More than ten years after the introduction of Chinese language education through Confucius Institutes, most instructors remain native speakers from China. However, many of these teachers serve only short terms—typically between one and five years, depending on their volunteer or contractual status. Some of them lack formal training in teaching Chinese as a foreign language, as they are still undergraduate or postgraduate students with limited classroom experience.

On the other hand, some locally trained Nigerian Chinese language instructors also lack sufficient pedagogical training or formal degrees in Chinese studies. This results in inconsistencies in teaching quality and limits the overall effectiveness of the language program. Another major challenge is the linguistic environment. According to environmental theories of learning, an organism's growth is shaped more by its experiences and surroundings than by innate abilities. Similarly, language acquisition depends heavily on environmental exposure. A second or foreign language can be learned both formally and informally through immersion in a rich linguistic setting. Wang (2009) notes that while formal instruction is useful, it is not always a sufficient condition for effective language acquisition.

Unfortunately, the linguistic environment for learning Chinese in Nigeria is limited. Opportunities for learners to interact with native speakers are scarce, and language immersion programs are minimal. Matusky (n.d.) defined language immersion as a teaching method in which learners are consistently exposed to the target language (L2) across various learning contexts. In such programs, students not only attend language classes but also take other courses taught in the target language. Continuous exposure aids comprehension and retention. While Nnamdi Azikiwe University is still developing its immersion programs, the University of Lagos offers students a two-year language immersion opportunity in China.

According to Sahlins (2013), the Confucius Institute is a non-profit public educational organization affiliated with the Ministry of Education of the People's Republic of China. Its goals include supporting Chinese language instruction abroad, encouraging cross-cultural exchange, and promoting Chinese culture (Penn, 2014; Mattis, 2012). The Confucius Institute Headquarters explains its mission thus:

“As China's economy and exchanges with the world have seen rapid growth, there has also been a sharp increase in the global demand for Chinese learning. Benefiting from the experience of the UK, France, Germany, and Spain in promoting their national languages, China began its own exploration through establishing non-profit public institutions aimed at promoting Chinese language and culture abroad in 2004—these were given the name ‘Confucius Institutes.’”

In other words, a Confucius Institute is a non-profit educational institution established by the Chinese government to promote and disseminate Chinese language and culture globally. However, the description of the Institute as a “non-profit” organization has attracted debate. Although designated as non-profit, some Institutes charge tuition or service fees. According to *Wikipedia* and other sources, since its inception in 2004, the Confucius Institute program has faced criticism concerning its close ties to the Chinese Communist Party, the quality of instruction, its relationship with partner universities, and issues of academic freedom and financial transparency (Starr, 2009).

Despite these controversies, the Confucius Institutes hold strong potential to advance language learning and international cooperation. As China continues to emerge as a global hub of technological innovation and economic growth, learning Chinese has become increasingly valuable for Nigerians. As Oladunjoye (in Aboderin, 2012) asserted, “Knowing the Chinese language will help students further their studies in China and conduct research across various fields, as China has become a success story in the world economy.”

Encouragingly, Lagos State has become the first in Nigeria to integrate Chinese language into its public-school curriculum. Moreover, China's growing economic and cultural influence in Nigeria and Africa has deepened bilateral relations. Language and culture are inseparable—one cannot fully grasp a language without understanding the culture of its speakers.

Despite the challenges and perceived risks associated with introducing Chinese language education in Nigeria, such partnerships hold immense potential for national development. As WeSizwe Platinum's CEO, Jonathan Ke Gao, remarked:

“Sino-African partnerships have the potential to play an important role in fostering the future growth and development of African economies. Economic diversification based on high competitiveness, supported by specialist expertise, skills, and technology transfer, would be the main catalyst of China's contribution to Africa's economic transformation in the global marketplace.”

Thus, encouraging Nigerians to engage more closely with China through linguistic and cultural integration could open new avenues for economic collaboration and global competitiveness. Strengthening political, educational, and economic cooperation aligns with the broader global trend toward inclusivity in development. In international studies, the importance of professionals and scholars gaining overseas training cannot be overstated, as it enables cross-cultural exchange, language acquisition, and the transfer of knowledge and technology. While Western powers continue to struggle to advance their ideological model of egalitarianism, China has effectively leveraged cultural diplomacy and educational outreach—such as through Confucius Institutes—to expand its soft power. As Mohan et al. (2009) note, China's growing influence rests not only on its economic might but also on its capacity to attract and persuade through cultural and intellectual exchange.

Empirical review

Liu (2010) reported that approximately 750,000 people (including 670,000 from overseas) took the Chinese Proficiency Test (HSK) abroad in 2010. Learning Chinese has become increasingly popular across many nations. According to the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC, 2006), the number of English students taking Advanced Level (A-Level) examinations in Chinese rose by about 57%. In the same year, Brighton College in the United Kingdom designated Chinese as one of its core disciplines of study.

According to Miao and Chen (2015), there is a positive correlation between the number of international students and the number of Confucius Institutes in trading partner nations. They further demonstrated that this relationship is particularly evident among countries with high trade volumes and within common law jurisdictions. However, Lin et al. (2016) discovered that each new Confucius Institute actually reduces the number of international students coming to China by 0.3%. Their findings also indicate that Confucius Institutes tend to attract more students from developing countries than from industrialized nations. Lin et al. (2016) argued that since international students

from developed countries often have access to education of a higher standard than what is available in China, the promotional role of Confucius Institutes in these contexts is weakened, thereby amplifying their inhibiting effect.

With reference to cross-cultural exchanges involving Chinese culture, Shen (2013) examined intercultural communication and analyzed both the challenges and future developmental directions of the Confucius Institutes. She argued that China should learn from other countries' experiences in fostering intercultural dialogue. Diao and Liu (2014) also explored and elaborated on the role that Confucius Institutes play in cultural communication and institutional development.

Chen (2018) observed that Confucius Institutes in Russia have achieved significant progress while expanding rapidly. However, over time, several challenges have emerged regarding management style, institutional autonomy, and the effective promotion of culture. First, Confucius Institutes in Russia operate independently at various administrative levels within their partner universities and often duplicate the functions of subordinate institutions. Given the awkwardness of such autonomy, many Confucius Institutes have effectively evolved into revenue-generating departments of their host universities. This contradicts the Institutes' designation as "non-profit organizations," thereby creating a dilemma for their future growth.

Secondly, although "cooperation" is emphasized in the management, operation, and organization of all Confucius Institutes, the absence of legal frameworks or mechanisms makes it difficult to formally recognize the authority of Chinese directors within the standardized management and daily operations of these institutes in Russia.

Lastly, there are notable differences in Chinese and Russian perspectives regarding the organization and purpose of cultural activities. From the Russian viewpoint, cultural events should primarily support educational efforts. Moreover,

Confucius Institutes in Russia face the additional challenge of high taxation.

In response to these issues, Sun Jie proposed four strategic directions for the long-term development of Confucius Institutes in Russia: cyclical, characteristic, innovative, and diversified development. These strategies include reusing instructional materials and equipment, training teachers, developing core culture courses focused on Chinese traditions, implementing creative teaching and cultural communication methods, and fully utilizing the Institutes' diverse functions—such as establishing Consultation Centres for Russian–Chinese Affairs, News Communication Bases, International Conference Centres, and Foundations.

A book titled *Chinese Language in Nigeria: Teaching and Learning* was published in Germany by Odinye (2016). It originated from his 2013 doctoral dissertation at Xiamen University, China, and represents the first comprehensive study on Chinese language teaching and learning in Nigeria. The thesis addressed five research questions focused on learners' attitudes toward the language, their motivation and proficiency levels, teachers' perceptions, and the challenges of teaching and learning Chinese.

Odinye (2016) found that Nigerian students studying Chinese generally exhibit a positive attitude and are primarily motivated by external factors. However, several challenges were identified, including a shortage of learning facilities, unqualified and inexperienced instructors, the short tenure of volunteer teachers, and the limited presence of native Chinese teachers. The study made several recommendations to the Nigerian government, Hanban, universities, Confucius Institutes, and classroom instructors. These include increasing the number of Chinese teachers deployed to Nigeria, training more local Chinese language teachers, extending volunteer teachers' stay to at least two years, establishing more Confucius Institutes, offering free Chinese language instruction outside certificate and diploma programs, maintaining good relations with partner institutions, and introducing Chinese language instruction at the primary and secondary school levels.

Okafor (2020) cited Odinye (2015), emphasizing that learning Chinese in Nigeria is essential because China has become a global hub for economic growth and technological development. The study also notes that the first Confucius Institute in Nigeria was established at Nnamdi Azikiwe University in 2008, followed by the University of Lagos in 2009. In another study, Odinye (2017) explored the attitudes of Nigerian learners toward the Chinese language, using students from the Confucius Institute at Nnamdi Azikiwe University as a case study. His findings revealed positive learner attitudes, consistent with those reported in Odinye (2016). Furthermore, Odinye (2018) conducted a comprehensive investigation into the challenges of teaching and learning Chinese in Nigeria. The findings include inadequate learning centers (Confucius Institutes), a shortage of qualified teachers, insufficient teaching materials and aids, lack of ICT integration in language instruction, absence of language laboratories, poor linguistic environments, and high learning costs.

DATA PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS

This section presents the data analysis and findings from the field survey. The analysis is divided into two sections: the analysis of the research questions and the demographic information of the respondents. Each respondent's interview response is discussed under the relevant research question. A total of one hundred and ten (110) copies of the questionnaire were distributed to the field survey participants; however, only one hundred (100) copies were duly completed and returned. Therefore, this section focuses primarily on the analysis of the interview responses and the data obtained from the correctly completed and returned questionnaires.

Research Question 1: What are the challenges affecting the teaching and learning of Chinese at Chinese Institute at Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka?

TABLE 2: Mean ratings of the responses on the challenges affecting the teaching and learning of Chinese at Confucius Institute at Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka.

This formula for Calculating mean: Frequency x point values ÷ number of respondents.

Eg: $61 \times 4 + 38 \times 3 + 1 \times 2 + 0 \times 1 = 360 \div 100$ (total number of respondents) = 3.6

S/N	Comments	SA	A	D	SD	Mean	Remark
1	The Confucius Institute at UNIZIK has adequate infrastructure to accommodate the population of Chinese language learners.	62	38	0	0	3.6	Agreed
2	The Confucius Institute at UNIZIK has a constant power supply to support digital learning.	16	24	60	0	2.56	Disagreed
3	There are sufficient learning materials available in the library.	69	31	0	0	3.6	Agreed
4	There is an official website where information on Chinese studies can be accessed.	0	0	61	39	1.4	Disagreed
5	There is sufficient staff at the Confucius Institute, UNIZIK.	0	0	30	70	1.3	Disagreed

Data in Table 2 indicate that the respondents agreed that the Confucius Institute at Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka, has adequate infrastructure to accommodate the population of Chinese language learners, including a well-equipped library that supports research and study. This reflects the strong collaboration between the university and the Chinese government in promoting Chinese language learning and fostering cultural exchange. However, the respondents' views on staffing reveal that the institute suffers from an inadequate workforce. In addition, the challenge of irregular power supply continues to hinder the effective implementation of digital learning.

Speaking on the problems facing the Confucius Institute, UNIZIK:

Interviewee 1 stated:

"The Confucius Institute is in dire need of adequate teachers. Very few native Chinese teachers remain at the institute for more than three to five years before returning home. Some stay for only a year or two, such as the volunteer teachers. A few of the educators lack prior teaching experience in language instruction, and some are still undergraduate or graduate students who have never taught before. There are also certain issues with the Nigerian Chinese teachers, as a few of them lack both teaching experience and sufficient language background."
 (Male staff, 25)

Interviewee 2 explained:

"The lack of readiness among some graduate students to take up teaching positions at the UNIZIK Confucius Institute is a major challenge. The Institute requires all graduate students trained in China to return to Nigeria and serve as teachers; however, most of them remain in China to teach English and never return to the Institute."
 (Female staff, 30)

Interviewee 3 remarked:

"There is also the challenge posed by the Chinese government, which involves reducing the Institute's financial support in order to make it more self-sufficient. However, this does not imply a complete withdrawal of assistance. The reduction could be attributed to the financial strain the Chinese government faces in funding Confucius Institutes across the globe."
 (Female staff, 40)

Interviewee 4 noted:

“The power supply system at the university occasionally breaks down. Since teachers rely on PowerPoint and multimedia presentations for teaching, this has a negative impact on the effectiveness and quality of lesson delivery.” (Male staff, 42)

Research Question 2:

What are the future prospects of Confucius Institute at Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka?

Table 3: Mean ratings of the responses on the prospects of CI at UNIZIK, Awka.

This formula for Calculating mean: Frequency x point values ÷ number of respondents.

Eg: $61 \times 4 + 38 \times 3 + 1 \times 2 + 0 \times 1 = 360 \div 100$ (total number of respondents) = 3.6

S/N	Comments	SA	A	D	SD	Mean	Remark
1	The Confucius Institute (CI) at UNIZIK serves Nigeria’s needs in fostering Nigeria–China bilateral relations.	70	30	0	0	3.6	Agreed
2	The CI at UNIZIK helps to address the problem of unemployment.	69	31	0	0	3.6	Agreed
3	The CI at UNIZIK helps to facilitate the aspirations of Nigerian students to study abroad.	90	10	0	0	3.6	Agreed

Data in Table 3 indicate that the participants agreed that the Confucius Institute at UNIZIK plays a significant role in bridging the gap in international trade between Nigeria and China. Considering China’s large population, the ability of Nigeria to effectively engage in trade relations with China would greatly contribute to the growth of the Nigerian economy. In addition, the influx of Chinese businessmen and investors into Nigeria has created employment opportunities for Nigerians. It is also evident that, due to persistent security challenges and rising inflation in the country, many Nigerian youths aspire to travel abroad. For many students, learning Chinese through the Confucius Institute at UNIZIK serves as a pathway to achieving this goal. This is reflected in the reluctance of several students on the Year Abroad programme to return to Nigeria after completing their studies. However, the reduction in financial assistance from Hanban, China, has further complicated this challenge.

Speaking on the prospects of the Confucius Institute at UNIZIK:

Interviewee 1 stated:

“Things have improved for many Nigerians thanks to the entry of Chinese businesses and the establishment of Confucius Institutes in the country. By learning Chinese, many people have been lifted out of poverty.” (Female, 30)

Interviewee 2 remarked:

“None of the centres in Africa have closed, despite the fact that several have shut down in some Western nations. This is because the Confucius Institute performs distinct functions in both regions. For instance, in Africa, the focus is mainly on addressing societal issues such as youth restiveness and unemployment.” (Male, 33)

Interviewee 3 observed:

“Another issue is that Nnamdi Azikiwe University does not receive adequate federal subventions. As a result, there is concern that the university’s ability to fund the Institute may be limited. As a joint project, Nnamdi Azikiwe University has certain responsibilities, including providing administrative support such as vehicles and infrastructure.” (Male, 46)

Interviewee 4 explained:

“The declining number of Chinese teachers dispatched from Hanban presents another challenge. Even worse, it appears that local educators are reluctant to work at the Institute again. Thus, it raises the question of what would happen if the number of teachers coming from China were drastically reduced. There might not be enough local manpower to sustain the Institute.” (Female, 37)

Interviewee 5 noted:

“Scholarships are powerful study incentives; they attract more students to the centre and motivate current students to work harder since they have something positive to look forward to. In my opinion, there should be more scholarship offers, as they are currently few and difficult to obtain.” (Male, 26)

Interviewee 6 added:

“Language barriers and cultural adaptation remain major challenges for native Chinese teachers. Additionally, I believe the Institute should introduce more study incentives.” (Male, 30)

Interviewee 7 concluded:

“One of the biggest challenges we had to overcome was negative public perception. In the early days of the Confucius Institute at Nnamdi Azikiwe University, some individuals turned against the Institute after being influenced by Western propaganda and misinformation. Some even claimed that the Institute was part of China’s global dominance agenda, based on these unfavourable impressions.” (Female, 37)

Summary of Findings

Problems Associated with the Establishment of the Confucius Institute at UNIZIK

One major challenge identified in this research is the shortage of staff at the Confucius Institute. The limited workforce has created difficulties that affect both instructors and students. Instructors are compelled to devote excessive time and energy to support their students, which can lead to burnout and reduced teaching effectiveness. This challenge is further aggravated by the increasing number of students interested in learning Chinese, resulting in an overwhelming staff–student ratio.

Petroleum and electricity remain the two most vital energy subsectors driving Nigeria’s economic growth. However, the lack of reliable power supply continues to hinder national development. Unstable electricity not only discourages potential investors by increasing operational costs but also affects every aspect of urban life—homes, businesses, schools, and research institutions. For Nigeria to benefit from trade liberalization and globalization, adequate attention must be given to strengthening the power sector. Reliable and affordable energy is indispensable if Nigeria is to meet its developmental targets under the National Economic Empowerment and Development Strategy (NEEDS) and the Millennium Development Goals.

The challenge of unstable electricity supply at the Confucius Institute, UNIZIK, mirrors the broader national issue but has direct consequences on teaching and learning. Sixty percent (60%) of the respondents observed that poor power supply hampers the use of digital facilities at the Institute. Similarly, the absence of an official website undermines the e-learning experience of both teachers and students.

Despite these challenges, the study revealed that participants generally agreed that the Confucius Institute at UNIZIK has sufficient physical infrastructure and digital tools to support learning. The Institute’s library is also well-equipped with rich materials for both academic and recreational purposes.

Prospects of the Establishment of the Confucius Institute at UNIZIK

The findings indicate that participants strongly recognized the importance of the Confucius Institute in Nigeria, particularly as China’s soft power continues to gain traction across Africa. About 69% of respondents agreed that the presence of Chinese investors in Nigeria creates employment opportunities for local interpreters and translators. Furthermore, 90% of students expressed that studying Chinese offers them an opportunity to travel to China for further education or better economic prospects.

SUMMARY

The first research question examined the factors affecting the teaching and learning of the Chinese language at the Confucius Institute, Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka. Findings revealed that the Institute is significantly understaffed. If this trend continues amidst the growing interest in Chinese language studies, the existing staff may become increasingly overwhelmed.

The study also established that instability in power supply has led to the underutilization of digital teaching resources. This situation negatively affects students’ learning experiences and overall academic performance. It can be inferred that students would perform better if digital learning tools were effectively harnessed. The second research question explored the prospects of the Institute both locally and internationally. Respondents agreed that the study of Chinese is crucial to Nigeria’s participation in international trade, as it creates opportunities for employment in interpretation, translation, and diplomacy. Moreover, for many students, learning Chinese represents a pathway to studying or working abroad, particularly in China.

CONCLUSION

This study examined the effects of establishing the Confucius Institute at Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka, Anambra State. It employed a descriptive research design using questionnaires and interviews to collect data. Unlike previous studies that focused primarily on linguistic comparisons between Chinese and Igbo or on

pedagogical aspects of teaching Chinese, this study provides insight into the learning environment itself and how it influences teaching and learning outcomes.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The Nigeria–China educational partnership has grown rapidly over the past decade through the establishment of Confucius Institutes across the country, yielding notable achievements—especially at Nnamdi Azikiwe University. These include increased staff strength, intellectual development, local and international staff exchange programmes, economic and human capital development, and infrastructural growth. However, several pressing challenges remain, requiring urgent attention from both the university administration and its Chinese counterparts. If not addressed effectively, these challenges could undermine the significant progress already achieved and threaten the sustainability of the Institute.

1. **Staff Compensation and Retention:**

The university could explore alternative funding sources, such as registration fees and special grants, to support Chinese instructors. While the university is not obligated to cover all costs, providing supplementary support could help retain qualified teachers.

2. **Electricity and Digital Learning:**

To address the problem of unstable power supply, the university should ensure the availability of at least one or two backup generators to facilitate uninterrupted digital learning and multimedia teaching.

3. **Infrastructure and Facilities:**

The university should propose to the Chinese government the establishment of a **Model Confucius Institute** at Nnamdi Azikiwe University. This purpose-built structure should include adequate offices, classrooms, and an auditorium. Ideally, the Institute could resemble a “Chinese Village” within the university campus to enhance cultural immersion and functionality.

4. **Scholarships and Incentives:**

The Chinese government should be encouraged to increase scholarship opportunities for Nigerian students and extend grants to local teachers. Greater incentives will enhance the appeal of studying and teaching Chinese, motivating more students to engage with the programme.

5. **Website and Information Access:**

The Confucius Institute at UNIZIK should establish and maintain an official, regularly updated website containing accurate information about its programmes, staff, and activities. This would improve research access and promote transparency and visibility.

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