AUTONOMOUS LEARNING ABILITY OF CHINESE LANGUAGE LEARNERS IN CAMEROON

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Abstract

Since the end of the 20th century, autonomous learning has become a popular research topic in education and has received much attention from researchers. The acquisition of Chinese as a second language requires learners to practice autonomous learning and develop their language learning ability. The present study used the theory of autonomous learning proposed by (Holec H., 1981), in addition to questionnaires and interviews to study the general trend of autonomous learning ability of Chinese language learners in Cameroonian universities and institutions. The results of this study show that Cameroonian Chinese language learners have a certain level of autonomous learning ability in Chinese language, which is demonstrated by their ability to control the learning process and evaluate its effectiveness but they still encounter some problems, such as lack of the ability to achieve learning goals and develop reasonable learning plans, lack of the ability to select properly learning content and apply learning strategies, and most students are not aware of the importance of autonomous learning. Finally, this study suggests some main ways to develop the autonomous learning ability of Cameroonian Chinese language learners.

Keywords: Autonomous learning ability, Chinese language, Cameroon

CAPACITÉ D'APPRENTISSAGE AUTONOME DES APPRENANTS DE LANGUE CHINOISE AU CAMEROUN

Résumé

Depuis la fin du 20ème siècle, l'apprentissage autonome est devenu un sujet de recherche populaire dans l'éducation et a reçu beaucoup d'attention de la part des chercheurs. L'acquisition du chinois comme deuxième langue exige que les apprenants mettent en pratique l'apprentissage autonome afin de développer leurs compétences en langue. La présente étude a fait recours à la théorie de l'apprentissage autonome proposée par (Holec H. , 1981), ainsi qu'utiliser les questionnaires et les entretiens afin d'étudier la tendance générale des compétences d'apprentissage autonome des apprenants de la langue chinoise dans les

universités et institutions du Cameroun. Les résultats de cette étude montrent que les apprenants de la langue chinoise au Cameroun ont un certain niveau de capacité d'apprentissage autonome en langue chinoise, ce qui est démontré par leur capacité à contrôler le processus d'apprentissage et à évaluer son efficacité mais ils rencontrent certaines difficultés, telles que: le manque de capacité à atteindre des objectifs d'apprentissage et à développer des plans d'apprentissage raisonnables; le manque de capacité à sélectionner correctement le contenu et à appliquer des stratégies d'apprentissage , et la plupart d'étudiants ne sont pas conscients de l'importance de l'apprentissage autonome. En conclusion, la présente étude propose également quelques recommandations afin de développer la capacité d'apprentissage autonome des apprenants camerounais en langue chinois.

Mots clés : Capacité d'apprentissage autonome, apprenants de langue chinoise, Cameroun.

Introduction

With the development of Chinese language teaching worldwide, Chinese language learners have started to use various learning methods such as autonomous learning and cooperative learning. Students' autonomous learning ability refers to learners' General skills in the classroom. Researchers such as (Holec, 1981), (Allwright, 1988), and (Dickinson, Self-instruction in language learning, 1987) introduced autonomous learning into the classroom, emphasizing that students can take responsibility for their learning and demonstrate autonomous cognition and behavior. Autonomous learning also means that students think and decide for themselves, and acquire knowledge on their initiative. It encourages students to have a desire to learn, have a sense of time when learning, and helps them demonstrate creativity and exploration in their learning. According to the Humanistic Approach to Psychology learning elaborated by Carl Ransom Rogers in 1951, only the learners know whether they have made significant progress in the learning process, if they have worked hard, in which areas they have failed and in which they have succeeded. This method of learning involves the learner's initiative in learning, which results in more proactive and persistent learning. Moreover, since 1990, (Zimmerman, 1990) has used Ulric Neisser's cognitive psychology theory in the educational context and believes that most learners learn autonomously and their meta-cognitive and behavior are self-motivated. In brief, learners' learning is autonomous when they actively use meta-cognitive strategies, are motivated to learn, and engage in deep observation, self-evaluation, and self-reflection. He goes on to describe the nature of self-directed learning in six ways, learning motivation, learning methods, learning time, learning behavior, learning physical environment, and learning sociability. In Cameroon, the number of Chinese language learners is increasing, and several universities, colleges and high schools already offer Chinese language programs, and now Cameroon has about more than 100.000 Chinese language learners reported (Nama, 2021). The new pandemic (Covid-19) has brought a considerable change in Chinese language learning, and students have encountered many obstacles in autonomous learning. Therefore, what is the overall situation of the autonomous learning ability of Chinese language learners in Cameroon? What problems and factors influence their autonomous learning ability? And how can we develop their autonomous learning ability? This study's main objective is to investigate the autonomous learning ability of Cameroonian Chinese language learners in four sub-sections, which are: the analysis of the ability to set learning goals and develop learning plans; the ability to select learning content and use

learning strategies; the ability of learning process monitoring; and finally, learners' learning effectiveness. This research also identified some problems and factors affecting the autonomous learning ability of Chinese language learners in Cameroon. Based on the findings, this study provides suggestions to help them maximize their autonomous learning ability, introduce a new Chinese language learning method, and create a new teaching model for Cameroonian Chinese language teachers.

I. Literature review

Autonomous learning is the ability to assume responsibility for learning. This ability is developed through learning and is not innate. As for (Holec H., 1981), it manifests itself in the setting of learning objectives, the determination of learning materials and pace, the selection of learning methods and strategies, the monitoring of the learning process and the evaluation of learning outcomes. Besides, (Littlewood, 1999) defines autonomous learning as the ability of learners to «self-regulate» and divides it into two kinds: the first is operational autonomy and the second is passive autonomy from a language standpoint. The former refers to learners' establishing their objectives. In contrast, the latter refers to learners using a set of self-directed learning procedures to attain their objectives. Learner autonomy is the psychological link between the learning process and the learning content. For example, the ability to transcend, think critically, make decisions, and act autonomously. In response to (Holec H., 1981) and (Littlewood, 1999) theories, (Dickinson, 1992) argues that autonomous learning should include the ability to comprehend what is being taught, set learning goals, select, and use appropriate learning strategies, control the use of these strategies, and learn autonomously. Furthermore, (Arnold, 1999) asserts that autonomous learning skills involve psychological and technological support. Psychological support is the ability to impact students' motivation, goal setting, topic selection, learning strategies, and task completion, while technical support is self-regulation and self-evaluation.

Moreover, (Deci, 1991) examined the significance of learner autonomy from a socio-linguistic and psychophysiology standpoint. Autonomous learning implies that students have specific motivations, behaviors, and meta-cognition and can engage in active learning. According to (Nunan, 1997), autonomous learners can be able to set their own goals and create opportunities for learning. (Benson, 1997)believe that autonomous learning is the ability to create learning opportunities and conditions outside of school, plan to learn, select learning locations, and choose learning content. As regards (Shu, 2004), autonomous learning is composed of aptitude, ability, and environment. In terms of aptitude, students should take responsibility for their learning and be mentally active; in terms of ability, they should be able autonomously to complete the tasks assigned by teachers and have the learning ability to employ multiple learning strategies; in terms of environment, teachers should allow students to create their own learning environment and cultivate their ability of autonomous learning. (Broady, 1996) asserts that autonomous learning is distinct from self-learning and is composed of at least three elements: responsibility, independent learning from the teacher, and freedom of choice.

Concerning autonomous learning characteristics, (Wenden, 1991) summarized the characteristics of autonomous learners as the ability to maintain a positive and optimistic attitude toward the learning task and the awareness of the critical role of meta-cognitive knowledge in autonomous learning. He believed that autonomous learners have no qualms about making errors in expression and they can reflect in real-

time, adjust and modify learning strategies. Similarly, (Zimmerman, 1990) argues that learners are autonomous if they are actively involved in these three areas: meta-cognitive knowledge; motivation, and control of learning behaviors. Thus, to summarize, (Pang, 2001) asserts that autonomous learning is characterized by subjectivity, self-awareness, emotional expression, and relative independence.

Concerning learners' attitudes towards autonomous learning, (Chan, 2015) through questionnaires and interviews, discovered that students at Hong Kong Polytechnic University maintain positive attitudes toward autonomous learning but are insufficiently motivated to learn and lack meta-cognitive knowledge; they are not yet at the level of autonomy in their learning behaviors, and teachers do not provide students with autonomy-enhancing resources. Furthermore, (Zhang, 2010) surveyed 113 English major Students using a correlation and path analysis questionnaire, and found that using self-efficacy and learning strategies significantly and positively affected learners' autonomous learning ability. Moreover, (Ni, 2010) also studied college students in Chongqing through questionnaires and interviews, and, discovered that students' motivation level was positively correlated with autonomous learning ability. The correlation coefficient between overall motivation and the use of learning strategies was significantly lower than that for autonomous learning ability. It means that learning motivation and learning strategies are the most influential factors on learners' autonomy.

In Cameroon, particularly in the Far North region, (Tadjuidje, 2022) found that students at Ouro-Tchédé high school are involved in autonomous learning activities. He discovered that learners' success in a task is not only about getting the right answer but also about adopting the right process, as the student is required to do autonomously what he previously did with the teacher's assistance. On the other hand, (Roland, 2018) argue that developing Maroua students' autonomous learning ability is essential because, in Maroua, the status of autonomous learning is highly worrisome. She observed that, despite the challenges regarding pedagogical, didactic, and meta-cognitive linkages in relation to the heterogeneity of the class and the learning target population, nothing is done in schools to achieve genuine autonomy in student learning. Therefore, she concluded that what is done should not be done and what should be done is not done. (Ramnarain, 2020) also investigated South African Science students and found that they have a considerable amount of autonomous learning and felt empowered and motivated as a result of their experience.

According to (Nneji, 2015) teaching and learning in most African countries, especially in Nigeria do not give room for the full implementation and fulfilment of learner autonomy. It has had a significant impact on the ability of learners to realize their full potential as development agents. Furthermore, (Viau, 2009) argues that the student's strong motivation to complete a result from a pupil's perception of the task's value, his competence to complete it, and the degree of control over the progress of its execution. It also requires the pupil's engagement with the cognitive plan and persistence. In addition, (Bouffard-Bouchard, 1991) and (Doly, 2006) have noticed that failing students are not meta-cognitive because they do not apply control methods, manage randomly without awareness, rely on surface indices, and encode the task wrongly. In contrast, successful students are meta-cognitive and self-regulating due to their self-awareness and selection of effective learning strategies to enhance their academic performance.

2. Method

The present study explores the autonomous learning ability of Chinese language learners in Cameroon using a questionnaire-based survey and interview methods. The first part of the questionnaire collects basic information about students, including their gender, HSK level, and university or Institution. The second part examines their autonomous learning ability level. This part is divided into four categories according to Holec's definition: the first category is the ability to set learning goals and plans; the second is the ability to select learning contents and utilizes learning strategies; followed by the ability to control the learning process and eventually the ability to evaluate the effectiveness of learning. For participants' convenience, the questionnaire employed a five-point Likert scale ranging 1= strongly disagree; 2=disagree; 3=neither to agree nor disagree; 4=agree; 5=strongly agree, this allows the participants to choose the equivalence of their current situation, and through this, the researcher were be able to analyse the data of their abilities. An online questionnaire was sent to the expected participants and the sample was composed of 189 respondents, among whom 85 were students at the University of Maroua, 57 were students at the Confucius Institute of the University of Yaoundé II, and 47 at the Confucius center of Douala, and 11 interviews were conducted with students from various institutions (including graduated students).

After collecting the questionnaires, the data was analyzed using Excel and «questionnaire Star». For interviews, face to face interviews were conducted as well as whatsApp and wechat video calls with a subgroup of learners, including phone calls to gain a better understanding of the autonomous learning ability of Chinese learners in Cameroon. In addition, 5 Cameroonian teachers of Chinese language were interviewed. Given that the researchers and the participants share common languages (French and English), there were no communication obstacles during the research, which made the collection of data quite efficient.

3. Findings and Discussions

3.1. Analysis of the overall situation of Cameroonian Chinese language Learners' autonomous learning ability

3.1.1. Analysis of the ability to set learning goals and develop learning plans

This part includes the learner's ability to set learning goals (Q4) and plan study time (Q5), as well as the ability to adjust learning goals (Q6) and develop learning plans (Q7).

In terms of learner's ability to set learning goals, in response to the question of "whether they could clearly set learning goals" the results show that most learners are able to set their goals as can be seen in the graph below:
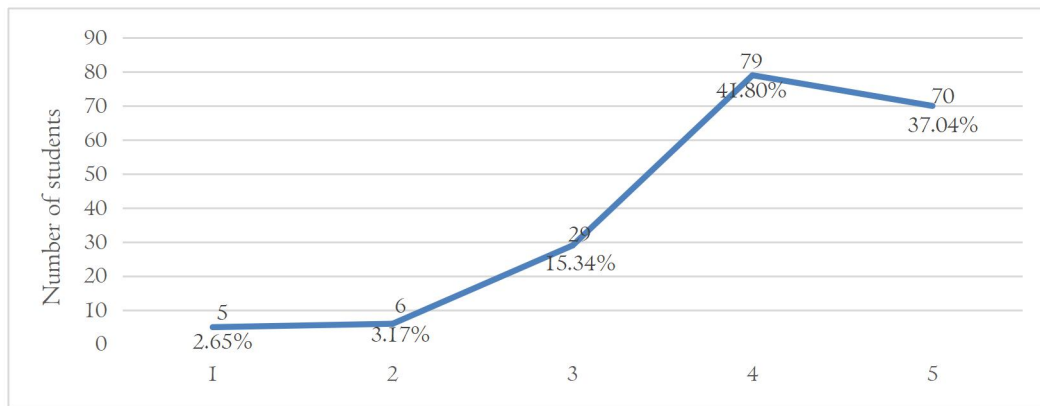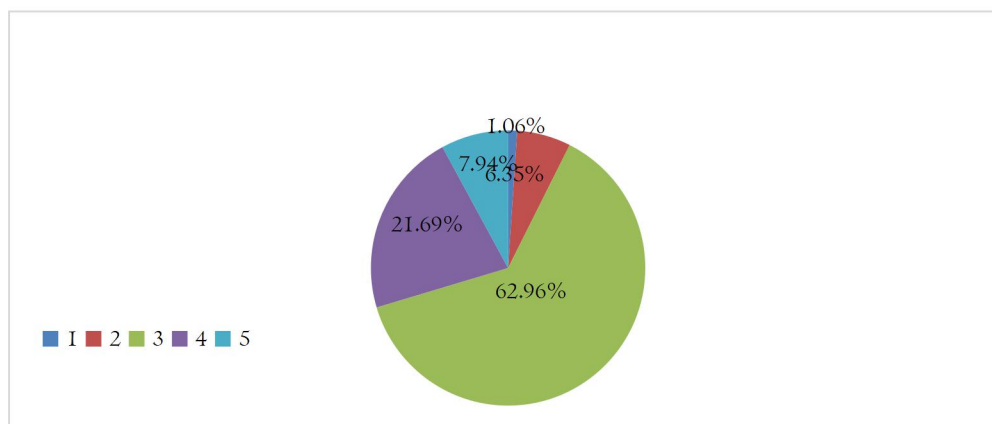
Graph 3.1: Learners's ability to set learning goals

From the above graph 3.1, we can see that 5 learners (2.65%) and 6 learners (3.17%) respectively choose "strongly disagree" and "disagree", indicating that they are unable to set their learning goals; while 29 learners (15.34%) choose "neither agree nor disagree" which implies that they are sometimes able to set their learning goals and sometimes not. This study also noticed that 79 learners (41.80%) responded "agree," which indicates that they can easily set their learning goals; and 70 learners (37.04%) "strongly agree", which means that they can set their learning goals without any difficulty. As can be seen, the proportion of students able to set their learning goals is significantly higher. However, there is still a minority of learners who are not able to set their learning goals.

As regards the ability to plan study time, the findings show that 41, 80% of learners can plan their study time in the process of autonomous learning. Learners who have a high autonomous learning ability use to study whenever they want according to their learning interests, without any schedule.

In terms of adjusting learning goals only two learners (1.06%) "strongly disagree" and 12 learners (6.35%) "disagree" which means they lack this ability; 41 learners (21.69%) "agree" which indicates that they can more easily adjust their learning goals. What was unexpected is that this study found more than 118 learners (62.96%) who "Neither agree nor disagree" which implies that they are not really sure if they are able or not to adjust their learning goals as shown in graph 3.2.

Graph 3.2: Learners' ability to adjust their autonomous learning goals and plans

As shown in the graph above, most learners cannot always adjust their learning goals as they proceed

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through the learning process. The results of the interviews indicate that the inability of students to adjust their learning goals is due to a lack of learning experience and guidance. Furthermore, this study also revealed that 108 students, accounting for 57.14%, have the ability to develop autonomous learning plans, and only 1 student accounting for 0.53% does not master this ability. Therefore, we can conclude that, most learners use to establish their learning plans and are able to make their primary plans from different perspectives according to their learning goals.

In conclusion, the table3.1 show the overall ability of students as concern setting learning goals and developing learning plans respectively Q4 (the learner's ability to set learning goals); Q5 (plan study time), Q6 (the ability to adjust learning goals) and Q7 (finally develop learning plans).

Table 3.1: Overall ability in setting learning goals and developing learning plans

Items	Number of students	Mean	Standard deviation
Q4		4.07	0.94
Q5	189	3.67	0.91
Q6		3.87	0.80
Q7		3.29	0.75

From the above table, we can conclude that most learners of Chinese in Cameroon can define learning goals and plans. However, some learners find it challenging to pursue their goals and plans during the learning process which means that they easily lose interest in learning. This study revealed that a student from the University of Maroua gave up his studies because he found learning the Chinese language to be extremely stressful and challenging.

3.1.2. Analysis of the ability to select learning content and use learning strategies

This part examines learners' ability to select learning content and use learning strategies in four areas: selecting content through media search materials, selecting and monitoring learning methods, organizing content for specific tasks, and selecting content based on independent goals.

As for the ability of students to select learning content through media research, the majority of students (40.21%) choose neither agree nor disagree, which implies that only a minority of students (12.17%) effectively master this skill, as seen in graph 3.3.
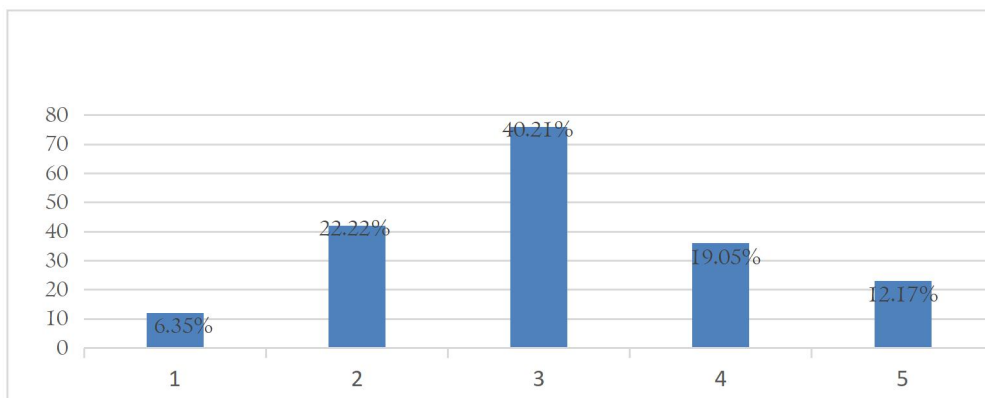
Graph 3.3: Learners' ability to search for information through media

According to the results, 40.21 % of students are unable to search for materials via the Internet, newspapers, and other media since the majority of them do not know Chinese websites that can assist them in improving their Chinese level. During the interview, the most students asserted that it is difficult for them to find the necessary learning materials and that the only books they are familiar with are the New Practical Chinese Textbook, Business Chinese, etc., indicating that they have no way to expand their autonomous learning ability.

Graph 3.4 shows that most 112 learners (59.26%) are able to choose an appropriate learning method, while only 1 learner (0.53%) does not have this ability. In general, Chinese beginners face many difficulties when it comes to choose appropriate learning methods.
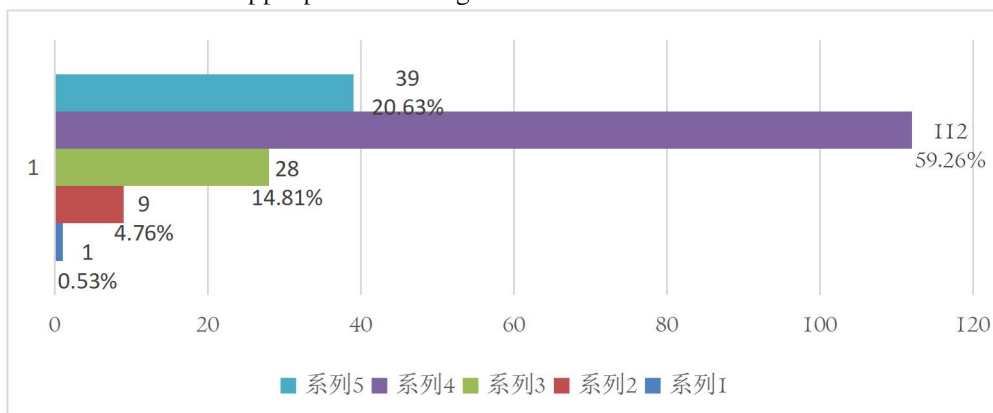
Graph 3.4: Learners' ability to select learning method

As the above graph 3.4 shows, most learners can have an appropriate learning method that meets their needs. They refer to their teachers or seek advice from their friends who have a high level of Chinese. Successful Chinese learners usually have rich learning methods and can improve their Chinese by learning HSK vocabulary, watching Chinese movies and reading Chinese articles or essays. In summary, the learning methods of Cameroonian Chinese learners are diverse from one student to another.

Regarding the possibility of self-organizing the learning content for the given task, only 1 learner (0.53%) chose 1, 10 (5.29%) chose 2, 89 (47.09%) chose 3, 65 (34.39%) chose 4, and 24 (12.70%) chose 5.
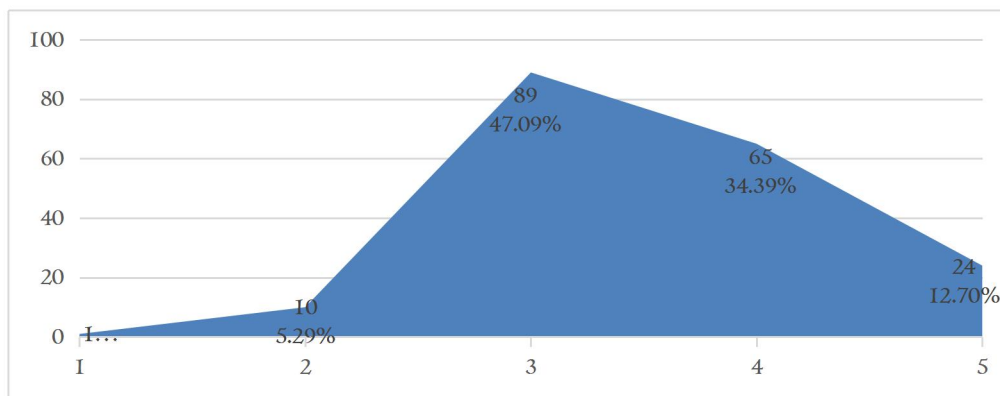
Graph 3.5: Learners' ability to organise learning content for a given task

Graph 3.5 shows that 12.70% of learners totally agree with the fact that they can organize their learning content according to the tasks assigned by the teachers, 47.09% of them sometimes first pay attention to the learning tasks set by the teacher and then see if they can complete these tasks according to the teacher's requirements; and only 5.29% of students are not totally able.

Furthermore, regarding the content that interest learners, the largest number of students (96 students) can choose learning content according to their own goals, select learning materials according to their interests, and are more able to make their own choices. Therefore, we can say that Cameroonian Chinese language learners can select learning content and use strategies.

3.1.3. Analysis of learning process monitoring ability

In this Section, we examine learners' ability to monitor the learning process from four perspectives: the ability to explore effective learning methods (Q12), the ability to solve autonomous learning difficulties (Q13), the ability to self-regulate (Q14), and the ability to self-correct (Q15).

As regards the ability to explore effective learning methods, this study found that only 3 students, accounting for 1.59%, are unable to learn Chinese in an effective way, while the majority of students (N=94 (49.74%) have mastered this skill, which basically means that most students can effectively communicate with their teachers, friends and others to improve their autonomous learning skills and can efficiently monitor the learning process.

On the other hand, concerning student ability to solve learning difficulties, as illustrated in Graph 3.6, the majority of students (112) have not mastered the ability to solve learning difficulties while only 20 students representing 10.58% are really able to solve learning difficulties.
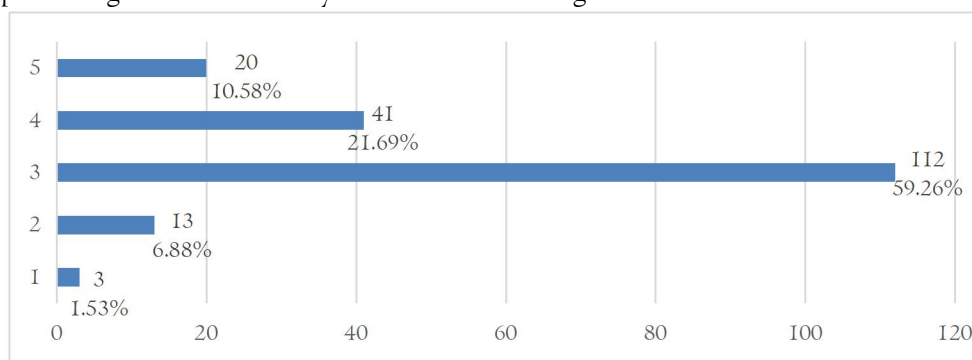
Graph 3.6: Learners' ability to solve learning difficulties

As shown in the above graph, Cameroonian Chinese language learners cannot always solve all their learning difficulties autonomously. Interviewee 1, said, « I think some grammar points need teachers' guidance because some students do not know how to use them. » It can be seen that students are not always able to solve grammar problems.

Regarding the ability to self-regulate learning, the results show that only a minority of students (1.59%) are not able to focus their attention according to the needs of group learning activities. On the other hand, this study also revealed that 41 students (21.69%) mastered this skill, which indicates that most students are able to focus on group activities and complete group tasks carefully.

According to the results regarding students' learning self-correction, 74 students (39.15%) agree that they can find the cause of errors and can take action when performing a certain task, but some students (5.82%) are not really able to achieve that goal. This means that only a minority of learners cannot find the reasons for their errors through self-monitoring and self-diagnosis when performing tasks and cannot take measures to solve them by themselves.

Table 3.2：The overall Learning process monitoring skills

Items	Number of people	Mean	Standard deviation
Q12		3.33	0.82
Q13	189	4.16	0.83
Q14		3.89	0.86
Q15		3.71	0.93

In conclusion, the overall results from table2, Q12 (mean=3.33; standard deviation=0.82) can indicate that Cameroonian Chinese learners encounter many difficulties in the process of autonomous learning. Not all difficulties can be solved by the student himself; he also asks his teacher or friends for advice. Q13 (mean=4.16; standard deviation=0.83) and Q14 (mean=3.89; standard deviation=0.86) show that when students learn autonomously, they can strengthen their autonomous learning in different ways. They mainly interact with experienced students to get support and focus their attention through learning activities. Furthermore, Q15 (mean=3.71; standard deviation=0.93) can also indicate that Cameroonian Chinese language learners can monitor the learning process.

3.1.4. Analysis of learners' Learning Effectiveness

In this section, the study explores self-reflection (Q16), self-monitoring and improvement (Q17) and self-Assessment learning (Q18).

Self-reflection is an important part of the autonomous learning process and motivate learning behavior. Through self-reflection, students can reflect on problems in the autonomous learning process and self-evaluate task performance. Based on the findings, 28 students, representing 14.81 %, were unable to reflect and summarize their studies during autonomous learning, while 51 students, representing 26.98 %, had mastered this skill. In conclusion we can say that the majority students can reflect and assess the effectiveness of their learning.

Regarding self-monitoring and improvement, the result show that 86 (45%) students are able to monitor and improve their skills during the autonomous learning, while only 10 students "Strongly Disagree". In one word, we can say that most Chinese language students can improve by evaluating and finding their mistakes as they learn to complete the tasks.

As regards Self-assessment, it allows learners to make judgments about their autonomous learning ability, and positive self-assessment can enhance learners' self-affirmation and even help them understand their learning.

This study reveals that 2 learners and 3 learners, respectively, "strongly disagree" and "disagree" indicating that they are unable to analyse the reasons why their academic performance drops. However, when compared to the overall analysis of this section, the largest number of learners (129) "strongly

agrees," accounting for approximately 68.25%, indicating that Cameroonian Chinese language learners are able to assess their learning ability.

Table 3.3：Learning Effectiveness Assessment Competencies

Dimension	Number of students	Mean	Standard deviation
QI6		3.95	0.89
QI7	I89	3.92	0.9I
QI8		3.92	0.92

The above results show that for most learners when their performance decreases in Chinese or when someone fails an exam, they cannot find the source of the problem. In general, when someone fails an exam, it may be because he did not study properly, did not concentrate, or was nervous during the exam. However, if Chinese learners can find all these causes of exam failure through self-analysis, they will be able to achieve brilliant results in the next exam.

3.2. Results of the overall analysis and factors influencing autonomous learning ability of Cameroonian Chinese language learners

3.2.I. The results of the overall analysis

As can be seen in the table 3.4, the Cameroonian Chinese language learners' autonomous learning ability scored highest in the ability to assess learning effectiveness (4.08), followed by the ability to monitor the learning process (3.77), indicating that learners can reflect on their learning work through monitoring the learning process. This is followed by the ability to establish learning objectives and create learning plans (3.72), and then the ability to select learning content (3.73) and employ learning strategies (3.70). The data dimensions for the latter two are very close, indicating that learners select learning content once they have determined their learning strategies. All the scores for these dimensions exceed 3.50. From the overall analysis we can identify some crucial problems such as: students lack the ability to achieve learning goals and develop reasonable learning plans.

According to the results, most of students are able to set learning goals, but due to the accelerated learning pace; it is difficult for them to achieve their learning goals. Many students get bored with their studies before completing their tasks. The author interviewed Xia, a student from Douala who had participated in several Chinese cultural activities and aspired to study in China. She attempted the HSK level 5 examination more than once but never passed. Therefore, she abandoned her Chinese studies and enrolled at the University of Maroua, Department of Geography. Today, she is slightly envious of her friends who finally had the opportunity to go to China. According to Xia's example, she was able to set learning goals but was unable to achieve them. Additionally, we can draw from her experience that she was not mentally prepared for potential obstacles during the learning process. This study concludes that, although students can set learning goals, but they are prone to lose them when they cannot control the situation as learning progresses. Therefore, the ability of students to achieve their learning goals need to be enhance.

Students are also unable to properly select learning content and apply learning strategies. According to this study, most Cameroonian Chinese language learners select the content that captivates their interest and rarely use other methods to enhance their Chinese language skills, such as downloading

materials from Chinese websites, newspapers, and learning platforms. It is also more challenging for them to apply learning strategies according to the teaching situation or learning task. Generally, they use textbooks for autonomous learning, and they can facilitate the mastery of learning monitoring under the guidance of their teachers.

Students are not aware of the importance of autonomous learning. According to the interview results, only 8 participants understood the meaning and the importance of autonomous learning while the others did not. The majority of interviewees, excluding the 08 students who knew the notion of autonomous learning, defined «autonomous learning» by confusing it with «self-learning», which they believed was identical to autonomous learning. This clearly shows that most students are not aware of the importance of autonomous learning.

Table 3.4： The general trend of autonomous learning ability of Chinese learners in Cameroon

Dimension	Number of students	Mean	Standard deviation
Determining learning goals and developing learning plans		3.72	0.85
Selecting learning content and using learning strategies		3.7	0.89
Monitoring the learning process	189	3.77	0.86
Assessing learning outcomes		4.08	0.87

3.2.2. Factors influencing autonomous learning ability of Chinese language learners in Cameroon

According to autonomous learning theory, influencing learners' autonomous learning factors can be divided into two categories: internal and external.

3.2.2.1. Internal factors

This study showed that the internal factors influencing Chinese language learners in Cameroon include motivation and self-efficacy. Motivation is essential to foster students' autonomous learning ability because, without motivation, many students have no desire to improve their autonomous learning ability. This study reveals that students with a strong motivation to learn Chinese also have a solid ability to learn autonomously. For example, the most common motivation for studying Chinese among Maroua University students was the motivation to go abroad and get good job. For them, studying Chinese language in order to go abroad and get a good job is a source of motivation because it allows them to have precise learning objectives, develop learning plans, select contents and use learning strategies etc. On the other hand, the motivation of Chinese language learners of Yaoundé and Douala Confucius Institutes is to pass the Chinese proficiency test (HSK) and participate in Chinese cultural activities. As Interviewee C said, «I study Chinese because of cultural activities organized by the Confucius Institute teachers and these activities help me to improve my autonomous learning ability». They are also motivated to improve their autonomous learning ability because they want to master the Chinese language itself in order to find an excellent job in Cameroon as translators. As interviewee B said, «I would like to pass my hsk5, and automatically I know that I would be able to be a good translator in Chinese. » To sum up, we can say that Chinese language learners at Yaoundé and Douala Confucius Institutes can take the initiative to learn autonomously because they have a strong motivation.

As regards self-efficacy, many studies have shown that is a major factor affecting students' autonomous learning ability. (Bandura, 1977) explained learner self-efficacy as «Students' evaluations of their ability to master a learning problem and the degree of perfection, they are likely to achieve by engaging in related learning activities are related to their degree of academic achievement. » To better understand the self-efficacy of Chinese language learners in Cameroon, we interviewed some students, among whom student C from Yaoundé II Confucius Institute replied by saying: «Besides the influence of motivation, there are some decisions I always make in my heart. » Learners with a strong sense of self-efficacy have strong self-discipline in learning, often carry out self-learning with confidence and emotion, and dare to face difficulties and take more detours, thus ensuring a healthy and orderly learning process. By setting learning goals, learners clarify the standards they want to achieve in their learning activities, guide their learning, provide a basis for monitoring their learning, and assess their learning outcomes. Besides self-efficacy and motivation, we have other factors, such as Self-perception and learning strategies which are also factors that influence Cameroonian students in Chinese learning.

3.2.2.2. External factors

The external factors influencing Cameroonian Chinese language learners are the learning environment and the teacher.

The learning environment is an important factor that affects learners in Chinese language learning. Some feel that the school environment and classroom environment affect their autonomous learning ability because they usually have daily conversations in Chinese at school and communicate with teachers and advanced-level students at the Confucius Institute in Chinese. Some of them love to speak Chinese, whether in or out of class. Studies show that students learning a foreign language need to speak the target language in class, and students need to adapt to the environment. In a classroom environment, autonomous learners are influenced by the motivation of their classmates. When they are surrounded by motivated students, they try to learn also like them. This shows that the environment has a significant influence on the autonomy of learners. Teachers also should take control of students' learning pace and monitor their learning strategies to improve students' autonomous learning.

Moreover, Teacher influence is one of the most important factors influencing learners' autonomous learning. In autonomous learning, can learners get rid of the teacher's help? Is it possible to do it independently? Does the teacher's responsibility diminish? This is debatable. Teachers are the ones who can provide instructional guidance and facilitate individualized learning for learners, and they should also provide material and moral support, as well as encouragement and expectations for students. Outside the classroom, teacher guidance is sometimes needed. Students need teacher guidance to explain the parts of the language when completing their learning tasks. As interviewee D from the University of Maroua said, «Because Chinese grammar is difficult; sometimes I need a teacher's explanation. When I study autonomously and come across a grammar aspect that I don't know, I write it down and ask the teacher how to use it. » interviewee C from the Confucius Institute at the University of Yaoundé II also said, «When you have no motivation, no clear goal, and feel no need to learn, the process needs to be guided by a teacher. » To summarize, teachers take on more roles and responsibilities in the autonomous learning context than the unilateral role of knowledge brokers in traditional teaching contexts. A teacher must play

the role of a guide and facilitator. To better understand students' approaches to learning Chinese, teachers should guide to develop realistic learning plans and goals, and help them enhance their awareness and confidence in autonomous learning. Teachers should also provide students with as many opportunities as possible to acquire new knowledge and practice learning strategies and encourage more communication between students so that students can get more opportunities to develop their autonomous learning skills.

4.   Recommendations
4.1. Improve students' ability to achieve learning goals, plan study time, select learning content and use learning strategies

According to the survey results, this study shows that Cameroonian Chinese language learners cannot achieve their learning goals. They have a strong desire to learn the Chinese language as a subject and understand the importance of Chinese language learning, but their psychological state of motivation to learn leads to problems in achieving their goals. For students to achieve their learning goals, Chinese language teachers should discuss the overall goals of Chinese language learning with students in class so that students will know what they need to learn and can clarify their learning goals. In addition, Chinese language teachers can also assign group tasks for students to accomplish simple learning objectives so that students can realize that difficult tasks are achievable and can be accomplished through their efforts.

From the survey results, we can see that need to make a reasonable study plan because they do not have time to schedule their studies; they are a bit lazy and lack the awareness of making a study plan. Therefore, to enable students to make a reasonable study plan, Chinese language teachers should first train students to pre-learn before class and review after class because it can help students understand the key points and focus on them in class; post-lesson review can also help students deepen their understanding of what they have learned. Chinese language teachers can ask students to complete their pre-learning notes within a specified period, listing the key vocabulary and language points learned in the lesson, the content of the text focus, and recording the main obstacles they have encountered during the pre-learning. Before the lesson, teachers should check students' notes to enhance their understanding of what they have learned in each lesson and improve their learning efficiency. After the lesson, they can ask students to review what they have learned that day promptly and take a self-test to check their mastery of the knowledge. Furthermore, students are asked to consolidate what they have learned in Chinese to make a review book. The teacher should also check and review the completion of the review notes, give feedback and encouragement to the students and issue rewards to those who have done better.

Secondly, teachers should develop students' ability to make reasonable plans inside and outside the classroom; they should be able to make detailed plans, supervise their students, and develop their ability to plan their learning. When making plans, Chinese language teachers should not only pay attention to the students' abilities and weaknesses but also follow the planning rules. Teachers should combine long-term and near-term plans, asking students to develop learning plans according to their individual goals. Teachers can make a long-term (e.g., a semester) plan, such as the grade of the final exam of the semester, the HSK level, etc. In the long-term plan, the teacher can make a near-term plan based on the curriculum and teaching content of the semester. For example, when will students review each day, how much vocabulary will they memorise, how many texts should they read in a week, how many essays will they write in a

month, how many sets of HSK test papers will they do. Finally, the study plan should be realistic, not detached from the facts, and falsified. Some students have a good idea of what they want to study, but if the idea is challenging to implement, they will briefly lose their confidence and interest in learning Chinese. At this point, Chinese language teachers should play a supervisory and helpful role, guiding them to make plans according to the individual and not to set them too high or too complicated and out of touch with reality.

This study found that Chinese learners cannot choose learning content because they only choose learning content according to their interests. It is not easy to follow the teaching tasks. Then, to improve students' learning strategies, teachers can recommend more Chinese learning resources to students, such as learning platforms, books, learning websites, etc. Teachers can also provide students with rich learning materials and flexible learning spaces to meet the different needs of different students; teachers should also make students aware that learning strategies can help them improve their learning efficiency and academic performance.

4.2. Innovation of Chinese language teachers' teaching methods

The primary task of Chinese language teachers is to get the whole teaching process right. The quality of teaching depends on the quality of teaching methods, which is a key factor in the success of teacher education reform. If Chinese language teachers want to make their classroom more effective and interesting, they must innovate their teaching methods. This can be done by creating a relaxed learning context and using flexible teaching methods to create a deep interest in learning among learners. When teachers conduct classroom teaching, they are encouraged to create interesting supporting teaching materials to enrich the multimedia style. In this way, they can stimulate students' interest in learning Chinese and improve their autonomous learning ability. For example, organize Chinese cultural activities for students to relax in learning. Teachers can also organize interesting situations where students can bravely play multiple roles based on Chinese idioms and poems. For example, in the first lesson, teachers can use poetry recitation to motivate students and let them imitate their performance. We call this part of the lesson a «warm-up». The second stage is to demonstrate new knowledge. Teachers can use multimedia to create pictures to show the new content. We call this part "demonstration". The third stage is to practice the content repeatedly through competitions, performances, etc. The fourth stage is to summarize. Teachers can summarize by rapping, drawing, and guessing. The fifth stage is extra-curricular activities. The classroom will become rich and colorful if teachers choose different teaching methods.

4.3. Stimulate learners' interest and habit of autonomous learning

To better stimulate students' interest in autonomous learning, Chinese language teachers should create an excellent interactive learning atmosphere. To increase students' motivation to express themselves orally in Chinese and create an equal and interactive teaching environment, Chinese language teachers should base their learning on students' interest in the topic and start by changing the roles of teachers and students. For example, when studying the lesson "Internship", teachers can improve students' critical thinking skills by asking them to talk about their internship experience or expected job positions. Teachers can correct their learning attitudes through constant feedback and communication and develop autonomous learning skills.

Teachers can also assign online or offline learning tasks for students according to the arrangement of course tasks, teaching contents, and teaching objectives and guide students to explore and learn independently by using extra-curricular materials or some additional tools. The development of learners' autonomous learning ability cannot be achieved without teachers' guidance and encouragement.

4.4. Promote collaborative learning outside the classroom

Autonomous learning outside of the classroom is fundamental. Due to the lack of a language environment, students rarely have the opportunity to use Chinese outside the classroom. Opportunities for practicing the Chinese language are not only limited but also singular. In contrast, there are few other ways to develop students' foreign language communication skills through the use of language in formal educational settings. Cooperative learning outside the classroom can provide students with opportunities to use and practice the language, especially in Cameroonian colleges and universities where Chinese majors have fewer class hours. We advocate a theme-based cooperative learning approach in which group members can jointly determine the theme. At the same time, theme-based cooperative learning enables students to use the target language to reflect on these themes, communicate with each other, and express their opinions. Less autonomous students receive peer support and want to learn Chinese language better but are not determined enough to realize that they are catching up with others. Research has shown that peer support and peer pressure can motivate students to learn Chinese independently outside of class, promoting cooperative learning outside class is consistent with (Littlewood, 1999) view of social interaction. Students can increase their opportunities to use Chinese through interaction with their peers and gradually become more active and autonomous.

Conclusion

To summarize this paper used questionnaires and interviews to better understand the current situation of Cameroonian Chinese language learners' autonomous learning ability. According to the results, autonomous learning ability is high in monitoring the learning process and evaluating the learning effect. This study also found that Cameroonian Chinese language learners are unable to achieve their learning goals and develop reasonable learning plans, select properly learning content and apply learning strategies, and also most students are not aware of the importance of autonomous learning. In addition, based on the interview results, this paper also explores the factors that influence Cameroonian Chinese language learners' autonomous learning ability. This study hopes that Chinese language teachers in Cameroon will introduce autonomous learning into Chinese language teaching to improve the Chinese language proficiency of Cameroonian learners.

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