

## Enhancing Mandarin Teaching in Indonesia through a Cross-Cultural Awareness: A Comprehensive Training Program for Chinese Mandarin Teachers

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### Abstract

*This article exposes the implementation and effectiveness of a cross-cultural training program designed for Mandarin teachers from China who instruct students in Indonesia. The training aims to equip these Mandarin teachers with a deeper understanding of the Indonesian context, fostering cultural sensitivity and diversity to enhance their teaching approaches in Indonesia. The study describes the impact of this cross-cultural approach on the teachers based on their perception in terms of the effectiveness in promoting a more inclusive and effective Mandarin language education in the Indonesian setting. The study involved 13 Mandarin teachers from China who teach Mandarin in Surabaya. The results show positive feedback from the Mandarin teachers upon the inclusive Mandarin education through cross-cultural approach and it is effective for future teaching planning. This study highlights the importance of the cross-cultural understanding for second language learning. It can be accommodated by either training or courses provided at the campus for teacher candidates of foreign language.*

**Keywords:** Cross-cultural approach, Chinese teachers, Mandarin education, Indonesia, Training

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## INTRODUCTION

In the global interconnectedness, the demand for Mandarin language education has increased recently, transcending borders and cultures. In Indonesia, for example, where a growing number of students are eager to study Mandarin for several reasons from education to business leads to higher needs for qualified Mandarin teachers from China –as the native speakers of Mandarin. Several partnerships and programs have been held in Indonesia to accommodate the higher needs for the quality Mandarin education, one of which is inviting and partnering with Chinese institutions to assign Chinese native speakers to teach Mandarin in Indonesia.

However, the instant involvement of native speakers as the language to teach foreign learners brings some consequences, one of which is the interlanguage and intercultural boundaries. The cultural differences between the two nations can pose challenges in delivering an effective educational experience. The biggest challenges for undergraduate level interpreting trainees were nervousness during interpreting assignment (Limuria & Sutandi, 2022). The efficacy of foreign language instruction is undeniably linked to the cultural aspects within the community the foreign language is being learned (Rohmani & Andriyani, 2022; Syafiyah et al., 2022). The

relationship between language and culture is a fundamental aspect of foreign language instruction. Another study emphasizes the importance of incorporating cultural component in second language teaching, as it not only enhances language skills but also fosters intercultural understanding (Grigorian, Bekaryan, & Melkonyan, 2018).

Recognizing the emerging challenges faced by the Mandarin teachers from China in the Indonesian educational context, a comprehensive needs analysis was conducted to identify possible areas of improvement in their teaching approach. One of aspects is the inclusion of cultural understanding as an integral part of the success of the teaching Mandarin as a foreign language. A study by Gong et al (2018) assert that the main objectives of Chinese education in the teaching process were more skill-oriented, highlighting the skills rather than inclusive process like cultural awareness. Another study by Han & Han (2019) shows that the cultural concepts of relationship, hierarchy, respect, and harmony have had a profound impacts the Chinese teachers' understanding and management of the relationships with their students. Issues such as lack of teachers' identity and understanding of inclusive education through cross-cultural approach becomes imminent especially for novice Chinese teachers who teach Mandarin outside China, including in Indonesia where Mandarin serves as a foreign language.

These challenges can be accommodated through workshops of training concerning with cross-cultural classroom management, curriculum development, content-based language teaching (local context), and host country school culture education (Chen, 2022). The training is intended to provide additional social capital of cultural awareness for novice Chinese Mandarin teachers. In addition, the importance of preparing and supporting teachers in cross-cultural settings has been revitalized, with the focus on managing classrooms, developing teaching materials, and collaborating with other parties both on and off the classes. Practical strategies to improve teaching ability and professional quality of the foreign teachers, such as cultural activities and humanities communication, are suggested (Qiu & Qiu, 2019). In addition, universities can implement cross-cultural coursework and field-based experiences to prepare culturally responsive teacher candidates (Williams et al., 2019).

The need analysis of Mandarin teachers from China who teach in Indonesia revealed a gap in their understanding of the local cultural milieu. One of the proposed solution is by employing a cross-cultural training program (Trihardini & Wikarti, 2022). This is in line with the broader need for curriculum and syllabus development that meet students' needs, such as the utilization of digital tools in second language teaching (Hutauruk, 2020). In response to these findings, a targeted and innovative cross-cultural training program should be developed, aiming to bridge such gaps and enhancing the overall teaching effectiveness of Mandarin teachers in the Indonesian context.

This research addresses these challenges by introducing a comprehensive cross-cultural training program that combines cultural understanding training with appropriate language instruction. In more specific, this article discusses the perception and the implementation as the outcomes of cross-cultural training program, exploring how it addresses the specific needs identified through the comprehensive needs analysis. By investigating the impact of this training on Mandarin teachers' cultural awareness and teaching instructions, it is expected that the study aims to contribute valuable insights to the field of language education. This research aims to provide a holistic discussion on the cross-cultural understanding posed by the Mandarin teachers from China and their perception towards the effectiveness of the cross-cultural training program into their classes.

## **METHOD**

This research adopted a mixed-methods approach, incorporating both quantitative and qualitative data collection methods. The integration of surveys (questionnaires) and interviews provided a comprehensive understanding of the impact of the cross-cultural training program to the Mandarin teachers as the participants. The mixed-methods combining questionnaire and reflective questions were employed to gain a more comprehensive and nuanced understanding of the participants' reflections and perceptions resulting from a training program which will be used to propose adjustment for future training and policies. The study involves Mandarin teachers from China (N=13) currently serving as teacher volunteers teaching Mandarin in some educational institutions in Surabaya, Indonesia, through U-to-U partnership program between Indonesian and Chinese universities in the area of the teaching of Mandarin and Indonesian-Chinese cultural exchange. The participants were selected purposively based on their status as novice Mandarin Chinese teachers and the location where they are assigned to teach Mandarin as a foreign language to Indonesian students in Surabaya.

For data collection, a structured questionnaire was administered to all 13 participants to gather quantitative data. The questionnaire includes Likert-scale items and open-ended questions, focusing on cultural

awareness/understanding, perceptions, relationships with the appropriate teaching strategies, and the effectiveness teaching methodologies. Likert-scale items classified participants' self-perceptions before and after the cross-cultural training. Open-ended questions were given to provide an opportunity for the participants to inquire detailed insights and share personal experiences. In addition, semi-structured interview was conducted with selected participants to gather in-depth qualitative data related to the understanding on cross-cultural understanding, participants' experiences and challenges faced in the classroom, and the perceived impacts of the cross-cultural training on their teaching approach.

In terms of research procedures, before the cross-cultural training, participants were invited to address their initial understanding on cross-culture aspect in foreign language teaching as the baseline data. The training program was implemented over a set period, covering cultural sensitivity, communication skills, and innovative teaching methodologies (local culture utilization using augmented reality). Following the completion of the training, participants were asked to complete the post-training questionnaire to assess changes in their perceptions and possible approaches. Interview was scheduled with selected participants to explore their personal experiences, challenges, and the perceived impact of the training on their teaching methods. Quantitative data from the questionnaires are analyzed statistically to measure changes in participants' self-reported perceptions. Qualitative data from the interview underwent thematic analysis to identify key themes and patterns in participants' narratives.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

In this section, the findings and discussion is classified into three aspects namely issue identification and the training programs, perception and understanding on the cross-cultural understanding posed by the Mandarin teachers from China, and the teaching instruction employing cross-cultural approaches in the foreign language classes after the training.

### Issue identification from Mandarin teachers from China and the cross-cultural training programs

In the pre-training assessment, the teachers were invited to provide in-depth reflection on their teaching experience in Indonesia in the last six months. As they are novice yet native Mandarin-speaking teachers, their capacity in terms of the concept of second language acquisition had been trained before their assignment in Indonesia, it was evident that the teachers from China displayed some issues that can categorized as the following:

- a. moderate level of awareness concerning the importance of cultural understanding in the context of foreign language teaching,
- b. a recognition of potential cultural barriers, especially local language (Indonesian), that two of the teachers have basic level of Indonesian language proficiency, suggesting an acknowledgment of the challenges that might arise in the foreign language classroom due to cultural disparities, and
- c. low level of awareness concerning the local characters/cultures in Indonesia, especially in Surabaya.

The paramount objective of the training is to provide basic conception of inclusive education by accommodating culture-based materials in the teaching of Mandarin for foreign learners, in this case is students in Surabaya. The training employed consists of the following aspects:

- a. Indonesian language for foreign speakers (BIPA). The session was intended to provide basic level of Indonesian language for foreign teachers. Simple expression by using targeted learner's language may indicate closeness between the teachers and students. The session also introduced basic expression and idioms used for survivals and classroom context.
- b. Introduction to Indonesian studies covers information about Indonesian culture in comparison with the Chinese culture. Through comparative discussion, participants were invited to connect the two cultures to search the common ground and relate it to the process of second language acquisition.
- c. Computer-assisted language learning (CALL) was also exhibited to the participants. Something special was how to utilize local culture content (Indonesian culture) in the teaching of Mandarin by using augmented reality.
- d. Language evaluation using action research for foreign language learning was also given in order to provide understanding on the use of objective evaluation in the classroom.
- e. Academic quality assurance became the last material to encourage the participants to assure the quality of teaching Mandarin, especially as they are considered as pre-service teachers.

### Perception on the Cultural Understanding toward the Teaching of Mandarin for Foreign Learners

Following the completion of the cross-cultural training program, the post-training questionnaire revealed improvements in the teachers' perception of the significance of cultural understanding towards their teaching experience (see Table 1 with Likert Scale 1 corresponds very disagree and 5 corresponds very agree). All participants not only acknowledged the importance of cultural awareness but also recognized its essential role in creating a conducive learning environment as indicated with the positive responses from the participants (4.8-5.0 corresponds very agreement from the participants).

**Table 1.** Perception Toward Cultural Awareness as Foreign Language Teachers

Aspects	Responses
Foreign language teachers should have cross-cultural understanding	5.0
Understanding students' cultural background contributes to preparation of teaching materials	4.8
Understanding students' cultural background contributes to instruction strategies	4.8
Understanding students' cultural background contributes to evaluation and assessment approach	4.8

Table 1 shows all participants unanimously stated the highest score for the importance of cross-cultural understanding for foreign language teachers due to the repeated exposure to the positive relationship between cultural awareness and the effectiveness of teaching second language. Reflection from one participant was also addressed to future Chinese teachers who will come to Surabaya about the importance of "basic phrases" of local language and "open-minded" are key things. The reflection above indicates the importance of pre-departure orientation and training for the Chinese teachers who will come and teach Mandarin for foreign learners.

*"For future volunteer (teachers), I welcome you to come to Surabaya. You should learn basic phrases in Indonesia like 'terima kasih' before coming to Surabaya (to survive and go any places in Indonesia) [...] Learn Indonesian culture to make you comfortable (when teaching Mandarin in Surabaya). Secondly, you should come here with open-minded."*

This shift in perception exposed by the participants suggests that the training program succeeded in instilling a deeper appreciation for the role of cultural awareness in the pedagogical approach of the teachers in Indonesia. A range of studies have emphasized the importance of cultural awareness and sensitivity in second language teaching, not only in Mandarin classes in Indonesia. Another study by Ratnasari (2019) emphasized the need for cultural understanding in foreign language teaching. The reflection is also to propose that the training should have been given before the arrival of the foreign teachers in Indonesia, namely in the form of pre-departure orientation consisting of cross-cultural materials.

For Mandarin teachers from China who teach in Indonesia, the positive responses in perception is important to foster the effective cross-cultural communication and accommodate potential challenges that may arise in the diverse educational landscape of Indonesia. The recognition that role of cultural awareness is important indicates transformative impact on the mindset within the Mandarin teachers (Han & Han, 2019; Jafri et al., 2020), which focuses on the importance of integrating cultural understanding into their teaching methodologies. The shifts are particularly relevant in the context of Mandarin teachers in Indonesia, as studied by Han & Han (2019) that Chinese cultural concepts significantly influenced their understanding and management of teacher-student relationships.

These findings suggest that the cross-cultural training program had a significant influence on the cognitive aspects of the teachers. The participants showed positive awareness and recognition of the cultural dimensions in the process of foreign language teaching. This awareness is expected to contribute to a more culturally sensitive and inclusive teaching approaches, so it improves overall quality of Mandarin language teaching in Indonesia. In addition, the perceptions highlight the effectiveness of a targeted training in shaping educators' perceptions inherent in the teaching of Mandarin for foreign learners. Several studies have asserted positive impact of cross-cultural programs on teachers' awareness and recognition of cultural aspect in foreign language learning. Such training is needed significantly increased cultural awareness, with experiential training leading to more positive reactions; that cross-cultural understanding plays key role in foreign language teaching (Hsueh & Hsiao, 2020; Zhang & Zhou, 2019). This is also in line with the findings discussed by Yang (2021), which emphasized the importance of theoretical dimensions of cultural variation in second language education. In

addition, the role of intercultural learning approaches in developing second language competence, that second language teachers should participate in a training in intercultural nonverbal communication to facilitate their learning practice (Yang, 2020). Lastly, Banit (2019) discussed the adaptive approach to cross-cultural training focuses on forming cultural significance and promotes tolerance and empathy.

### The Importance of Cross-Cultural Understanding on the Teaching of Mandarin for Foreign Learners

In addition to the findings on the transformative shift of the Mandarin teachers' perception of the importance of cultural understanding following their participation in the cross-cultural training program, this section discusses significant improvement observed in relation with the effectiveness of the training initiative to their teaching instruction. Moreover, the impact of cross-cultural workshop on foreign language teaching quality became evident in the post-training assessments.

Majority of the Mandarin teachers demonstrated a more nuanced and culturally adaptive approach to Mandarin language instruction. This adaptability was reflected in the incorporation of culturally relevant content into their teaching instructions (see Table 2). Participants unanimously agreed that culture and language teaching are intertwined each other. The training emphasized their attitudes upon the relationships between two aspects. The only aspect that gained lowest score (3.8), yet still considered as positive, is the appropriate strategies to integrate cross-cultural understanding into the teaching of foreign language. The training should have provided more practical information on the teaching instructions besides using augmented reality by utilizing local content/culture. One of five sessions only exhibited practical teaching examples (using augmented reality in the teaching of foreign language by accommodating local culture).

**Table 2.** Cross-Cultural Understanding and Foreign Language Teaching Instructions

Aspects	Responses
Cross-cultural training helps teachers understand the relationships with foreign language teaching	5.0
Cross-cultural training helps teachers understand the significance of cultural awareness with quality foreign language teaching	4.8
Cross-cultural training shows which components of cultural aspects in foreign language teaching	4.2
Cross-cultural training shows the strategies to integrate cross-cultural understanding into foreign language teaching	3.8

The study also showcases the recognition of cultural understanding as an integral pedagogical tool in foreign language teaching, not only Mandarin. In the context of EFL learning, for example, when the teachers concluded that cross-cultural understanding is instrumental, they may be easier to employ contextual and meaningful teaching methodologies for the Indonesian students (Munandar & Newton, 2021), even though no specific instructional strategies should have been employed. The importance is the adaptation or adjustment into the local context. Such an adaptive approach emphasizes the importance of considering cultural nuances in delivering language instruction. The integration of cultural understanding as a pedagogical tool reflects an inclusive teaching trends that contributes to improved teaching process as well as student engagement in the culturally-diverse classroom (Suarda et al, 2022).

Furthermore, the improvement in cultural understanding positively impacted the engagement between the teacher and students, aligning teaching practices with the cultural context of the students to establish a safe and positive learning environment. As stated by one participant above that "basic phrases" are believed to play important start for the future teachers who will come to Indonesia. This positive perception toward the relationships between teacher and student is the indication of a more harmonious and engaged learning environment in foreign language learning (Li, 2023), that students are likely more engaged in the classrooms involving teacher's warmth and strictness, homeroom teacher involvement, appreciation, instructional clarity, and a balance of activities (Oga-Baldwin & Nakata, 2020). Beyond the immediate impact on teaching quality, a kind cross-cultural training program has been proven to demonstrate its significance in the professional development of Mandarin teachers (Ratnasari, 2019). The teachers are expected to show a commitment to cultural learning, indicating sustainable impact beyond the training period. This sustained interest in professional development proves the cross-cultural training program is effective to instill a sense of sustainable improvement as well as improve cultural awareness among educators.

## CONCLUSION

This study highlights the transformative impact of cross-cultural training on Mandarin teachers from China who teach Mandarin for foreign learners in Indonesia. The shift is in terms of their perception of cultural understanding and relationships with their teaching quality. The positive correlation between improved cultural awareness and improved classroom instructions suggests that conducting cross-cultural training becomes integral effort to the success of foreign language education; such commitment should be conducted not only for Mandarin as a foreign language but also other foreign language in Indonesia. This study provides valuable insights for educational institutions which has plans to improve the quality of Mandarin language instruction in multicultural settings. Future research is expected to explore the sustainability of these improvements and their long-term impacts on both teachers and students in the teaching of foreign language. In addition, designing appropriate training (both during the service and pre-departure orientation) should be examined based on their needs in order to prepare future teachers with culture-based understanding.

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