

# Multimedia software to motivate ethnic minority children to learn about their culture and language of origin

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## ABSTRACT

The goal of this research is to analyse how multimedia can help ethnic children to understand their culture of origin and to identify the problems encountered in teaching ethnic languages. British born Chinese children were chosen as the group to study, as the researcher is Chinese. This poster describes an exploratory study at a Chinese school in UK. The school serves families from many different Chinese cultures who use different versions of Chinese language. Teaching materials and motivation were also problem areas.

## Keywords

Multimedia, Chinese, culture, ethnic, motivation, language

## INTRODUCTION

Many parents of British born Chinese children wish their children could speak Chinese. Some send their children to 'Saturday' schools where their mother tongue is taught. Unfortunately many children drop out. Chinese parents who have studied and worked in the UK for many years have encountered problems after they go back to China as their children cannot study in ordinary schools in China because they are unable to speak fluent Chinese. Some parents have had to seek a way to come back to an English speaking country<sup>1</sup>.

## PREVIOUS RESEARCH

Ethnic children struggle with self-esteem and identity. As well as language, art and classic texts help to convey culture. Adhering to culture of origin reduces delinquency<sup>2</sup>. Job prospects depend on different skills across cultures.

## PROPOSED RESEARCH METHOD

While negotiating collaboration with the school, governors, teachers, parents and children were interviewed to discover their perspective on learning Chinese, teaching methods and what the children were really interested in.

Observation included finding out what language material was available in the schools and in local shops. A prototype

is under development where the child teaches English to Monkey King (a traditional Chinese character). Later prototypes will include material from children themselves.

## FINDINGS FROM RESEARCH IN A CHINESE SCHOOL

Most parents preferred traditional Chinese characters rather than simplified Chinese characters. Traditional Chinese characters are used by more people throughout the world. However, they believed that simplified Chinese characters would play an important role in the future and take over from traditional ones, so their children have been asked to learn two kinds of Chinese characters. At home, the parents do try to help their children to learn Chinese, but most do not speak fluent Mandarin and write simplified characters, so their help is limited. Many asked if the Chinese school could train them.

Generally, few children are willing to learn Chinese. Most of the children are at the Chinese School because their parents want them to be there.

British born Chinese children need age-appropriate stories with much simpler language than stories written for Chinese born children. Teachers are Chinese born students from a local university<sup>3</sup>, so they use traditional Chinese teaching methods that do not motivate British born children. No teaching software is used.

## CONCLUSIONS

Conveying Chinese culture to British born Chinese children may be very worthwhile, but to do so successfully the Saturday school must address many difficult issues. Motivating ethnic children to learn is essential to success and for this they need special purpose teaching materials.

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