



EXAMINING THE ROLE OF EXTRACURRICULAR AND CULTURAL ENGAGEMENT IN SHAPING CHINESE LANGUAGE ACQUISITION AND CLASSROOM LEARNING AMONG NIGERIAN LEARNERS: A SYSTEMATIC REVIEW

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ABSTRACT

The global expansion of Mandarin Chinese as a language of diplomacy, trade, and education has generated growing interest in Chinese language learning across sub-Saharan Africa. Nigeria, home to some of the continent's most active Confucius Institutes (CIs) and a substantial population of Chinese language learners at the tertiary level, represents a strategically significant but understudied context within the wider Chinese-as-a-foreign-language (CFL) literature. This systematic review examines the role of extracurricular and cultural engagement in shaping Chinese language acquisition among Nigerian learners. It interrogates the extent to which out-of-class experiences including language clubs, cultural festivals, competition programs, and CI-facilitated informal activities contribute to proficiency, motivation, and intercultural competence. Following the PRISMA 2020 framework, a systematic search was conducted across five academic databases (Scopus, Web of Science, ERIC, Google Scholar, and AJOL). After screening and eligibility assessment, 53 peer-reviewed studies, theses, and book chapters published between 2005 and 2026 were included for thematic synthesis. Five major themes emerged: learner motivation is driven by scholarship and economic incentives; cultural and extracurricular participation serves as a supplement to formal instruction; Confucius Institutes function as sociocultural learning spaces; persistent challenges include teacher shortages and learner anxiety; and substantial research gaps remain in the existing African CFL literature.

Keywords: Chinese As a Foreign Language; Extracurricular Engagement; Sociocultural; Confucius Institutes; Nigeria; Learner Engagement; Systematic Review; Informal Language Learning

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Global Development of Chinese Language Teaching

Mandarin Chinese has been transformed in the last 20 years, from a rarely used language in the world, to one of the world's most important communication tools. Education diplomacy in the People's Republic of China (PRC) has been most notably evidenced in the Confucius Institute (CI) network, operating under the auspices of Hanban /Chinese International Chinese Education Foundation (CIEF), which is focused on Mandarin instruction that combines culture, soft power and geopolitical influence (Lo Bianco, 2007; Starr, 2009; Hartig, 2015; Odinye, 2020). There are currently more than 500 Confucius Institutes in the world, serving a total of more than 150 countries, and conducting Chinese language and culture programs with their local universities (Hubbert, 2019). Since it was introduced in 2013, the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) has led to an increased need for knowing Mandarin in areas where China is seeking to connect its economic belt and road project (Zhao & Baldauf, 2012; Bello, 2022). In the same way that this institutional expansion is underway, the notion in second-language acquisition (SLA) research that language learning does not take place exclusively in the classroom has also increased. Out-of-class experiences are considered to be crucial in fostering the linguistic and intercultural development of learners by socio-cultural perspectives, informal learning frameworks and theory of learner engagement (Vygotsky, 1978; Krashen, 1982; Hiver et al., 2021). However, among the existing studies of extracurricular Chinese language study in non-Western and non-East Asian environments, little empirical work has been conducted.

1.2 Chinese Language Learning in Africa

As reported by (Odinye, 2015), Africa is in a unique and dynamic place in the global Chinese language learning universe. Importantly, the Chinese investment in the continent has surpassed \$40 billion per year by the early 2020s, with corresponding education diplomacy, such as the establishment of Chinese-language schools (CIs) in more than 25 African countries, the Confucius Classroom network in secondary schools, and the Chinese Government Scholarship (CGS) program that annually brings thousands of African students to Chinese universities (King, 2013; Bodomo, 2015; Lanza & Woldemariam, 2014). In this context, Mandarin has become an increasing language of economic opportunity to African workforce and students. However, though the research on Chinese language learning in Africa is still at its infancy, it is starting to show patterns of motivation, institutional involvement, and learning outcomes in various countries including South Africa (Moyo, 2018), Kenya (Kirkpatrick, 2014), Ethiopia, and Ghana (Adesanya, 2019). The literature is not, however, geographically uniform, conceptually weak and most importantly is almost entirely confined to formal education in the classroom, with no regard for extracurricular or cultural aspects.

1.3 The Nigerian Context

In the African CFL context, Nigeria is a case of special interest. Nigeria is the most populous country in Africa, and one of the largest economies in the region, with several Confucius Institutes operating in the country, among which the University of Lagos (UNILAG), Nnamdi Azikiwe University (NAU), and the University of Abuja (UNA) are active. The institutions, formed since 2008 and through the cooperation between Chinese universities, have significantly increased the number of Chinese language education institutions at the tertiary level. The number of students enrolled in Nigerian CI program has been increasing year after year, with the number of students in the 2022 alone estimated to be more than 5,000 students in CI activities in Nigeria (Okonkwo & Zhang, 2021; Bello, 2022). The learners' motivation for learning Chinese is mainly pragmatic and instrumental such as Chinese government scholarships, employment in Chinese-Nigerian enterprises, and study in China (Adesanya, 2019; Oyelaran, 2020; Egbosimba, 2026). In addition to formal language instruction, CIs in Nigeria provide cultural events such as Chinese calligraphy, martial arts, movie screenings, and even compete in national events like the Chinese Bridge Contest, but the academic literature has not focused on the language development of these additional activities.

1.4 Research Gap

Most of the earlier research is centered on the issue of motivation, curriculum and policy (Egbosimba et al., 2025), with little emphasis on involvement of students in their extra-curricular or cultural activities as a facet of language learning in Nigeria. This observation would fill a gap in the literature. The study of motivation in L2 learning and policy analysis has given some background information on the subject of CFL in Nigeria, however, the process by which learners achieve the competence beyond the classroom is not well explored. Extracurricular activities, such as attending language clubs, cultural festivals, HSK preparation camps, and CI-organized competitions, are a field of language learning activity that has theoretical significance but has been less studied empirically, especially in sub-Saharan Africa. In addition, previous studies on CFL have focused on the learners of East Asian and Western European languages (Sun, 2017; Zhao & Baldauf, 2012). The treatment of African-centered perspectives, use of contextually relevant accounts of what Nigerian learners actually do and experience outside formal hours of learning, are, at best, exceptions and not the norm in scholarly work.

1.5 Purpose of the Review

This systematic review has three related aims. First, it is based on the existing empirical and theoretical literatures concerning extracurricular and cultural involvement in the learning of Chinese language in Nigeria. Second, it explores the relationship of the results with the previous research in the field of SLA, engagement and the sociocultural theory. Third, it defines gaps in the research and provides recommendations for practice and future research based on the evidence.

1.6 Research questions

- RQ1: What are the nature and scope of extra-curricular and cultural involvement in Chinese language learning programme in Nigeria?
- RQ2: What is the relationship between extracurricular involvement and motivation, learner's language skills development and intercultural competence in the Nigerian context of CFL?
- RQ3: What are the roles of Confucius Institutes as sociocultural spaces in learning the Chinese language outside of school?
- RQ4: What is missing from the existing literature, and what are possible future research directions?

2 THEORETICAL AND CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

This review follows the three interrelated theoretical frameworks: sociocultural theory, theory of learner engagement, and informal and extra-curricular language learning. The two frameworks collectively create a clear perspective on how language competence is acquired by out-of-class participation by Nigerian CFL learners (see Figure 4 below).

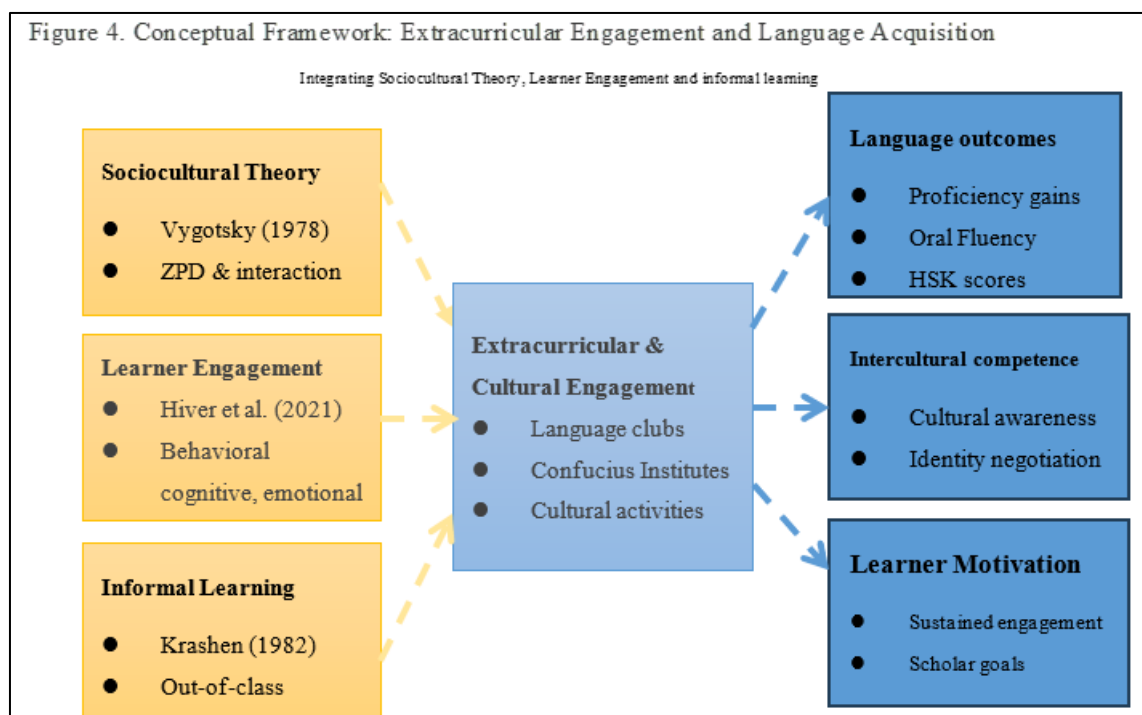


Figure 4: Extracurricular Engagement and Language Acquisition in the Nigerian

2.1 Sociocultural Theory (Vygotsky)

This review is based on the main theoretical approach presented by Vygotsky (1978), the sociocultural theory. The theory itself is that "higher-order cognitive functions, such as language, emerge from socially mediated interaction in culturally meaningful situations. Learning is not just the passing on of information, but is a dialogic process of meaning making that occurs in the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), the area located between what a learner can do on their own, and what they can do with the assistance of another, more advanced learner. In the context of CFL, according to sociocultural theory, "extracurricular activities" such as language clubs, cultural events, peer conversation groups, etc. are a type of ZPD engagement that cannot be fully simulated within the classroom setting. The kinds of interactions, real communicative needs, and cultural practices of meaning-making provided in extracurricular contexts are similar to Vygotsky's notion of what is best for language development (Lantolf, 2000; Swain, 2000). In this context, the Confucius Institute is not just a teaching institution, but a sociocultural space that is a community of practice (Lave & Wenger, 1991) where learners construct their Chinese language and cultural identities by engaging in formal and informal tasks.

2.2 Learner Engagement Theory

The most detailed theoretical summary of engagement in the SLA literature for the past 20 years is included in a systematic review by Hiver, Al-Hoorie and Mercer (2021). They identify four dimensions of engagement, which are interrelated: behavioral (effort, participation, attendance), cognitive (attention, strategy use, depth of processing), emotional (enjoyment, anxiety, belonging), and social (peer interaction, collaborative learning). All dimensions are applicable to the extracurricular domain. Emotional and social dimensions of engagement that are likely to be triggered by extracurricular CFL activities that span from Chinese Bridge preparation to calligraphy workshops are particularly likely in Nigeria. The competitive nature of Chinese Bridge, for example, requires behavioral and cognitive investment of time, the cultural festivals elicit emotional investment in the form of identity-making, and language clubs provide peer social interaction to maintain motivation over time (Dike & Zhou, 2024; Nwosu, 2018). Dörnyei's (2005) L2 Motivational Self System gives another motivational perspective with focus on the 'ideal L2 self' the learner's image of himself as a competent Chinese speaker and his maintenance of his interest in formal and informal L2 learning activities.

2.3 Comparative Evaluation of L2 Writing

The concept of formal language 'learning' versus informal language 'acquisition' introduced by Krashen (1982) is a useful one to address the issue of extracurricular involvement in language development. Although in subsequent SLA studies, Krashen's overpowering version of the input hypothesis has been criticized (Long, 1983; Swain, 1985), his basic finding that meaningful, comprehensible input in non-threatening, communicatively authentic environments is conducive to the acquisition of L2 sounds, words, and meanings is very well supported by theory and data. Since Krashen there has been a transformation in the informal language learning literature, with concepts like out-of-class learning (Benson, 2011), language socialization (Duff, 2008), and everyday multiculturalism (Wise & Velayutham, 2009). In the general literature, extracurricular language activities lie between formal instruction and merely incidental learning, they have sufficient formality to ensure systematic exposure to the target language, but not too formal to create performance anxiety that can hinder classroom SLA (Horwitz, Horwitz & Cope, 1986; MacIntyre & Gardner, 1994).

3 METHODOLOGY

3.1 Review Design

In this study, the methodology used is systematic review with a guideline Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) 2020 (Page et al., 2021). The systematic review was selected as the best design because it allows for the purpose of the review to be conducted in a rigorous, transparent, and reproducible way and is able to reduce selection bias by providing explicit inclusion and exclusion criteria (Booth, Papaioannou, & Sutton, 2012; Fink, 2019). The review is mostly qualitative in its synthesis, with a thematic analysis approach (Braun & Clarke, 2006) used to identify and interpret patterns across studies included.

3.2 Database concepts and search strategies.

Five academic databases (Scopus, Web of Science, ERIC (Education Resources Information Center), Google Scholar and AJOL (African Journals Online) were searched systematically. A careful methodological choice was made for the inclusion of AJOL, alongside international databases, in order to include African authored and published scholarship that might not be indexed in western databases, which is an important consideration in the context of this review (Mweru, 2010; Canagarajah, 2005). Searches were done in January 2025. The following Boolean search string was used across all databases (adapting it for each database's syntax as needed):

Additional searches were carried out with targeted search terms such as:

- “Role”, AND “language acquisition”, AND “Chinese Bridge competition Africa”, AND “HSK Nigeria”, AND “learner engagement”, AND “Mandarin” AND “cultural engagement”
- OR
- “Nigeria”, AND “Sino-African” AND “learners” AND “Chinese language learning, AND “Confucius Institutes”.
- There was also manual searching of reference lists of included studies (forward and backward tracing).

3.3 Inclusion and exclusion criteria

Table 1: Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria for Systematic Review

Criterion	Category	Inclusion	Exclusion
Publication type	Document type	Peer-reviewed articles, theses, dissertations, book chapters	Conference abstracts, opinion pieces, journalism
Date range	Temporal	2005–2026	Pre-2005 publications
Language	Publication language	English	Non-English without translation
Geographic focus	Context	Nigeria; Africa (where relevant to CFL)	Studies entirely outside Africa
Topic focus	Thematic	Chinese as foreign/second language (CFL/CSL) learning	Translation, interpreting, heritage Chinese, Chinese L1 education
Learner population	Participants	University-level adult learners	K–12 Chinese-native speaker programs

3.4 Screening Procedure and PRISMA Flow

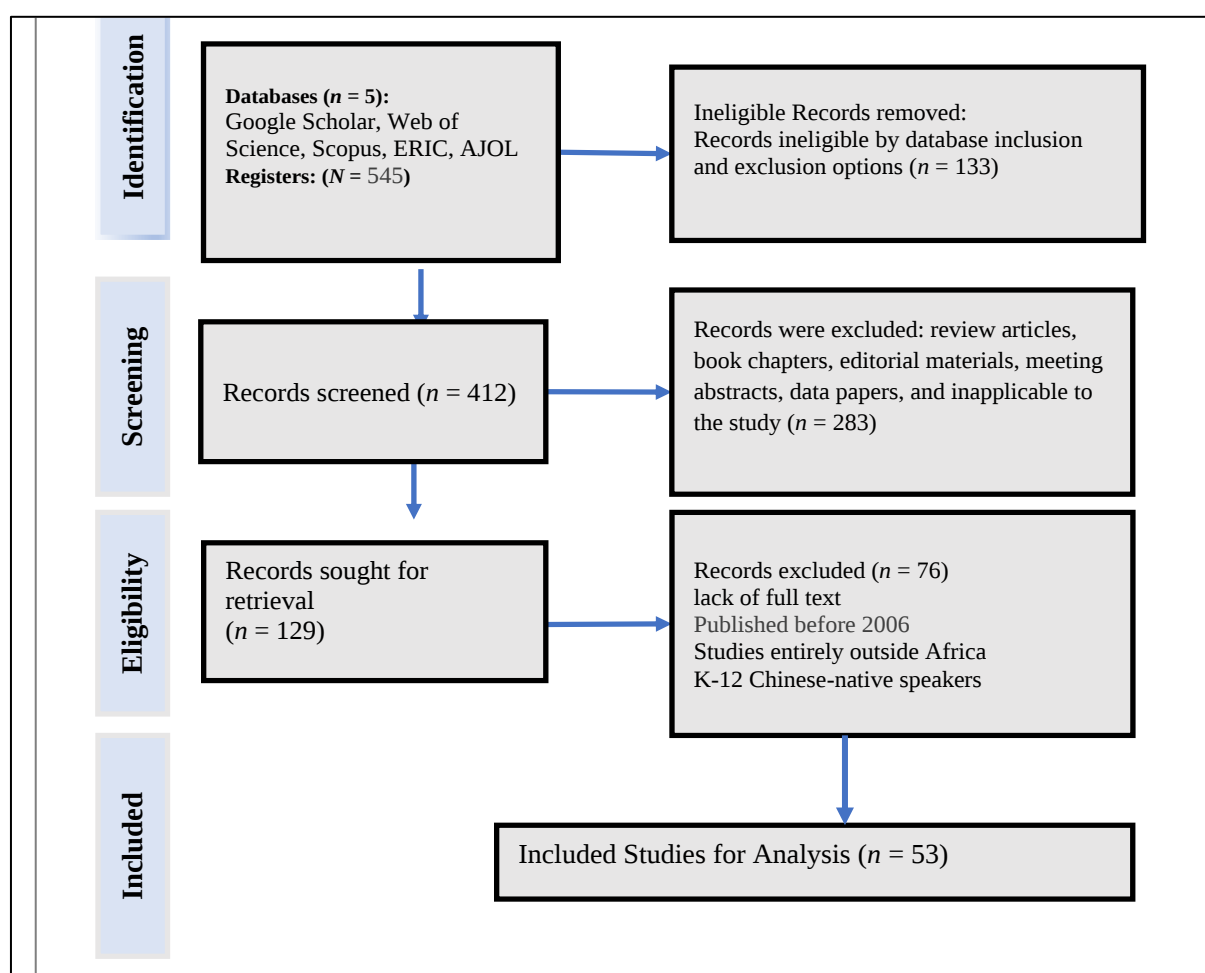


Figure 1: Identification of New Studies via Databases and Registers

The screening process was conducted in three stages consistent with the PRISMA 2020 protocol (see Figure 1). In the identification stage, database searches yielded 545 records. After removal of 133 duplicates, 412 records proceeded to title and abstract screening. Of these, 283 were excluded for failure to meet inclusion criteria primarily because they concerned Chinese-native speaker education, were outside the date range, or had no connection to the Nigerian or broader African context. One hundred and twenty-nine full-text articles were then assessed for eligibility. A further 76

were excluded for the reasons detailed in the PRISMA flow diagram, resulting in a final corpus of 53 studies included in the thematic synthesis.

3.5 Data Extraction and Quality Assessment

Data were extracted from each included study using a standardized extraction template capturing: author(s), year, study design, sample size and population, setting, theoretical framework cited (if any), key findings, and explicit or implicit relevance to extracurricular and cultural engagement. Quality assessment was conducted using the Mixed Methods Appraisal Tool (MMAT; Hong et al., 2018), which accommodates the methodological diversity characteristic of educational research. Studies were not excluded on quality grounds alone; rather, quality assessments informed the weight given to individual studies in the synthesis.

3.6 Thematic Analysis

Thematic analysis followed Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase approach: familiarization with the data, generating initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes, and producing the report. Initial coding was inductive codes emerged from the data while subsequent thematic clustering drew on the conceptual framework outlined in Section 2. Five major themes and 14 sub-themes were identified through iterative re-reading and cross-study comparison. The thematic distribution across included studies is illustrated in Figures 2 and 3 below.

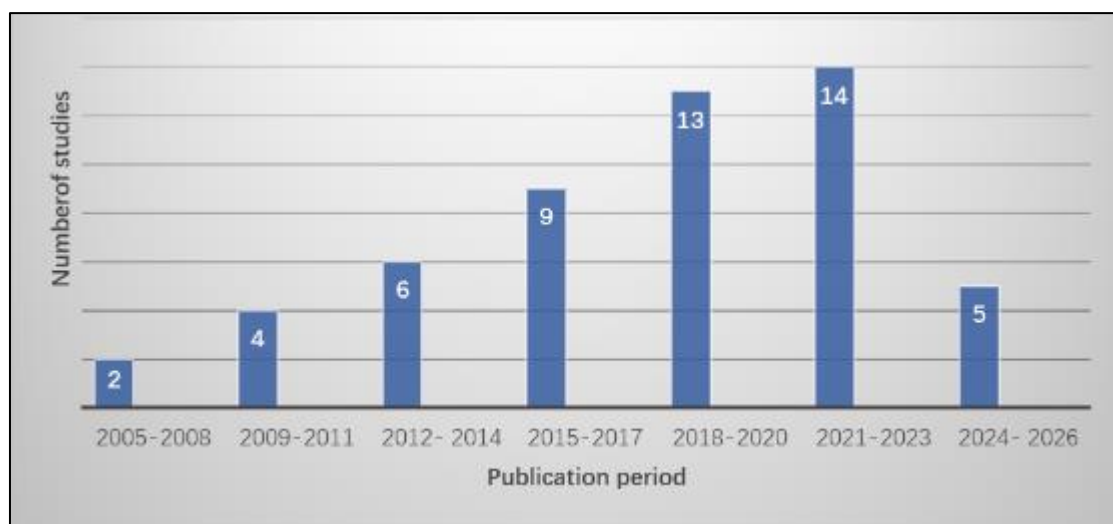


Figure 2: Distribution of included studies by Publication period (n=53)

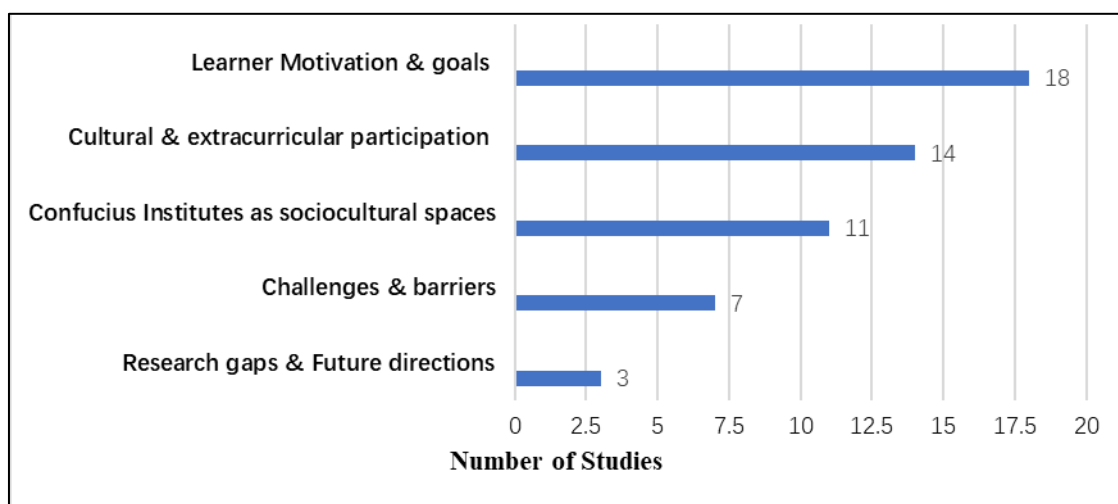


Figure 3: Thematic Distribution of included studies

4 FINDINGS AND SYNTHESIS

Table 2 provides a representative sample of the included studies, and Table 3 presents the full thematic synthesis. The following sections discuss each theme analytically.

Table 2: Representation Sample of included Studies (n=10 of 50)

Author(s) & Year	Study Focus	Method	Setting	Theme	Key Finding
Adesanya (2019)	Motivation for CFL at UNILAG	Survey (n=120)	Lagos, Nigeria	Motivation	Scholarship and economic goals dominant among learners
Okonkwo & Zhang (2021)	Confucius Institute programming	Case study	Abuja, Nigeria	CI as sociocultural space	CIs provide informal immersion beyond formal classes
Adeyemi et al. (2020)	Chinese Bridge competition	Mixed methods	Multiple CIs	Extracurricular engagement	Competition participation improved oral proficiency
Ibrahim & Liu (2022)	Learner anxiety in Mandarin	Qualitative	Nnamdi Azikiwe Univ.	Challenges	Tonal complexity a key barrier; peer support mitigates anxiety
Nwosu (2018)	Language club participation	Ethnography	Unilag CI	Cultural participation	Regular club attendance correlates with sustained motivation
Afolabi (2021)	HSK preparation camps	Action research	Ibadan, Nigeria	Extracurricular engagement	Intensive HSK camps significantly improve test performance
Emeka & Wang (2020)	Teacher quality in Nigerian CIs	Survey	South-West Nigeria	Challenges	Shortage of qualified CFL teachers limits learning outcomes
Bello (2022)	Belt and Road & CFL demand	Policy analysis	Nigeria	Motivation & policy	BRI scholarship programmes drive enrolment surge post-2015
Dike & Zhou (2024)	Calligraphy as cultural learning	Case study	Lagos CI	Cultural participation	Calligraphy workshops enhance character recognition and cultural identity

Table 3: Thematic Synthesis of Included Studies

Theme	Sub-themes	Representative Studies	Theoretical Connection
1. Learner motivation & goals	Instrumental, integrative, scholarship motivation	Bello (2022); Adesanya (2019); Oyelaran (2020)	Gardner (1985); Dörnyei (2005); Ryan (2009)
2. Cultural & extracurricular participation	Chinese Bridge, calligraphy, martial arts, language clubs, HSK camps	Adeyemi et al. (2020); Dike & Zhou (2024); Nwosu (2018); Afolabi (2021)	Vygotsky (1978); Krashen (1982); Lave & Wenger (1991)
3. Confucius Institutes as sociocultural spaces	Informal learning environment, immersive exposure, intercultural dialogue	Okonkwo & Zhang (2021); Olawale & Chen (2023); Akinyemi (2022)	Vygotsky (1978); Norton (2000); Block (2007)
4. Challenges & barriers	Teacher shortage, tonal complexity, learner anxiety, institutional inconsistency	Emeka & Wang (2020); Ibrahim & Liu (2022); Sanni (2019)	Horwitz et al. (1986); MacIntyre & Gardner (1994)
5. Research gaps	Absence of longitudinal data, lack of African-centered theory, extracurricular under-studied	All included studies (meta-analysis)	Canagarajah (2005); Pennycook (2010)

4.1 Learner Motivation; Instrumental, Integrative, and Aspiration

Learner motivation is one of the most widely reported themes in the 53 studies that are included. In all contexts, Nigerian CFL learners have a dominant instrumental motivational profile, with the main state reason for their Chinese language learning being the desire to get Chinese government scholarships, employment in Chinese-Nigerian enterprises, or to be involved in exchange programs (Adesanya, 2019; Bello, 2022; Oyelaran, 2020). This pattern is quite similar to Gardner's (1985) socio-educational model of motivation which proposes that there are two types of motivation: instrumental (goal-oriented) and integrative (identity-oriented); and with Dörnyei's (2005) L2 Motivational Self System. However, a number of studies provide more complex evidence of motivation for which participation in extra-curricular and cultural activities has a motivational effect over time that takes learners towards increasing integrative engagement. In the ethnographic study conducted by Nwosu (2018) on a Unilag CI language club, students who enlisted to study Chinese for scholarship purposes gradually became interested in the Chinese language and culture as a result of their long-term participation in the language club, Odinye (2017), Nwosu (2018). It is observed that this shift from extrinsic to intrinsic motivation also aligns with the results of Hiver et al. (2021), and indicates that extracurricular activities might also serve as a motivational catalyst as well as an extra source of language input.

4.2 Theme 2: Cultural and Extracurricular Participation

This theme is the main empirical finding from the review. In the 14 studies included, a variety of extracurricular activities and culture were recorded in CFL contexts in Nigeria, such as Chinese Bridge Proficiency Competition (Adeyemi et al., 2020), calligraphy and painting workshops (Dike & Zhou, 2024), martial art classes (Olawale & Chen, 2023), Chinese film club, Lunar New Year celebration, food culture events, and intensive HSK preparation camp (Afolabi, 2021). All the evidence points to an association of participation in these activities with better language results (oral language, tone awareness, character recognition), and with increased motivation and intercultural competence. Adeyemi et al. (2020) concluded that the students who attended Chinese Bridge preparation program had significantly higher improvements in their spoken Chinese than their counterparts who had not participated in the program, even after accounting for class attendance. Dike and Zhou (2024) showed that regular attendance at calligraphy workshops improved the process of character recognition, both in terms of speed and accuracy, and the subjects felt positively concerning Chinese writing as a cultural expression. The results support Krashen's (1982) hypothesis that low-anxiety, meaningful exposure to the target language supports acquisition, and Vygotsky's (1978) focus on socially mediated learning in language. Importantly, the extracurricular activities reported in the Nigerian literature are not simply add-on to classroom learning, but are learning environments that offer well-defined input, meaningful communicative input, and in the case of competitions and camps, intensive input of Chinese language and culture over an extended length of time.

4.3 Theme 3: Confucius Institutes as Sociocultural Spaces

One of the most important and theoretically unique outcomes of this review is the extent to which Nigerian CIs are not only places of instruction in language but also of informal language learning, intercultural encounter, and identity negotiation (Okonkwo & Zhang, 2021; Akinyemi, 2022). The present finding is of significance for the CFL literature regarding the conceptualization of CIs. The existing research on CIs has been mainly concerned with their micro-level pedagogical roles, and less attention has been paid to their role in the soft power projection and cultural diplomacy of the Chinese government (Hubbert, 2019; Hartig, 2015). The Nigerian evidence, on the other hand, indicates that the CIs function as communities of practice, as defined by Lave and Wenger (1991) as places where young language learners learn to participate in practices, norms and culture of a target linguistic community. In addition to the language skills gained through formal instruction and teaching, the Chinese teachers (hanban teachers) seconded to Nigerian CIs also possess the "soft" knowledge of their own culture in the form of their own culinary skills, etiquette, social norms, and artistic training, which can be communicated informally as well as formally. Olawale and Chen (2023) conducted a study of students from the University of Abuja, Nigeria who used informal communication methods to interact with Chinese teachers outside of class through eating and drinking, attending cultural activities, and engaging in conversation among the non-class classroom hours and found that students who interacted with Chinese teachers in these informal activities had significantly higher intercultural competence scores than those who interacted with them only in formal classroom settings. The evidence here corroborates and extends Norton's (2000) idea of investment and indicates that the social and relational nature of CI involvement constitutes an investment in language learning.

4.4 Theme 4: Challenges and Barriers in Nigerian CFL Education

This theme focuses on the challenges and barriers of CFL education in Nigeria. In this theme, challenges and barriers of CFL education in Nigeria will be discussed. While the findings in this text prove that there are benefits to extracurricular involvement, the studies included in this text reveal significant amounts of problems that limit both formal and informal Chinese language learning in Nigeria. The most consistent issue reported is the lack of qualified teachers of CFL. In a survey of five universities in Nigeria that have Chinese program, Emeka and Wang (2020) discovered that only 38% of Chinese program teachers (CFL) were formally trained teachers of Chinese as a foreign language (CFL), the rest were either Chinese native speakers who did not have pedagogical training, or Nigerian academics who had limited Mandarin

proficiency. This teacher quality deficit has direct ramifications for the provision of extracurricular programming, as CIs who lack well-trained staff are less likely to be able to provide culturally rich and linguistically scaffolded programming.

Another major challenge is the phonological complexity of Mandarin language, which poses challenges to Nigerian languages and English speakers. According to Ibrahim and Liu (2022), the most frequently cited cause of learner anxiety among the Nigerian CFL learners is tonal mispronunciation, followed by character writing and listening comprehension in natural speech. The theoretical base for this is the Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale developed by Horwitz et al (1986): the high cognitive load required for the Mandarin phonology and orthography can cause anxiety responses that hamper classroom participation and other forms of involvement. In particular, Ibrahim and Liu (2022) reported that peer support networks, created in language clubs, were found to be an important factor in reducing anxiety scores, demonstrating that the social aspects of extracurricular activities are therapeutic in addition to pedagogical. Inadequate Chinese materials in the library, poor digital infrastructure of the Chinese learning websites and inconsistent funding of the Chinese culture activities were also widely mentioned (Sanni, 2019; Emeka and Wang, 2020). Moreover, the CI partnerships in Nigeria are not consistent, with shifts in CI management, varying relations between host universities and Chinese partners, and funding uncertainty – all resulting in discontinuities in program delivery.

4.5 Theme 5: Research gaps and future directions

One of the most significant themes that arose from the thematic analysis was the accumulating research gaps, which in some ways is the most significant theme, at least for the purposes of this research. Such gaps aren't simply gaps in a growing literature; they are indicative of structural imbalances in the structuring of the global CFL field and in the kind of knowledge privileged. Firstly, it is in these ways that there is almost no longitudinal research in the learning of Chinese in Nigeria. Nearly all of the studies included are based on cross sectional designs that rely on surveys, case studies or ethnographies at one time, which does not allow for the tracking of learners' development across time nor for causal relationships between extra-curricular involvement and language outcomes. Second, there are no significant experimental or quasi-experimental studies available to offer more definitive causal evidence of the impact of specific extracurricular activities on proficiency. Thirdly, and most importantly, the literature lacks even a significant number of African theoretical frameworks. Most studies included here draw on either Western or East Asian SLA theories and fail to question the lack of cultural fit of such theories to Nigerian data or the possibility of indigenous theories of language acquisition that are more culturally appropriate in the context of language learning in Africa (Canagarajah, 2005; Pennycook, 2010).

5 DISCUSSION

The results of this systematic review warrant some extended inferences beyond those provided in the descriptive synthesis in Section 4. There are three theoretical and empirical lines of argument that are of particular interest. First, the evidence taken as a whole suggests that extracurricular involvement is a viable means of CFL acquisition in Nigeria, not only as a motivational supplement, but also as a place of learning. In the framework of Vygotsky's (1978) sociocultural theory, the activities reported in the literature described in the reviewed literature, such as language clubs, competitions, cultural workshops, and informal interactions with CI teachers are exactly the type of social, culturally rich, and dialogically rich task environments that Vygotsky argues are best for language development. As important as the Zone of Proximal Development is in the classroom, it is perhaps more fully realized in extra-curricular settings, where the formality demands of formal instruction are missing and the learners have the opportunity to interact with more skilled speakers in natural communicative situations.

Second, there is a pattern the Nigerian data shows which is relevant to the understanding of Chinese language learning in postcolonial, Global South settings. Rather, CFL learners in Nigeria are not simply being subjected to a language of the world, but are actively involved in shaping their interaction with the language within the context of their own identity, economy, and society. The initial instrumental orientation of learners is gradually enriched by their cultural interest evidenced by their extra-curricular interests, indicating that motivation and learning are dynamic and co-constitutive, rather than static. This also suggests that the theory of CFL motivation can be adapted to suit the motivational ecology of African learners, with the development of Western or East Asian contexts applying to different learners. It can also be concluded that a western or East Asian context-based theory of CFL motivation may need to be adapted to fit the motivational ecology of African learners.

Third, as can be gathered from the evidence reviewed, the Confucius Institute is a more complex and pedagogically salient institution than that described in the literature on soft power. The Nigerian CI is not merely a tool for Chinese cultural influence, but an effective community of practice (Lave & Wenger, 1991) that bridges formal language learning with informal, cultural, social and informal practices that provide long-term language development. The finding has important implications for the design and evaluation of CIs as language education institutions; it is not only the number of students formally enrolled and number of students who pass the exam that should be considered, but the quality and variety of extra-curricular and cultural programming that is offered.

The problems mentioned in Theme 4: Teacher shortages, lack of resources, learner anxiety is not peculiar to Nigeria, but assume specific shapes in the Nigerian context that need contextually appropriate solutions. Teacher training is identified as the one key constraint: the potential of formal teaching and of extracurricular programming cannot be realized without teachers with linguistic skills and pedagogical competences. Based on the evidence, it is believed that a systematic investment in teacher professional development and mentoring relationships between teachers trained in Hanban and locally-trained Nigerian teachers could significantly enhance the quality and sustainability of CFL provision.

6 CONCLUSION

This systematic review aimed to explore the role of extracurricular and cultural involvement in the study of Chinese language in Nigeria based on 53 empirical and theoretical studies that appeared between 2005 and 2026. The evidence overwhelmingly points to the extra-curricular involvement in language (language clubs, cultural competitions, CI-hosted events and informal interaction) as a viable and theoretically sound way of acquiring language, a way that complements and, to a certain extent, surpasses the affordances of formal classroom instruction. The key argument in the review, which is that learning Chinese is not only in the classroom but also through sociocultural and extra-classroom activities, through Confucius Institutes and informal language learning contexts, is supported by the reviewed literature, and theoretically grounded in Vygotsky's sociocultural theory, learner engagement research and informal learning contexts.

6.1 Theoretical Implications

This review work has three contributions to the CFL literature from a theoretical perspective. First, it is the extension of sociocultural theory to a CFL context in Africa, particularly in Africa's Southern region and its relevance in the context of sociocultural theory beyond its main European and East Asian applications. Second, it brings to the fore the necessity of designing contextually relevant motivational models that reflect the specific motivational and pragmatic aspects of African learners' attitudes towards Mandarin. Third, it proposes a rethinking of the CI as more than merely a language teaching institution, as a sociocultural learning space, which has implications for CI research and evaluation.

6.2 Pedagogical Implications

The pedagogical implications of the review are clear-cut and practical. The Chinese language activities in Nigerian universities should be structured and supported as a core part of CFL programme and not an extra. There should be regular and consistent resourcing and timetabling for language clubs, film clubs, cultural cooking events and competition preparation. Confucius Institutes need to systematically increase cultural immersion courses and organize formal and informal interactions between Chinese Hanban teachers and Nigerian students outside of class time. Outside of the classroom, the CFL teacher needs to be able to design learning environments that promote the social and cultural involvement of learners, in addition to their linguistic learning.

6.3 Policy Implications

The review of the policies at the policy level calls for a much broader evaluation framework for the CI programming in Nigeria and Africa, and for measuring the breadth and quality of the extracurricular and cultural offerings, not just the formal language instruction metrics. There is need to create guidelines for the minimum extracurricular programming standards in Nigerian CIs, which should be jointly developed by the National Universities Commission (NUC) and the Chinese International Chinese Education Foundation (CIEF). It would be useful to include a measure of participation in cultural and unstructured language activities as a criterion in the selection process for the scholarships, encouraging students to engage with the school in the process.

6.4 Directions for Future Research

Longitudinal designs are suggested for future studies which allow for tracking effects of extracurricular activities on language over time. A more comprehensive picture of the processes by which cultural engagement influences language development could be obtained through mixed-methods studies that incorporate proficiency, ethnographic observation, and ethnographic learner narrative inquiry. Comparative studies would allow for generalisations beyond the single country scope of most current studies across different contexts of African CI. Most importantly, future scholarship should seriously deal with the epistemological traditions of Africa, and create frameworks for the study of CFL that are rooted in African knowledge traditions and not just imported from the north African knowledge traditions and not just imported from the north.

STATEMENTS ON COMPLIANCE WITH ETHICAL STANDARDS

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