The Study on the Status of Chinese Language Education in Lithuania

Jing-Yang WANG
School of International Exchange, Bohai University, Jinzhou, Liaoning, China
584210978@qq.com

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Abstract. International Chinese education is flourishing recently. Teaching Chinese overseas is an important part of it. The Chinese language teaching in Lithuania was carried out more than ten years. However, survey and theoretical research on Chinese language teaching in Lithuania are still blank. Through a large number of first-hand information on teaching practice, this paper aims to introduce the history and the current situation of Chinese teaching in Lithuania. Then we investigate the reason of learning Chinese, the comprehension degree of China, the attitude of the teaching materials, requirements for teachers, learning and re-learning difficulties. Finally, according to these difficulties and problems, we will promote the construction and reform of the curriculum, strengthen the selection and training of the teachers, focus on the development and improvement of teaching materials and conduct campus activities and interscholastic cooperation.

Introduction

Lithuania is located in the northeastern part of Europe. The land area is 65,300 square kilometers. The total population is 2.988 million. Most of the people speak Lithuanian and the main foreign language education are English, Russian and polish. The establishment of diplomatic relations between China and Lithuania started as early as September 14, 1991, but the close communication began in the 21st century. With the opening of the 2008 Beijing Olympic Games and the implementation of “the Belt and Road Initiative”, the high-level visits between the two countries promoted the development of the relationships. Therefore, on the basis of major breakthroughs in economy and politics between the two countries, the language and culture should play a greater role as a link between the people. So it is urgent and necessary to promote Chinese language teaching and Chinese culture and strengthen cultural exchanges in Lithuania.

The Development and Present Situation of Chinese Teaching in Lithuania

The History of Chinese Teaching in Lithuania

Lithuanian cultural and educational development has a unique development process, because of its specific historical and political factors. To study the Lithuanian Chinese teaching history, we have to mention two significant universities, Vilnius University and Vytautas University. The introduction of Sinology began at Vilnius University's Center for Oriental Studies, which was established in 1993, to study Eastern languages, culture and history. In 2002, the Center opened the Oriental Language School and invited all those who want to learn Chinese and other Asian languages. It invited some famous professors to provide open teaching to this community. The largest number of students whose major is Chinese are in Vytautas University. In September 2007, Chinese classes were officially taught at the university. Until September 2012, the establishment of the East Asian Language and Culture Bachelor degree made the Chinese class formally into the syllabus, as a specialized course to teach. Thanks to the establishment of the Lithuanian Confucius Institute, in the past four to five years, the number of students was rapidly expanding. The Confucius Institute at Vilnius University was founded by Vilnius University in Lithuania and Liaoning University in China. In April 2010, the two sides formally signed the agreement of the establishment of the Confucius Institute. Then in November 26, 2010, it was officially unveiled. The Confucius Classroom is under the Confucius Institute.
Current Situation of Chinese Teaching in Lithuania

**Distribution of Chinese teaching institutions in Lithuania.** Lithuania's land area is small, so education is concentrated in several developed cities. According to statistics, the total number of universities in Lithuania is 23. Until December 2015, there have been 5 universities (Vilnius university, Lithuanian University of Educational Sciences, Mykolas Romeris University, Vytautas Magnus University and Kaunas University of Technology) offering Chinese-related courses. In just ten years, almost a quarter of Lithuanian universities have offered Chinese language courses, and four of them have introduced Chinese courses into the credit system. By the objective restriction of teachers and schooling conditions, Lithuanian primary schools do not offer any Chinese courses. Only the Dockshaus Middle School in Vilnius which cooperated with the Confucius Institute in Lithuania provided Chinese interest Classes.

**Chinese teachers in Lithuania.** At present, the Chinese teaching in Lithuanian universities and secondary schools is mainly composed of local teachers from Lithuania and teachers from China. The nature of the work is divided into two types which are full-time teachers and part-time teachers. Local teachers are the majority in Vilnius University. Local teachers are divided into different stages of the old, middle-aged and young, according to the age and teaching experience. Their contribution to the spread of Chinese culture and language also has its own focus. As a discipline pioneer, they put more energy into the Chinese culture, especially the traditional culture research. And young teachers have more knowledge of communication and practical ability. In addition to Vilnius University, the Chinese language teaching in other universities mainly depends on Confucius Institute in Lithuania and teachers are appointed by the Chinese side. Those teacher passed the strict national screening and training. Most have a wealth of experience in teaching students.

**Learners of Chinese in Lithuania.** From the distribution of teaching institutions in Lithuania, we could see the main learners are undergraduates. The 2015 statistics show that there are 17 students in first grade of Sinology, 15 students in third grade. The fourth grade students are only 10. There are 27 first-year students, 40 second-year students and 29 third-year students at Vytautas University. The other two universities, in capital has no strong professional requirements. They choose the elective courses. And the average annual enrollment are 30 people. In addition, the Confucius Institute in Lithuania has also opened evening classes. The course is aimed at all people who are interested in Chinese language and culture. The program began in February 2012. It has a total enrollment of 21 people.

**Curriculum and teaching materials in Lithuania.** Vilnius University and Vytautas University in Lithuania set up Bachelor of Asian Comparative Literature Studies and bachelor of East Asian language and culture. In the amount of learning hours and credits, the proportion of cultural teaching is more than language teaching. The Chinese intensive reading class in Vilnius University are two times per week about four academic hours. The Chinese language and culture lectures in Vytautas University are three times per week about five academic hours. A single integrated teaching model is adopted in the curriculum. Teachers should take into account the students' abilities of listening, speaking, reading and writing. So far it has no local textbook for Lithuanian students with Lithuanian translations. The textbooks which are selected for the language courses include "Road to Success", "Contemporary Chinese", "Boya Chinese", "New Practical Chinese Textbooks" and "Happy Chinese" for young people. Above all are used in English version.

Analysis of Chinese Learners' Learning Situation in Lithuania

**Reasons of Learners who Learn Chinese**

Students who learn Chinese are mainly for their own needs. Nearly half of them are interested in the Chinese language and regard learning process as a challenge. China as an ancient country of oriental civilization has a unique charm and attractiveness. Especially its unique ideographic system and cadence tones make students feel very interesting. In addition, students also pay attention to practicality. They learn Chinese as a tool, hoping to communicate with the Chinese people, even finding a better job in the future.
Analysis of the Comprehension Degree of China

The Proportion of Chinese learners who have really been to China is very small. In the survey, more than half of the people are very familiar with China's food. This is mainly due to the current situation that there are a lot of Chinese restaurants in the territory of Lithuania. Secondly, Chinese traditions and customs are also concerned by many Lithuanian people. During the Chinese New Year, the Dragon Boat Festival and the Mid-Autumn Festival, the Confucius Institute will organize various performances, exhibitions and cultural gatherings for the citizens. Many learners also mentioned that they would listen to Chinese news, read Chinese books and newspapers, and take the initiative to learn about China's current affairs. However, As for Chinese literature, students know little about it.

Analysis of Learner's Attitude towards Learning Materials

The results of the survey on learners' satisfaction with the teaching materials are optimistic. The teaching materials chosen by the institutions are widely recognized and recommended in China. In the process of using teaching materials, the teacher do some option according to their students' characteristics and the requirement of the curriculum. Most of the learners value the accurate knowledge and abundant exercises. So the learners hope to obtain "Chinese traditional culture and thinking" through the teaching materials, which reflecting the development and changes of modern China.

Analysis of the Learners' Requirements about Teachers

Most Lithuanian students like teachers from China. At the same time, some learners also suggested that teachers from China and Lithuania could co-teach Chinese classes. In the phonetic stage, they would like to accept the formal pronunciation training from the Chinese teachers. But in the grammar learning stage, they want to get local teachers’ interpretation from the two languages contrast. Among the characteristics of the teachers, all students want their teachers with a wealth of teaching experience. They like humorous teachers who also have a strict standards of judgment.

Measures and Suggestions on Chinese Teaching in Lithuania

To Promote Curriculum Construction and Reform

How to solve the single type and less teaching hours becomes the primary problem of Chinese curriculum reform in Lithuania. We can refer to the domestic institutions to add spoken language, Chinese listening, Chinese writing and other basic courses. In addition, as Mr. Zhao Jinming said, "people from all walks of life have different learning objectives" We can also consider the school's educational goals and students' learning motivations and offer specialized courses such as Business Chinese, Tourism Chinese, Medical Chinese and so on. All these reforms need to be supported and coordinated by the institutions of Lithuania and it is necessary for the teachers to be able to make reasonable suggestions and communicate well with the school to formulate a syllabus.

To Strengthen the Selection and Training of Teachers

“To promote the development of Chinese teaching, the most basic factor is to have good teachers”. The current problems are the lack of teachers resources, the large mobility of teachers and the poor coherence. Considering those factors, the first step for school is to expand the scale to attract more students who will engaged in Chinese language learning. At the same time, to set up a special teacher training path for the local teachers and provide a range of support and protection. Meanwhile, concerning about their lives and gradually designing a set of incentives for local teachers are also important. For the teachers from China, they should strengthen the understanding of Lithuanian national conditions and customs and be familiar with the school's teaching model. They had better understand the students' thinking habits and learning characteristics.
To Develop and Improve Teaching Materials

The development of local textbooks has its necessity. First of all, in the primary and secondary stage, Chinese textbooks only with English comments are unrealistic. And the real realization of Chinese teaching at all stages is necessary. Lithuanian language teaching material development is imminent. Scholars and teachers who are in the preparation of teaching materials need to comply with the basic principles of teaching materials. And they also need to take into account of the "natural and social characteristics of learners, learners goals and learning requirements". Emphasizing the similarities and differences between Lithuanian and Chinese, they also had better focus on the development of modern China. It is essential to concern about the social reality of Lithuania and stimulate students' interest in learning.

To Carry out In-school Activities and Inter-school Cooperation

In interviews with students, the students generally expressed their liking and desire to learn the Chinese language and Chinese culture through various ways. We should encourage teachers to step out of the classroom and hold various cultural activities on various topics, including Chinese calligraphy, painting, Chinese medicine, martial arts, music, tea and other fields. At the same time, combined with the love of young people on the network media, teachers can organize students to develop WeChat group and set the public web page. In the long-term contact with the school, we know that many schools look forward to establish cooperative relations with more institutions in China and become sisterly institutions. Therefore, Lithuania should strengthen cooperation with domestic institutions in China. The exchange includes high-level visits, co-op schools, teacher exchanges, student exchanges, summer camps, seminars, student competitions and host families.

Conclusion

Based on the actual teaching experience in Lithuania, this paper analyzes the current situation of Chinese teaching in Lithuania. On the basis of grasping the whole situation of Chinese teaching in Lithuania, this paper analyzes the learning situation of learners and puts forward some feasible suggestions on curriculum setting, teachers, teaching materials, school activities and intercollegiate cooperation. It hopes to attract more people's attention and thinking and to explore the future development way of Chinese language teaching in Lithuania.

References