

# A Study on Talent Training at Confucius Institute in Zimbabwe

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**Abstract:** The Confucius Institute at the University of Zimbabwe contributes in a "distinctive" way to the success of educational and cultural interaction between Zimbabwe and China. The Confucius Institute in Zimbabwe has played an important role in nurturing talent. It has developed various programmes and ways to train talents. The training of these talents helps to promote innovation, cooperation and mutual benefits for both countries. This research aims to find out how the Confucius Institute is performing a role in talent training through Chinese language and culture teaching in Zimbabwe. Qualitative research method-interviewing and observation is implemented to obtain information, a critical analysis of the information collected about the talent cultivation at the Confucius Institute in Zimbabwe. The purpose of this study is to find out what role the Confucius Institute plays in training talent through the teaching of Chinese language and culture in Zimbabwe. Qualitative research methods - interview and observation are used to obtain information, and this study critically analyse the information collected about talent development at the Confucius Institute in Zimbabwe. In 2007, the Confucius Institute at the University of Zimbabwe began recruiting students for Bachelor of Arts, Tourism and Hospitality programmes. It has trained many excellent local Chinese teachers, tutors and translators. Despite the success in training these talents, there are challenges that limit the performance and full success of talent development and the quality of collaboration; these issues need to be reconsidered and resolved. There is still a need to reform the teaching infrastructure and create post-training opportunities for talent to achieve effective and successful outcomes.

**Keywords:** Confucius Institute, Zimbabwe, Talent Training, Chinese Language

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## 1. Introduction

Confucius was a philosopher who the Chinese believe had a significant impact on international culture. According to the Information Office of the State Council of the People's Republic of China 2021, China is training much-needed professionals for African countries and encouraging outstanding African youth to study in China through various scholarships. China had the opportunity to expand its influence in Africa in the 1990s, but it was not until 2006, when the leaders of over 40 African countries visited Beijing for a summit, that the world took notice of this ever-evolving partnership [2]. China supports education in Africa; since 2012, China and Africa have implemented the 20+20

Cooperation Plans for Chinese and African Universities as a platform for university-to-university exchanges and cooperation [13]. China not only has a history of education, but also has political and economic relations with Zimbabwe and Africa in general [7].

The cooperation entered a new phase as the first Forum on China-Africa Cooperation (FOCAC) took place in 2000, [11]. To offer more than 10,000 teachers in African nations teacher training programs, China established an educational trust fund under UNESCO. Since 2018, China has established workshops together with colleges and universities in countries, including sharing top-notch resources for vocational education with Africa and hiring highly skilled technical employees [6]. China has also set up Chinese language departments or Chinese language majors in 30 African

universities.

Cooperation in the field of education is centred on respect for one another, friendship, shared interests, and growth [3]. Numerous initiatives are part of the Sino-Africa Educational Cooperation, including the teaching of the Chinese language and Chinese culture, the awarding of Confucius Institute Scholarships, the Chinese Government Scholarship (CSC), school construction projects, and cooperation in higher education [2]. In cooperation with China, Chinese has been introduced into the national curriculum of 16 African nations, and 61 Confucius Institutes and 48 Confucius Classrooms have been established in Africa. Since 2004, a total of 5,500 Chinese language volunteers and teachers have been dispatched from China to 48 African countries.

Zimbabwe and China have a long history of educational cooperation. The Confucius Institute plays an important role in the educational and cultural exchange between the two countries. It plays a pivotal role in talent cultivation. The Confucius Institute at the University of Zimbabwe was established in 2007 and jointly built by Renmin University, China, and the University of Zimbabwe. As an important platform for local Chinese language teaching and cultural exchanges between China and Zimbabwe, the Confucius Institute at Zimbabwe University has become one of the largest and most powerful Chinese teaching institutions with the largest number of students.

Zimbabwe is among the countries that have relatively extended cooperation with China. Recently, scholarships under the China-Zimbabwe Friendship Scholarship were given to a number of students at the University of Zimbabwe to help with their tuition costs. The Confucius Institute at the University of Zimbabwe (CIUZ) hosted the opening ceremony of the program organized by the China-Africa Economic and Culture Exchange and Research Center (CAECERC) with the support of the Chinese Embassy in Zimbabwe. According to the director of CIUZ, the China-Zimbabwe Friendship Scholarship was launched early last year and is aimed at students from state universities majoring in engineering and technology, health sciences, agriculture, natural sciences and other fields. Each of the scholarship recipients received a cash award. In addition, the winners of an essay contest with the theme "My Story with China" organized by the Chinese Embassy and CIUZ were awarded [15].

One of the visions and long-term goals of the Confucius Institute at the University of Zimbabwe is to spread throughout the entire nation. Over the past few years, the CIUZ has intensified its expansion campaign. To build Chinese language teaching and training centers, they have been reaching out to various universities and institutions across the nation.

CIUZ specializes in the teaching and learning of Chinese language and culture in Zimbabwe. It focuses on the training for the preparation of the "Chinese Bridge" competition, the training for the Chinese proficiency test, and the teaching of Chinese language and culture. The Confucius Institute at the University of Zimbabwe constitutes a platform for the

teaching of the Chinese language and culture. This institute, which trains Chinese language talents, also serves as a platform for promoting economic, educational, and cultural exchanges between China and Zimbabwe.

## 2. Literature Review

The Confucius Institute Regulations specify the following five main tasks: Teaching Chinese, training Chinese teachers, providing teaching materials, and conducting Chinese proficiency tests. Chinese language teaching is one of the most important tasks of Confucius Institutes and the best way to promote intercultural understanding between China and other nations. Confucius Institutes organize translation and interpretation services, conduct Chinese language examinations, coordinate language competitions, and organize study trips to China [4]. Language courses may focus on everyday or business Chinese. Cultural courses can also vary, from calligraphy to cooking to Tai Chi. Many Confucius Institutes also run a range of activities and events for a general audience [10]. The Confucius Institute runs the China Briefing Series through public lectures on political, economic, and cultural developments in China [4]. In 2004, China formulated a five-year plan to cultivate Chinese language programs abroad and an initial goal of establishing one hundred CIs around the world [9]. Some Confucius Institutes specialize in a certain area, for instance, in professional development for teachers and in supporting Chinese language and culture education in schools. It also focuses on language and culture training for tourism purposes, and they also teach Chinese medicine. Confucius Institutes across the world regularly host the Chinese bridge competition, whose semifinals and finals are conducted in China. The winner will earn scholarships to study in China as well as the title of "Chinese Language Envoy" [8]. Hanban runs a number of programs related to Chinese language acquisition, including certification programs for teaching Chinese as a foreign language, Chinese proficiency competitions, and summer camps for students [5]. The Confucius Institute in Zimbabwe also works to verify the credentials of Chinese teachers, guides Chinese language and culture, and implements exchange programs for Chinese language and culture.

The University of Zimbabwe's Confucius Institute serves as a venue for the instruction of the Chinese language and culture. The Confucius Institute, which develops Chinese language experts, serves as a forum for fostering education and cultural ties between China and Zimbabwe.

## 3. Talent Training at Confucius Institute at the University of Zimbabwe (CIUZ)

The developing economic relations between the two nations have encouraged more young people to choose to study Chinese language and culture, opening up great opportunities for them. At the Confucius Institute in Zimbabwe, talents are trained mainly through teaching Chinese language, taking

courses in Chinese culture, and participating in cultural activities such as martial arts, Chinese painting, calligraphy, traditional Chinese opera, silhouette cutting, and traditional Chinese acupuncture. Zimbabwean students are trained by teaching Chinese language and culture. Some become local Chinese teachers and translators, while others go to China to study at Chinese universities and gain global knowledge and skills. The main courses offered by the Confucius Institute in Zimbabwe are:

- 1) Spoken Chinese
- 2) Chinese Listening
- 3) Chinese Reading
- 4) Chinese Writing
- 5) Chinese activities and competitions;

Confucius Institute in Zimbabwe, every year organizes events about Chinese culture and also Chinese Bridge competition auditions. The Confucius Institute at the University of Zimbabwe also conducts training for the preparation of the "Chinese Bridge" competition and the Chinese Proficiency Test. In 2021 Xinhua reported that the Zimbabwean edition of the 20th Chinese Bridge contest was held at the University of Zimbabwe in the capital Harare, saying that Zimbabwean students were showcasing their Chinese language skills at Chinese Bridge contest [14]. The best talents will be sent to China for global competition. In addition to language training, the Confucius Institute provides a wide range of cultural activities, including exhibitions, concerts, film screenings, and discussions. Chinese folk instruments, martial arts, Chinese opera, music, calligraphy, folk dancing, Chinese paper-cutting, Chinese tea, and cuisine culture are some of the subjects taught at the Confucius Institute in Zimbabwe.

### 3.1. Research Question and Aims

1. What kind of talents are trained?
2. How are talents cultivated?

The purpose of the study is to find out how the Confucius Institute plays a central role in the cultivation of talents through the teaching of Chinese language and culture in Zimbabwe. The study also examines what talents are trained, how they are cultivated, and the results of talent training at the Confucius Institute of Zimbabwe.

### 3.2. Methodology

This study focuses on the analysis of the results obtained at the University of Zimbabwe Confucius Institute using first-hand information obtained during the studies. The author has had experience with the Confucius Institute and has observed and experienced some facts. An analysis of the Confucius Institute's role in cultivating talent in Zimbabwe was conducted, using interviews and observations to gather information. These methods are indispensable because they allow us to follow what talents they cultivate and how they train these talents. In this study, the author has made a critical analysis of the information obtained about the Chinese language and culture, talent training, and talent development

at the Confucius Institute in Zimbabwe.

## 4. Findings and Discussion

The Confucius Institute in Zimbabwe has trained more than 5000 students in a range of degrees and courses since its inception in 2007. The number of students enrolled at the Confucius Institute is increasing every year. The Institute, which started with a few training classes, currently has a few branches in the Midlands, teacher colleges, and primary and secondary schools in Zimbabwe. It trains talents from primary level to college. Confucius Institute students include primary school students, high school students, college students, college students, government officials, and also some private sector representatives. At Midlands Christian College, more than 200 students learned Chinese language and culture in 2019. At Zimbabwe College of Music, talents are trained through music. At the ZINTECH Teachers Training Colleges in Zimbabwe, future Chinese teachers are trained for primary and secondary schools. After graduation, they will pass on the knowledge they have learned to their students. Hillside Teachers College was the first to train all A-level teachers, and each year a significant number of outstanding graduates become highly qualified educators in primary and secondary schools.

In 2021, the Confucius Institute at the University of Zimbabwe hosted a ten-week in-service training for primary and secondary Chinese teachers. The training targeted Chinese teachers in primary and secondary schools to improve the level of Chinese language teaching and the teachers' Chinese language skills. In 2014, Zimbabwe became the first country in Africa to offer training for talents in Chinese language and culture at the Confucius Institute. The best talents receive scholarships to continue their studies at Chinese universities. After their training at Chinese universities, they return to Zimbabwe and start training other talents in schools. Some even work as translators in Chinese companies in Zimbabwe and other institutes, and some are even employed abroad. So far, there have been six local lecturers and more than 20 guest lecturers. When the Confucius Institute at the College of Zimbabwe won an award for the best institute in sub-Saharan Africa in 2013, it was the only institute in the world with indigenous teachers. The College of Zimbabwe made history in this regard, as it was one of the first institutions to train indigenous teachers to earn a doctorate in Chinese language teaching.

In the last 10 years, more and more students from the Confucius Institute of Zimbabwe were given the opportunity to go to China to continue their studies. Some continued their education in teaching the Chinese language through the Master of Teaching the Chinese Language to Speakers of Other Languages (MTC SOL), the Chinese Language Program (long and short term), and the Bachelor Degree in Chinese Language and Literature (Business Chinese).

A few years ago, the Confucius Institute experienced a surge of interest in Chinese language and culture among Zimbabweans. To meet the growing demand for the language,

more and more schools in Zimbabwe have begun offering Chinese language programs in the last five years. A case study of Gateway High School Harare, Chinese language learning is becoming increasingly popular among students at the private Gateway High School in Harare, the capital of Zimbabwe. Since the introduction of Chinese language at Gateway School in 2018, a Chinese teacher there has reported an increase in demand for the language. It is reported that many of her students want to study in China after graduation. "Some have argued that it would be beneficial for them to learn the language while they are still young and can memorize it easily and freely. They might even decide to forgo a language course for a year when they start university,"[1] she explained. According to the teacher, many students are drawn to the language by their love of Chinese culture.

To train talents, they organize events that promote Chinese language and culture. The Chinese Embassy in Zimbabwe and the Confucius Institute at the University of Zimbabwe organized a competition in 2022 to promote the learning of Chinese language and culture in Zimbabwe. Outstanding participants are awarded prizes. In 2022, the Confucius Institute at the University of Zimbabwe (CIUZ) introduced "Chinese Corner Events" to provide students with opportunities to engage with Chinese language and culture outside the classroom. The Confucius Institute at the University of Zimbabwe also facilitates interactive virtual and offline meetings to inspire youth and promote creativity in science and technology. On September 6, 2022, participants had an interactive virtual meeting about the Chinese Shenzhou-14 'taikonauts'[12].

This research also found that the number of talents trained at CIUZ in the teacher training program is increasing. Confucius Institute has successfully conducted 2022 Chinese teacher training courses in Zimbabwe. Twenty-one Chinese teachers from the Confucius Institute and 15 primary, secondary and elementary schools in the cities of Harare, Bulawayo and Gweru participated in the Chinese teacher training course.

## 5. Challenges and Suggestions

The development of Confucius Institutes in Zimbabwe is hampered by a lack of teaching infrastructure. The Confucius Institute is still under development in Zimbabwe, and there are still some difficulties in training highly qualified Chinese language and culture talents. Currently, Chinese language training at the Confucius Institute of Zimbabwe consists mainly of introductory and intermediate courses, but efforts are being made to expand the offering and establish training and learning centres, and it is also being extended to teacher training colleges in Zimbabwe. One reason is that many Zimbabweans, although enthusiastic about Chinese culture out of curiosity, are unable to cope with the difficulties of learning and eventually give up.

The lack of implementation of opportunities for talent after education is due to the fact that the university has high requirements for teachers and requires a doctorate degree for

teaching. Very few have doctorates, so the majority of talent with bachelor's degrees are considered unqualified for the teaching profession. Few talents take language and culture courses, especially when they go to China. One of the goals of Confucius Institute is to have more local teachers. On the other hand, these talents who are sent on Confucius Fellowships later move on to other programs in China where they acquire global skills that benefit the development of their countries, for example in industry and construction. There are great differences in language, culture, religious beliefs, and customs that make it difficult to train talent at the Confucius Institute. The Confucius Institute can train more talent, but the institution needs to work harder to ensure successful and effective talent training and mutual understanding between Zimbabwe and China. The institution also needs to create suitable opportunities for talents after training.

## 6. Conclusion

The Confucius Institute should establish more effective global appropriation and cooperation structures for the development of Chinese language talent training techniques. The Confucius Institute is a platform through which some Zimbabweans can gain more knowledge about China, Chinese language, and Chinese culture while producing high-calibre talents. However, the institution needs to make more efforts to carry out some reforms in teaching infrastructure and create opportunities for talents after education to achieve effective and successful results and successful educational and cultural exchanges.

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