

# **An Action Research on Teaching Chinese Characters to Chinese Heritage Students from the United States**

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Learning Chinese has become a trend in recent years; with the majority of students being heritage learners. Most of the Chinese heritage students perform better on Chinese listening and speaking than on reading and writing. Many scholars believe that teaching Chinese characters is one of the main points in teaching Chinese heritage students. However, compared to the relevant studies about second language learners, the relevant studies concerning heritage students are only a few. Therefore, the main purpose of the study is to explore how to harness the linguistic advantages of heritage learners, and through appropriate teaching models, further enhance their Chinese character reading and writing skills.

This study conducts an action research using subjects that are 18 to 25 year-old Chinese heritage learners from America. The main purpose of the study is to design a most suitable and effective curriculum of teaching Chinese characters according to the special needs concerning Chinese character reading and writing of these heritage students. Based on the previous teaching experiences, first of all, information and previous studies on the characteristics of heritage learners and their learning difficulties are gathered and examined. Second, through questionnaires, writing tests and interviews, we analyze the special needs of the heritage learners. Based on the analysis results, a teaching curriculum suited to the needs of heritage students can then be designed and implemented.

Under this pilot teaching assessment, properly designed teaching strategies will indeed improve the Chinese character reading and writing ability of the Chinese heritage learners. This study proposes the following suggestions with regard to teaching: 1) Teaching Chinese characters to middle-level Chinese heritage students from America: (a) “Communication” should be the first priority concerning teaching; realia should be employed in teaching materials in order to combine teaching with real life; (b) Implementing teaching contents of basic and combined strokes of Chinese characters as well as Chinese stroke order to improve learners’ Chinese character writing ability; (c) Employ vocabularies and phrases as teaching units rather

than single Chinese characters; (d) Implement more teaching on comparisons of similar Chinese character components as well as the components themselves; (e) In order to motivate learners' learning interest as well as enhance the learning effect, choose properly and conduct some Chinese character games in teaching; 2) Concerning the teaching of Chinese heritage students: (a) Do need analysis of students; (b) During class and after class, individualize teaching in order to eliminate the difficulty raised by mixed classes of various learning backgrounds; (c) If there is enough class hour, take students to field trips to practice learning; (d) Prepare extra teaching materials; (e) Schedule teaching according to teaching schedules of every individual institution.

**Keywords :** teaching of Chinese characters, curriculum design, heritage students, teaching strategy