

Review

Chinese Language Education in Vietnam: Structural Drivers, Constraints, and the Reconstruction of "Chinese+" for Integrated Human Capital Development

Hien Nguyen Thi^{1,*}¹ Faculty of Chinese Language, School of Languages and Tourism, Hanoi University of Industry, Hanoi, Vietnam

* Correspondence: Hien Nguyen Thi, Faculty of Chinese Language, School of Languages and Tourism, Hanoi University of Industry, Hanoi, Vietnam

Abstract: Chinese language teaching in Southeast Asia has developed rapidly due to deepening economic cooperation with China, growing workforce demands, and increasing institutional support. However, its role in cultivating quality human capital remains insufficiently examined. Existing scholarship has predominantly focused on pedagogical methods, curriculum adjustment, and workforce requirements, with limited attention to the integration of language instruction into broader human capital development frameworks. This study addresses this gap by analyzing Chinese language education from the perspective of Human Capital Theory, supplemented by Language Economics, Institutional Theory, and Cultural Proximity Theory. Employing a qualitative narrative review of representative publications analyzed through thematic analysis, the findings reveal three structural factors contributing to educational growth: workforce demand, institutional backing, and cultural affinity. Additionally, four principal challenges are identified: instructional capacity, curriculum and knowledge infrastructure, digital integration, and education-industry linkages. Based on these findings, the study proposes a reconceptualization of the "Chinese+" model as a competency-based system integrating linguistic, professional, digital, and intercultural competencies within a collaborative educational framework. This research contributes by situating Chinese language education within the strategic context of human capital development, offering an integrated analytical framework, and presenting a novel conceptual interpretation of "Chinese+" to guide future scholarship and policy formulation.

Keywords: chinese language education; chinese plus; human capital theory; human capital development; international chinese education

Received: 06 June 2026

Revised: 13 July 2026

Accepted: 28 July 2026

Published: 31 July 2026



Copyright: © 2026 by the authors. Submitted for possible open access publication under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution (CC BY) license (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>).

1. Introduction

Foreign language proficiency is increasingly recognized as strategic human capital amid regional supply chain reconfiguration, digital advancement, and evolving labor market requirements—not merely as a tool for communication. Human Capital Theory posits that education enhances productivity, employability, and long-term economic returns by cultivating knowledge and competencies [1]. Consequently, foreign language education should be evaluated not solely by enrollment trends or linguistic attainment, but also through its contributions to workforce readiness and national development capacity. This review adopts Human Capital Theory as its primary analytical lens; complementary perspectives—including Language Economics, Institutional Theory, and Cultural Proximity Theory—are integrated where appropriate to examine labor-market incentives, institutional evolution, and cross-cultural dynamics influencing Chinese language instruction.

This dynamic is particularly evident in contexts where deepening economic engagement with China has heightened demand for Chinese language capability. Sectors

such as manufacturing, logistics, international trade, and tourism—integral to regional production networks—now require personnel with functional Chinese language competence [2]. Concurrently, Chinese language instruction has expanded across higher education institutions, supported by policy initiatives, bilateral educational collaboration, and growing academic exchange. As a result, pedagogical emphasis has shifted from traditional linguistic instruction toward employment-aligned training designed to equip graduates with competencies responsive to diversified occupational needs.

Beyond Human Capital Theory, three additional theoretical lenses inform this analysis. Language Economics frames language proficiency as economic capital: enhanced linguistic ability correlates with improved employability, productivity, and anticipated labor-market returns—providing a rationale for rising interest in Chinese language learning alongside intensifying economic cooperation. Institutional Theory underscores that educational development responds not only to market signals but also to formal governance structures, public policy frameworks, and organizational legitimacy—factors shaping program scale, resource allocation, and instructional quality. Cultural Proximity Theory suggests shared historical and cultural foundations may lower cognitive and communicative barriers in language acquisition and intercultural interaction. Together, these four perspectives constitute a comprehensive framework for analyzing the evolution of Chinese language instruction and its function within integrated human capital formation.

Table 1 indicates a marked increase in scholarly attention to Chinese language instruction over the past decade. Current research clusters around five thematic areas: program development, educator professional growth, curriculum design, intercultural competence integration, and technology-enhanced learning. Collectively, this body of work reflects a transition from linguistically focused instruction toward interdisciplinary, vocationally grounded education [3]. Recent findings highlight growing employer expectations for graduates who combine Chinese language proficiency with domain-specific expertise, digital fluency, and intercultural communication capacity—while persistent challenges remain in educator development, curricular innovation, resource availability, and institutional-industry alignment.

Table 1. Representative Studies Informing the Conceptual Framework

No.	Authors (Year)	Research Focus	Method	Key Findings	Contribution to the Conceptual Framework
1	Schultz (1961)	Human capital investment	Theoretical	Educational investment increases individual and national productivity.	Provides the theoretical basis for viewing Chinese language education as an investment in human capital.
2	Becker (1964)	Human Capital Theory	Theoretical	Education improves productivity, employability and future earnings.	Establishes the theoretical foundation of this review.
3	McConnell et al. (2009)	Labour economics	Theoretical	Education and training enhance labour productivity and competitiveness.	Reinforces the relationship between language competence and employability.
4	Wu Xiaowen (2021)	Chinese language education in Southeast Asia	Comparative review	Development depends on policy support and institutional capacity.	Supports the institutional driver of Chinese language education.

5	Zeng Xiaoyan & Nguyen Duc Anh (2023)	Chinese language education in Vietnam	Literature review	Identifies challenges in teachers, curriculum and localisation.	Supports the structural constraints of teacher capacity and curriculum development.
6	Nguyen Phuong Anh (2024)	Cultural teaching	Survey	Cultural education remains insufficiently developed.	Supports cultural proximity and intercultural competence.
7	Peng Jianling & Huang Zhenwen (2024)	Chinese + Vocational Skills	Survey & interviews	Growing labour-market demand for interdisciplinary Chinese-speaking professionals.	Supports labour market demand and the transition towards Chinese+.
8	Yang Jian & Luo Yin (2024)	Chinese+ in Vietnam	Comparative analysis	Chinese+ should be localised for Vietnam.	Supports localisation within the Chinese+ framework.
9	Cam Tu Tai & Vu Phuong Thao (2025)	Chinese for Specific Purposes	Case study	Calls for interdisciplinary curricula and stronger university–industry collaboration.	Supports curriculum innovation and education–industry linkages.
10	Nguyen Hoang Oanh & Truong My Van (2025)	University–industry cooperation	Documentary analysis	Recommends collaborative curriculum development and workplace learning. Vietnam remains at an early stage of digital resource development compared with China.	Supports the education ecosystem and industry partnerships.
11	Huynh Thuc Nhi (2025)	Digital resources	Review		Supports digital transformation within Chinese language education.
12	Wang Yiguang, Wang Yanhong & Nguyen Mai Trinh (2025)	Bibliometric analysis	Bibliometric	Identifies major research themes and trends in Chinese language education in Vietnam.	Maps the existing research landscape and identifies knowledge gaps.
13	Nguyen Thi Hien & Phan Thanh Hoang (2026)	Programme development	Documentary analysis	Chinese language programmes are becoming increasingly interdisciplinary.	Supports the transition from language-centred education to competency-oriented education.
14	Wang Qingqing & Tran Thi Thu Hoai (2026)	Supply–demand analysis	Survey	Graduate competencies do not fully match labour-market expectations.	Supports the competency mismatch that motivates the proposed Chinese+ framework.

Nonetheless, four critical gaps persist [4]. First, existing scholarship predominantly addresses pedagogical methods, curriculum adaptation, and specialized language applications, with limited attention to how Chinese language instruction contributes to

broader human capital development. Second, key dimensions—including educator capacity building, curriculum design, technological integration, and industry-academia coordination—are typically examined in isolation rather than as interdependent components of a cohesive educational system. Third, although labor-market demand, institutional support, and cultural affinity are widely acknowledged as influential factors, their synergistic relationships have not been systematically articulated. Fourth, the emerging 'Chinese+' approach is largely treated as a curricular variation or vocational language initiative, rather than conceptualized as a holistic model for competency integration.

In this context, this review analyzes Chinese language instruction through the lens of Human Capital Theory. Drawing on a synthesis of representative studies, it examines the structural conditions enabling growth in Chinese language instruction, identifies systemic limitations affecting its contribution to high-caliber human capital formation, and reframes the 'Chinese+' model as an integrated framework for competency-based development. Accordingly, this review addresses three research questions:

- RQ1. What structural conditions have supported the growth of Chinese language instruction?
- RQ2. What systemic limitations affect its contribution to high-caliber human capital formation?
- RQ3. How can the emerging 'Chinese+' model be reframed as an integrated framework for human capital development within this context?

This review offers three scholarly contributions [5]. First, it repositions Chinese language instruction as a strategic element of human capital development, moving beyond its conventional classification as a subfield of foreign language education. Second, it proposes an integrated analytical framework that connects structural enablers with systemic limitations to explain the shift from quantitative growth to qualitative advancement. Third, it reconceptualizes 'Chinese+' as a competency-integrated framework—unifying linguistic, professional, digital, and intercultural capabilities within a collaborative educational ecosystem (As shown in Figure 1).

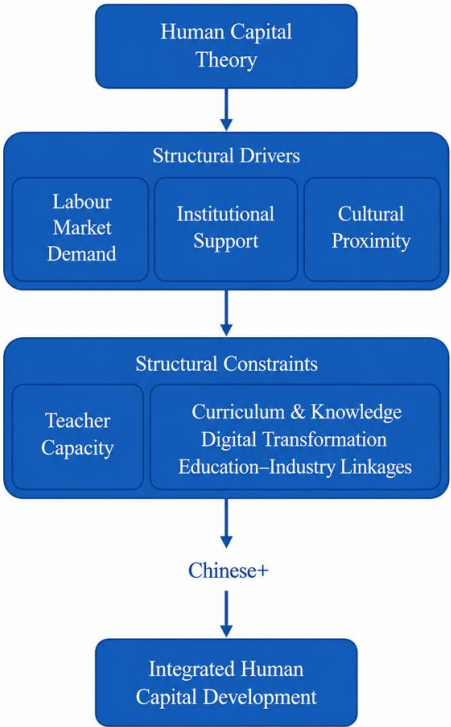


Figure 1. Analytical Framework of This Review

2. Methodology

2.1. Literature Selection

This study adopts a qualitative narrative review informed by thematic synthesis. A purposive corpus of approximately 30 representative publications was compiled, including peer-reviewed journal articles, books, theses and dissertations, policy documents, statistical reports and labour-market reports concerning Chinese language education in the region and the broader field of international Chinese language education.

Publications were selected according to three criteria: (1) direct relevance to the research questions; (2) provision of empirical evidence, theoretical discussion or policy analysis; and (3) contribution to understanding the development of Chinese language education from the perspective of human capital development [6]. Studies with limited relevance, duplicated findings or incomplete bibliographic information were excluded.

To improve clarity and avoid an excessively long literature summary, Table 1 presents only the 14 most representative studies that made the greatest conceptual contribution to the analytical framework developed in this review. The remaining studies were incorporated into the thematic synthesis and are cited where relevant throughout the analysis [7].

Building upon the synthesis of the reviewed literature, the present study develops an integrated analytical framework linking three structural drivers, four structural considerations and the reconceptualisation of Chinese+ as a competency-based human capital development framework. This framework provides the conceptual basis for the subsequent analysis [8].

2.2. Data Analysis and Analytical Framework

Thematic synthesis of the selected literature was carried out to identify trends in Chinese language education within the region. Seven themes emerged: labour market demand, institutional support, cultural proximity, teacher capacity, curriculum and knowledge infrastructure, digital transformation, and education–industry linkages. The analysis was primarily guided by foundational perspectives on human capital development, supplemented by frameworks addressing language-related economic dynamics, institutional evolution, and sociocultural resonance. These perspectives were integrated into an analytical framework comprising three structural enablers, four structural considerations, and a reconceptualised "Chinese+" approach to human capital development. Conclusions were drawn only where consistent evidence appeared across multiple studies [1].

2.3. Structural Drivers of Chinese Language Education in Vietnam

2.3.1. Labour Market Demand

The reviewed literature consistently indicates that the spread of Chinese language education in the region can be attributed to the interplay of three mutually reinforcing structural forces: labour market demand, institutional support, and cultural proximity [9]. These drivers are interdependent and collectively support programme development, curriculum innovation, and the transition from language-centred instruction to competency-based education. Together, they account not only for the recent growth in enrolment but also for the increasing integration of Chinese language education with broader human capital development goals.

Labour market demand has become the most immediate factor influencing Chinese language education. Human Capital Theory and Language Economics frame language learning as an investment: enhanced education and linguistic competence contribute to improved productivity, employability, and long-term economic returns [10]. As a result, proficiency in Chinese has become an increasingly valued component of human capital, enabling graduates to participate more effectively in regional production networks and cross-border economic collaboration. Demand for professionals with Chinese language capability has grown across internationally oriented sectors—including manufacturing, logistics, tourism, and finance—as economic cooperation with China continues to deepen.

Research indicates that this demand extends beyond linguistic proficiency alone. Recruitment practices are shifting toward valuing integrated competencies, with employers increasingly seeking graduates who combine Chinese language ability with domain-specific expertise, digital literacy, and intercultural communication skills. In parallel, learner motivation has evolved: many students now pursue Chinese primarily to strengthen employment prospects and advance career trajectories, rather than for cultural appreciation or linguistic study per se [11]. This shift has prompted higher education institutions to diversify their offerings, expanding programmes such as Chinese for Specific Purposes and Business Chinese.

However, the literature also identifies a persistent misalignment between labour market expectations and educational provision [6]. While industry requires graduates capable of applying Chinese in authentic professional contexts, many university programmes remain predominantly language-focused, offering limited opportunities for interdisciplinary integration or workplace-oriented practice. Consequently, graduates often possess adequate linguistic competence but lack the applied professional skills needed to meet sectoral requirements.

In summary, labour market demand functions not merely as a catalyst for increased enrolment; it has fundamentally reshaped the purpose and pedagogical orientation of Chinese language instruction—shifting emphasis from discrete language teaching toward holistic competency development. This transformation underpins the rationale for the 'Chinese+' model, which seeks to strengthen language education through integration with professional knowledge and practical application. Yet without complementary institutional frameworks, such educational evolution cannot be sustained by market signals alone—a point elaborated in the following section [2].

2.3.2. Institutional Support

The second structural factor that supports the development of Chinese language education in the region is institutional support. Labour market demand generates motivation for language learning, while institutional support provides the policy, organisational, and international foundation necessary for sustained educational advancement. Institutional frameworks indicate that organisations operate within broader contexts where formal regulations, policy structures, and recognised legitimacy shape their development and operations [12]. From this perspective, educational progress is influenced not only by market dynamics but also by public policy, inter-institutional collaboration, and governance mechanisms that affect resource distribution, programme design, and institutional credibility.

Evidence indicates that institutional support has strengthened through three complementary pathways. First, national education authorities have prioritised the internationalisation of higher education and the promotion of foreign language proficiency, creating conducive conditions for expanding Chinese language programmes at tertiary institutions [4]. Second, universities have responded to societal demand by establishing dedicated Chinese language units, diversifying curricula, and deepening partnerships with industry and overseas academic institutions. Third, bilateral academic cooperation has facilitated the provision of teaching resources, teacher training initiatives, curriculum development, and pedagogical exchange in Chinese language education—thereby enhancing local institutional capacity.

These institutional arrangements have functioned synergistically, supporting the transition of Chinese language education from a niche discipline to an increasingly integral component of higher education and professional preparation. Research consistently highlights that such support contributes to improved access, expanded learning resources, and responsive curriculum development aligned with societal and economic priorities. Furthermore, collaborative mechanisms among academic institutions, government agencies, and international partners have fostered a stable and enabling environment for long-term growth in this field [13].

However, institutional expansion does not automatically guarantee educational quality [4]. While supportive policies and cross-border cooperation have accelerated programme scale-up, the effectiveness of these inputs ultimately depends on local capacity to translate them into rigorous instruction, meaningful curriculum renewal, and graduate readiness for employment. These considerations represent key operational factors examined in the following section.

2.3.3. Cultural Proximity

A third structural factor that supports the development of Chinese language education in the region is cultural proximity. Its influence is indirect, fostering positive socio-cultural environments for language learning and institutional collaboration, unlike labour market demand or institutional support. According to established theoretical frameworks, individuals tend to engage more readily with languages and cultures sharing historical, cultural, and social affinities, as perceived cultural distance is reduced and intercultural interaction becomes more accessible [14]. This perspective helps explain the relatively rapid growth of Chinese language education compared to many other foreign language programmes.

The literature indicates that sustained historical and cultural interaction has created favourable conditions for learning Chinese. Shared historical experiences, enduring cultural exchanges, the historical role of Chinese characters, and ongoing economic and educational cooperation have collectively enhanced familiarity with Chinese language and culture among learners [15]. Research further shows that such cultural affinity strengthens learner motivation, supports effective intercultural communication, and encourages collaborative academic initiatives between institutions. These dynamics have contributed to increased student mobility, academic exchange, and the broader internationalisation of Chinese language education.

However, the literature also indicates that cultural affinity alone cannot ensure sustained advancement of Chinese language education. As professional expectations evolve, graduates are increasingly required to integrate intercultural competence with domain-specific knowledge, digital proficiency, and practical workplace capabilities. Therefore, cultural affinity should be understood not merely as a historical advantage but as an enabling condition that supports the cultivation of comprehensive intercultural competence within competency-oriented human capital development.

Overall, the literature suggests that labour market demand, institutional support, and cultural proximity function as complementary—rather than independent—structural drivers. Labour market demand provides economic incentives, institutional support establishes conducive organisational frameworks, and cultural proximity lowers barriers to engagement and deepens intercultural participation. Together, these three factors account for the robust expansion of Chinese language education and provide context for the structural considerations discussed subsequently.

2.3.4. Synthesis

Based on existing research, no single structural factor fully accounts for the development of Chinese language education in the region [10]. Rather, labour market demand, institutional support, and cultural proximity operate as complementary forces shaping its growth and evolution. Labour market demand generates economic incentives for language acquisition; institutional support provides policy frameworks and organizational capacity for educational advancement; cultural proximity fosters social affinity and intercultural receptivity, facilitating language learning and international academic collaboration.

These factors are not independent but mutually reinforcing [16]. Rising demand for Chinese language proficiency has prompted educational authorities and institutions to expand course offerings, while strengthened institutional support has improved the capacity of educational systems to respond effectively to evolving societal needs. Concurrently, cultural proximity has enhanced learner motivation and enabled deeper

cross-regional academic cooperation, thereby reinforcing development driven by both market dynamics and policy initiatives.

However, scholarly consensus indicates that favourable structural conditions alone do not guarantee high-quality human capital formation. Although Chinese language education has experienced rapid growth in student enrolment, programme variety, and institutional engagement, challenges persist in converting this quantitative growth into improvements in pedagogical quality and graduate employability. These persistent gaps underscore the importance of examining structural constraints that continue to affect the sustainable advancement of Chinese language education (As shown in Figure 2).

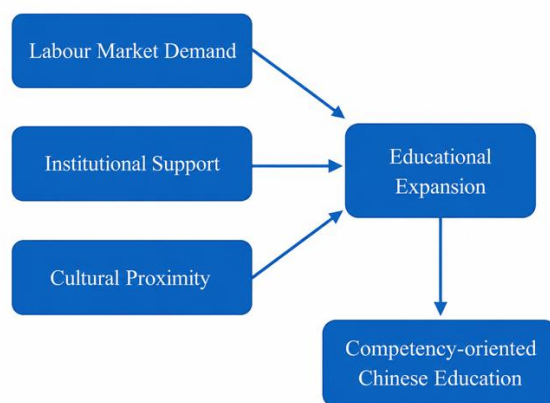


Figure 2. Interaction among Structural Drivers

2.4. Structural Constraints

Although the structural factors discussed previously have contributed to the rapid advancement of Chinese language education in the region, this growth does not automatically translate into high-quality human resource development [11, 13]. Based on a comprehensive review of relevant literature, four interrelated systemic challenges affecting educational quality and graduate readiness have been identified: teaching capacity, curriculum design and knowledge infrastructure, digital integration, and alignment between education and industry requirements. These challenges are deeply interconnected, reinforcing one another and collectively influencing how effectively Chinese language education responds to evolving professional demands.

2.4.1. Teacher Capacity

Teacher capacity constitutes a critical structural constraint on the advancement of Chinese language teaching quality in certain regions. Educators serve as strategic human capital within institutions, as their professional competencies, practical experience, and subject-matter expertise directly shape learners' skill development and career readiness. The existing literature indicates persistent challenges, including insufficient teacher supply, limited access to professional development opportunities, deficits in interdisciplinary knowledge, and underdeveloped digital teaching capabilities.

Rapid expansion of Chinese language programmes has outpaced the cultivation of locally trained, qualified teaching personnel. Institutions continue to face difficulties in recruiting and retaining experienced instructors, while postgraduate training and sustained professional growth pathways remain unevenly available. Furthermore, although many educators possess strong linguistic proficiency, they often lack specialized knowledge in domains increasingly demanded by industry—such as business, logistics, and technology—thereby constraining the effective implementation of interdisciplinary models like 'Chinese+' and Chinese for Specific Purposes.

Digital competence has emerged as an essential dimension of contemporary teaching capability. As digital technologies become integral to pedagogy, educators are expected to proficiently utilize online platforms, design blended learning experiences, critically

evaluate digital resources, and embed technology meaningfully into communicative and task-based instruction. Yet institutional support for cultivating these competencies remains inadequate in many settings.

Overall, strengthening teacher capacity requires a holistic approach addressing professional expertise, interdisciplinary integration, digital fluency, and long-term career sustainability. Strategic enhancements—including expanded postgraduate education, lifelong learning frameworks, industry-academia collaboration, and robust institutional backing—are vital to elevating both pedagogical quality and labour-market relevance of Chinese language instruction.

2.4.2. Curriculum and Knowledge Infrastructure

The other major structural factor limiting the development of high-quality human capital for the Chinese language in certain Southeast Asian contexts is curriculum and knowledge infrastructure. Educational investment is valuable only if the curriculum is able to structure knowledge, develop transferable skills, and align with evolving labour market requirements, according to Human Capital Theory. Nevertheless, existing research indicates that Chinese language programmes under review remain predominantly language-focused, and a well-integrated knowledge system linking language learning with professional application has yet to be established.

Current research reveals several interrelated limitations in curriculum design. Although the number of Chinese language programmes at higher education institutions in the region has increased significantly, many continue to adopt a language-centred approach, with limited differentiation based on learner profiles, disciplinary emphases, or local economic conditions. Furthermore, curriculum localization remains insufficient [10]. Imported teaching materials often lack contextual appropriateness for regional educational settings and workplace realities, while locally developed resources frequently lack systematic coherence and rigorous quality assurance. As a result, learning content does not consistently reflect learners' linguistic backgrounds or their intended career pathways.

The literature also highlights a persistent gap in integrating cultural understanding, professional knowledge, and practical competencies into current curricula. While intercultural communication is increasingly recognized as a graduate competency, it is typically treated as an ancillary component rather than being embedded within the language learning process. Similarly, the development of Chinese language instruction tailored for professional domains remains underdeveloped, despite growing demand for proficiency in sectors such as business, logistics, tourism, and technology. Consequently, learners may attain satisfactory language proficiency but fall short in discipline-specific competencies essential for contemporary professional environments.

In general, the reviewed literature underscores that curriculum should not be viewed merely as a sequence of courses, but as foundational knowledge infrastructure supporting human capital development [3]. Strengthening this infrastructure requires differentiated programme design, contextually appropriate teaching materials, coherent integration of cultural and professional knowledge, and greater emphasis on authentic, practice-oriented learning experiences. Without such enhancements, the growth of Chinese language education is unlikely to produce graduates equipped with the full spectrum of competencies demanded by dynamic regional labour markets.

2.4.3. Digital Transformation

The third structural limitation on the quality and relevance of Chinese language education is digital transformation. From the perspective of Human Capital Theory, digital technologies can enhance educational investment by improving access to learning materials, enabling personalized instruction, and cultivating competencies required in a digital economy. However, existing research indicates that the core challenge lies not in technological availability, but in the effective pedagogical integration of technology into teaching practices, curriculum frameworks, and institutional development.

Current findings reveal uneven implementation of digital transformation across educational institutions. Although online platforms, artificial intelligence tools, and digital learning resources have seen increased adoption, their use remains largely supplementary to conventional classroom instruction. Digital materials often lack sufficient localization, while institutional investment in digital infrastructure and teacher professional development remains inconsistent. Consequently, technology has not yet been systematically embedded into curriculum design, assessment methodologies, or competency-based learning approaches.

Digital competence is increasingly recognized not merely as a technical skill, but as an essential component of graduate human capital. Evolving labor market demands require proficiency in Chinese alongside the ability to utilize digital tools, navigate online information environments, communicate effectively across digital platforms, and adapt to technology-intensive work settings. Yet these competencies are insufficiently incorporated into many Chinese language programs, leaving graduates underprepared for contemporary professional contexts.

Overall, evidence suggests that digital transformation constitutes an educational evolution rather than a purely technological upgrade. Developing robust digital human capital necessitates coordinated efforts—including investment in localized digital resources, institutional digital platforms, teacher capacity building in digital pedagogy, and comprehensive curriculum renewal. In isolation, technological deployment is unlikely to improve the quality, adaptability, or labor-market alignment of Chinese language education without such complementary enhancements.

2.4.4. Education--Industry Linkages

The fourth structural barrier in the role of Chinese language education in developing high-quality human resources is the education–industry linkage. According to Human Capital Theory, investments in education generate economic value only when the knowledge and competencies acquired can be effectively translated into labour market productivity. However, existing research consistently indicates that institutionalised collaboration between higher education institutions and industry remains underdeveloped, and a persistent mismatch persists between graduate competencies and employer expectations.

Evidence suggests that demand for Chinese-speaking professionals in the labour market is increasingly shifting from quantitative to qualitative criteria. Beyond language proficiency, employers now prioritise professional domain knowledge, digital literacy, intercultural communication competence, and the ability to solve practical workplace problems. Yet many Chinese language programmes still rely predominantly on classroom-based instruction, with limited integration of workplace-based learning, enterprise engagement, or competency-oriented assessment. Consequently, graduates often possess linguistic capability but lack applied experience necessary for seamless workplace integration.

Effective education–industry partnerships extend beyond student internships [4]. Sustainable cooperation among educational institutions, enterprises, and relevant public agencies is essential—including joint curriculum design, experiential learning embedded in real work contexts, active enterprise participation in teaching delivery, collaborative research initiatives, and continuous feedback loops informed by evolving labour market needs. Such integrated cooperation enables curricula to remain responsive to industrial transformation and aligned with occupational requirements.

The literature collectively affirms that robust education–industry linkages constitute a critical mechanism for converting educational outputs into productive human capital. Strengthening these collaborations is therefore vital—not only to enhance graduate employability but also to advance the strategic development of Chinese language education within broader socioeconomic transformation. This perspective further supports reconceptualising "Chinese+" as an integrated framework that unifies language acquisition with professional, digital, and intercultural competences [6].

2.4.5. Synthesis

Based on the literature reviewed, it can be seen that challenges in Chinese language education in certain regions stem from interconnected systemic factors. Teacher capacity, curriculum design and knowledge infrastructure, digital integration, and alignment between education and industry needs are mutually reinforcing elements that collectively influence teaching quality and vocational relevance. Weakness in any one area tends to affect performance across others. For example, curriculum enhancement depends on well-prepared educators; digital integration requires both institutional readiness and pedagogical adaptation; and stronger education–industry alignment necessitates coordinated curriculum development and teacher expertise.

From the perspective of Human Capital Theory, these systemic factors indicate that the central issue is not merely scaling up Chinese language instruction, but effectively converting educational investment into high-quality human capital. Although the number of Chinese language programmes has increased substantially, educational advancement has not consistently kept pace with evolving labour market competency requirements. Therefore, quality improvement must proceed holistically—simultaneously strengthening human resources, knowledge systems, technological capability, and institutional collaboration [6].

The findings further suggest that addressing each factor in isolation is unlikely to yield sustainable educational progress. Instead, Chinese language instruction requires a coherent framework that integrates language proficiency, professional domain knowledge, digital competence, and intercultural communication within a unified pedagogical structure. This imperative supports redefining the 'Chinese+' approach—not solely as a vocationally oriented language initiative, but as a comprehensive, competency-driven model for human capital development, as elaborated in the following section (As shown in Figure 3).

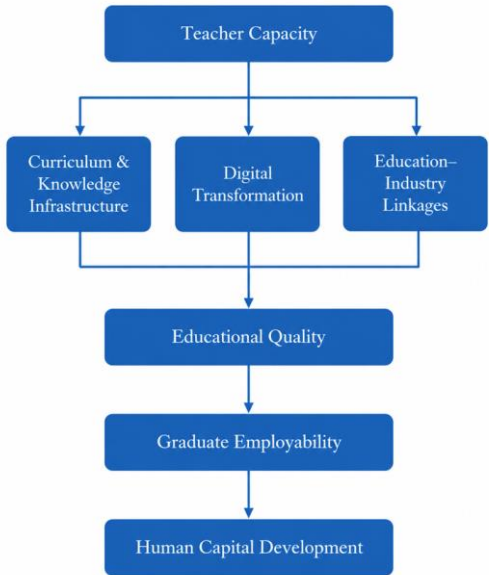


Figure 3. Structural Constraints Affecting Human Capital Development

2.5. Reconceptualising "Chinese+"

2.5.1. Why "Chinese+" Needs Reconceptualisation

Based on the above analysis, it can be seen that in addition to broadening educational access, future development of Chinese language education in the region also requires enhancing the quality of human capital cultivated. Although labour market demand, institutional support, and cultural affinity have facilitated growth, persistent challenges—including teacher professional development, curriculum modernisation, digital

integration, and alignment between education and industry—hinder the effective conversion of educational investment into graduate competencies. The findings indicate that Chinese language education has entered a phase shifting from scale-oriented expansion to quality-driven advancement.

This evolution further reveals limitations in prevailing interpretations of "Chinese+". Current understandings typically frame the concept as Chinese language instruction combined with a discrete vocational domain—such as business, logistics, or tourism. While this represents progress beyond traditional language-only pedagogy, it continues to treat language proficiency and professional knowledge as separate, additive components. Such an interpretation is insufficient for capturing the holistic nature of education in building productive, adaptable human capital.

From the perspective of human capital theory, the value of education lies not merely in the transmission of knowledge, but in the cultivation of transferable skills that enhance long-term employability, adaptability, and productivity. Proficiency in Chinese should therefore be understood as one integrated element within a broader competence framework—encompassing professional expertise, digital literacy, and intercultural capability. Accordingly, this review proposes redefining "Chinese+" as an integrated, competency-based model for human capital development, rather than a segmented programme combining language instruction with vocational training.

2.5.2. An Integrated Chinese+ Competency Framework

Based on this reconceptualisation, this review proposes that "Chinese+" be grounded in four mutually reinforcing competencies: linguistic competence, professional competence, digital competence, and intercultural competence. These competencies are conceived not as isolated educational outcomes but as an integrated capability system designed to equip graduates for effective performance in increasingly globalised and technologically advanced workplaces.

While language proficiency remains foundational to Chinese language education, the pedagogical objective has evolved beyond grammatical accuracy toward enabling effective communication in authentic academic and professional contexts. Professional competence supports learners in applying Chinese within specific disciplinary and occupational domains, thereby bridging the transition from university learning to workforce expectations. Digital competence equips graduates with the capacity to communicate, collaborate, and solve problems using digital tools that are now integral to education and professional practice. Intercultural competence enhances cross-cultural communication and enables successful engagement across diverse international environments.

These four competencies should not be developed sequentially or in isolation. Rather, they must be coherently integrated across curriculum design, instructional delivery, assessment practices, and workplace-based learning experiences. Their dynamic interplay reflects a broader reality: professional success in contemporary work environments depends less on any single competency and more on the synergistic integration of language ability, domain-specific knowledge, technological fluency, and intercultural agility.

2.5.3. An Integrated Chinese+ Education Ecosystem

The suggested competency framework requires an education ecosystem in which governments, universities, enterprises, teachers, learners, and international partners collaborate to advance human capital development. This review treats teacher development, curriculum design, digital integration, and university–industry cooperation not as isolated initiatives, but as interdependent components aligned with competency development and labour market responsiveness.

Within this ecosystem, governments establish strategic policy direction and quality assurance frameworks; universities implement interdisciplinary curricula and competency-oriented pedagogy; enterprises engage as co-designers of learning experiences—including curriculum input, workplace-based learning, and graduate

assessment—not merely as internship or employment providers; international partners contribute to professional development for educators, curriculum enhancement, digital resource sharing, and collaborative research, ensuring globally informed practices are adapted to local educational contexts; and teachers serve as central facilitators, guiding students to actively construct competencies across classroom, digital, and real-world settings.

From the perspective of Human Capital Theory, this ecosystem functions as the institutional infrastructure through which educational investment is translated into productive human capital [3]. Through coordinated engagement of all stakeholders around a shared competency matrix, Chinese language education can evolve beyond quantitative growth and cultivate adaptable, innovative, and globally engaged graduates to support sustainable socioeconomic advancement (As shown in Figure 4) (As shown in Table 2).

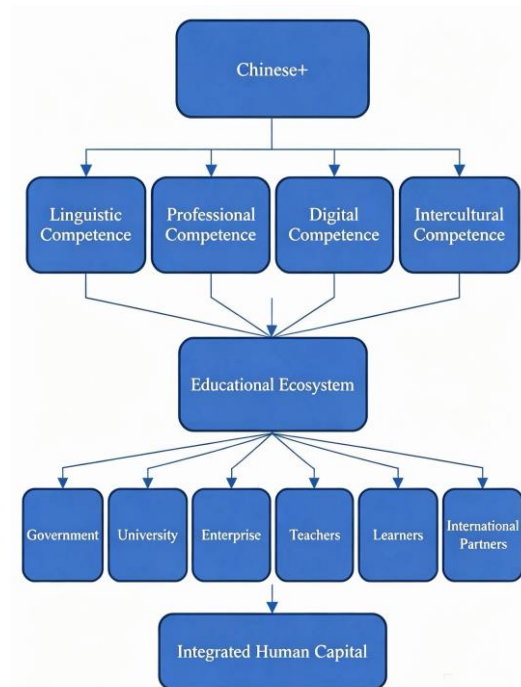


Figure 4. Chinese+ as an Integrated Human Capital Development Framework

Table 2. Components of the Proposed Chinese+ Framework

Competency	Educational Focus	Expected Outcome
Linguistic	Chinese communication	Language proficiency
Professional	Business & disciplinary knowledge	Occupational competence
Digital	AI & digital literacy	Workplace adaptability
Intercultural	Cross-cultural communication	Global competence

3. Conclusion

This review has analyzed the development of Chinese language education in the region based on the integrated analytical framework of Human Capital Theory and supplemented by the analytical frameworks of Language Economics, Institutional Theory, and Cultural Proximity Theory. Through summarising and synthesizing representative studies, the review reveals the structural drivers shaping Chinese language education, outlines key challenges in teaching practice that affect its contribution to high-quality human capital development, and introduces a redefined concept of "Chinese+" for future educational development.

The findings indicate that three structural drivers—labour market demand, institutional support, and cultural proximity—are mutually reinforcing and have contributed to the expansion of Chinese language education. Labour market demand provides economic motivation for language learning, institutional support enables policy implementation and organisational capacity building, and cultural proximity facilitates access to learning resources and intercultural engagement. Together, these drivers underpin the evolution of Chinese language education from a subject-centered discipline toward a strategic component of workforce development and regional economic cooperation.

However, favourable structural conditions alone do not guarantee high-quality human capital development. A persistent misalignment between educational outcomes and labour market needs remains evident, driven by factors including teacher capacity, curriculum design, knowledge infrastructure, digital integration, and education–industry coordination. These elements are deeply interconnected; therefore, future initiatives require coordinated, systemic approaches rather than isolated interventions.

Building on this analysis, "Chinese+" is reconceptualised as a competency-based human capital development framework—not merely a vocational language course. The framework comprises four interdependent competencies: linguistic, professional, digital, and intercultural. It is supported by a collaborative ecosystem involving governmental bodies, higher education institutions, enterprises, educators, learners, and international stakeholders. Viewed through the lenses of Human Capital Theory, Language Economics, Institutional Theory, and Cultural Proximity Theory, this framework demonstrates how language education can simultaneously advance employability, institutional effectiveness, intercultural communication capacity, and long-term socioeconomic progress.

This study contributes to the literature in three ways. First, it reframes Chinese language education as an integrated human capital development strategy, moving beyond its traditional classification as a foreign language discipline. Second, it proposes a multi-theoretical analytical framework that links structural drivers, systemic challenges, and competency development, offering a more holistic account of educational transformation. Third, it advances a comprehensive interpretation of "Chinese+"—extending beyond curriculum innovation to a systemic, ecosystem-based model of competency development—with theoretical and practical relevance for Chinese language education in diverse contexts.

This review has several limitations. As a qualitative narrative synthesis, its conclusions derive from existing literature rather than new empirical data. Future work should empirically validate the proposed analytical framework and examine the implementation of the "Chinese+" competency model across varied institutional settings. Comparative studies across neighbouring regions would further inform the adaptability of the framework and its potential to strengthen graduate outcomes, educational quality, and sustainable human capital development.

References

1. T. W. Schultz, "Investment in human capital," *The American Economic Review*, vol. 51, no. 1, pp. 1–17, 1961.
2. G. Caire, "Becker (Gary S.)—Human capital, A theoretical and empirical analysis with special reference to education," *Revue Économique*, vol. 18, no. 1, pp. 132–133, 1967.
3. C. R. McConnell, S. L. Brue, and D. A. Macpherson, *Contemporary Labor Economics*, 433rd ed. New York: McGraw-Hill, 1986.
4. F. Grin, "English as economic value: facts and fallacies," *World Englishes*, vol. 20, no. 1, 2001.
5. W. R. Scott, *Institutions and Organizations: Ideas, Interests, and Identities*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2013.
6. H. Casas-Tost and M. Vargas-Urpí, "e Chinese Plus: An Open-Access Online Platform for Spanish-Speaking Learners of Chinese," *Journal of Technology and Chinese Language Teaching*, vol. 17, no. 1, pp. 99–119, 2026.
7. M. Xu, "Teaching Chinese as a foreign language in the background of internet plus," in *2023 IEEE 12th International Conference on Educational and Information Technology (ICEIT)*, Mar. 2023, pp. 348–352.
8. G. X. Zhang and L. M. Li, "Chinese language teaching in the UK: Present and future," *Language Learning Journal*, vol. 38, no. 1, pp. 87–97, 2010.

9. D. Starr, "Chinese language education in Europe: the Confucius Institutes," *European Journal of Education*, vol. 44, no. 1, pp. 65–82, 2009.
10. M. Scott and H. K. Tiun, "Mandarin-only to Mandarin-plus: Taiwan," *Language Policy*, vol. 6, no. 1, pp. 53–72, 2007.
11. Z. Hua and L. Wei, "Geopolitics and the changing hierarchies of the Chinese language: Implications for policy and practice of Chinese language teaching in Britain," *The Modern Language Journal*, vol. 98, no. 1, pp. 326–339, 2014.
12. E. Codó and A. Sunyol, "'A plus for our students': the construction of Mandarin Chinese as an elite language in an international school in Barcelona," *Journal of Multilingual and Multicultural Development*, vol. 40, no. 5, pp. 436–452, 2019.
13. W. Xu and J. Knijnik, "Critical Chinese as an additional language education in Australia: A journey to voices, courage and hope," *British Educational Research Journal*, vol. 47, no. 6, pp. 1635–1651, 2021.
14. D. Wang, R. Moloney, and Z. Li, "Towards internationalising the curriculum: A case study of Chinese language teacher education programs in China and Australia," *Australian Journal of Teacher Education (Online)*, vol. 38, no. 9, pp. 116–135, 2013.
15. Y. Liu, "Commodification of the Chinese language: investigating language ideology in the Chinese complementary schools' online discourse," *Current Issues in Language Planning*, vol. 23, no. 3, pp. 319–342, 2022.
16. B. Francis, L. Archer, and A. Mau, "Language as capital, or language as identity? Chinese complementary school pupils' perspectives on the purposes and benefits of complementary schools," *British Educational Research Journal*, vol. 35, no. 4, pp. 519–538, 2009.

Disclaimer/Publisher's Note: The statements, opinions and data contained in all publications are solely those of the individual author(s) and contributor(s) and not of Publisher and/or the editor(s). Publisher and/or the editor(s) disclaim responsibility for any injury to people or property resulting from any ideas, methods, instructions or products referred to in the content.