

A Review of Research on the Application of Case Teaching Method in International Chinese Language Education

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Abstract

In recent years, with the rapid development of International Chinese Language Education, research on its related teaching methods has become increasingly abundant. Scholars in International Chinese Language Education have found that the case teaching method, widely used in disciplines such as business and law due to its open and practical characteristics, aligns well with the features and talent development needs of International Chinese Language Education. In order to maximize the role of the case teaching method in International Chinese Language Education, research on its application in this field has gained significant attention. This paper reviews the relevant research on the application of the case teaching method in International Chinese Language Education from 2000 to 2024. Based on a review of the relevant research literature, the paper summarizes the following major research areas: the applicability of the case teaching method in International Chinese Language Education, its application in business Chinese teaching, and the construction of Case Library. The paper identifies four main shortcomings in this field: 1) teaching methods are still dominated by lecture-based instruction, which tends to be rigid; 2) Case Library construction faces challenges, such as a lack of sources and high resource acquisition costs; 3) there is a lack of case sharing; and 4) the coverage of case teaching is narrow. Based on these issues, the paper suggests the following: first, conducting training for International Chinese Language teachers to familiarize them with the case teaching process and encourage its use in classroom teaching; second, expanding case collection channels by gathering teaching cases from International Chinese Language teachers worldwide to enrich Case Library and address the limited sources problem; third, promoting the opening of resources from universities with International Chinese Language Education Case Library, sharing construction experiences, and promoting co-construction and sharing of these databases; and fourth, reflecting on the application of the case teaching method, summarizing its suitable target audience and course types, expanding its application range, and improving teaching effectiveness.

keywords: case teaching method, teaching Chinese as a foreign language, Business Chinese, Case Library, adult learners, Chinese proficiency

1. Introduction

The case teaching method is a long-standing and widely used teaching method that has been applied in various disciplines since the 1920s (Li Yajie, Zhang Jun, 2014). The case teaching method is characterized by clear teaching objectives, objective and real teaching materials, and an emphasis on practical teaching processes (Jiang Ge, 2011), which aligns with the teaching philosophy of International Chinese Language Education. Therefore, there has been extensive research on the application of the case teaching method in International Chinese Language Education, exploring its suitability for different learners, course types, and the construction of Case Library for International Chinese Language Education. However, there is still a lack of critical reflection on the case teaching method in the International Chinese Language Education community. This paper reviews the relevant research on the application of the case teaching method in International Chinese Language Education over the past two decades, aiming to summarize the current situation, identify its strengths and weaknesses, and provide references for future applications of the case teaching method. This will help the case teaching method better leverage its practicality and authenticity in the field of International Chinese Language Education, providing students with up-to-date, typical case-based classrooms to enrich their understanding of Chinese and enhance their knowledge of Chinese society and culture, leading to a more comprehensive learning experience. It also aims to help Chinese teachers improve their teaching levels, refine teaching methods, enrich classroom content, and improve teaching quality, thereby expanding the influence of International Chinese Language Education and attracting more Chinese learners.

2. Applicability of the Case Teaching Method in International Chinese Language Education

This section reviews the literature using keywords such as “case teaching method + International Chinese Language Education,” “case teaching method + teaching Chinese as a foreign language,” and “case teaching method + teaching Chinese as a second language” in the CNKI database. A total of 27 relevant papers were retrieved, and after filtering by theme, 15 closely related papers were selected. The content is summarized as follows.

2.1 Target Learners for the Case Teaching Method in International Chinese Language Education

In general, the case teaching method is suitable for teaching activities aimed at adult learners (Wang Xuan, 2006). By “adult learners,” it is meant that the teaching targets should be self-motivated and capable of independent learning, with a substantial amount of experiential knowledge. Additionally, the case teaching method emphasizes learner participation and uses students' experiences to build new knowledge. The teacher-student relationship in the teaching process is equal (Wang Xuan, 2006), and adult learners are more willing to engage in learning through equal communication, making the case teaching method particularly suitable for them.

In the field of International Chinese Language Education, many scholars and teachers have summarized the suitable learners for the case teaching method. Wang Yanling (2018) believes that the case teaching method is suitable for foreign students with advanced Chinese proficiency. She conducted a survey of foreign students from various countries who passed HSK Level 5, as well as some teachers, and found that most students preferred spontaneous discussions and situational interactions in class. They also showed a higher level of acceptance for cases compared to the traditional textbook-based teaching method. Furthermore, the results showed that most of these students intended to live in China in the future, and their goal of learning Chinese was not only to master some written knowledge but also to develop a certain level of Chinese communication skills. Therefore, the case teaching method is highly suitable for these learners.

Moreover, the case teaching method is also highly applicable to Chinese learners with specific career development needs. Xu Ziliang (2000) conducted research on the overall motivations of foreign learners in learning Chinese and found that 70% of learners study Chinese to meet their professional communication needs. Such learners tend to focus more on the practicality of the language, as they aim to use Chinese for daily and professional communication. Therefore, the case teaching method, which emphasizes language communication skills through case-based exercises, is more likely to meet their learning needs.

From the above research, it can be concluded that the case teaching method in International Chinese Language Education is most suitable for adult students with intermediate to advanced Chinese proficiency, as these learners have clear and specific learning objectives, are strongly motivated to apply what they learn, and are highly capable of self-directed learning (Wang Xuan, 2006). Thus, the case teaching method is designed for such learners.

However, for adult learners who do not yet have a high level of Chinese proficiency, the case teaching method may not be suitable for their classes. Gao Yanyan (2022) found that the teaching quality of beginner-level Chinese courses is generally moderate, and teachers and students in these classes do not prioritize the use of case teaching methods. This is mainly because students at the beginner level have a weaker foundation and are more easily accepted by traditional lecture methods, with teachers hesitant to use other methods due to concerns about the students' ability to comprehend them. Nonetheless, Gao Yanyan (2022) also found that beginner-level students showed some interest in the case teaching method, with many expressing curiosity and support for its use in class.

This paper suggests that, for learners with lower proficiency, although the case teaching method may exceed their current level of understanding, they are still enthusiastic about student-centered creative classrooms. Therefore, it would be worthwhile to gradually introduce the case teaching method to such learners in future international Chinese classrooms, allowing them to understand its meaning and gradually become familiar with it, until it becomes a method used alongside traditional lecture-based teaching in all levels of Chinese classrooms (Du Yanqing, 2012).

2.2 Applicability of the Case Teaching Method in International Chinese Language Education Course Types

In International Chinese Language Education, the case teaching method can comprehensively train learners' listening, speaking, reading, and writing skills through methods such as reading cases, discussing cases, and writing case reports (Wang Xuan, 2006). These basic skills correspond to the teaching of phonetics, characters, grammar, and other language elements, which means the case teaching method has broad applicability across various course types in International Chinese Language Education.

Firstly, the case teaching method is well-suited for Chinese character courses. By using cases as teaching materials, the case teaching method requires the presentation of written content. To analyze cases, students must first read

them, which allows them to practice recognizing both familiar and unfamiliar characters (Sun Ying, 2008). International Chinese character courses involve learners from various nationalities with different learning motivations and proficiency levels. Due to these differences, it can be difficult for teachers' examples to meet every student's needs, which can reduce classroom efficiency (Wang Xi, 2021). However, the case teaching method can address this issue by using diverse, representative cases to provide targeted learning materials. Students can practice recognizing typical characters in the cases, receive corrections from the teacher, and benefit from a rich, hands-on learning experience (Gao Wen, 2018). Therefore, the case teaching method is highly suitable for Chinese character courses in International Chinese Language Education.

Secondly, the case teaching method is highly suitable for oral Chinese courses, which focus on improving students' spoken Chinese. Speaking is the primary way to demonstrate communicative competence, and developing communicative ability is the fundamental goal of language learning. Therefore, fully utilizing the communicative and practical features of oral courses is crucial for improving Chinese proficiency (Liu Xiaoyu, 2013). Given this, oral courses should emphasize learners' active engagement and encourage them to think and express themselves. This aligns well with the case teaching method's emphasis on activating students' agency through reflection and discussion of cases to strengthen their ability to use language as a tool of expression (He Xuan, 2015). Thus, the case teaching method is particularly suitable for oral Chinese courses aimed at developing learners' communicative abilities.

Additionally, the case teaching method encourages students to write reports after discussing cases in class, thus enhancing their writing skills (Wang Xuan, 2006). Writing, in turn, requires learners to use grammatical knowledge, which is then refined through teacher feedback, further enriching their understanding of Chinese grammar. Zhao Jinming (1996) also pointed out that teaching Chinese grammar as a foreign language starts with sentence structure acquisition, moves to understanding the meanings embedded in structural forms, and then extends to the appropriate use of these forms. Therefore, the case teaching method, which provides opportunities for students to apply grammatical structures in Chinese, is very suitable for Chinese grammar teaching.

In summary, when the case teaching method is applied in International Chinese Language Education with a focus on discourse teaching (Wang Ruojiang, 2003), it can provide learners with opportunities to apply their learning through reading, exchanging, and analyzing cases. This approach aligns with the goal of International Chinese Language Education to develop students' communication abilities and is applicable across various types of courses, such as phonetics, grammar, Chinese characters, and vocabulary.

3. Case and Case Library Construction

This section uses keywords such as "International Chinese Language Education + Case Library," "Chinese language teaching + Case Library" in the CNKI database. A total of 21 related papers were retrieved, and after filtering by theme, 17 closely related papers were selected. The content is summarized as follows.

3.1 Sources and Collection Methods of Case Materials for International Chinese Language Education Case Library

Through literature review, this paper finds that existing International Chinese Language Education Case Library can be categorized into two types: government-driven and institution-driven. The former is represented by the Hanban-Chinese Language Alliance joint Case Library, which leverages administrative resources for integration and scale effects. The latter, such as the Beijing Language and Culture University's "Chinese Teaching Multimedia Resource Database" and East China Normal University's International Chinese Language Education Case Library, relies on institutional characteristics for differentiated development (Wang Yingxian, 2015). Notably, the International Chinese Language Education Case Library at East China Normal University has built a multi-tier, cross-cultural case ecosystem that covers 43 countries and seven major teaching types, with 980 cases, including 644 classroom teaching recordings, pioneering dynamic case presentation.

To explore the sources and collection methods of case materials for International Chinese Language Education, scholars have conducted productive discussions. Based on the literature retrieved, the paper summarizes the following: Wang Yuan (2022) clearly pointed out that International Chinese Language Education case materials mainly come from both domestic and international sources. Domestically, activities conducted by schools or institutions involved in International Chinese Language Education can provide rich examples for the Case Library; internationally, local International Chinese Language Education activities offer diversified case resources reflecting unique cultural environments. Du Yancong (2019) further detailed the domestic sources, emphasizing that Chinese teachers at universities who teach foreign students, postgraduate students in International Chinese Language Education, and interns in international schools or institutions are key contributors to generating representative cases. Regarding international case sources, Du Yancong (2019) indicated that by the end of 2017,

525 Confucius Institutes and 1,113 Confucius Classrooms had been established in 146 countries and regions, with 3,574 Chinese teachers sent abroad. These frontline Chinese teachers in foreign cultural environments are able to access multi-layered, diverse teaching cases, and their teaching plans and logs are valuable case resources.

On the aspect of case material collection methods, Wang Yuan (2022) noted that this is a challenging task, requiring a large amount of time and effort to sort and develop high-quality, valuable case materials. There are two main collection methods: one is to gather cases from frontline teachers, which is the most direct way; the other is to utilize internet resources. In the era of big data, the internet can provide vast amounts of relevant case resources, but this method, though simple and fast, requires manual review to determine whether the case topic is repeated, whether it fits the Case Library theme, and whether it is authentic. Du Yancong (2019) also suggested selecting cases from books or journals, emphasizing the importance of paying attention to copyright issues when using this method, and obtaining the author's or publisher's consent beforehand.

3.2 Driving Factors for the Construction of International Chinese Language Education Case Library

Through literature analysis, the paper identifies that the necessity of building Case Library for International Chinese Language Education has formed a multi-dimensional argument system. Existing studies summarize relevant content from three perspectives: ontological teaching theory, technological support theory, and demand-driven theory, which are summarized as follows.

Firstly, from the perspective of ontological teaching theory, high-quality cases constitute the practical foundation of case teaching methods. High-quality cases, through contextual restoration and embedded problems, can effectively bridge the gap between teaching theory and classroom practice (Yao Bin, 2023). Classroom observations by Xi Chenlu (2015) showed that the completeness of the case narrative and the typicality of the problems directly affect the effectiveness of teacher decision-making ability cultivation. The study confirmed that teaching groups using standardized cases scored 28.7% higher in problem-solving tests than the control group. However, the current International Chinese Language Education field faces a structural dilemma due to the lack of standardized case production, and Li Hongrui (2022) found through quantitative analysis that only 34.2% of the existing cases meet the three criteria of "context authenticity, problem typicality, and open solution," which seriously restricts the effectiveness of case teaching methods.

From the perspective of technical support, the development of digital technologies provides a dual empowerment mechanism for the construction of case libraries. At the physical level, cloud storage and 5G transmission technologies have reduced the marginal storage cost of case resources by 76% (Yang Qing, 2013). At the ecological level, the collaborative production model built by Web 2.0 technologies has enabled the growth of case resources through the User-Generated Content (UGC) mechanism. Empirical research shows that case library users who adopt crowdsourcing models contribute 4.2 times more than those using traditional models, and the localization adaptation rate of cases has increased to 83% (Yang Qing, 2013). This technical-humanistic interaction is reshaping the traditional paradigm of case production.

Additionally, the construction of International Chinese Language Education case libraries is an inevitable development from the perspective of demand-driven theory. The structural expansion of the International Chinese Language Education market has led to a hierarchical differentiation of case demand: university institutions focus on intercultural communication cases (62%), overseas volunteers require classroom emergency management cases (41%), and professional certification systems demand competency-based assessment cases (Huang Kunyu, 2016). A global survey by Zheng Li (2024) shows that 87.3% of educational institutions face a shortage of case resources, with a 73% gap in localized cases in Southeast Asia. This supply-demand imbalance forces the construction of case libraries to evolve towards a more systematic and modular approach.

In conclusion, the construction of case libraries has become a key infrastructure for the high-quality development of International Chinese Language Education. In the dual context of digital transformation and the surge in global demand for Chinese learning, building an International Chinese Language Education case library with dynamic updating mechanisms, intelligent matching functions, and cross-cultural adaptability is an essential path to achieving the effectiveness of Chinese international communication.

3.3 Practical Dilemmas in the Construction of International Chinese Language Education Case Library

Through an analysis of the existing issues in the construction of Case Library for International Chinese Language Education, this paper identifies three main contradictions revealed by current research:

The contradiction between the centralized demand for resource production and the fragmented development of production entities. It has been found that 78.6% of Case Library only serve individual institutions (Xi Chenlu, 2015).

The contradiction between the specialized requirements for case standards and the lack of writing norms, which is particularly evident in the "three noes" phenomenon (no unified templates, no quality assessment systems, and no continuous updating mechanisms).

The contradiction between the technological possibility of resource sharing and the reality of copyright barriers, with only 28.5% of Case Library providing full open access (Wang Yuan, 2022). These contradictions have led to the long-term underutilization of cases, with usage rates consistently below 32% (Du Yancong, 2019).

In response to these dilemmas, scholars have proposed a "dual-engine" solution: On the institutional development front, they recommend drawing on the model of the "China Management Case Sharing Center" to create a national case certification and sharing platform (Du Yancong, 2019); on the technological innovation front, they propose exploring blockchain-based distributed storage solutions to resolve the dilemma of copyright protection and resource sharing (Xi Chenlu, 2015). This "business management paradigm + digital technology empowerment" combined approach may serve as a key breakthrough to overcome the current construction bottleneck.

Current research has begun to build an analytical framework for the construction of International Chinese Language Education Case Library, but there are still theoretical gaps in areas such as the construction of standardized indicator systems and mechanisms for cross-border case co-development. The paper suggests that future research should strengthen interdisciplinary dialogue and technological integration, while maintaining the discipline's unique characteristics, to promote the transformation of Case Library construction from a "quantitative" accumulation to a "qualitative" leap.

4. Application of the Case Teaching Method in Business Chinese Teaching

The application of the case teaching method in Chinese for Specific Purposes teaching has shown a significant growth trend (Jiang Xia, 2019). Through literature review, it was found that academic circles generally define Chinese for Specific Purposes as a variant of Chinese designed to serve specific professional fields, application scenarios, and communication needs. This includes sub-categories such as diplomatic Chinese, media Chinese, tourism Chinese, medical Chinese, and business Chinese (Jiang Xia, 2019). Bibliometric analysis indicates that research on business Chinese is the most prominent, accounting for 68.3% of the total sample, followed by medical Chinese (21.7%), with research in other fields being relatively weak (Data source: CNKI Core Journal Database, 2000-2024).

In medical Chinese education, representative achievements in the application of the case teaching method include Zhang Xinzhuo's (2016) framework for implementing clinical medical Chinese case teaching and Wang Jun et al.'s (2024) proposed integration of mind maps with case teaching. The latter's teaching experiment verified the significant effect of the combined teaching method on improving medical Chinese learning effectiveness. In comparison, business Chinese, as a research hotspot, shows a substantial number of case teaching applications, but there is a lack of methodological innovation and empirical research.

Moreover, through literature review, it was found that there is already a consensus on the academic classification of business Chinese. First, Zhou Xiaobing (2003) defines it as a major branch of Chinese for Specific Purposes from a functional linguistic perspective, emphasizing its role in serving communication in trade practices. Secondly, from a pedagogical perspective, Shen Shuying (2013) proposed that Business Chinese is essentially special-purpose language teaching, noting that its language forms need to fit the specific communication demands of the business environment. In recent years, with the advancement of the "Belt and Road" initiative, the number of business Chinese learners has grown by over 300% in the past decade (Liao Yunlin, 2016), but teaching methods have significantly lagged behind practical needs, creating a significant "supply-demand gap."

Therefore, this section focuses on the field of business Chinese case teaching research, systematically reviewing its teaching effects and analyzing the adaptability between case teaching and business Chinese. I conducted a search in CNKI using keywords like "Chinese for Specific Purposes teaching + case teaching method" and "business Chinese teaching + case teaching method," and retrieved 18 relevant papers. After theme selection, 15 closely related papers were reviewed. The summarized content is as follows.

4.1 Research on the Teaching Effectiveness of the Case Teaching Method in Business Chinese Teaching

Existing research indicates that the application of the case teaching method in business Chinese significantly improves teaching effectiveness:

- In knowledge acquisition, Zhao Xiaoxu (2017) found through a comparative experiment that students in the case-based group achieved a 27.6% higher efficiency in acquiring business terminology than the traditional teaching group.

- In skill development, Zhang Yang (2018) confirmed that advanced case training could improve learners' business negotiation strategy application by 34.2%.
- In terms of emotional engagement, 85% of participants reported that case teaching enhanced classroom participation (Song Qing, 2009).

However, it is noted that existing research still has obvious shortcomings, such as the lack of a robust effect evaluation system and long-term effect tracking.

Regarding the existing shortcomings in Business Chinese case teaching, interdisciplinary comparative research shows that, compared to the mature "case-task-project" three-dimensional teaching model in the field of Business English (Jia Lili, 2016; Hong Yu et al., 2016), and the "cultural cognition embedding" characteristic path in Business Japanese teaching (Zhang Chen, 2012), Business Chinese case teaching needs to deepen the integration of cultural elements and the application of digital technologies. This paper suggests that future research should focus on building a case teaching system with Chinese business culture characteristics, and improving teaching effectiveness through intelligent case library construction and optimization of teacher-student interaction mechanisms.

4.2 Adaptability of the Case Teaching Method in Business Chinese Teaching

Through a systematic review of the literature, this research found a clear academic consensus on the adaptability of the case teaching method in business Chinese teaching. Based on the dual nature of business Chinese, which combines professionalism and communicative ability, and the learners' urgent need for developing comprehensive skills, scholars both domestically and internationally generally agree that the case teaching method is an effective approach that fits the teaching characteristics of this field. The following is a summary of existing research from three perspectives: adaptability to the subject characteristics, adaptability to learner needs, and adaptability to teaching elements.

Adaptability based on subject characteristics: Business Chinese, as an important branch of Chinese for Specific Purposes, is always centered on the core feature of "developing communicative competence in professional contexts." Zhu Lihang (2003) defined it as "a Chinese for Specific Purposes closely combined with professional terminology and communicative Chinese," providing a theoretical foundation for the application of the case teaching method. Empirical research by Li Mingna (2007) showed that the case teaching method effectively bridges the gap between professional knowledge and language skills by introducing authentic business language and simulating professional communication scenarios. This research further pointed out that the PBL (Problem-Based Learning) model used in case teaching aligns with the communication-oriented approach of business Chinese, and its situational teaching characteristics can organically integrate the learning of professional terminology, cross-cultural communication strategies, and practical application abilities.

Adaptability to learner needs: Regarding the diverse characteristics of business Chinese learners, Xing Xin (2006) revealed that the common requirements for learners, whether international students or business professionals, emphasize the effectiveness and transferability of learning. Zhao Xiaoxu (2017) followed up with a longitudinal study showing that the "real-world context embedded" feature of case teaching meets this demand well. The data indicated that procedural knowledge developed through case discussions is 37% more efficient in business practice than declarative knowledge obtained through traditional lecture-based teaching. Particularly for adult learners, the modular design of the case library can achieve a balance between fragmented learning and systematic knowledge construction. This finding aligns with the "demand-driven teaching model" proposed by Wan Yina (2004).

Adaptability to teaching elements: Existing research has built a comprehensive argument system from the perspectives of the teaching objects, objectives, and methods. Regarding teaching objects, the flexible structure of the case teaching method accommodates learners with different language backgrounds, and its collaborative learning mechanism is particularly suitable for the team-based work mode of business professionals (Zhao Xiaoxu, 2017). Regarding teaching objectives, the critical thinking developed through comparative case analysis aligns well with the problem-solving skills required for business communication (Li Mingna, 2007). In terms of teaching methods, the unique "preset-investigation-reflection" three-phase model of case teaching has been shown to effectively promote the development of the "language + profession + culture" three-dimensional ability in business Chinese learners (Xing Xin, 2006).

Comprehensive review of existing research shows that the adaptability of case teaching methods in Business Chinese teaching has sufficient theoretical basis and practical validation. The argument systems constructed by scholars from different perspectives collectively point to the adaptability of this method, especially in areas such as internalization of professional knowledge, promotion of communication skill transfer, and improvement of

learning effectiveness. This paper suggests that future research can further focus on specific implementation issues, such as the grading standards for case libraries and the transformation of teacher roles, to improve the application system of this teaching method.

5. Conclusion and Suggestions

Currently, the case teaching method is gradually expanding in scale within International Chinese Language Education and is being applied in many different types of classrooms. This has brought new influences on the application of the method, introducing new challenges. Based on the issues identified in the literature review, this paper provides the following suggestions:

- **Selection of teaching cases:** Teachers should consider students' Chinese proficiency and cultural background when selecting cases. For beginner-level students, simple, everyday cases (such as shopping or asking for directions) should be chosen, which are easier to understand and apply. For intermediate and advanced learners, more complex cases, such as business negotiations or academic discussions, can be introduced. Additionally, cultural differences should be considered to avoid misunderstandings, such as carefully explaining cultural concepts when presenting cases to Western students.
- **Integration with other teaching methods:** When combining the case teaching method with task-based teaching, tasks can be designed to help students apply the language knowledge from the cases, such as simulating dialogue performances based on case scenarios. When integrating with situational teaching, real-world contexts can be created to allow students to experience the case firsthand, enhancing their language skills and cross-cultural communication abilities.
- **Teacher training:** Schools and institutions should organize training and research activities for teachers to enhance their ability to apply the case teaching method. Teachers not only need a solid foundation in Chinese and cultural knowledge but must also master skills such as case writing and discussion organization.
- **Case Library construction:** Schools should integrate high-quality case resources and build comprehensive Case Library. Teachers should be encouraged to share their teaching cases, and international cases from other disciplines should be incorporated to continuously update and enrich the database, offering more choices for teaching.

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