

Research report for Chinese /Mandarin study for BBC (British born Chinese Children)

Personal Profile

My name is Li,WANG. I am a native Mandarin speaker. I have completed my education to university level in China. I had worked in China as bilingual tour guide. It was a very interesting job as I met all sorts of people. They had different expectations than me. I had to widen my knowledge and learn new abilities to adjust my working approach to meet customers' needs. I learned a lot during those years. In 2007, we moved to England because my husband wanted our boy (who was only one at that time) to receive a British education. In the first few months, I felt lonely and lost, I didn't know what I could do here. But at least I could study. I did my NVQ level 3 business start-up course. When I successfully finished the course, I got a small grant which I used to learn Level 3 community interpreter course with Vandu , and later on I did the advocate course as well. I have been working for Vandu since then. The work is flexible, it suits me well as I can manage the work and family life at same time.

I have taught Mandarin from beginner's to GCSE level at local Chinese weekend school for a few years.

I like to meet people and to work with them. I am confident in talking with people from different backgrounds with different approaches to life. I feel happy when the communication between the clients and the professions goes smoothly with my help.

When I have the time and chance, I like to learn new knowledges and skills. I am studying university foundation accounting course and this community research course right now. I believe learning is a life time process.

The research problem

I am a native Mandarin speaker. I have 2 boys. Just like most of the other Chinese parents, I would like my boys to keep our cultural heritage by speaking and understanding the language to a passable degree at least. It is important that they are able to communicate with family members at home in China. I have been teaching my children Mandarin at home for a while. This year, my older boy has done his GCSE exam. I have contacted the school to see what help they could provide. The only thing school could help with is to enrol him for the exam. I have to pay for it as it is an additional exam requested by myself. I do not mind paying for the fee. But my question is that since the government has had huge funding (£10 million for England only) into Mandarin study and teaching, why can't students like my son who want to do the GCSE exam get any support from school? I am asking whether state schools have the duty to offer Mandarin support/study?

The purpose of my research is to find out and express the views of Chinese parents and to make schools aware that they should support students' GCSE Mandarin study.

Literature review

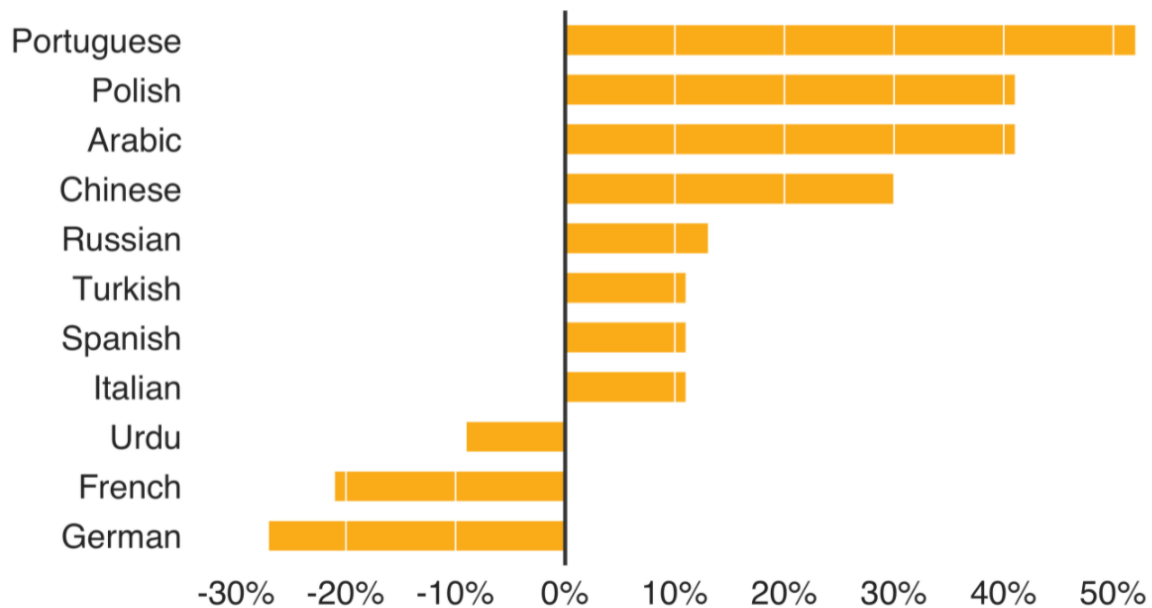
Mandarin GCSE Study

I undertook a literature review to find out more about the context of learning and teaching Mandarin in schools. At school, different students have a different motivation to learn Mandarin Chinese. As for sixth formers, McPake, Johnstone, Low & Lyall (1999) suggest that many students recognise the potential for travelling, studying and working abroad that competence in another language would support.

In 2015, The UK Education Secretary Nicky Morgan said: *“The relationship between UK and China is vital to our growing economy which is why we want even more young people, from all backgrounds, to have the opportunity to learn Mandarin”*. Chancellor of the Exchequer George Osborne announced in 2015 that a £10 million investment would be made to allow even more children to learn Mandarin at school, with the ambition of having an additional 5,000 students learning Mandarin by 2020. (<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/chancellor-announces-boost-to-mandarin-teaching-in-schools>)

Branwen Jeffreys an education editor at BBC published an article on 27th February 2019 on BBC website writes about GCSE language learning in UK schools. There is no further reference to the £10 million investment in her report. She has also mentioned that £10 million government investment in Mandarin teaching and also showed the rising and falling of GCSE language studies as shown in the graphic below.

Trends in studying languages by GCSE subject in England, Wales and NI Ireland from 2013 to 2015



Source: DfE, DE NI and Welsh government

BBC

This graphic shows that GCSE study of Chinese has risen approximately 30% between 2013 and 2015.

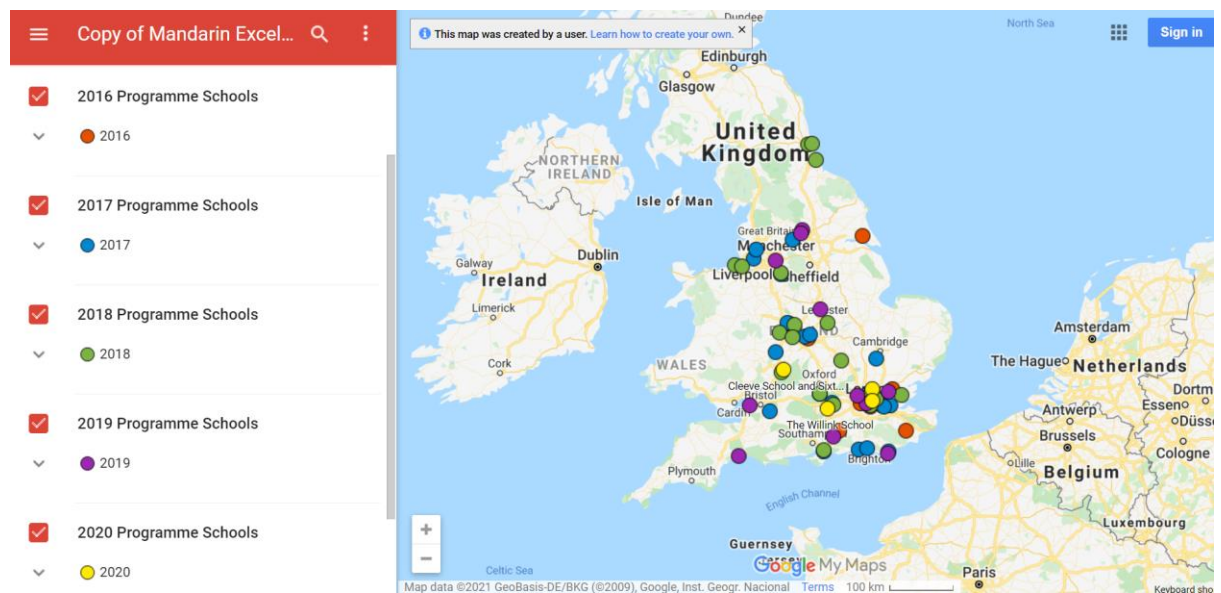
In UK, Mandarin is listed as a modern foreign language in secondary school, which the students can take at GCSE and A Level exams.

To meet this demand, there is a program called The Mandarin Excellence Programme (MEP), which is being delivered by the UCL IOE Confucius Institute for Schools on behalf of the Department for Education (DfE) and in partnership with the British Council. The original aim of the programme was to have 5000 students on track to fluency in Mandarin by 2020. As of January 2021, there are almost 7000 students enrolled on the programme. The programme also aims to train a sufficient number of teachers to support the programme. All state-funded secondary schools in England with 'good' or 'outstanding' Ofsted ratings can join the programme. The Mandarin Excellence Programme offers supports such as :

- £20,000 a year for schools in the programme
- extra payments for student retention and for yearly intensive learning
- partnership with a hub school to help you develop the programme
- online teaching materials and resources

Here is a map to show all the participating schools and the year joined in UK.

[Join the Mandarin Excellence Programme - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](http://www.gov.uk)



Ratton School in Eastbourne joined the program in 2019, Hove Park School in Brighton join the program in 2017, Bohunt School in Worthing joined in 2017. No schools in Hastings have joined to date, so Chinese parents there have not been able to benefit from this programme, neither did the students.

Due to the pandemic, this year, the students can't take their Mandarin GCSE and A levels. We need to know more about how the authority's award these qualifications.

How qualifications will be awarded in 2021?

Simon Lebus Chief regulator of Ofqual, explains the arrangements for 2021 For GCSEs, AS and A levels, teachers will assess only on what you have been taught so they can decide the grade. Teachers' assessment will be evidence based which can be in the classroom or by remoting learning . As a private candidate studying independently, students will need to provide evidence in line with the sort of evidence that other students will produce. But from experiences of my self and other 2 parents, the schools did differently. 2 schools didn't ask for any evidence at all, one did. All the three students had taken only one exam. One student was told her mark straight way after her test, the other two will know their results in August.

Given the context of Chinese parents in Hastings it was my aim to carry out some research to see how accessible it was for them to ensure their children received good tuition for Chinese GCSE and A level and to find out more about their experiences. Are they able to benefit from these Government schemes that say that they support the teaching of Chinese in UK schools?

Research methods

I have worked as an mandarin interpreter and advocate for over 10 years. I know the local community pretty well, especially the families with children. I asked 6 mothers to be my interviewees. Two of them had children in nursery, primary and secondary school , one of them had a child studying in a grammar school. One of the mothers had a child who will take GCSEs next year. 2 of the mothers had children who did their GCSE this year. These All 6 mothers were willing and happy to have interviews with me.

Because of the pandemic, I couldn't carry out a focus group. as there was still some concern among my participants about Covid 19 and reluctance to meet together. 3 interviews were carried out face to face in the shop where the participants worked. The other 3 were telephone interview. All the interviews were recorded, they were carried out in Mandarin, transcribed and then interpreted into English by myself. The interviews took longer than I expected. Generally, they took about 30 minutes each. All the parents expressed the same idea that their children need help regarding the GCSE Mandarin study and that this GCSE was very important to them.

For my research, I have used the following 6 questions.

1. Why do you want your children study Chinese language? Or Why do you think bilingual is important?
你为什么让孩子学习中文？ 或者为什么你认为双语重要呢？
2. What is your experience of your children's Chinese study? Is there anything particular method works out ? Is there anything which you think they could do better?
在孩子学中文这方面，你的经验是什么？ 有没有行之有效的办法？ 你觉得有什么地方还可以做的更好？
3. How do your children think about the Chinese study?
你家小孩对学习中文的态度怎样？

Which part is the best from these: listening, speaking, reading/writing?

听说读写，他们在哪方面最好？

4. Are they happy to attend any Chinese culture event, such as Chinese New Year celebrations?

他们愿意参加中国文化活动吗，比如说中国新年庆祝活动？

Are they happy to go to China? What do they like the most in China?

他们愿意去中国吗？在中国，最喜欢的事情是什么？

5. Do you want your children to do GCSE exam? Why?

你打算让孩子参加中文中考吗？为什么？

What's your experience when your child did his/her Mandarin GCSE?

你的孩子参加中文中考的时候，你的体验是什么？

6. Are you able to help them with GCSE study? Do you think they can get help at school? Or do you think the school should have a duty help?

你自己可以辅导孩子在中学的中文学习吗？在学校，他们可以得到帮助吗？

你觉得学校有职责帮助孩子吗？

Ethical considerations

Ethical considerations are of vital importance when carrying out research to ensure that the participants are kept safe and free from potential harm. According to Ethics of Care principle (Ward and Gahaghan, 2010) this is how I ensured that my research evidenced competence, trust, responsiveness and confidentiality

Competence means an ability to do something well or efficiently. I have taught Mandarin at Chinese weekend school for a few years. I have been teaching my two boys Mandarin at home for a long time. Furthermore, I have taught my son GCSE Mandarin in the last two years. I have checked the specifications. I know the requirement of each part of the exam, listening, speaking, reading and writing. I have knowledge how to prepare them for the exam. I realize that writing is the weakness of most Chinese children. I am also aware of the problems we are facing, such as a lack of quality teachers and study materials. I have looked at several different documents regarding Mandarin GCSE study. So, I am competence and well qualified to do this research focused on GCSE Mandarin study.

Responsiveness means the quality of having a reaction to something or someone, especially a quick or positive reaction. I have interviewed 6 parents. I listened carefully to what they said either positive or negative. Such as their attitude towards the online lessons. Most children like to play computer games, so they are happy doing designated online lessons which they can progress to higher level by playing different games. No home work, no pressure, so they like it. But on the other hand, parents are not very satisfied as they are not sure how much their children have learned. And it is quite expensive. They have shared their children's attitudes towards the study of Mandarin, some like it, some don't. They have shared their concerns. I feel that I am responsive to their concerns about Mandarin GCSE study. That is why my research topic is about this. I hope to make the authorities and schools pay some attention to Mandarin GCSE and possibly A level study as well.

Trust I have been working as a Mandarin interpreter and advocate for the local community for years. I know the local community pretty well and most importantly they know me well too, especially the families with school age children. So, the trust is there. During my research they were relaxed, just being themselves rather than nervous during the conversation. It was much easier to conduct the interviews because of this trust.

Confidentiality is very important as well. I have discussed the Consent Form with my interviewees before the interviews. The interviewees know their names won't appear in my research and that they can't be identified. They know they can withdraw anytime within the time span given. So, the parents were willing and happy to take part in interviews with me, to tell me their thoughts and concerns which have become part of my research.

Findings and Analysis

I interviewed 6 Chinese parents regarding their children's mandarin study, focusing on GCSE study. All the Chinese parents wanted their children to learn Mandarin. Some are going to Chinese classes at weekends or afterschool, some are doing on-line lessons. The main reasons are very practical. They want their children to be able to communicate with family back in China. And the children can act as interpreters and translators for the parents in daily life due to their (referring to the parents) poor English levels. Generally, the participants said that their children are good at speaking and listening in Mandarin but that their reading and writing levels are poor. It was also felt that in the future, the children would benefit from their language skills if they wish to work in China. All of the parents wanted their children to take the GCSE Mandarin exam, but realise that it is a very tough task to do so without support from school. This was a major issue which was shared with me during my research. These were the key themes that came from my research findings:

1. Do I have the ability and skills to teach my own kids?

The parents are keen for their children to learn Mandarin. At the basic level, they are able to help their children learn Mandarin. But in regards to coaching them to pass their GCSE exams, they don't have the skills or ability to tutor their children.

One mum said ,

I have received low education level in China and my English is not good either. I don't have the skill and ability to help my kids at all. I can't explain the text contents to my children.

Another mum said

We are all good and peaceful until I try to tutor my children. If I explain to them a few times and they still make the same mistakes. I am just losing my temper and they get upset as well. They just don't want to carry on .

2. The parents try to cope without support from schools.

One parent said

My daughter was doing the past papers, watching videos clips to gathering the evidence for her assessment all by herself . The past papers were not difficult to her. But when she was doing her really test, it was much harder, especially the listening. As the curriculum has changed She was very upset. But she did her best Another mum said,

I tell my son to study almost every Sunday by himself. If he doesn't I 'threaten' him to sign him up for a course which he doesn't want. So he has to do it at home.

Mandarin is not on the GSCE choice list as a modern foreign language, but the European languages are. So there is no study material and tutorial provided by the schools.

3. Teaching methodology is important

Teachers in Chinese weekend school are using typical Chinese ways to teach, which can be more strict, more criticizing, not much praising. Many of them have not adapted to English teaching methodology.

Recommendations

Lack of tuition/support from school

This is the main issue to have emerged from this research. The Chinese parents understand that it is hard for a school to hire a tutor for just for one or two students. It can be very expensive. The idea that they have expressed is that either the local schools could share a part /full time teacher to work on regular basis, or the schools could get a freelance tutor ideally for face to face tuition, but the online tuition would be accepted too. The parents would be willing to contribute towards the fee.

Lack of study materials

As parents, they have no idea about what study materials should they get for their children. The school could get information from the exam board which they use and pass on to parents.

Students are not familiar with the exam models.

The schools could still get such information from the relevant exam board, download the different sections, and give students hard copies to practise. Several parents spoke of the students being surprised by the content of the GCSE exams.

If the schools can join the **Mandarin Excellence Program**, this would be ideal. This would enable answers to be given to the above mentioned issues.

References used for my research

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Appendix

First transcription

Interview questions 访谈问题 ,06/07/2021

1. Why do you want your children study Chinese language? Or Why do you think bilingual is important?
你为什么让孩子学习中文? 或者为什么你认为双语重要呢?

It is quite a natural thing to do as I am Chinese. It is said that that bilingual study can boost the brain development. Hopefully it will be useful in the future as well.

2. What is your experience of your children's Chinese study? Is there anything particular method works out? Is there anything which you think they could do better?

在孩子学中文这方面，你的经验是什么？有没有行之有效的办法？你觉得有什么地方还可以做的更好？

I daughter has studies Mandarin since she was 4. Maybe because of her age(too young), at that time, she couldn't concentrate for long in the classroom, she didn't learn much in the first few years. But she didn't dislike it. When she went to the local Chinese school here, she started to dislike it. She told me that she didn't want to continue . She said "I am not in China, I am not going to work or live in China. Why should I learn Mandarin?" But it would be a shame to stop ,As she already had some knowledge, so I pressed her on. While she didn't pay much attention. Until a few months before her GCSE exams, I said to her" you can think about to attend Chinese GCSE." This might stimulate her (gave her the idea). She actually wanted to do GCSE Chinese exam.

Obviously, it is important to listen Chinese songs , watching movies with Chinese subtitles and speak at home as much as possible. But if we speak Mandarin at home all the time, my husband would feel that he is left out. And because of my busy work, sometimes laziness too, we speak English at home only, barely any Chinese. I know it is not good , but I just get used to it.

3. How do your children think about the Chinese study?

你家小孩对学习中文的态度怎样？

From dislike to OK. She actually wants to know more about Chinese now.

Which part is the best from these: listening, speaking, reading/writing?

听说读写，他们在哪方面最好？

For her, her reading and writing is actually better. Because she writes a bit more and watching movies with subtitle. Her speaking and listening are not as good as her reading and writing.

4. Are they happy to attend any Chinese culture event, such as Chinese New Year celebrations?

他们愿意参加中国文化活动吗，比如说中国新年庆祝活动？

When she was little, she was very happy to attend all the events, she liked to sing and dance on the stages. She always attended festival celebrations.

Are they happy to go to China? What do they like the most in China?

他们愿意去中国吗？在中国，最喜欢的事情是什么？

Yes, she likes to travel in China. She actually recognized some words on the board at the bus stop when we were in Shanghai. She felt good about herself (thinking actually I know some Chinese.)and had more confidence.

5. Do you want your children to do GCSE exam? Why?

你打算让孩子参加中文中考吗？为什么？

What's your experience when your child did his/her Mandarin GCSE?

你的孩子参加中文中考的时候，你的体验是什么？

She worked hard to prepare her profiles this year. I printed the past papers for her. She did quite well with those papers. But when she did her really exam, the listening exam was not good. She couldn't understand many of the questions. She cried after the listening exam because she was disappointed.

6. Are you able to help them with GCSE study ? Do you think they can get help at school? Or do you think the school should have a duty help?

你自己可以辅导孩子在中学的中文学习吗？在学校，他们可以得到帮助吗？

你觉得学校有职责帮助孩子吗？

I didn't help her at all. I was planning to hire a tutor for her and other two Chinese kids, so if we could share the tutor fee, it is not too much for each person. But one did her exam last year. And the pandemic started, so this plan didn't go ahead. She did the study all by herself.

No she didn't get any help from school. We did not know how the exam went. Purely based her regular works or she needed to sit in the exam. Not much information. The school asked my daughter to bring her work which she has done including the past papers to school. I was worried and confused a bit because I didn't know what was going on. Her school even asked us if we can find qualified accessor. I do know one accessor, I gave the contact detail of the accessor to school, the school contacted the accessor, somehow it didn't went through. I think the school probably found another accessor already.

Yes, the school has the duty to help, but it is not practical, as they won't do it just for one kid. It is all about money. We pay very little to our Chinese teacher at our Chinese weekend school because we charge very little from students and not much funding which we can apply for, very frequent to have different teachers due to their availabilities and their qualifications are varied as well.

Second transcription, 07/07/2021

Interview questions 访谈问题

1. Why do you want your children study Chinese language? Or Why do you think bilingual is important?
你为什么让孩子学习中文? 或者为什么你认为双语重要呢?

Because we are Chinese. Families at home(in China) can't know English, if my kids can't speak Mandarin, then they can't communicate with them, especially grandparents. It is also a practical issue, as we don't understand(actually this parent can speak some English) English, they have to learn English. They can acting as out "translator". Mandarin will be useful and it is also a privilege for them(knowing Mandarin).

2. What is your experience of your children's Chinese study? Is there anything particular method works out? Is there anything which you think they could do better?

在孩子学中文这方面，你的经验是什么？有没有行之有效的办法？你觉得有什么地方还可以做的更好？

Face to face lesson is better than online lessons. Because the teacher can show you how to write the words properly, the teacher can correct on your writing pad, you can see the mistake physically. They don't speak Chinese to each other and their Chinese friends, just English. They don't have the(language)environment here. They do learn something from online lessons, probably not very much. But I still like face to face teaching more.

3. How do your children think about the Chinese study?

你家小孩对学习中文的态度怎样？

In the past, they didn't really like it because of the home work.

My kids are studying online with a big online Mandarin organisation. They actually like it because it is more like playing games, when they have done well, they will move up to high level. And there is no homework, so no pressure either.

Which part is the best from these: listening, speaking, reading/writing?

听说读写,他们在哪方面最好? Normally, listening and speaking is much better, as they are talking at home every day. My son's reading is better than my daughter. We have Chinese books at home, but they don't really read although my son can read binpin (which is Chinese

phonetic), but he doesn't understand the meaning . My daughter doesn't even know binyin, so she doesn't read at all. So if we have bilingual teacher to explain to them, it will be much better.

4. Are they happy to attend any Chinese culture event, such as Chinese New Year celebrations?

他们愿意参加中国文化活动吗，比如说中国新年庆祝活动？

They were happy to go and watch. That's it, not personal involved to sing and dance. It's interesting to them, especially Chinese New Year.

Are they happy to go to China? What do they like the most in China?

他们愿意去中国吗？在中国，最喜欢的事情是什么？

Yes, they were very happy when we were in China last time. It was the New Year time. They were very excited. Nice weather, Dragon dance , fireworks, visiting families, receiving red bags(which is an red envelope with money in for good luck), big feast, a lot interesting things to do. I use this to encourage them to learn more Chinese. I said to them," so if you want to go back to China again, you need to learn more Chinese, so you can understand more and talk with family more." They didn't understand why we eat hot food , everything is hot , it doesn't matter which season it is, hot food for winter time, hot food summer summer. But it is our custom.

5. Do you want your children to do GCSE exam? Why?

你打算让孩子参加中文中考吗？为什么？

Yes, I would like them to do the exam. Because it is a qualification. And it is also a way to test their years study. A bit pressure is good for them .

What's your experience when your child did his/her Mandarin GCSE?

你的孩子参加中文中考的时候，你的体验是什么？

6. Are you able to help them with GCSE study ? Do you think they can get help at school? Or do you think the school should have a duty help?

你自己可以辅导孩子在中学的中文学习吗？在学校，他们可以得到帮助吗？

你觉得学校有职责帮助孩子吗？

We don't have the ability to help them at all as our own education level is low and our English is not all as well. and we are really busy and don't have time . It all depends on themselves to do it. My son's school doesn't have Chinese lesson, he is learning French. If the school can help, it will be really good. We are happy to pay a small fee for it , maybe 5,10 pounds one hour.

Third transcription, 2/07/2021

1. Why do you want your children study Chinese language? Or Why do you think bilingual is important?

你为什么让孩子学习中文？ 或者为什么你认为双语重要呢？

There are a lot of reasons. Because we are Chinese, they need to know Chinese. The parents' English is not good. When they can speak Chinese, it is more convenience in daily life.

What is your experience of your children's Chinese study? Is there anything particular method works out ? Is there anything which you think they could do better?

They need to speak , read and write more. It will be best to do it every day.

2.在孩子学中文这方面，你的经验是什么？有没有行之有效的办法？你觉得有什么地方还可以做的更好？

We speak Chinese/Mandarin everyday at home. It will be better if they can read and write everyday as well. We have some Chinese books at home, but they barely read because they can't understand. When they were little, they watched Chinese Children's programs, listened Chinese children's songs. So they learned a lot. But the older ones only watch programs in English. Only the youngers one is still watching Chinese program.

3.How do your children think about the Chinese study?

你家小孩对学习中文的态度怎样？

They actually like to learn Chinese now. Right now they are having online lessons with other 3 kids with a Chinese teacher. They like the teacher. They also fine to do their homework.

Which one is the best from these: listening, speaking, reading/writing?

听说读写，他们在哪方面最好？

Of course, listening and speaking. Because they speak with us everyday. But just simple daily conversation, not long or a bit more complicated chat.

4.Are they happy to attend any Chinese culture event, such as Chinese New Year celebrations?

他们愿意参加中国文化活动吗，比如说中国新年庆祝活动？

They don't want to. Because they are shy and quiet, they would be scare to stand on the stage with the other people looking at them.

Are they happy to go to China? What do they like the most in China?

他们愿意去中国吗？在中国，最喜欢的事情是什么？

They haven't been to China yet. We were planning to go back last year, because of the pandemic, we had no way to go back. Maybe next year if it is Ok to go.

5. Do you want your children to do GCSE exam? Why?

你打算让孩子参加中文中考吗？为什么？

Yes. It is still a few years away. They already have foundation there.

They are good at speaking and listening already. It will be easier than to learn another language from the beginning.

What's your experience when your child did his/her Mandarin GCSE?

你的孩子参加中文中考的时候，你的体验是什么？

6. Are you able to help them with GCSE study? Do you think they can get help at school? Or do you think the school should have a duty help?

你自己可以辅导孩子在中学的中文学习吗？在学校，他们可以得到帮助吗？

你觉得学校有职责帮助孩子吗？

No, not really. We easily lose our temper when teaching our own kids. Our level is not good enough to teach them. There is no Chinese option at my daughter's school. So more likely, there is no help. They should get some help at school. If the school can offer some Chinese lessons, we have no problem to pay the small fee. We also don't have to struggle to find suitable teacher. The Chinese teacher with typical Chinese method can't really teach our children here, they criticize much more than encouraging and praising. Chinese teachers have more authority, you have to listen to the teacher. They keep pointing out your mistakes, barely praise. So for our kids, (who are) born here and growing up here, just can't accept (cope) this.

Fourth transcription,03/07/2021

1. We,(as)parents are all Chinese. It will be helpful in the future. When we go back to visit families, they can communicate. And possibly to work in China in the future.
2. Speaking every day at home, when they were little, they watched Chinese programs . Needs to write and read more.
3. My son is Ok, he doesn't dislike . I ask him to study Chinese every Sunday at home for 30 minutes. Sometimes, he doesn't want to, I will tell him, " if you don't want to study at home, I will sign you up for online lessons." Then he will do it reluctantly . And he has learned for years. It is a pity to give up right now. My daughter doesn't like it.

Of course, speaking and listening is much better than reading and writings. We have some Chinese books at home. They barely read, because they can't really understand.

4. My son used to attend lion dance during the Chinese New Year celebration. My daughter is very shy, she won't go to the stage at all. They don't really like to be in China. We always go back in summer. It's just too hot for them.
5. Yes, I want him to attend GCSE exam this year. But the school didn't arrange for him. He will do it next year. It is good to test his level. He will know how good he is. I want him keeping studying.
6. I can't help him with the study. I tell him to practise writing using the old text book. Private tutor is very expensive. I think the school has no duty to help. This is our own choice. But I can pay if the school can arrange some sort of support.