

An Action Research Study on the Management of Interruptions in the Classroom Among from Guinea

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Abstract: *As the Belt and Road Initiative continues to advance, cultural exchanges between China and Africa have deepened, resulting in a large number of international students from Guinea with no prior knowledge of Chinese coming to China to study the language. During the teaching process, it is evident that the classroom habits of Guinean students differ significantly from the norms of Chinese language classes in China. This study involved 14 Guinean international students with no prior knowledge of Chinese—12 males and 2 females. During their seven months of study in China, they completed all HSK Levels 1–3 listening and speaking courses. The following issues arose in the classroom: students would sometimes interrupt the teacher during class, openly contradict the teaching content, or challenge their classmates' answers in front of the class. Consequently, through classroom observations and student interviews, I documented these classroom issues and analyzed their causes from four perspectives: cross-cultural differences, the establishment of classroom rules, and the adaptation of teaching materials. First, I developed a management plan based on a "student-centered" approach, implemented it, observed changes in student behavior, and then evaluated the effectiveness of the teacher's intervention. The study indicates that management approaches relying solely on suppression or criticism can intensify students' resistance. By co-creating speaking rules with students, allocating dedicated time for them to express their ideas, and making them the "protagonists" of the classroom, everyone is able to express themselves in an orderly manner, and instances of interrupting and backtalking are significantly reduced. The conclusion offers practical, country-specific classroom management recommendations tailored to West African international students with a French-speaking background.*

Keywords: International students from Guinea, Listening and speaking classes, Classroom interruptions, Cross-cultural classroom management.

1. Introduction

1.1 Research Background

1.2 Significance of the Study

1.2.1 Theoretical Significance

To enrich research on the classroom behaviors of international students from Guinea in West Africa, this study integrates humanistic "student-centered" theory and cross-cultural communication theory to elucidate the underlying reasons for students' questioning behaviors in the classroom within the context of West Africa's egalitarian culture, thereby filling a gap in country-specific classroom management case studies.

1.2.2 Practical Significance

This project fully illustrates the complete action research process—"problem observation—cause analysis—solution design—phased implementation—effect evaluation"—and provides targeted, culturally compatible management approaches for teachers responsible for elementary-level Chinese listening and speaking classes in Guinea and French-speaking West African countries, thereby helping to avoid cross-cultural management conflicts.

1.3 Research Subject and Research Methods

1.3.1 Research Subject

The study participants were 14 international students from Guinea with no prior knowledge of Chinese. They were

between the ages of 18 and 23 and had virtually no experience learning Chinese in Guinea. Their native languages were Malinké and Susu, and they spoke French as a common language; From November 2025 to June 2026, they completed a 7-month study program consisting of comprehensive Chinese courses, listening and speaking classes, and reading and writing classes. The curriculum covered vocabulary, sentence patterns, texts, and everyday conversational exchanges at the HSK Levels 1–3; Male students make up the vast majority of the class. They are quite active in class interactions; when they have differing opinions during the teacher's lecture, they do not raise their hands but instead interrupt directly. Interruptions and objections are primarily exhibited by male students.

1.3.2 Research Methods

1) Classroom Observation Method

For seven consecutive months, record incidents that occur in the classroom, observing the frequency and number of interruptions and public rebuttals that occur at different stages during this period, as well as the specific parts of the class where interruptions and rebuttals take place, and the details of student behavior.

2) Semi-structured interviews

In several phases, six students—four male and two female—were selected to participate in brief interviews after class to explore the deeper cultural and academic motivations underlying their behavior.

2. Describing the Current Situation: Classroom Observation Record of Interruptions and Public Objections

Based on complete classroom logs from two weekly listening and speaking classes, this study systematically analyzes instances of interruptions and objections, common scenarios in which they occur, and their negative impacts on teaching.

2.1 Typical Classroom Behavior

2.1.1 Unconsciously interrupting the lecture and disrupting the flow of the class

During the teacher's explanations of new vocabulary and grammar, demonstration of dialogues, and playback of listening materials, students did not raise their hands or wait for the teacher to pause; instead, they immediately asked questions or talked among themselves. When multiple students spoke at the same time, their Chinese proficiency was insufficient for communication, so they switched to their native languages—such as Malinkai or French—and their voices sometimes drowned out the teacher's lecture. For example, when explaining the HSK Level 2 shopping phrase "How much is this?", some students would discuss the prices of goods while joking that they had bought a shirt for 30 yuan. When the teacher then asked, "Is that expensive?" the students would split into two completely different camps and begin arguing, sometimes resorting to French, which completely deviated from the lesson content and forced the teacher to interrupt the class. Although two female students rarely spoke up on their own, they would join in quiet conversations with the male students, further adding to the classroom noise.

2.1.2 Openly and bluntly refuting the lesson content and dismissing the classroom materials in front of everyone

When example sentences or cultural points in the textbook are out of touch with or slightly at odds with everyday life in Guinea, students will interrupt immediately and directly voice their doubts or objections, expressing themselves bluntly and without much tact. When discussing local cuisine, students might say, "My mom is a great cook! Teacher, do you know how to cook?" When the teacher admits they aren't very good at cooking, the students are very surprised and say, "Then you absolutely have to learn how to cook." This is because in Guinea, very few women cannot cook, and this skill even affects their prospects for marriage. When discussing the system of kinship terms—noting that the terms for "grandmother" and "grandfather" differ, as do those for a mother's siblings and a father's siblings—several students collectively pointed out that the Chinese kinship system is too complex, and they often get the terms mixed up.

2.1.3 A single interruption sparked a wave of copycat behavior, causing the classroom to briefly descend into chaos.

During class, a topic raised by the teacher or a humorous remark can easily trigger disruptive behavior. After an outgoing male student interrupts the teacher first, the rest of the boys follow suit and engage in a group discussion. While the teacher stands at the front of the classroom, the students below carry on their own discussion in French, completely

diverting the class's attention from the instructional objectives. It takes the teacher 3–8 minutes to bring the students back on track and restore normal order to the class; even so, the class remains severely fragmented.

2.2 Scenarios Prone to Problems

During the new content explanation segment—which covers new vocabulary, situational dialogues, and Chinese cultural concepts—interruptions and objections occur most frequently. When teaching materials differ from local customs in Guinea, student objections increase significantly. After half an hour of continuous instruction, students' attention wanes, their self-control weakens, and the frequency of interruptions doubles. During activities requiring quiet information reception—such as listening exercises and explanations of long dialogues—interruptions severely impair listening comprehension.

2.3 The Negative Impact of This Issue on Teaching

First, I've found that listening and speaking practice often lags behind the lesson plan. I originally intended to complete two sets of situational dialogues and the HSK listening exercises at the end of each class, but I'm frequently interrupted by students during the dialogues, so on average I can only complete one set of dialogue practice per class. It's also difficult to finish the listening exercises. Over the past seven months of studying Chinese, I've repeatedly found that my progress in listening and speaking practice hasn't kept pace with the actual pace of the class.

Second, lectures are interrupted, disrupting the flow of logic. When teachers are explaining key concepts, students' questions immediately interrupt the flow, making it difficult to present vocabulary and dialogue explanations coherently, which makes it hard for students to build a comprehensive body of knowledge.

Third, if students are strictly suppressed, they will develop strong feelings of rebellion. After teachers reprimand or criticize them, students will harbor negative emotions, and in subsequent classes, they will be relatively unengaged and reluctant to participate in speaking exercises and other classroom activities.

3. Analytical Framework: An Analysis of the Multiple Causes of Interruptions and Rebuttals

Based on classroom observation records and student interview results, a framework for analyzing the causes was developed across four dimensions: cross-cultural factors, language learning, classroom management, and teaching materials.

3.1 Cross-Cultural Communication Differences: The Conflict Between Local Educational Cultures Emphasizing Equality and Chinese Classroom Etiquette

3.1.1 An equal teacher-student relationship, free from any sense of hierarchy or constraints

Guinea, in West Africa, was formerly a French colony, and its

education system follows an egalitarian classroom model with blurred boundaries between teachers and students. In class, students can ask questions or express their opinions at any time without raising their hands. Classmates believe this is what demonstrates a proactive attitude toward learning; the idea that “interrupting the teacher is disrespectful” simply does not exist in their minds, so they find it difficult to understand the Chinese classroom practice of raising one’s hand to ask questions and listening quietly. When the same person assumes different roles and positions, the relationship between the speaker and the listener is bound to change constantly. This relationship may be equal, or it may be unequal [6].

3.1.2 An outgoing social culture, with a habit of expressing opinions immediately

The Guinean people are warm and talkative, with a love for singing and dancing. They are accustomed to sharing their thoughts spontaneously; long periods of one-way lecturing can make students feel stifled and bored, causing them to subconsciously express their views by interrupting or contradicting the speaker. Quietly waiting does not align with local social norms.

3.1.3 Religious Observances Affect Classroom Performance

There are 14 students in the class, 12 of whom are Muslim. The Friday noon prayer takes a toll on their energy, and by the first class of the afternoon, the students look very tired. If the teacher simply lectures without engaging them, the students will grow even more fatigued. At this point, they may interrupt or voice objections in class as a way to stay focused and better participate in the lesson.

3.2 The Language Learning Level: Resistance to Expression Caused by Obstacles in Learning Chinese from Scratch

3.2.1 Chinese is a difficult language, and not being able to understand it can lead to negative emotions.

For Guinean students, both their native language and French are non-tonal languages. Chinese, with its four tones, measure words, and word order, differs vastly from their native languages. Even now, after studying Chinese for seven months, these international students still ask their teachers, “Is this the third or fourth tone?” after seeing a Chinese character or hearing the teacher read it aloud. They consider the first and fourth tones to be the most difficult, and the difficulty level increases sharply when they reach the HSK Level 3 stage, which focuses on complex sentences. When students do not understand a concept, they are unable to ask clear questions using their limited Chinese and can only vent their confusion by interrupting or arguing.

3.2.2 Students tend to express themselves in their native language

When students encounter concepts they find difficult to understand, their first instinct is to communicate in French or a local Guinean language rather than trying to ask questions in simple Chinese. Combined with the lack of a formal,

structured channel for asking questions in class, this leads students to resort to interrupting the lesson to chat.

3.2.3 The textbooks are out of step with local realities, and students lack a sense of connection to the material.

The listening and speaking materials that accompany the HSK are closely tied to everyday life in China—such as buying a house and entertaining guests—which are very different from the mindset of Guinean students. Scenarios and ways of thinking typical of Guinean life are rarely featured, so students find the content difficult to understand and do not feel a strong sense of connection or familiarity with the material.

3.3 Core Shortcomings in Early-Stage Classroom Management

3.3.1 Classroom rules are communicated in a one-way manner, with little student participation.

At the beginning of the course, since I had only taught elementary school students in my home country and this was my first time working with international students, I simply adopted the rules from Chinese classrooms back home. I unilaterally informed the students, “Unless absolutely necessary, please do not interrupt the class or raise your hand to speak. If you have questions that require a lengthy explanation, you can discuss them with the teacher after class.” I failed to explain the differences in classroom etiquette between the two cultures. The students passively accepted the rules, but may not have agreed with them internally, resulting in weak enforcement of the rules.

3.3.2 Management methods are one-dimensional and heavy-handed

When students interrupt in class, I initially resorted to strict measures, such as requiring them to raise their hands before speaking. However, this only suppressed their outward expressions without addressing the root of the problem; it denied students the opportunity to voice their opinions. When students are suppressed for too long, their reactions become even more intense.

3.3.3 Lacking a way to express themselves, students have questions but don’t know how to bring them up.

There was no time set aside for questions or discussion during the entire class, so whenever students suddenly thought of something, they would just interrupt the teacher because there wasn’t a suitable time to ask.

3.4 The Problem of Exaggerated Class Group Characteristics

The 12 male students in the class make up the vast majority of the group. The boys are highly inclined to engage in social interaction, and when one of them speaks up, it easily triggers the rest of the group to follow suit; the two girls, influenced by the group dynamic, do not actively object but passively join in the idle chatter, further adding to the noise in the classroom.

4. Improvement Plan: Designing a Student-Centered, Guidance-Based Classroom Management Intervention

Moving away from the traditional “prohibition and restriction” approach to management and drawing on humanistic “student-centered” theory, the core objective is not to suppress students’ desire to express themselves, but rather to establish orderly channels for expression, resolve cross-cultural conflicts, and reduce the tendency to interrupt others or contradict them in public at its root. The comprehensive intervention plan is divided into four major modules.

4.1 Teachers and Students Collaborate to Establish Classroom Speech Guidelines to Resolve Cultural Perception Conflicts

4.1.1 Specialized Classroom Collaboration Initiative

Using an entire listening and speaking class period and a bilingual (Chinese and French) presentation, the lesson compares and contrasts speaking etiquette in Chinese classrooms with that in local Guinean classrooms, explaining the significance of classroom behavior across different cultures. Students are organized into small groups to discuss how to ask questions appropriately—in a way that allows them to express their own views without interrupting the teacher’s lesson.

4.1.2 Work Together to Establish Three Classroom Rules

(1) Raising Hands Agreement: If students have questions or differing opinions during the lesson, they should raise their hands to let the teacher know; each class will set aside 5 minutes for a dedicated question-and-answer session to address all questions at once; (2) Text Comprehension Agreement: If students find the dialogues in the text difficult to understand, they should write their questions on sticky notes for the whole class to discuss during the dedicated question-and-answer session; (3) Speaking Agreement: Everyone should speak in turn, refrain from interrupting others, and respect the teacher and fellow students.

4.1.3 Culture Sharing Time

Set aside 10 minutes each week for “Guinea Culture Sharing Time,” during which students can freely describe daily life in their hometowns using a little French and simple Chinese. Channeling their desire to express themselves into a designated time slot helps prevent disruptions to classroom order.

4.2 Incorporating Short, Interactive Activities into Lessons to Unleash Students’ Desire for Immediate Expression

Incorporate a 1-minute quick Q&A session every 20 minutes. The teacher should proactively ask students if there are any parts they don’t understand and encourage them to speak up, thereby reducing the number of interruptions during the lecture. If students have any spontaneous questions during the lecture, they should write them down on sticky notes; these

will be addressed collectively during the 5-minute Q&A period.

4.3 Localizing Teaching Materials to Reduce Objections at the Source

Before class, collect examples of everyday life in Guinea — such as buying coffee at a market, traditional West African festivals, transgender social interactions, and local modes of transportation—to replace the Chinese-style example sentences in the textbook. When explaining grammar and vocabulary, prioritize using local materials familiar to students to enhance their sense of connection to the content and reduce public objections stemming from resistance to the lesson material. When students suggest changes to the materials, adopt their suggestions immediately and collaboratively create example sentences, transforming “objections” into collaborative classroom activities.

4.4 Empowering Students Through Roles to Channel the Excess Energy of Active Students

Have the students who tend to interrupt take turns serving as classroom assistants, responsible for leading the class in reading, facilitating discussions, and collecting questions. This channels their desire to speak into contributing to the class, thereby reducing disruptive interruptions. Rotating the roles weekly ensures students don’t feel it’s unfair, and everyone gets a chance to participate.

5. Implementation of the Plan and Validation of Results

5.1 First Phase of Implementation: Establishing Classroom Agreements and Setting Aside Dedicated Time Slots for Expression

Implementation Details: Establishing a positive teacher-student relationship is very important, as it helps alleviate international students’ resistance. Teachers should interact with students regularly to gain a comprehensive understanding of them [7]. Classroom activities can be organized to collaboratively establish classroom agreements, including a daily 5-minute question-and-answer session and a weekly session for sharing Guinean culture.

Observation Findings: Students have begun to develop the habit of raising their hands, but some boys still habitually interrupt. While students’ tendency to challenge textbook content has decreased slightly, there has been no fundamental improvement.

Shortcomings: The current issue is that although the class rules have been established, they have been set aside without any incentive measures, and the student assistants have not enforced them. As a result, students have no outlet for their energy.

Optimization and Adjustments: Implement a points system where students can earn points for raising their hands to speak and participating in adapting teaching materials, which can be redeemed for small rewards; rotate the teaching assistants weekly to ensure everyone feels involved.

5.2 Second Phase of Implementation: Simultaneous Rollout of Points-Based Incentives and Classroom Teaching Assistants

Implementation Details: Implement a points-based reward system; have each student take a turn as a classroom teaching assistant; include a one-minute Q&A session every 20 minutes; and incorporate local Guinean scenarios into classroom activities.

Results: The number of random interruptions decreased by 40%; most students were willing to wait and express their views during designated Q&A periods; public rebuttals of classmates and the instructor decreased significantly; students no longer interrupted directly but instead proactively voiced their thoughts.

Current Issues: The 5-minute Q&A period is too short and frequently runs over time, affecting the teaching schedule; male students are particularly interested in the point-based reward system.

Optimization and Adjustments: Strictly enforce time limits during question-and-answer sessions; if time runs out, address the remaining questions before the next class begins. Teachers should offer more verbal encouragement to students, especially those who are shy and hesitant to speak up.

5.3 Third Phase of Implementation: Differentiated Guidance and Refinement of the Collaborative Content Creation Process

Implementation Details: The rotation of teaching assistants continued as usual; classroom activities were enhanced to incorporate elements of Guinean culture; and a dual-track incentive system (points + verbal praise in front of the entire class) was implemented.

Results: In class, instances of students interrupting the teacher without permission or publicly contradicting classmates have decreased by more than 70%; when students encounter difficulties, they no longer interrupt immediately but instead proactively write their questions on sticky notes to ask collectively; classroom coherence has improved, allowing two sentence patterns to be successfully covered in each class.

Current Issues: Some teaching assistants chat with nearby classmates, resulting in a situation where the teacher is lecturing while students are talking among themselves; however, a small number of interruptions still occur during the explanation of more challenging HSK Level 3 material.

Optimization and Adjustments: Teaching assistants' performance is now tied to points; points will be deducted for chatting. During sentence explanations, long sentences will be broken down into shorter ones to lower the difficulty for students and reduce interruptions caused by misunderstandings.

5.4 Fourth Phase of Implementation: Normalized and Stable Operation of the Program

By integrating the optimization strategies from the first three

rounds, we have established a consistent, long-term classroom management model that completely eliminates rigid management tactics—such as public criticism and reprimands—and focuses primarily on guidance, motivation, and collaborative learning.

6. Research Findings and Recommendations for Classroom Management

6.1 Research Findings

Guinean international students with zero Chinese proficiency who interrupt the teacher during class or openly contradict their classmates' answers are not doing so intentionally. This behavior stems from the influence of Guinean culture and the anxiety they feel as newcomers to China studying Chinese. It is also a result of the teacher's initial reliance on one-way instruction. Therefore, simply reprimanding them will only backfire.

Teachers should adopt a student-centered approach and avoid simply suppressing students. Instead, they should collaborate with students to establish classroom rules, designate specific time slots for students to ask questions, and involve students in managing the class alongside the teacher. Only by doing so can we address the root causes of students interrupting the teacher's lecture and openly contradicting their classmates' answers.

In this class, boys make up the majority, and they tend to be more active and enthusiastic during class. By having students take turns serving as teaching assistants and implementing a point system, the teacher can foster a sense of participation, which in turn stimulates students' interest in learning and helps maintain order in the classroom.

(2) Practical Recommendations for Managing Listening and Speaking Courses for International Students from Guinea with No Prior Knowledge

Early in the course, establish classroom rules together with the students so they feel that the teacher isn't the sole decision-maker—they, too, are co-creators of the rules.

Set aside a specific time during class for a question-and-answer session, during which students can ask the teacher questions written on sticky notes. This reduces instances of students randomly interrupting the teacher during lectures and allows students to exchange ideas with one another during the designated Q&A time.

Before class, collect material on daily life in Guinea and adapt the example sentences in the textbook. Turn students' objections into collaborative classroom tasks to minimize public rebuttals.

For boys with a strong desire to express themselves, assign them rotating roles as classroom assistants to channel their excess energy in a positive way. Avoid criticizing students in front of the class at all times; communication and correction should be handled privately after class.

(2) Limitations of the Study and Future Directions

This study involved only 14 international students from Guinea, which is a very small sample size; therefore, its findings cannot be generalized to all international students from Guinea in West Africa. Furthermore, the study period was very short. In future research, the number of international students from French-speaking West Africa could be increased, and artificial intelligence could be incorporated to further improve classroom efficiency.

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