

# A Brief Analysis of the Potential Significance and Innovative Strategies of Informal Learning in Traditional Chinese Medicine Cultural Transmission: A Case Study of the International Students from Hunan University of Chinese Medicine

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**Abstract:** From the perspective of Chinese cultural communication, this paper conducts qualitative research on informal learning among international students at the Hunan University of Chinese Medicine, collects question-answer data by way of interviews, analyzes the commonalities and personalities of informal learning among different objects, and analyzes them, to explore the significance of informal learning and the possibility of its innovation path in the context of traditional Chinese medicine culture transmission.

**Keywords:** Informal Learning; TCM; International Students

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## 1. Introduce

In the late 1940s, UNESCO put forward the concept of Informal Learning. Informal learning is learning led by daily life, individual experience, work demands, or entertainment. A review of literature on informal learning at home and abroad shows that informal learning has strong adaptability, which can be applied to many fields such as medicine, the workplace, education, and even the community. Informal learning is a kind of lifelong learning, which plays a crucial role in improving learning ability<sup>[1]</sup>.

By summarizing the literature on informal learning at home and abroad, it is clear that the innovation and development of informal learning are imminent. We've known the dynamics of informal learning research at home and abroad and the blankness of cultural communication perspective<sup>[2]</sup>.

With the deepening of relevant studies, informal learning has gradually come into the public eye. The study of informal learning by foreign researchers involves many aspects, including the connotation, characteristics, theoretical basis, and value of informal learning. Informal learning has been applied to many fields<sup>[3]</sup>.

But how to innovate informal learning and explore more standardized and systematic informal learning has become a new problem.

Recently, research on cross-cultural communication theory is prevalent. The findings of Gary McLean (2020) suggest that professionals in adult education and informal learning workplaces need to pay attention to cultural influences and localization efforts when adopting foreign theories or practices. Fan Simeng (2021) also proposed strengthening the contact with teachers through assisted informal learning to promote the cause of international Chinese education. This perspective is worth further exploration. For example, Yang Qing and Chen Xiaoqing (2021) put forward valuable suggestions on improving students' cross-cultural communication competence and building an informal learning community and expounded various modes of multilingual interactive learning of online learning

and offered suggestions for improvement. Under the strategic needs of traditional culture to go out, domestic scholar Bao Xinhong pointed out that the learning method guided by the concept of informal learning is essential in the process of learning Chinese traditional culture. However, these researches are still few, which are not enough to demonstrate the important role of informal learning in cross-cultural communication for international students<sup>[4]</sup>.

As English majors at the Hunan University of Chinese Medicine, we have a unique perspective, that is, the significance of informal learning in cross-cultural communication. We focus on the international students who practice this possibility. They have an educational background in traditional Chinese medicine and are also important subjects of cross-cultural communication. This perspective seems to coincide with the blank field of informal learning at home and abroad. Therefore, we conducted dialogue and question-and-answer interviews with some international students from the Hunan University of Chinese Medicine based on their TCM cultural learning background, in an attempt to explore this possibility from the data<sup>[5]</sup>.

By comparing the commonality and individuality of informal learning among overseas students interviewed, the potential significance of informal learning in TCM cultural communication can not be underestimated in combination with the realistic background, to provide vision and ideas for exploring better strategies and routes of TCM cultural communication<sup>[6]</sup>.

## 2. Research problem

This paper is processed by following questions by way of an interview.

- 2.1 Do you know anything about informal learning? (No, the interviewer will explain it.)**
- 2.2 What are the main ways of informal learning? (Place and manner)**
- 2.3 Learning difficulties mainly through what methods to solve.**
- 2.4 The influence of school atmosphere on informal learning at the Hunan University of Chinese Medicine.**
- 2.5 Your general evaluation of informal study at Chinese Medicine University. (advantages, disadvantages, improvements to be made)**
- 2.6 Do you think Chinese Medicine University should hold activities in traditional Chinese culture? related to the informal learning of Chinese Medicine culture?**
- 2.7 Whether they are willing to spread traditional Chinese Medicine culture?**
- 2.8 If you could give us some suggestions on the effective dissemination of traditional Chinese Medicine culture in your country?**

## 3. Research process

### 3.1 Research objectives.

The research is based on a total of 6 participants (4 males, and 2 females), who are international students at the Hunan University of Chinese Medicine<sup>[7]</sup>.

Table 1 Participants

Name	Gender	Age	Nationality	Major	Class
Bilal Mazhar	Male	30	Pakistan	Medicine	B,2017
Rand	Female	23	Syria	MBBS	2018
ZAYN	Male	22	Pakistan	MBBS	2018
Liting	Female	23	Pakistan	MBBS	2018
Maqbool	Male	26	Pakistan	MBBS	2018
IMRAN GUL	Male	23	Pakistan	Western medicine	B

(Emphasize: Each participant has an abbreviation, such as T1, T2, T3...each number stands for the different participant in Table 1)

### 3.2 Methods

The methods presented here are featured in two stages. The first stage focuses on literature reading and analysis based on the literature method to determine the main research direction. The second stage is to conduct a statistical analysis of data through interviews according to the research direction<sup>[8]</sup>.

### 3.3 Data collection and summary

Through interviews, we learned some commonalities and personalities of these students' informal learning.



Figure1



Figure2

( 2 figures above taken on September 23, 2022, shows an interview in the corner of the School of International Education, Hunan University of Traditional Chinese Medicine )

Based on the background of a traditional Chinese medicine university, they will attend courses related to traditional Chinese medicine culture. After the formal learning, interested students like T2 said “I will independently carry out some exploratory learning, such as attending the traditional Chinese medicine culture-related activities of the school or going to the traditional Chinese medicine plantation of the school for observation, retrieval, and understanding.” The activities described above do not always involve the complete intervention and guidance of someone other than the learner. At the same time, T3 also gives his opinion that “We have more or less voluntarily or involuntarily received some TCM health treatment experiences, such as acupuncture and drinking traditional Chinese medicine. And I hope to bring my parents to experience TCM treatment. In the process of these experiences, I also learned some knowledge of traditional Chinese medicine culture, not limited to the organization and arrangement of school education. ” The places, forms, channels, and even acceptance levels of informal learning of these interviewees were different. Some subjects like T1 and T4 retrieved superficial knowledge on the Internet by themselves, while others like T5 knew some core concepts of TCM through casual conversations with teachers, classmates, and friends. All of them don't even know the concept of informal learning at first. However, when they were introduced to the concept, most of the students like T2, T3, T4, and T6 said that their informal learning was more meaningful than the education provided by the school because they had more autonomy in the process and could learn a lot of different things. There are also two of them, T1 and T5 who holds the opposite view that they are more likely to do formal learning. However, all subjects mentioned the scarcity of platform resources provided by schools and the insufficient popularity of the application of informal learning, so most people could not make good use of it<sup>[9]</sup>.

### 3.4 Data analysis

The data analysis finally points to the fact that, although it is obvious that these overseas students have a strong desire to spread TCM culture to their own countries and even to the international world but schools still provide few TCM exchange platforms and opportunities. They are less likely to do informal learning subjectively. And they are a little confused about how to do informal learning more systematically and effectively.

## 4. Results and discussion

### 4.1 Results of research

Most informal learning helps greatly in both the breadth and depth of learning. Informal learning is also unique in its flexibility. It is not limited by time and space and can be carried out at any time, anywhere. These characteristics of informal learning provide people with a multifunctional way of learning. In some ways, it works better than formal learning like schooling.

The crux of the problem is that although informal learning has many advantages compared with formal learning, it also has many inevitable defects. Informal learning is very dependent on its learning and has low standardization. The flexibility of informal learning makes higher requirements on learners' self-restraint ability and attention. Since there is no guidance from the instructor and

it is not restricted by time and space, learners can carry on or stop independent learning at any time, and they are easy to get distracted during the learning process. In addition, informal learning is also a great challenge to learners' logical thinking and exploration ability. Without good information retrieval ability or clear thinking, it is difficult to develop the breadth and depth of learning. Moreover, according to the specific objectives of the interview, we can not deny the fact that the platform and resources related to TCM culture are insufficient and there is no standardized and systematic informal learning mode.

## 4.2 Possible solutions

Based on these real problems, we can explore solutions.

4.2.1 The first thing to do is to popularize the concept of informal learning, so that the general public and even the grassroots areas to contact and accept informal learning. And we should attach significance to international students in China.

4.2.2 Moreover, on the one hand, national governments can support more interesting and interactive cultural exchange platforms. More TCM cultural activities should be carried out in schools, workplaces, communities, and other fields, and the participation and intervention of the public, especially cross-cultural subjects such as overseas students or foreigners, should be encouraged. By allowing such groups to feel a more profound cultural experience in the practice of informal learning, cultural transmission, and localization will be promoted.

4.2.3 On the other hand, we should speed up the establishment and popularization of a set of standardized and exemplary informal learning templates and systems for reference throughout the country. For example, we should develop some time management apps to regulate learners' self-control ability or provide the official retrieval map of traditional Chinese cultural resources on the network platform to make informal learning more efficient.

## 5. Conclusion

This study takes the international students from the Hunan University of Chinese Medicine as an example to discuss the significant advantages of informal learning and the shortcomings of its practical application. Due to the lack of cross-cultural research with international students as the main body, this paper just fills this gap. Given this situation, the potential significance of informal learning and possible measures to make up for its shortcomings are explored under the research practice of interviews. There will be more possibilities for the development of informal learning in the future. We expect more perspectives on informal learning to emerge. And in addition to the international students in TCM colleges, we also look forward to the intervention and support of more subjects on the road of TCM culture transmission.

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