

Language Strategies and Language Preferences in the Russian Tertiary Sector, the International Trade and the Impact of the One Belt One Road Initiative

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ABSTRACT: While trade policies are important for international trade, the significance of the link between language and trade cannot be ignored. Understanding the language dimensions of trade is essential for assessing the broader impact of the One Belt One Road Initiative (OBORI). This study aims to: (1) analyse the perceived influence of the OBORI on China and Russia; (2) examine the current status of language strategies by both countries within the OBORI's multilingual framework; and (3) explore the strategic link between language and international exchange, particularly through language strategies. Questionnaire data from Russian university students were analysed to assess preferences for English and Chinese language courses. The findings suggest that both languages are poised for continued relevance in the context of the OBORI in Russia. As China deepens its engagement with the OBORI, graduates with proficiency in Chinese language and cultural literacy will be increasingly sought after—especially within Russian institutions and industries. The results indicate that the growing importance of Chinese language in Russia's tertiary sector, with long-term implications for international collaboration, trade readiness, and cultural diplomacy.

Keywords: Russian, English, Chinese, International Education, Intercultural Communication.



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INTRODUCTION

In September 2013, the Representative of the People's Republic of China, Xi Jinping first publicly proposed the OBORI when he gave a speech in Kazakhstan. Soon after, the Chinese government officially incorporated the OBORI into its national strategy. At the third Plenary Session of the 18th Communist Party Congress Central Committee held in November of 2013, the government adopted the "Decision of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China on Some Major Issues Concerning Comprehensively Deepening [economic] Reforms." The decision was adopted

with the aim of promoting the development of the OBORI, and in the hopes of creating a shift in world power (Party, 2013).

In March 2015, the Chinese government authorized relevant departments to release the ‘Vision and Actions on Jointly Building the Silk Road Economic Belt and 21st-Century Maritime Silk Road.’ The document proposed the framework and prospects for actions of the OBORI (Framework, 2015).

For example, China's participation in the construction of railways, ports, roads, dams and industrial corridors in the countries of the OBORI has helped expand China's economic influence in Asia, the Middle East, Europe, and Africa (W. Liu & Dunford, 2016). According to Kravchenko (2017), through the transport links with which the Chinese authorities have made their investments in the countries along the OBORI, it will be much easier for the Chinese authorities to supply Chinese goods to the markets along the OBORI, and transport natural resources from the countries of the OBORI to China.

Russia is located in northeast Eurasia. It is bordered by the Arctic Ocean to the north, the Pacific Ocean to the east, and the Black Sea and the Caspian Sea to the south. The Ural Mountains, which stretch from north to south, traditionally represent a border between Europe and Asia (World Regional Geography, n.d.). The district of Siberia is located to the east of the Urals, sharing borders with Kazakhstan, China and Mongolia and stretching to the Arctic coast (Naumov, 2007).

Because of the geological advantages, one of China's key allies in implementing the OBORI is Russia. Given the influence of the sanctions imposed by Western countries (Official website of the European Union, 2014), the Russian authorities have been shifting their interests from the European Union (EU) in the West to China in the East (Kravchenko, 2017). As a key ally of the OBORI, more than half of the world's trade moves through Russia, which is considered a gateway country between the EU and Asia. Kravchenko (2017) provided the insight that, although in the beginning Russia and China were equal partners in the OBORI, Russia no longer enjoys that status. It is now a participant that needs China's support.

As international trade increases, effective communication between trading partners becomes more important. Economic activity among human beings cannot be achieved without language. There are many forms of languages that humans use, from spoken language, to written language, to language being expressed through gestures (Corballis, 1999). Marschak, (1965) argued that language is a tool with the same economic characteristics as physical capital, these characteristics include value, utility, cost, and benefit. The value of language includes social value and economic value. Language is not just a tool of communication, but also of persuasion, in order to influence the listener or reader (Dhir, 2005). With the development of society and economic globalization, the economic value embodied in language is more prominent. To realize increasing economic value, the need to learn additional languages grows. This fosters mutual understanding, which is essential for realizing that value (Schroedler, 2018).

The language diversity index is negatively correlated with bilateral trade flows (Melitz, 2008). Trading partners should strive to reduce transaction costs and promote a win-win situation for all

parties involved in the trading relationship (Cox, 2004). The value of costs that can be saved depends, to a large extent, on minimizing translation costs, minimizing lost time, and on all parties having a common understanding so that agreements are met (Beckman, 2011).

In a significant economic initiative such as the OBORI, the importance of language is undeniable. In the context of the OBORI, relevant language policies can contribute to a smoother operation of the OBORI. For instance, language policy along the OBORI could result in lower transaction costs. The main cost savings would be realized through a reduced need for interpreters and translation services, which will also reduce the time taken to have documents and spoken conversations translated, which are not generated by technologies (Masland et al., 2011). The likelihood of parties misunderstanding each other is also reduced, if all parties have an understanding of each other's language and culture.

The OBORI has benefited the member countries in trade. However, the problem in opening up overseas markets was an inability to find translation of speech and text into less commonly spoken languages. This inability is a hindrance to negotiations and creating contracts where all parties have a common understanding. If someone encountered a translation problem, they could only translate Chinese into English first, and then use translation software to translate into other languages. There are online tools that appear to be able to translate between less commonly used languages, however, due to the confidentiality of negotiations and agreements, using online tools might be a security risk (Giampieri, 2016). If English is not the primary language of either party, translation first to English, and then to the other party's language could introduce mistakes such as semantic errors in the process of machine translation of English into other languages (Popović & Ney, 2011). These errors could be undetected by both parties.

Determining a common language among countries with many diverse languages is important for maximizing the benefits of international trade (Egger & Toubal, 2016). The benefits of a common language are less friction, less time and cost translating, resulting in reducing the risk of misunderstanding (Al-Mallahma, 2025).

Governments see language as key to global influence to shape international relations through both culture and communication (Zhou, 2018). For example, in 2013, the Communist Party of China stated that it was necessary to actively carry out foreign cultural exchanges, strengthen international communication capabilities and create systems of foreign discourse, and promote Chinese culture to the world (Committee, 2013). In order to promote the sustainable development of the Chinese language in international communication, the government announced the Outline of the National Plan for Medium and Long-Term Education Reform and Development (2010-2020) and the Outline of the 13th Five-Year Plan for the National Economic and Social Development of the People's Republic of China. The goal of these plans is to promote the Chinese language in the international arena by arranging various events to stimulate the spread of the Chinese language, to support international Chinese education, and to improve the quality of the Confucius Institutes (Kai, 2012).

In addition to the establishment of Confucius Institutes, since the implementation of the OBORI, the Russian media has begun broadcasting relevant Chinese programs to encourage more citizens to take an interest in the region. For example, the TV documentary *Follow Uncle Ye to China*, was broadcast on Channel One on Russian TV, introducing the development of China today. It has caused a strong response in Russia and China. Yevgeny Kolesov (Uncle Ye), who has lived in China for many years, has won the favour of a wide audience with his first-hand perspective on site visits and a deeper understanding of China (Agency, 2016).

Chinese government authorities have been using China's international economic status to promote the spread of Chinese, giving full play to the role of Confucius Institutes, and taking up the opportunities brought by the OBORI to maximize the number of Chinese language exchanges (M. Liu et al., 2020).

Some scholars believe that the main body of Chinese cultural dissemination is still Chinese language teaching. Therefore, Chinese language courses provide some concrete and feasible promotion strategies in China. For example, the Chinese authorities have strengthened the strategic awareness of the international promotion of Chinese (integrate the resources and disciplinary advantages of Chinese universities, break through interdisciplinary barriers) and expanded communication channels, including increasing Sino-Russian exchange programmes and expanding the scale of Confucius Institutes. The demand for Chinese language courses in Russian universities is also an example of the increasing enthusiasm for learning Chinese in Russia (Li & Yu, 2019).

The above-mentioned increasing interest by students in Russia to learn Chinese corresponds with the course offerings by Russian universities. Considering the geographic expanse and regional diversity of Russia, the country offers a rich wide variety of tertiary education opportunities. Shifting from the natural landscapes to the academic terrain, this paper explores the distinct offerings at Russian higher education institutions, specifically focusing on English and Chinese language courses. The major districts have been identified: Central, Northwestern, Southern, North Caucasian, Volga, Ural, Siberian and Far Eastern districts. The language programs and academic approaches differ between these districts, reflecting the cultural diversity and distinct academic traditions prevalent in each.

Through an analysis of the data by district, we consider geographical and local influences in relation to the OBORI and their impact on the popularity of Chinese and English language programmes in Russian universities. This is an area of research that has had little focus in the past.

This study focuses on the universities of Russia and the experiences of graduates who had been studying at those universities. Specifically, it is about language choices among students and the level of awareness of the teaching and learning of English and Chinese in Russian universities.

The study objectives are that through this study of the economic effects of language policies and strategies, a contribution can be made to the understanding of how language policies and strategies may be improved in the future to promote economic growth and closer trade relations. Even

though this is a goal of the OBORI, countries not involved with the OBORI can also benefit from this research.

Regarding the effect of the introduction of the OBORI on foreign language programs in Russian universities, an overall question has been raised:

What impact has the OBORI had on the perceived popularity of foreign language programmes in the universities of Russia?

To address this general question, three more specific questions were considered:

- a. What changes can be observed in Chinese and English language courses offerings in the universities of Russia between 2010-2014 and since 2015?
- b. What changes can be observed in students' enrolment in Chinese and English language courses in the universities of Russia between 2010-2014 and since 2015?
- c. Is there a significant difference between (i) the number of students enrolled in foreign language programmes and (ii) the number of Chinese and English language courses offered between 2010-2014 and since 2015 in the universities of Russia?

The objectives of the study were to investigate the interests of Russian university students in English and Chinese language courses, and how those interests aligned with the priorities of Russian universities. The results of this research on student preferences offers insights into how Russian universities can refine foreign language curriculum and policies to meet the needs of students, while also working towards achieving the universities' priorities.

METHOD

This study employed quantitative methods in the questionnaire to obtain answers for the overarching research question: What impact has the OBORI had on the popularity of Chinese and English language courses in Russian universities? The quantitative data analysis involved several statistical procedures such as descriptive analysis.

These are the steps conducted in the research. First, a link of the online questionnaire to the respondents was shared, who were either studying at Russian universities or were graduates from Russian universities. The questionnaire was translated into Russian then administered in such a way as to cater to the language preference of the participants. The questionnaire included questions such as whether they thought their university offered any English and Chinese language courses, whether they were/are enrolled in any English and Chinese language courses, and other similar questions regarding English and Chinese language courses. After receiving the data, the data were compiled onto an Excel spreadsheet. The responses were sorted out according to age, gender and district.

A total of 198 respondents filled out the questionnaire, from which only 163 questionnaires were deemed to be valid, representing 82.3% of all responses. Answers to the questionnaire were invalid

and the responses were discarded where they included cases in which the respondents indicated that they did not graduate from a university in Russia and/or they were duplicates from the same IP address (more than one questionnaire was from the same IP address). In some districts the number of respondents was less than 10. As there were insufficient responses, the district responses were aggregated into larger districts to enable meaningful analysis to be undertaken. Analysis of the responses showed different trends, depending on which district the respondents undertook their study.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

In order to comprehensively answer the over-arching question, first, the distribution of courses across districts in Russia was analysed. In details, the availability and popularity of foreign language courses that have been offered by universities in different districts of Russia before and after the implementation of the OBORI was considered, in order to see the effect the OBORI has had, if any, on decisions by Russian universities on their Chinese and English language course offerings.

In the questionnaire, the respondents were asked to choose the year when they received their highest degree. The present study classified the respondents' year of graduation into their year of graduation. A comparison was made between the relative frequencies of offering English and Chinese language courses at different times and in different districts, using a parallel data set to analyse the trends. It was then considered whether the OBORI may have had any influence. Based on this present research, the conclusions corresponded with the findings as reported by the OBORI. The aim is to find the change in the perceived pervasiveness of foreign language courses, or classes, from before and after the implementation of the OBORI. The findings can be drawn from answers regarding students' knowledge on their own courses, if they undertook any English or Chinese courses, or if not, their knowledge on whether or not the university in question offered foreign language courses. Where a university did or does offer foreign language courses, the number of classes run has also been drawn from the students' answers.

In order to demonstrate the influence of the formation of the OBORI on the frequency and availability of English and Chinese language course offerings, three factors were taken into account. The first two factors were the year of graduation of the individual respondent and district where each respondent was attending university, which served as independent variables. The third factor was the availability of the English and Chinese language course offerings at the universities in the questionnaire, which served as the dependent variable.

The universities from which data were collected were located in the following districts: the Central Federal District, North-Western Federal District, Southern Federal District, North Caucasian Federal District, Volga Federal District, Ural Federal District, Siberian Federal District and Far Eastern Federal District of Russia.

The following table provides data on the percentage of universities according to the eight Russian Federal districts that offered English and Chinese language courses. The respondents were able to

choose multiple options. The percentages in each district represent the proportion of universities the respondents indicated that offered English and Chinese language courses.

Table 1. English and Chinese language courses offered by universities in 8 Federal Districts.

			English courses	Chinese courses	Total respondents
Federal District of highest degree achieved	Central Federal District	No.	43	19	46
		%	93%	41.3%	
	Northwestern Federal District	No.	21	10	30
		%	70%	33.3%	
	Southern Federal District	No.	17	4	19
		%	89.4%	21%	
	North Caucasian Federal District	No.	6	1	6
		%	100%	16.7%	
	Volga Federal District	No.	11	8	13
		%	84.6%	61.5%	
	Ural Federal District	No.	8	4	9
		%	88.9%	44.4%	
	Siberian Federal District	No.	23	15	28
		%	82.1%	53.6%	
	Far Eastern Federal District	No.	10	7	12
		%	83.9%	58.3%	
Total	No.		139	68	163

The following patterns can be seen from the above table.

While English language courses were offered on average in a higher proportion compared to Chinese across Russia, the distribution of English language courses offered across Russia was not uniform. In the Northwestern Federal District of Russia, there were considerably fewer English language courses being offered, with only 70% of participants reporting that their university offered English language courses. In all other Federal Districts, as reported by respondents, more

than 80% of respondents reported that English language courses were offered by the universities attended by the respondents.

The next table shows an analysis of the graduation year of students with their highest degree compared with the spread of foreign language courses studied.

Table 2. Graduation year of students and the percentage of course offerings

			English classes	Chinese classes	Total
The graduation year of respondents with their highest degree	Before 2000	No.	2	1	4
		%	50%	25%	
	2000-2004	No.	9	0	9
		%	100%	0	
	2005-2009	No.	14	0	14
		%	100%	0	
	2010-2014	No.	39	12	41
		%	98%	29%	
	2015-2019	No.	24	18	34
		%	71%	53%	
	2020-2024	No.	44	34	52
		%	85%	65%	
	After 2025	No.	7	3	9
		%	78%	33%	
Total		No.	139	68	163

From the above table, the following observations can be made:

Comparing the data of university graduates and their year of graduation, 98% of respondents in the years 2010-2014 reported being aware of English language course offerings by their university. In the years 2015-2019 (after the introduction of the OBORI) across Russia, only 71% of graduates reported being aware of English language course offerings by their university, there was a decrease of 27%.

When comparing the same time periods for Chinese language courses, there was a corresponding 24% increase in the level of awareness of Chinese language courses. In the years 2010-2014, only 29% of university graduates were aware of Chinese language courses, whereas 53% of respondents indicated that Chinese language classes were offered at their universities between 2015 and 2019. There was insufficient data from the questionnaire to draw definite conclusions. Factors such as

students' awareness and perception of the availability of English language and Chinese language classes may be influenced by personal interests. If the students did not have a need or desire to learn another language, they would not have sought information on language courses, or taken notice of any language promotions. Hypothetically speaking, after the introduction of the OBORI the drop in the percentage of students studying English courses may have been because students were less aware of the English courses than the Chinese language courses being offered at their universities.

After reviewing the questionnaires for students across a variety of universities throughout Russia, it was found that overall, universities did increase the availability of Chinese language courses. Although the data obtained from the students were based on their individual experience and perception, the results showed that Chinese course offerings grew at a higher rate compared to the growth of English course offerings within Russia.

The following table reflects the figures obtain from the data of all the respondents who responded "I have foreign language classes in my university" and those who signed up for English and Chinese language classes across districts.

Table 3. Foreign language courses taken by Federal district of highest achieved degree

			English courses	Chinese courses	Total respondents
Federal district of highest achieved degree	Central Federal District	No.	22	14	31
		%	71%	45.2%	
	Northwestern Federal District	No.	8	6	16
		%	50%	37.5%	
	Southern Federal District	No.	9	3	12
		%	75%	25%	
	North Caucasian Federal District	No.	4	0	5
		%	80%	0	
	Volga Federal District	No.	8	6	9
		%	88.9%	66.7%	
	Ural Federal District	No.	3	3	4
		%	75%	75%	
	Siberian Federal District	No.	15	4	17
		%	88.2%	23.5%	
		No.	2	3	4

	Far Eastern Federal District	%	50%	75%	
Total		No.	71	39	98

The table shows that in all districts without regard to the year of graduation, the number of students who have enrolled in English language courses was greater than the number that enrolled in Chinese language courses.

In the Central Federal District, Northwestern Federal District, Southern Federal District, North Caucasian Federal District, and Siberian Federal District, the percentage of Chinese language course enrolments for students was under 50% of the total respondents. By contrast, in other districts, the percentage was more than 50% of the respondents. In summary, the overall enrolment rate in English language courses was greater than the enrolment rate of Chinese language courses. However, in the Far Eastern Federal District, the percentage of Chinese language course enrolments for students was higher than that of English language course enrolments for students (75% of the total respondents v.s. 50% of the total respondents).

Moreover, in the Northwestern Federal District and Volga Federal District, the difference between the enrolments in English language courses and Chinese language courses was less than 25% of the total respondents, while in Ural Federal District, they were equal.

The following table represents the relation between the graduation year of the student's highest degree and the enrolment rate of students enrolling in English and Chinese language courses:

Table 4. The graduation year of students and the enrolment rates of foreign language courses

			English classes	Chinese classes	Total
The graduation year of respondents with their highest degree	2000-2004	No.	3	0	3
		%	100%	0	
	2005-2009	No.	7	0	7
		%	100.0%	0	
	2010-2014	No.	16	7	22
		%	72.8%	31.9%	
	2015-2019	No.	14	8	22
		%	63.6%	36.3%	
	2020-2024	No.	27	24	38
		%	71%	63.1%	
	After 2025	No.	3	0	4

	%	75%	0	
Total	No.	71	39	98

As can be seen in the table above, there was a downward trend in the enrolment rate for English language courses between 2015 and 2019. In comparing English language course enrolments among respondents in years 2010-2014 to those in 2015-2019, it was found an enrolment drop from 72.8% of the total respondents in 2010-2014 to 63.6% of the total respondents in 2015-2019. In contrast, from 2015 to 2019, there was a slight increase in the percentage of Chinese language course enrolments compared to the period before the introduction of the OBORI in 2015. The enrolment rate for Chinese language courses was 31.9% of respondents in 2010-2014, but in 2015-2019, the enrolment rate increased to 36.3% of respondents.

From 2015, interest in studying English for students increased only in the Central Federal District and Southern Federal District compared to students in other districts. However, there was a noticeable increase in interest in Chinese language courses among students. Within these increases, enrolment rates for Chinese language courses were highest in the Far Eastern Federal District, with the rate of student enrolment for these courses increasing faster than for English language courses.

In the previous section it was concluded that there is a difference in the enrolment in English and Chinese language courses by geographic location within Russia. In general, the enrolment in English courses was greater than the enrolment rate of Chinese language courses. However, in the Far Eastern Federal District, the percentage of Chinese language course enrolments for students was higher than for English language course enrolments (75% of the total respondents versus 50% of the total respondents).

The Northwestern Federal District and Volga Federal District had modest differences of less than 25% of the total respondents in English language courses and Chinese language courses, while in the Ural Federal District enrolments were equal. Therefore, students from these districts can be provided with more options from which to choose Chinese courses.

Beyond preference, other underlying motives of students to pursue with language learning, ranging from personal interest to career progression.

In this section, the initial motivation among respondents to learn the English and Chinese languages, and their views on the long-term views on the value of English and Chinese given their perceived impact of the OBORI in Russia were analysed. The goal is to provide data and analysis which helps us understand whether the OBORI has had an impact on the decisions to provide more English or Chinese courses in the tertiary sector. The data analysis can provide insights as to what new possible investments may be made to increase English and Chinese programs to accommodate the OBORI environment. Thus, this section focuses on the responses from the questionnaire regarding the motivations of students for studying English and/or Chinese together

with their views on the long-term prospects for these disciplines, given the introduction of the OBORI. Students were given the option to choose as many responses as they wished.

In Table 5 below, the responses of the students regarding their motivation to choose Chinese or English were summarized.

Table 5. The reasons students have selected English language courses

		No. of responses	%
The reasons for choosing English language courses	Purely liked English	25	16.4%
	To be able to communicate with English-speaking foreigners	13	8.6%
	To expand my career options	50	32.9%
	For passing exams	16	10.5%
	I liked the teacher(s)	1	0.6%
	My family/relatives have connections with this language	4	2.6%
	I wanted to go to English-speaking countries to work or live	26	17.1%
	To get to know the culture of English-speaking countries better	17	11.2%
	Total	152	100%

As seen in the above table, the three most frequent reasons for studying English were: 1. to expand career options (32.9% of responses); 2. the desire to go to English-speaking countries to work or live (17.1% of responses); and 3. the English language is appealing (16.4% of responses).

When comparing these results with the ones for students who chose to study Chinese, this study showed that the students' reasons for choosing their respective languages differed. Thus, the same number of respondents ticked the box indicating their motivation to study Chinese was to expand career options (24%) as the ones who ticked the box indicating their motivation was the desire to go to Chinese-speaking countries to work or live (24%). Additionally, 19% of responses indicated an interest in getting to know the culture of China better. The full breakdown for the motivations behind taking Chinese classes is shown in the table below.

Table 6. The reasons students have selected Chinese language courses

		No.	%
The reasons for choosing Chinese language courses	Purely liked Chinese	16	16%
	To be able to communicate with Chinese-speaking foreigners	10	10%
	To expand my career options	24	24%
	For passing exams	3	3%
	I liked the teacher(s)	3	3%
	My family/relatives have connections with this language	1	1%
	I wanted to go to Chinese-speaking countries to work or live	24	24%
	To get to know the culture of China better	19	19%
Total		100	100%

The tables suggest that the students pursuing the study of English and Chinese were motivated by the desire to enhance their careers (For English: 32.9% of respondents, for Chinese: 24% of respondents).

The further analysis was grouped into three themes to draw some over-arching conclusions about students' motivation for learning English and/or Chinese. These themes are:

1. Self-advancement: To expand career options; For passing exams, I wanted to go to Chinese/English-speaking countries to work or live;
2. Curiosity: The language is appealing to me, to be able to communicate with Chinese/English-speaking foreigners; I liked the teacher(s); to get to know the culture of China/English-speaking countries better;
3. Identity: My family/relatives have connections with this language.

In the table below, the percentages of responses according to these themes is given.

Table 7. Reasons for Selecting English and Chinese courses according to 3 broader themes

		% (English)	% (Chinese)
Reasons for Selecting English and Chinese courses by 3 themes	Self-advancement	60.6%	51%
	Curiosity	36.8%	48%
	Identity	2.6%	1%

From this table, it can be seen:

- 1) For the respondents learning English, self-advancement constitutes a much more frequent motivation than curiosity.
- 2) For the respondents learning Chinese, curiosity as a motivation is only 3% lower than the self-advancement reasons.
- 3) It can be concluded that there is a wider disparity between self-advancement and curiosity for the students who studied English, versus the smaller difference between the two reasons for the students who chose to study Chinese. For 60.6% of English language students and 51% of Chinese language students, self-advancement was one of the main reasons why students choose these individual subjects.

The following table outlines students' opinions on the prospects of studying English compared to studying Chinese. It provides a breakdown of how the respondents answered the question regarding their feelings about the prospects of English as opposed to Chinese after the introduction of the OBORI. In the questionnaire, I asked the respondents: "With the implementation of the OBORI, how do you feel about the prospects for English versus Chinese?" They were given response options such as: "English"; "Chinese"; "positive about both"; and "I do not know".

The hypothesis can be divided into two aspects:

- (1) English has been popular since the 1970s, especially after the collapse of the Soviet Union. It might not be affected by the OBORI. In spite of the introduction or the impact of the OBORI and trade emphasis, the interest in English, as measured by students' optimism about this language has remained the same.
- (2) The second side of the hypothesis is that even if there was an increase in the interest of Chinese language study, the demand for English measured by students' preferences will not be reduced, but instead stay the same.

Table 8. The future value of English and Chinese with the development of the OBORI

		No.	%
With the implementation of the OBORI, how do you feel about the prospects for English versus Chinese?	English	19	22%
	Chinese	13	15%
	Positive about both	53	61%
	I do not know	1	1%
	Total	86	100%

The data indicate that the majority of respondents believed the introduction of the OBORI would lead to an increase in the number of English course offerings as opposed to Chinese course offerings. The data show that 22% of the total respondents were optimistic about the English language being the most likely to benefit from the OBORI. However, the difference between those who chose English and Chinese was still relatively small, with a 7% difference (15% of respondents believing that Chinese would be of greater importance after the formation of the OBORI).

In Russia, English has become the main foreign language of study since the 1970s (Alpatov, 2014). After World War II, Spanish became the fourth most popular foreign language taught in Soviet public schools (along with English, French and German). However, during the Cold War, all international contact was heavily restricted, leading to a sharp decline in opportunities for citizens to learn foreign languages (Ivanova & Tivyaeva, 2015). However, English quickly became popular and, as a result, institutions put more emphasis on English in education. In addition, English began appearing in all districts of the Soviet Union. After the collapse of the Soviet Union, English became a very popular language to study.

In this section, the link between the introduction of the OBORI and the frequency of Business English and Business Chinese language courses was analysed. The hypothesis is that the introduction of the OBORI, with its focus on economic growth, has had an influence on the university students in Russia choosing to enrol in Business English or Business Chinese courses.

The hypothesis regarding Business English courses was supported by the following:

There are several reasons that could be applied to many Russian business professionals, for example:

- Employment in a multinational company, where the company requires knowledge of English, so employees have daily interactions with native speakers.
- The company owns various subsidiaries in Europe and uses the English language to communicate;
- The company is in the process of internationalization and has decided, based on the frequency of travel to the United States and other factors, to use English as the primary company language.

From the above-mentioned literature findings, along with this study focus on the OBORI, I could reasonably make the assumption that Business English is a popular course selection among students.

The hypothesis regarding Business Chinese courses was supported by the following:

According to news (Irkutsk State University, 2019) from Irkutsk State University, the universities in Baikal, Irkutsk, Ulan-Ude and Vladivostok have organized competitions with regard to Business Chinese.

According to the competition recorded on Irkutsk University's website, students from Irkutsk University, Ulan-Ude University and Vladivostok University participated on 23 March 2019 (Irkutsk State University, 2019). They performed various written and verbal tasks. In the written portion, respondents demonstrated their skills in handling text and video materials in the fields of trade and economics, including business correspondence, correcting vocabulary and grammatical errors, and answering tests and open-ended questions.

The verbal part was divided into two phases - a pair conversation (phone conversation on a specific topic), and a personal conversation with the judges in the form of an interview. The final stage was to interview the finalists in the competition. The final stage was traditionally the most interesting part of the competition, because the entire dialogue was conducted in Chinese and was completely improvised. In addition to answering classic interview questions, contestants also demonstrated their knowledge in foreign economic activities. The issues discussed ranged from the details of certain stages of cargo delivery to the prospects for the further development of Russia-China economic and trade relations (Irkutsk State University, 2019).

Tables 9 and 10 summarise the popularity of English and Chinese course offerings provided by Russian universities while tables 11 and 12 summarise students subject enrolment preferences regarding English and Chinese language courses.

Table 9. The popularity of English course offerings provided by Russian universities

		No.	%
Which of the following English-related courses does/did your university offer for your highest degree?	British and American Literature	15	5%
	Rhetoric	7	2.4%
	Interpretation	32	11.3%
	Translation	34	12%
	Basic English	42	14.9%
	Advanced English	35	12.4%
	Selected readings from newspapers	13	4.6%
	English writing	24	8.5%
	Introduction to Linguistics	19	6.7%

	National conditions of major English-speaking countries	12	4%
	Business English	38	13.5%
	Others	11	4%
Total		282	100%

Table 10. The popularity of Chinese course offerings provided by Russian universities

		No.	%
Which of the following Chinese-related courses does/did your university offer for your highest degree?	Chinese literature	10	8%
	Rhetoric	3	2.4%
	Interpretation	2	1.6%
	Translation	15	12%
	Basic Chinese	28	22.4%
	Advanced Chinese	12	9.6%
	Selected readings from newspapers	2	1.6%
	Chinese writing	13	10.4%
	Introduction to Linguistics	11	8.8%
	Chinese poems	5	4%
	National conditions of China	8	6.4%
	Business Chinese	11	8.8%
	Others	5	4%
Total		125	100%

As can be seen from the tables above, the three English language courses described by the respondents as being the most frequently chosen included: Basic English (14.9% of responses); Business English (13.5% of responses); and Advanced English (12.4% of responses).

The three Chinese language courses described by the respondents as being the most frequently chosen included: Basic Chinese (22.4% of responses); Translation (12% of responses); and

Advanced Chinese (9.6% of respondents). Business Chinese was ranked 4th, compared to other subjects.

The following table summarises students' subject enrolment preferences regarding English language courses. English and Chinese class offerings and class enrolment are indicators of student interest in English and Chinese courses. If students are interested, they will enrol in the classes offered. These courses will continue and more courses may be added.

Table 11. Summary of students subject enrolment preferences regarding English language courses

		No.	%
Which of the following English-related courses does/did you choose for your highest degree?	British and American Literature	11	5.8%
	Rhetoric	5	2.6%
	Interpretation	20	10.6%
	Translation	22	11.6%
	Basic English	28	14.8%
	Advanced English	29	15.3%
	Selected readings from newspapers	9	4.8%
	English writing	10	5.3%
	Introduction to Linguistics	12	6.3%
	National conditions of major English-speaking countries	8	4.2%
	Business English	30	15.9%
	Others	5	2.6%
Total		189	100%

Table 12. Summary of students subject enrolment preferences regarding Chinese language courses

		No.	%
Which of the following Chinese-related courses does/did you choose for your highest degree?	Chinese literature	8	8.6%
	Rhetoric	3	3.2%
	Interpretation	2	2.1%
	Translation	17	18.3%
	Basic Chinese	22	23.7%
	Advanced Chinese	10	10.8%
	Selected readings from newspapers	2	2.2%
	Chinese writing	7	7.5%
	Introduction to Linguistics	6	6.5%
	Russian poems	2	2.2%
	National conditions of China	5	5.4%
	Business Chinese	8	8.6%
	Others	1	1.1%
Total		93	100%

The three English language courses the respondents most commonly enrolled in were: Business English (15.9% of responses); Advanced English (15.3% of responses); and Translation (11.6% of responses).

The three Chinese language courses the respondents most commonly enrolled in were: Basic Chinese (23.7% of responses); Translation (18.3% of responses); and Advanced Chinese (10.8% of responses). The percentage of respondents who selected Business Chinese was 8.6% of respondents, ranking fourth.

In summary, Business English language courses were offered more frequently than Business Chinese language courses. The proportion of graduates who chose Business English courses was higher than those who choose Business Chinese. However, the percentage of students who took the Business-focused courses in either English language or Chinese language was smaller for both English (15.9% of respondents) and Chinese (8.6% of respondents).

The demand for the proficiency in Russian among business professionals is increasing due to the expansion of trade in Russia and China. Students majoring in Chinese that focus on cultural and

business interactions can serve a vital role in the trade development strategy in the development of the OBORI, compared with individuals who only know the Chinese language.

CONCLUSION

As seen above, a variety of data were collected, including gender (to determine if it is a contributing factor), highest level of education, and the motivation of respondents to learn foreign languages (in this paper, English and Chinese). The individuals sampled were chosen via a random sampling of respondents at universities in Russia to conduct an analysis of the relationship between the OBORI and the students' perceptions and preferences for English and Chinese courses in the Russian tertiary sector. In the present study, I proposed language strategies for universities that seek to encourage a greater number of students from diverse backgrounds to enrol in Chinese and English language classes.

The data suggest that the gender of respondents was not a significant factor to indicate a difference in the responses based on gender.

A questionnaire of 163 graduates and current students of universities in Russia showed the following:

with regard to English and Chinese language course offerings:

- (1) The most frequently offered courses were for English Language. The highest frequency was reported in the Central Federal District (93% of respondents), and less commonly offered in the Northwestern Federal District.
- (2) Since the introduction of the OBORI, perceived English course offerings declined by 27%, while Chinese classes offerings increased by 24%.
- (3) The analysis considered year of graduation, foreign language availability and the percentage of English and Chinese courses offered. The trends identified were:

Prior to 2015, English courses were available at nearly all surveyed institutions. Only 29% of respondents reported access to Chinese courses. From 2015 onwards, Chinese course availability increased, with 53% of respondents indicating the access.

With regard to English and Chinese student enrolment rates:

1. The enrolment rates in English language courses were higher than those in Chinese language courses, except in the Far Eastern District of Russia. One reason for this difference may be correlated to the geographical location, because the Far Eastern District of Russia is closer to the Russian-Chinese border.
The enrolment rate of English language courses is generally high, with the weakest enrolments in the Northwestern Federal District and Far Eastern Federal District, with about half of those respondents being enrolled.

2. A recent decrease in English language courses enrolments was reported by respondents, with a notable increase in Chinese language course enrolments being reported after the introduction of the OBORI.
3. Before the OBORI was implemented, the enrolment rate of English language courses in all districts of Russia had remained high. However, after the implementation of the OBORI, in the eastern and central districts it remained high, while in other districts it dropped. The Chinese courses presented the opposite situation, the enrolment rate of Chinese language courses increased.

With regard to the respondents' initial motivation to learn English and Chinese languages:

The data indicate that the introduction of the OBORI has led to an increase in students taking Chinese courses, likely due to an increase in job opportunities and the potential for advancement. In contrast, the popularity of English has not been significantly impacted by the introduction of the OBORI, though its popularity has remained consistent.

In summary, 61% of respondents had high enthusiasm for learning both English and Chinese and believed that Chinese would have a bright future in the OBORI. Another 15% of respondents were positive about only learning Chinese. This significant enthusiasm for Chinese may assist institutional decision-makers in choosing which language(s) to promote in an evolving education marketplace.

The data indicate that Business English courses account for a greater percentage of course offerings compared to Business Chinese courses. The proportion of graduates who chose Business English was higher than that of graduates who chose Business Chinese. The development of the OBORI has enabled Russia to strengthen their economic and trade policies, and combined with increasing trade with China, is an indicator that the trend of increase in demand to learn Chinese has a high likelihood of continuing.

Because of the popularity of English and Chinese language courses among students and graduates, many students are good candidates for roles in international trade, where both language skills and nuanced understanding of domestic economies are necessary. The local economy needs to be studied in the country's language to be able to truly understand the market.

In conclusion, this research has shown that both English and Chinese have a bright future in the context of the OBORI in Russia. As China becomes more committed in the OBORI, graduates with experience in Chinese language and culture will be increasingly in demand, especially Russia. The questionnaire results indicate that the demand for Chinese language and culture courses has the potential to be deeply important to the Russian tertiary education sector well into the future.

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