

On the Establishment of an Integrated Minority Language Teaching and Trade Platform in Countries along the Belt and Road Initiative

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Abstract: The Belt and Road Initiative offers new opportunities not only for China but also for the world, while inadequate language communication has become a major obstacle to the further development of trade and tourism between countries. The languages of the countries along the Belt and Road Initiative are mainly minority languages, such as Kazakh, Uzbek, Thai and Russian etc. The development of short video APPs and video websites has provided a convenient path for learning minority languages and building up a platform for doing business. Based on the analysis of the problems in minority language teaching and lack of an integrated platform status quo, this paper is to propose an integrated platform for trade and minority language teaching so as to contribute to the cultural exchange between people and economic development along the Belt and Road.

Keywords: minority language teaching; trade; live-streaming sales; integrated platform; the Belt and Road Initiative

1. Introduction

The Belt and Road Initiative marks the new strategy of opening up of China's foreign economic and trade activities. With the encouragement and support of the policy, China's economic, social and cultural exchanges with countries along the Belt and Road Initiative are increasingly close, which emphasizes to strengthen the cultural exchanges between various countries. However, the big gap between the languages and cultures has become increasingly the impediments for exchanges across the countries [1]. One solution to the problems is to use English as a universal language in all activities. But the translation from their mother tongue to English will lead to huge information loss and is not friendly for local participants. The other solution is to use multi-languages as information carriers and build an integrated platform to enhance cultural, economic and social exchanges [2]. This paper firstly raises the problems in minority language teaching, then an Integration of Minority Language Teaching and Trade Platform in

Countries along the Belt and Road Initiative will be proposed. It is concluded with a concrete project for an integrated minority language teaching and specific trade platform.

2. Problems in Minority Language Teaching and Trade Platforms

2.1. Minority Language Teaching Predicament

The teaching of minority languages in China is limited to a few foreign language colleges and universities. Comparatively the teaching of universal languages such as English, French and other international languages have more advantages due to sufficient and high-quality teachers. The foreign students in China whose mother tongues are minority languages are potential teachers of these languages. However, their Chinese proficiency is uneven, and communication barriers are likely to occur in the process of teaching minority languages, resulting in a decline in learning quality or little gain [3].

2.2. Lack of a Comprehensive Language Teaching and Trade Platform

For universal language learning, such as English, French and German, a learning system has been mature in the education market, and the training materials have been systematic and comprehensive. However, there is a dearth of training materials, training modes and educational conventions in the minority language learning market, greatly impacting on learning outcomes, and learning is more interest-oriented.

Current teaching content provided by some learning platforms for minority languages are limited and their teaching modes are extremely tedious. Such platforms inherit the outdated learning methods, and have no interactions with students, and the majority of the teachers are Chinese; in addition, there are fewer options for minority languages learning

At present, domestically, there are companies like Ctrip and Qunar, which provide services including commerce, tourism and accommodations. However, these

two apps do not provide the package tour. Tourists need to research the local customs on their own and then plan their trip. Nevertheless, some apps provide tour guides and package tour services, but the tour guides are Chinese rather than the locals. They need to connect with the local tour guides after their arrival. This process is a waste of time, which may ruin the tourists' feelings.

2.3. Potential Cultural Clashes

The Belt and Road Initiative covers 65 countries and 53 languages, which means that dozens of cultures will continue to collide and merge in the process of minority language learning and economic cooperation, trade and tourism.

The difference in cultural identities between two teaching parties easily triggers cultural misunderstanding in a sense. However, the optimization and deliberate selection of teaching themes and teaching content not only can promote the exchange and interaction between Chinese and foreign countries, but also provide a great opportunity for mutual exchange of traditional cultures between countries [4].

3. Feasibility of an Integrated Minority Language Teaching and Trade Platform

3.1. Demand Analysis of a Teaching and Trade Platform

The Belt One Road Initiative marks the further opening of China's foreign economic and trade and will increase the multilateral investment alongside the route. With the encouragement and support of policies, plenty of multinational companies have been set up, playing their responsibilities and roles in various fields and industries, and bringing more Chinese products to other countries in the world. With a fixed reserve of resources, how to obtain more excellent resources for our country is the main direction of international economic development and competition.

The development of transportation increases the economic demand of minority languages and trade platform. The continuous implementation of the Belt and Road Initiative has significantly promoted the facilitation of visas and transportation to China by countries along the route. Information released by the Ministry of Transport in April 2019 showed that China has opened direct flights with 45 countries and regions along the Belt and Road, making it easier for Chinese tourists to "going global".

3.2. Supply Analysis of a Teaching and Trade Platform

For the integration of minority language teaching and trade platform, the language talents are the pivotal factor. There are two ways to solve this problem. One is to strengthen the minority language education to cultivate more Chinese minority language talents, which will probably be encountered with the bottleneck that the number of Chinese students who are interested in and good at these languages is relatively small. Even if the number is enough, the cost of cultivating these talents is high. The other way to provide enough minority language

talents is to employ foreign students from relevant countries to do the job. With the advancement of the Belt and Road Initiative, the international exchanges and cooperation of Chinese universities have become more frequent and deeper, and the number of international students along the route to study in China continues to increase. In 2016, the total number of international students in China was 442,773, and there were 207,746 international students from countries along the Belt and Road, accounting for 46.92% of the total number of international students in China [5]. There are 317,200 international students from countries along the Belt and Road in 2017, accounting for 64.85% of the total number, an increase of 11.58%, which is higher than the average growth rate of other countries [5].

In addition, the growth rate of degree students in countries along the Belt and Road is also higher than that of non-degree students. The improvement of the academic structure of international students means that international students with high-quality academic qualifications can better learn and understand Chinese culture, and can also become one of the main forces in promoting Chinese culture to the outside world.

4. Establishment of an Integrated Minority Language Teaching and Trade Platform

4.1. Descriptions of the Project

The project is to set up an integrated platform in order to promote minority language teaching and trade. It contains three major parts, minority language teaching section, live-streaming sales section and business travel recommendation section.

4.1.1. Foreign language teaching

Based on the analysis of the current online foreign language learning platforms in the market, the coverage of minority languages teaching is small and the learning mode is monotonous and programmed. And the project proposed breaks the stereotypes by well-designed short video courses. The teachers of this project are international students studying in China. The minority languages almost cover the languages of most countries along the route. Moreover, the short video reduces the limitation of time and space, so that people who want to learn minority languages can enjoy the learning. For the minority language teaching, through instant online communication and learning, this project builds a bridge between China and other countries.

Multi-language teaching and learning project offers students unique experiences under the immersive teaching mode, which guides students to understand different cultures, promote exchanges between countries, and shorten the distance while learning another language [6].

4.1.2. Live-streaming sales held by overseas students

The proliferation of live-streaming boosts the growth of live-streaming-sales, providing a new channel for the sales of local agricultural products and imported goods.

Up to now, the majority of the live-streaming hosts are Chinese. Therefore, live-streaming sales hosted by foreigners will not only attract Chinese customers, but also the foreigners who live in China.

4.1.3. Business travel APP

At present, APPs like Ctrip and Qunar Travel in the domestic market are specialized in providing business tourism and accommodation and hotel services. Tourists still need to consult the guidebooks to understand local customs and decide where to visit, so they will miss local attractions based on their own knowledge and research. The project proposed aims to create an integrated business travel APP, featuring special program “ZUFE Students Take You Tour” (ZUFE, Zhejiang University of Finance and Economics, a provincial university in China), in which international students act as local guides to local scenic spots, facilitating tourists’ ticket purchase of scenic spots and reservation of accommodation.

It targets the international students coming to China, and the types of minority languages almost cover the languages of most countries along the Belt and Road Initiative.

4.2. Specific Services

The services provided by this project are listed as the following:

(1) Minority language teaching videos: International students are organized to take language teaching videos and post them on the platform.

(2) Live-streaming sales by international students: International students are paid to hold live-streaming and endorse the local foods. Meanwhile, they can also introduce some local specialties of their country, leading to the blossom of multilateral trade between China and the countries along the Belt and Road Initiative.

(3) Tour guidance service: The overseas students from ZUFE will serve as guides, which can be a great attraction for other overseas students. Also, they sign contracts with local hotels and tourist attractions and gain dividend from tourist revenue.

4.3. Market Positioning

The target people of this project are mainly divided into the following three categories:

(1) Chinese who want to learn minority languages. The project in the platform will position this part of the group as Chinese with minority language needs. The project will use short video to teach and shoot interesting short videos to allow them to learn in their spare time in a immersive learning environment, reducing the distance of time and space.

(2) Foreign merchants who want to sell local products and accessories to China. The project positions this group as foreign merchants who want to sell their products to China. The project will contact local businesses for docking. International students will employ Chinese to promote their products, so that they can have more channels for product sales.

(3) Chinese tourists who want to visit the countries along the Belt and Road. The project positions this group as Chinese tourists who want to experience different customs. The project will cooperate with local tourist agencies as well as hotels, and international students will act as tour guides for Chinese tourists. For local scenic spots or hotels, the platform can offer more information for them and promote the development of local tourism.

4.4. Development Strategies

According to the market analysis and positioning, the following development strategies are proposed.

(1) Early stage development strategy. The early stage mainly focuses on videos taking, and public release of minority language teaching videos on video platforms such as Tiktok, Kuaishou, Bilibili, and pre-promotion and exposure by cooperating with video bloggers with enormous followers to enhance brand awareness.

The aim of the primary stage is to attract internet users and their hits. Students from School of International Education and Studies at ZUFE will participate in short video production on daily communication, daily language, and tourist English for international students. The platform is to cooperate with Bilibili uploaders to promote the short videos, and at the same time guide users to interact with international students to get to know the customs of various countries and popularize the project. As the Covid-19 pandemic has prevented people from seeking for overseas study, commerce, and travel, leading to outburst of online language teaching platforms, the project proposed is to seize this gap and break the stereotypical English teaching mode. The language teaching content is rich and has great potential for development. Users can also customize their minority language courses according to their personal needs to achieve quality services. While the project is promoted through Bilibili, a corresponding WeChat official account will also be launched to publicize the project and help users reach the project more conveniently. In the promotion of WeChat official account and Douyin (Chinese version of Tiktok), discount activities on courses purchasing will be launched, such as collecting likes and reposting to get free materials, and 7-day experience of membership courses, using the characteristics of rapid information dissemination in the Internet era to expand its visibility in the market. The official Wechat account and Tiktok account will initiate one topic in every festival and pass on user-friendly skills. For example, how to order a hotel with discounts in a foreign country.

(2) Mid-term stage development strategy. The market positioning will be shifted from teaching minority languages to a multilingual tour guide mode with international students as the main body. Cooperate with enterprises in countries along the Belt and Road is the major step in this period so as to establish the basic profit model of the project by charging advertising fees and consulting service fees; on the other hand, the project plans to reach cooperation in tourism and commerce with

scenic spots and hotels in many countries, by charging intermediary fees to further expand its business scope.

The main goal in the medium term is to develop tourist cooperation with the world through the medium of international students. The project plans to reach well-known airlines, hotels, scenic spots at home and abroad to develop mutually beneficial cooperation with them. On the one hand, in the later period, these partners will be given priority and preferential advertising opportunities in the international student tour guide section. On the other hand, further enhance the popularity of the platform by domestic and overseas users, increase cooperation and world reputation. Through such publicity, the feasibility of the project can be enhanced.

(3) Mature stage development strategy. In this stage, it is expected that the project will become mature and the brand website will be established to attract business investment and expand the project scale. To grasp the opportunities of the Belt and Road Initiative, the project actively expands the upstream and downstream of the industrial chain, promoting online learning, multilingual commerce, tour guide integration in minority languages to countries alongside the Belt and Road.

In this stage, the goal mainly focuses on promoting Chinese products endorsed by international students on a global scale. It makes full use of the reputation and popularity accumulated in the early and mid-term stages to carry out commercial advertising through the Internet to achieve the goal of global coverage.

5. Conclusion

Language barriers have become a major obstacle to the development of trade and tourism between China and the countries along the Belt and Road. While engaging in more educational and economic activities between countries, China lacks of talents for minority language teaching and learning platform as well as a platform that can ease the trade barriers. Therefore, this paper aims to build a minority language teaching plus trade platform,

mainly targeting the people who want to learn minority languages or travel at the countries along the route and the merchants who want to make fortune in China. The platform integrating the business of language teaching, live-streaming sales and travel will contribute to facilitating the study and trade for the aforementioned people in the waging of increasing cultural and economic exchanges between countries along the Belt and Road.

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