

Student Perspectives of Teaching Chinese as a Foreign Language in Thailand Schools in Relation to Language Policy and Practice

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Abstract

Chinese language teaching in Thailand has developed rapidly since the 1990s and Chinese has become the second most spoken foreign language in Thailand after English. Due to the different language policies and educational policies of different countries, international education in Chinese has taken on a country-specific character in various aspects of teaching and learning. This study investigates the perceptions of students at Sarasas Witaed Bangbon School, an international public school in Bangkok, about Chinese language classes and Chinese language education using a quantitative approach, using a questionnaire divided into 21 single and multiple choice open-ended questions and answers. A questionnaire with 21 single- and multiple-choice open-ended questions and answers was used to survey a purposive sample of students. The results of the study show that, from the students' perspective, they have a positive attitude towards Chinese language learning. At the same time, the students' perceptions and expectations of the school's TCFL reflect the current status and problems of its Chinese language education policy in terms of Chinese language teachers, the school and language education policies, including the silence of Chinese language teaching in the classroom, the lack of Chinese language materials in the library, and the differences in policy implementation in terms of the infrastructure, design and materials already used for teaching.

Keywords

Thailand; Private secondary schools; Chinese language education; Student perspectives; Teaching Chinese as a foreign.

1. INTRODUCTION

Of the many languages spoken globally, Chinese has the most significant number of native speakers and is the most popular language in Asia [1]. In Thailand, Chinese is a second language for a large proportion of the population. Therefore, there is a long history of Teaching Chinese as a Foreign Language (TCFL). With the Thai Basic Education Council support, Chinese language teaching in Thailand has developed over a long period. It is now taught in kindergartens, primary schools, secondary schools, universities and vocational colleges. More than 300,000 students study Chinese in Thailand every year, which indicates its high popularity and demand for the language [2].

As Ricento and Hornberger [3] say, we place the classroom practitioner at the heart of language policy. As a Chinese teacher with experience and practice working in a private language school in Bangkok before and throughout COVID-19, a preliminary interview with students observed that learning Chinese is closely related to the school's TCFL policy. For example, the school's TCFL cannot meet their needs, and many factors affect their willingness

to learn. Therefore, I am very interested in investigating the school's views on TCFL from a student's perspective.

The primary research question is: How do students view teaching and learning Chinese in schools? This will be further explored, analysed and investigated using specific research methods by referring to three sub-questions in section four, namely

What is the student's attitude towards learning Chinese?

What are the student's views of Chinese language teaching in schools?

What are student expectations of the TCFL in schools?

This study explores the learning and teaching of Chinese as a foreign language in Thai schools from a students perspective. It will first provide an overview and critique of the existing literature related to the national, practice, education and language policy and research on Chinese as a foreign language by considering the existing literature and the author's practical teaching experience. Finally, it will offer possible conclusions drawn from the research, presenting possible avenues to explore TCFL's language education policy in Thai schools.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Language policy is described by Kaplan and Baldauf [4] as a body of ideas, laws, regulations, rules and practices intended to achieve the planned language change in societies, groups or systems. Moreover, in implementing these policies, schools play an essential role in improving and learning languages for students [5]. There is currently a large amount of literature in Thailand that has studied traditional and contemporary Chinese language education policies and practices. It can be divided into three parts; Thailand's national language policy, foreign language policy and Chinese language education policy.

2.1. National Language Policy

Thailand is a multi-ethnic country with more than thirty groups, 52% of which are native. Formerly known as Siam, Thai is the national language with four dialect areas: Central, Northern, North-eastern, and Southern. The Central language was initially only one of Thailand's dialects but was later made the norm and gradually became national [1]. Moreover, their government has emphasised national language education and the teaching of traditional Thai as a significant channel for linguistic and cultural integration and countrywide development. Previously, to have a certain status in Thai society required a Chinese national to become a named citizen with a command of their language [6]. In addition, the Thai government has long emphasised the vital role of its language in nation-building, unity and harmony. Jacques Leclerc, a sociolinguist at the Université Laval in Canada, has researched and collated national language procedures and has placed Thailand in these assimilation policies. He argues that the authorities have essentially adopted a monolingual policy [7].

2.2. Foreign language educational policy

In recent history, the Thai government has emphasised the instrumental nature of foreign languages. It has placed particular emphasis on English education among the many foreign languages. Issued by the Thai Ministry of Education, the 2008 Core Curriculum for Basic Education states that the objectives of foreign language learning are for students to acquire knowledge, skills, attitudes and the culture involved in the language. Also, to be able to communicate, attain knowledge and use it to seek employment. Additionally, within this policy document, the Thai government has made foreign languages one of the eight basic subjects in the national twelve-year primary education curriculum. Schools offer compulsory and optional foreign language courses in more than ten languages, with English, French, German, Japanese,

Chinese, Pali and Arabic being compulsory or optional subjects for the Thai entrance examination. English is compulsory, while the others are optional [8].

Furthermore, after the 1950s, it was noted that the only medium of language education in Thailand was standard (Central). Therefore, the only significant language subject was English rather than Thai. In 1978, the National Board of Education emphasised its policy and announced that all friendly countries languages have equal status. Therefore, English was temporarily made an optional subject, with other foreign languages. However, the policy also stated that English is the most widely used international language for academic and vocational purposes [9].

2.3. Chinese Language Education Policy

Thailand was the first country in the world to include Chinese teaching in its national education system. From its introduction in 1918, the Regulation on Private Schools, controlling the development of Chinese language schools, was implemented in 2014 to fulfil the Chinese Language Teaching Reform Policy. Thailand's Chinese language education programme has shown different tendencies at each historical stage. Its teaching has gone through many different stages of development [10]. In the early 20th century, the Siam government and the Ministry of Education issued several laws and policy documents to restrict the development of Chinese language schools. The primary purpose of the assimilation policy was to establish the status of Chinese as a foreign language. For example, the Siamese Civil Schools Act of 1918 controlled Chinese schools and emphasised the study of Thai, while the Siamese Enforcement of Forced Education Regulations of 1921 limited the curriculum of Chinese schools. In addition, it stipulated the number of years of primary education in Thailand [11], [12]. In 1932 the Ministry of Education introduced the National Education Plan, which began to relax and liberalise Chinese control and established it as a foreign language similar to other overseas languages [13].

However, from the political reforms of 1932 to establish diplomatic relations between Thailand and China in 1975, the Thai government restricted the Chinese language development by formulating specific details and provisions. Specifically in language education policies that tightly controlled the cultural transmission and language education in Chinese society. The policy during this period was characterised by several negative statements about the Chinese language, such as being a threat to Thai national security [14]. According to the mid-twentieth century statistics, 321 Chinese schools had been closed for violating the regulations of private schools [15]. The long-standing strategy of assimilation and limitation prompted the Thai government to stop worrying about the Chinese as a danger to its official language and national unity after establishing diplomatic ties between themselves in 1975. Various rules regarding the educational system, teacher resources, and student spaces were eased, allowing the Chinese language to expand and grow in Thailand. [16]. Since the 1990s, the Thai government has completely changed its long-standing policy of suppressing Chinese language education. Meanwhile, lifting the ban in 1992, China's language education in Thailand has not been confined to Chinese schools. However, it has become a foreign language for all races, classes and ages in Thai society. [8].

At the beginning of the 21st century, a series of policies made Thailand one of the most efficient Chinese language dissemination and education models globally. In 2001, the Ministry of Education of Thailand for National Basic Education Curriculum pointed out that Chinese is the country's second foreign language. Therefore, it has become the primary basis for teaching Chinese this century [17]. The 2005 Strategic Plan for the Promotion of Chinese Language Teaching in Thailand to Enhance National Competitiveness drawn up by the Thai Ministry of Education, is a five-year plan for promoting Chinese language teaching. The plan elaborates on the status and significance of Chinese language teaching from the perspective of national

competitiveness. Since the beginning of the 21st century, it has become a document framework for Chinese language teaching in Thailand [18].

Furthermore, since China proposed the International Popularisation of Chinese Language strategy, more than 1,000 Chinese foreign language volunteers are sent to Thailand each year. As of 2017, the total number of volunteers has exceeded 10,000 [19]. As a result, the character of existing Thai Chinese education has changed dramatically. It has infiltrated their mainstream culture with new implications and forms of Chinese education, ushering in a new period of complete openness and rapid development.

3. METHODOLOGY

This study uses a mixed qualitative and quantitative approach. Creswell (1994) states that it is advantageous for a researcher to combine methods to understand better a concept being tested or explored. Therefore, numbers and descriptions, which anchor quantitative and qualitative research paradigms, are mutually beneficial. The strengths of each can build a research synergy whose aggregate advantages are more significant than what either technique could achieve singularly (Sogunro, 2002). Therefore, it is suitable for the needs of numbers and descriptions in this study.

3.1. Context

Established in 2000, Sarasas School Education Group is a Thai-English bilingual secondary school. On a 120,000 square metre site, Bangkok's largest private bilingual schools have over 8,000 students, 605 Thai teachers, and 156 foreign teachers in grades ranging from kindergarten to high school. The school's language education policy enables students to communicate and learn English fluently without studying in a British or American country and directly accessing teachers from native English-speaking countries. Therefore, the teaching subjects at this school are divided in equal proportions between Thai and English. Subjects taught in English include mathematics, social studies, science, physical education, health education, English, moral education, life experiences and technology. The Thai Ministry of Education also authorises the school to present bilingual classes in Chinese, Japanese, French, German, and Korean as a third language, with Thai as the target language. In addition, the school has a bilingual Chinese/English class on file with the Thai Ministry of Education. This is exclusively for junior and senior school students, where it is taught in both English and Chinese.

3.2. Participants

Participants in this study are 152 students in the third grade of the school who learn Chinese as a foreign language. The group is the result of purposeful sampling. The sample was chosen because teaching Chinese in the third year of this school collected more relevant data. Therefore, variability and deviation cannot be measured, controlled or promoted outside the sample [20]. So, based upon teaching experience, understanding and judgement of students, these senior middle scholars have received high level Chinese foreign language education for a long. It means that Chinese student proficiencies will enable them to provide the best information for the success of the target research [21].

3.3. Methods

This study was conducted using a questionnaire divided into twenty-one single and multiple-choice, open-ended questions and answers. The design and content strengths allow a combination of teaching experience and observation to be as realistic as possible. The research questionnaire is divided into three dimensions according to which were developed using student attitudes towards learning Chinese and their perceptions and expectations of TCFL. It also included basic information, current and future attitudes towards learning the Chinese

language, views and perceptions of the teaching conditions in the classroom, homework, teaching materials, infrastructure and other aspects of TCFL in schools, and expectations of Chinese language teaching in schools in the future. The final presentation and details of the questionnaire can be accessed in Appendix 1.

3.4. Data Collection and Analysis

During the survey, the regular order of teaching was disrupted by the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, resulting in a complex process and more diverse means of distributing and collecting questionnaires. In order to collect as comprehensive and objective data as possible, paper questionnaires were primarily used in the early stages and collected centrally. However, as the spring epidemic in Thailand intensified, a small number of questionnaires were distributed online. In the later stages, they were delivered through various means such as emails and class groups on the Facebook social network. Ultimately, during their teaching tenure, all questionnaires were collected by mail and online delivery with the help of colleagues.

Overall, 152 questionnaires were distributed. As a result, 126 valid questionnaires were returned, with twenty-four invalid surveys being returned, giving a validity rate of 82.8% for this assessment. In addition, the data from this study was evaluated using a number frequency analysis method and the Excel statistical analysis tool. Incidentally, objective questions were presented in graphs and charts, with open-ended question and answers being integrated within the data. Answers with similar meanings were extracted and grouped using powerful words as an indication. Detailed information on the data can be accessed in Appendix 2-1 and Appendix 2-2.

3.5. Ethical Considerations

Before starting the study and survey, all participants are familiar with its content and value. They are assured that data will be handled to protect the information, and privacy is strictly confidential. Participants were free to decide whether or not to take part in the survey. When students agreed to participate, informed consent was sent to them to sign.

4. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

4.1. What are Student Attitudes Towards Learning Chinese?

The survey found that student attitudes towards learning Chinese are generally positive. Research results are primarily divided into three parts. First, the current attitude of school students to learn Chinese in bilingual classes may affect their attitudes to learning motivation and their willingness to learn the language after graduation and in the future. The statistical results and analysis are as follows:

The chart shows that 92% of students believe that learning Chinese in Thai schools is necessary. In this school, up to 86% of students voluntarily chose Chinese as a second foreign language in addition to English. Half of the learners are very concerned about their Chinese test scores, and 46% of the students said they are generally apprehensive about them. Secondly, the data on learning motivations that may affect student attitudes shows that as fresh graduates, the primary incentive for learning Chinese is to consider their employment needs. This proportion of students accounts for 23%. The 22% of the students who chose to learn Chinese are in the language education policy of the school's TCFL. Personal interests and social needs, such as making friends with the Chinese, accounted for 13% and 16%, respectively. Another 13% of the graduates want to study in China, 9%, and travel, 4%, so they want to disentangle the current language barriers and learn Chinese the most.

Table 1. Results for Questions 1

Questions 1	Options	Quantity	Precent
1-1. Do you think it is necessary to learn Chinese?	I think so	115	92%
	I don't think so	10	8%
1-2. Are you learning Chinese voluntarily?	Yes	105	84%
	No	17	14%
1-3. Do you care about the score of the Chinese test?	Yes, I do	63	51%
	No, I don't care	58	46%
	General concern	4	3%
1-4. Why are you learning Chinese? (Multiple choice)	Rules of the school	55	22%
	Employment	58	23%
	Make friends with Chinese people	40	16%
	Personal interests	34	13%
	To study in China	23	9%
	Parents' requirements	29	12%
	Travel to China in the future	9	4%
	Other reasons	3	1%
1-5. Which language have you studied the longest?	Chinese	36	29%
	Thai	32	26%
	English	39	31%
	Japanese, French, Korean, German	17	14%
1-6. Which language do you think will help you the most in the future?	Thai	10	7%
	Chinese	28	21%
	English	97	70%
	Other languages	3	2%
1-7. Would you like to continue learning Chinese after you leave school?	Yes, I'd like to	84	69%
	No, I won't	38	31%
1-8. If you won't, why?	I'm not interested	6	11%
	Learning Chinese is too difficult	37	66%
	No practical significance	13	23%
1-9. Do you plan to choose a major related to Chinese in college?	Yes, I do	40	33%
	No, I don't	65	45%
	Not sure yet	16	13%
1-10. If there is no mandatory requirement, will you continue to study Chinese in the next year?	Yes, I will	83	67%
	No, I won't	22	18%
	Not sure yet	18	15%

The data illustrates that student have a profound and positive attitude towards learning Chinese as a foreign language. In a study by Tan [17] the results of policy practice are consistent with the ban on Chinese after it was lifted in Thailand in 1992. He noted that attitude and instrumental motivation align with the Thai language education policy's influential characteristics that emphasise foreign languages. Specifically, their promotion for cultural exchanges and job hunting.

Additionally, data results about student willingness to learn Chinese after graduation or in the future found that the English language is still considered by 70% as the most important for

their future development. They are compared to their native tongue and Chinese. Among them, 31% of students reported that the English language takes the longest time to learn. This phenomenon is similar to what Richard pointed out in his research. The entire Thai society, including the parents of students, recognise the importance of English as it has always been treated as a compulsory course in schools and universities [9].

However, 21% of students believe that Chinese gives them more potential for development, and 2% deem that other foreign languages are also helpful for education and long-term development. A further 69% of students said they would continue to learn Chinese after leaving school, while 31% said they would not. Moreover, among the students who gave up learning Chinese, 66% said that it was because they found it too complicated. Other reasons were that they were not interested in Chinese, 23%, or that 11% believed learning was meaningless. Moreover, if the school does not have mandatory requirements, then 15% and 18% of uncertain students do not want to study. On the other hand, some 67% of the students expressed their willingness to continue learning Chinese next year. Finally, it is worth mentioning that although 54% of students are currently unsure of their ideal major, 33% plan to choose a Chinese-related degree at university. Also, in an open question and answer, of what do you think of Chinese as a foreign language in Thailand in the past five years, displays statistical results and analysis presented by this research after extracting keywords, are as follows:

Table 2. Results for Open Questions 1-11

Open Question 1-1	Answer Key Words	Quantity	Precent
1-11. How do you see the status of Chinese as a Foreign Language in Thailand in the past five years? (Open Q&A)	More and more Thais can speak Chinese	66	52%
	The status of the Chinese has improved	70	55%
	Tourism has made Chinese more important	56	44%
	It is necessary to learn Chinese because it is difficult	119	94%
	Lack of good Chinese teachers	47	37%
	Speak Chinese and get a better job	90	71%
	More popular than five years ago	110	87%

As shown in Table 2, the students reported that in the past five years, more and more Thai people speak Chinese. The status of the Chinese has improved, and the tourism industry has made the Chinese more significant. Simultaneously, they also feel that learning Chinese is difficult but necessary. They believe that there is a lack of good Chinese teachers and that they can speak Chinese to find better jobs in the future. TCFL has indeed formed a complete system of kindergartens, elementary schools, middle schools and universities in Thailand. In addition, public and private schools listed Chinese as a compulsory course [10]. However, the relaxation of the TCFL policy in the school system, like teacher resources and student quotas, has promoted the spread of Chinese in Thailand [16] Nevertheless, the students at Sara School, for example, still believe that the current TCFL has not fully addressed their needs.

4.2. What are Student Views of Chinese Language Teaching in Schools?

Regarding the above and cognition of school TCFL, they mainly focus on Chinese classrooms, textbooks, homework, and the Chinese learning environment. Statistics and analysis are shown in Table 3.

Table 3. Results for Questions 2

Questions 2	Options	Quantity	Precent
2-1. Do you like the Chinese class at school?	Yes, I do	69	55%
	No, I don't	53	42%
	Not bad	3	3%
2-2. What do you think of the learning atmosphere in the Chinese class?	Very good	38	31%
	Not so good	5	4%
	Not bad	78	65%
2-3. Do you like the current textbooks?	Yes, I do	87	74%
	No, I don't	10	9%
	Not bad	20	17%
2-4. Who has had the most influence on you in learning Chinese?	schools	96	75%
	parents	12	9%
	friends	20	16%

From the data in the table, it can be seen that 54.7% of students enjoy the current Chinese classroom teaching. Furthermore, 65% of students think that the current learning atmosphere in a class is average, while 31% think it is perfect. The textbooks used by students are the General Chinese Course and Chinese time series. Additionally, 74% of students are satisfied with the teaching materials, 17% are average, and 9% dislike them. Most importantly, 75% of students said their school had a much greater influence on learning Chinese than their parents (9%) or friends (16%). This is consistent with [5] emphasis on the important role of schools in foreign language education. Generally speaking, the Chinese teaching in Sara School meets the 2001 National Basic Education Curriculum requirements. It also complies with the specific requirements issued by the Bangkok Municipal Government on increasing the intensity of Chinese teaching in Bangkok's universities, middle and primary schools, the quality of Chinese classroom teaching, and the practicality of teaching materials [17].

4.3. What are Students' Expectations of Teaching Chinese as a Foreign Language in Schools?

The survey results showed that 41% of students said they would like to learn via the Internet when asked how they would like to learn Chinese in school. They hope to learn Chinese through newspapers, movies and books, other than in-class textbooks. Also, improve their language skills through social means, such as friendships, 12%, and 4%, participating in Chinese summer camps. They believe the school can increase the tutoring time at weekends, 14%, while 5% of students hope to improve their Chinese proficiency through tutoring organisations. Research says 28% of pupils hope to increase oral homework, with 28% from different assignments. They also expressed their preference for Chinese textbooks related to language and culture, 38%, and are more practical, 28%, and diverse 13%. More than half of students, 73%, believe that adding multimedia devices such as computers and projectors can increase their enjoyment of learning Chinese. The vast majority of students, 80%, said that the school library should add more extracurricular materials related to the Chinese language and cultural background. In addition, the student expectation survey also includes an open question and answer of what do you think

is the problem with the current school TCFL and what can be improved? The critical summary is as follows:

The statistics and analysis results of student beliefs for the school's TCFL are as follows:

Table 4. Results for Questions 3-1

Questions 3-1	Options	Quantity	Precent
3-1. What other ways do you want to learn Chinese?	Weekend tutoring arranged by the school	19	14%
	Chinese foreign teachers	9	7%
	Chinese tutoring institutions	7	5%
	Self-study through the Internet, such as Chinese newspapers, movies, books, etc.	56	41%
	Make friends with Chinese people	24	17%
	Participate in a summer camp in China	6	4%
	Other ways	17	12%
3-2. What homework additions do you think would be the most helpful?	Reading type assignments	33	27%
	Listen to the type of homework	35	28%
	Writing assignments	21	17%
	A variety of forms of combined work	35	28%
	Mainly practical content	59	28%
3-3. What kind of textbooks do you like? (Multiple choice)	Introduce more Chinese culture	80	38%
	Various contents and forms	27	13%
	The text is short in length	17	8%
	With many comments in Thai	21	10%
	Other types	6	3%
3-4. Do you think adding multimedia equipment such as computer and projector can promote your Chinese learning?	Yes, I think so	73	60%
	No, I don't think so	42	35%
3-5. Do you want the school library to add Chinese related extracurricular materials?	Not sure	6	5%
	Yes, I do	94	80%
	No, I don't	5	4%
	I don't care	19	16%

Table 5. Results for Open Questions 3-6

Open Question 3-6	Answer Key Words	Quantity	Precent
3-6. What problems do you think exist in the current Chinese teaching environment and teaching conditions in schools? How can we improve it? (Open Q&A)	Add teachers who speak Chinese as their native language	44	34%
	Less chance to use Chinese	100	79%
	Expect new teaching methods	68	53%
	Too few classroom activities	67	53%
	Classes are boring and inefficient	55	43%
	Expect more cultural activities	89	70%

From these keywords, it can be seen that students believe that learning the Chinese language lacks applicability. There are few classroom activities, so they suggest increasing mother-tongue teachers, evaluating new teaching methods and emphasising reading and writing instead of translation.

The above research results show that school student TCFL expectations are mainly reflected in a richer learning style and environment. Although there are currently more than 3,000 schools in Thailand offering Chinese courses, the level of detail and perfection of policies for Chinese education is still relatively low. At present, teaching lacks top-level design and requires the training of senior talents in professional fields and the investment of resources. Moreover, systemic and continuity problems of Thailand's TCFL system are still complex to completely solve in a short time [22]. Moreover, this status quo is unique and universal in different schools, continuing to exist [23]. In 2014, the Thai education department also re-launched the Chinese Language Teaching Reform Policy to further support language education by standardising and optimising the details of the TCFL in various schools [19]. Although these policies align with student expectations, the school's implementation and operation are particularly critical.

5. CONCLUSION

Overall, the central question of this study asked students about the TCFL policy of Thailand Sara School. From the student perspective, they have a positive attitude towards Chinese learning. The school's TCFL's views and expectations were investigated, and the survey results show that the students have a positive attitude towards learning Chinese. At the same time, their views and expectations of the school's TCFL also reflect the current status and existing problems of its Chinese education policy. It includes differences in the school's policy implementation regarding teaching infrastructure and design and materials. However, the small-scale characteristics of the sample make the research nonrepresentative. The questionnaires are based on the actual situation of the individual teaching experience. Therefore, it is not entirely sure whether the result is the student's most genuine thoughts and whether other factors affect the learner's answer. More importantly, the general analysis and discussion did not propose practical and effective solutions for the school's TCFL. For example, there is not enough research on the development of Chinese education in Thailand and the existing problems, making Thai Chinese education more in line with national conditions like more operational issues. These matters need further future studying. At the same time, due to a relatively shallow teaching experience, an in-depth and appropriate analysis of them when evaluating many problems may not be conducted.

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