

NARRATING CHINESE TEACHING AND LEARNING IN CULTURALLY LOCAL THAI SCHOOLS

Katematu Duangmanee

School of Education and Liberal Arts, Walailak University
Academic Building 1, 222 Thai-Buri sub-district, Thasala District
Nakhon Si Thammarat 80160, Thailand

E-mail address: katematu.du@mail.wu.ac.th

ORCID ID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-7982-4509>

Budi Waluyo

School of Languages and General Education, Walailak University
Academic Building 5, 222 Thai-Buri sub-district, Thasala District
Nakhon Si Thammarat 80160, Thailand

E-mail address: budi.business.waluyo@gmail.com

ORCID ID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-1919-2068>

ABSTRACT

Aim. Despite the popularity of Chinese foreign language teaching in schools worldwide, it is still little known how culturally local schools manage their Chinese teaching and learning. To address this gap, this study examined the pedagogical strategies and practices of Chinese as a Foreign Language (CFL) instruction in Thai secondary education, addressing the insufficient exploration of CFL educational undertakings beyond China's borders.

Methods. A narrative inquiry approach with interviews was employed. The sample included 34 school principals (11.8% female, 88.2% male), whose insights shed light on the cardinal aspects of CFL instruction and learning.

Results. The outcomes revealed essential elements shaping CFL pedagogy in culturally local schools in Thailand, including curricular considerations, collaboration through knowledge-sharing platforms and cultural events, teaching methodologies with teacher preparation and native-speaking instructors, learning activities inside and outside the classroom, and school-wide educational initiatives.

Conclusion. Overall, the findings contribute to the understanding of CFL education in Thailand and offer potential avenues for future research and pedagogical enhancement.

Keywords: Chinese language planning, Chinese as a foreign language, Chinese subject, Chinese curriculum, Thai schools

INTRODUCTION

Background

The pedagogical journey of imparting Chinese language skills within primary and secondary academic institutions beyond the frontiers of China, can be traced back over several decades. It finds its roots in initiatives such as the launch of local Chinese publications, as well as informal instructional sessions designed to uphold Chinese literacy and cultural heritage, ultimately culminating in the establishment of private and public educational bodies. Notable instances of this historical trajectory have been documented in countries such as Australia (Orton, 2016), New Zealand (Wang, 2021), and Thailand (Manomaiviboon, 2004). In 2004, the Chinese Ministry of Education inaugurated the Confucius Institute Headquarters (Hanban), an international organisation mandated with the promotion of the Chinese language and culture (Hanban, 2004). Hanban has since launched 548 Confucius Institutes and 1,193 Confucius Classrooms across 154 nations, amassing over 1.8 million students (Hanban, 2018). Their efforts have expanded the domain of Chinese language instruction through a wide spectrum of educational and cultural initiatives. Given the traditional dominance of English, the escalating significance of Chinese as a foreign language has emerged as a key counterpoint, both within China and beyond its borders (Moloney & Xu, 2015). Governmental investments, coupled with the establishment of Hanban offices in multiple countries, and the burgeoning research addressing pivotal issues surrounding Chinese as a foreign language pedagogy have collectively contributed to the upsurge in its instruction (Ma et al., 2017).

Nevertheless, the landscape of teaching and learning Chinese as a foreign language (CFL) in non-Chinese schools remains partially unexplored, particularly regarding management and the actual implementation of instructional activities. While the global expansion of CFL has been largely driven by China's policy via the Confucius Institutes (Zhao & Huang, 2010), the translation and integration of these policies into teaching and learning practices within public and private institutions overseas remain ambiguous. Previous studies concerning CFL education outside China have primarily centered around the roles of teachers and learners, examining efficient instructional methods and approaches (e.g., Bao & Du, 2015; Xu, 2020), and strategic learning to master key language skills (e.g., Cáceres-Lorenzo, 2015; Grenfell & Harris, 2015). Contemporary research has expanded its focus to incorporate emotional factors such as enjoyment and boredom (Li et al., 2018), alongside non-cognitive variables like willingness to communicate in Chinese and pragmatic awareness (Lv et al., 2021). In response, the current study endeavours to elucidate the management of teaching and learning of CFL, as well as the implementation of related educational activities within local Thai secondary schools, by examining the perspectives and experiences of school principals.

Chinese Language Teaching in Thai Educational Institutions

The 2001 Thai basic education curriculum, revised in 2002, necessitates the inclusion of a foreign language as one of the eight central subjects in the academic curriculum. This focus on foreign language pedagogy not only promotes innovative thinking and vocational aptitudes among students, but also equips them to acclimatise to societal advancements. The Thai Ministry of Education (2017) anticipates that students' proficiency in a foreign language will be a significant asset in their daily life. Consequently, Thai educational institutions now have the latitude to offer instruction in the Chinese language. This curriculum aims to endow students with a skill set that would be instrumental in their prospective career trajectories. The Thai government has historically demonstrated a lenient, open-minded, and accepting stance towards Chinese language education. However, the exact modalities of imparting Chinese language instruction are contingent on the unique language teaching strategy employed by individual schools.

The pedagogy of Chinese as a foreign language in Thailand is primarily centered around the secondary school level (incorporating upper secondary education), catering to students between 15 to 18 years of age. Initially, the Thai Ministry of Education formulated a curriculum permitting schools to provide Chinese language instruction to interested students. The objective was to create opportunities for students to hone critical Chinese language skills pertinent to contemporary life, under the guidance of native speakers. Consequently, in the academic year of 1992, the Ministry of Education made the decision to integrate Chinese as an elective subject into the 1981 secondary-school curriculum (as modified in 1990). The 1981 curriculum (as revised in 1990) necessitates that students undertake both mandatory and elective courses specified by the curriculum (Wongsothorn et al., 1996). Students have the option to choose between two foreign languages for study, with Chinese being one of the choices. This curriculum's Chinese component comprises six levels—Chinese I through Chinese VI—each necessitating six hours of study per week.

The introductory courses, Chinese I and II, utilise a limited vocabulary, concise sentences, and basic linguistic constructs to train students in listening, speaking, reading, and writing. Students are exposed to aural words and brief messages and engage in dialogues about everyday occurrences and reading of short articles. Writing exercises revolve around accurate construction of Chinese characters and development of foundational communicative abilities. Chinese III and IV expand upon the range of vocabulary and structures, allowing students to understand speech and brief conversations, interact in standard circumstances, read extended texts (particularly chapters of books in Chinese), and write about topics of personal interest. The capacity to converse in a myriad of contexts is also honed. Chinese V and VI focus on refining listening, speaking, reading, and writing skills with increasingly complex vocabulary and structures. Students can understand dialogues, narrated stories, and texts. They are

further enabled to narrate short stories and read texts of higher complexity, as well as converse on an extensive variety of topics.

In recent years, the emphasis on Chinese language instruction has emerged as a major priority for the Thai government, on par with English language teaching. This pattern is not exclusive to Thailand but has also manifested in developing and developed nations worldwide, as noted in prior research (e.g., Xu & Stahl, 2022; Yang et al., 2021). Hence, inspired by the identified research gap and the accelerated growth of Chinese language teaching outside of China, particularly in Thailand, this study seeks to explore the following research question: How is Chinese as a Foreign Language taught and learned in culturally local schools in Thailand?

LITERATURE REVIEW

Teaching Chinese as a Foreign Language at Schools: Instruction Components

The investigation into Chinese as a Foreign Language (CFL) instruction in schools outside of China remains an under-researched area. Existing literature has predominantly focused on Chinese instruction at the university level, where it is frequently offered as an elective in foreign language programmes (Aimin, 2015). Research has been similarly limited regarding the teaching of CFL in non-Chinese educational settings, often focusing instead on Chinese-based schools. Despite this, there is an enduring interest in early CFL learning, as evident by its sustained incorporation into various international school curricula. Thus, this study seeks to augment the body of research through the examination of CFL teaching and learning practices in foreign countries, specifically Thailand, as perceived by secondary school principals.

The foundation of CFL instruction in international settings diverges according to the country's distinct national curriculum. An emerging paradigm, deemed the "localised student-centered curriculum," underscores the advancement of students' sociolinguistic activities and the adoption of a knowledge-based approach (Zhao, 2020). This curriculum embraces translanguaging practices, viewed as a mechanism enabling bilingual students to bolster their weaker language using their dominant language, thereby promoting bilingual equilibrium (Lewis et al., 2012). In a study conducted by Jing Huang (2018), it was discovered that a cohort of Chinese Putonghua (Mandarin) teachers in the UK favour the adoption of translanguaging as a pedagogical tool to cultivate a versatile English Chinese bilingualism. Meanwhile, local or national languages often serve as potent pedagogical aids in CFL instruction when neither the teacher nor the students are native English speakers (Wei, 2018).

Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL), an approach with dual objectives pertaining to language and subject learning (Coyle et al. 2010), has also found applica-

tion in Chinese classes. CLIL supporters advocate that achieving this double-focused education necessitates the development of a specialised teaching methodology where non-language subjects are taught using and through a foreign language, rather than solely in a foreign language (European Commission, Directorate-General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture, 2006). Lesley Harbon et al. (2016) studied the CLIL implementation in an Australian school, observing increased motivation and engagement in students when language learning is blended with rigorous subject learning. In designing effective CLIL instruction, six elements have been identified: games, social interaction, use of the target language, music and movement, communication, and a sense of belonging, all of which were deemed efficacious by Chinese educators (Moloney & Xu, 2018).

In the context of CFL instruction, two distinct categories of educators exist: native Chinese teachers in international schools and local teachers teaching Chinese. This research considers both situations. Ying Yue (2017) notes that native Chinese teachers often strive to reconcile their pedagogical beliefs, values, and experiences as teachers and learners in China with their teaching experiences abroad. Challenges arise from discrepancies in educational systems, complicating curriculum development, lesson planning, classroom activity selection, classroom management, and parental interactions. In a qualitative study by Juan Yang (2019), Chinese language teachers valued professional competence, encapsulating linguistic proficiency, subject comprehension, and pedagogical expertise. The study identified a prevalent student-centered teaching orientation, yet some novice teachers and educators with experience in Chinese education reported difficulties adapting innovative teaching methodologies due to cultural variances. Teachers' understanding of their students' learning preferences and motivations reflects a deep understanding of the difficulties and interests students face when learning Chinese characters. In this context, mentorship has been recognised as a crucial tool in bridging cultural divides and bolstering teachers' preparation. However, success hinges on the alignment between mentors' and teachers' disciplinary and cultural backgrounds (Wang & Bale, 2019).

This study also considers non-native CFL educators with the same nationality as their students and who generally encounter fewer conflicts with the local educational system or cultural differences with students, as opposed to expatriate Chinese teachers. Chun Zhang (2016) pointed out that native and non-native Chinese teachers tend to employ divergent teaching methods. Native teachers lean towards a 'Chinese-styled teaching', while non-native teachers are more inclined to adopt the country's predominant teaching style. These teaching styles reflect the teachers' identities and can be addressed through intercultural professional development training. Non-native teachers, when compared to native counterparts, have an edge in establishing teacher-student rapport due to their closer personality traits to students, a heightened sensitivity towards linguistic and cultural variances, and an empathetic understanding of students' learning trajectory (Zhang & Zhang, 2018). Nonetheless, Ling Gu et al. (2021) discovered that

native and non-native Chinese teachers share similar motivations in teaching, including cross-cultural, intrinsic, and altruistic values, but display substantial differences in their perceptions of extrinsic value and social influence.

CFL learners often face significant challenges in deciphering Chinese characters (Hsiao et al., 2015; Zhang & Reilly, 2015). Both native and non-native Chinese teachers concur on the strategy of deferring the introduction of Chinese characters until later in the course, although this approach may complicate learning materials if students possess disparate proficiency levels (Ye, 2013). In the pursuit of effective methodologies for introducing Chinese characters, Cairtriona Osborne et al. (2020) evaluated four different approaches, concluding that rote memorisation aids short-term character recall while character colour-coding (CCC) assists in establishing character tone. Moreover, while CFL learners may independently explore Chinese language and culture outside of the classroom, teachers should make explicit classroom efforts to engage students' linguistic and cultural experiences in their first language and target language, thereby fostering learners' intercultural competence (Kennedy, 2020). It is recommended to immerse CFL learners in a teaching method that integrates distinctive Chinese features, such as Chinese tone drill, Chinese calligraphy, and video conferencing with Chinese peers, as this could render learning Chinese a unique and engaging experience (Xu & Stahl, 2021). To address the lack of interaction with native Chinese speakers and facilitate authentic Chinese usage, prior research has implemented task-based language learning and technological tools like virtual world apps, for example, Second Life (Pasfield-Neofitou et al., 2016), and online chat apps like WeChat, both of which have potential applicability for CFL learners globally.

Empirical research underlines the significance of enhancing non-cognitive skills to optimise CFL learning. Teachers are encouraged to scaffold students' metacognitive beliefs and strategies, which could lead to improved language acquisition, increased self-esteem, and confidence levels, all of which are associated with improved CFL achievement (Wang et al., 2009). It may be more crucial to inspire students to persist in their language studies and stimulate active participation than to prioritise linguistic accuracy and fluency in a specific context (Ruan et al., 2015). Students should be encouraged to use Chinese to gain deeper insights into the target language's cultural milieu and micro-setting life experiences (Chen & Du, 2022). However, there is a lack of existing knowledge regarding the measures schools take to enhance CFL student learning experiences, a gap this current research endeavors to fill.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design and Procedures

The present investigation employed a qualitative research design, characterised as a methodological framework that follows a systematic and adaptable approach to research, with an emphasis on the exploration and comprehension of intricate social phenomena, human experiences, and behavioural patterns (Ivankova & Creswell, 2009). Specifically, the qualitative component of this research embraced a narrative inquiry approach grounded in the notion that individuals construct meaning and understanding in their lives through storytelling (Rabelo, 2022). Modern psychologists and theorists increasingly assert that our comprehension of self-identity is intricately interwoven with narrative storytelling, influencing our perceptions of ourselves, others, and the dynamics of our relationships (Savin-Baden & Niekerk, 2007). Jerome Bruner (1991) contends that we cultivate a sense of self by crafting narratives about our lives and the world around us, with our life stories continuously evolving as new experiences unfold. In recent years, narrative inquiry has gained prominence as a methodological framework, offering valuable insights into unraveling the processes that underlie present realities across various professions and broader societal contexts (Golombek & Johnson, 2021; Sunday et al., 2020). In this study, narrative inquiry is harnessed to explore the dynamics of teaching and learning Chinese as a foreign language in culturally local Thai schools, with a particular emphasis on the perspectives and experiences of school principals.

The research implementation commenced with the identification of potential secondary schools, each represented by their respective principals. Subsequently, these principals were surveyed and interviewed to gather insights into the instructional strategies and educational activities employed in their institutions to enhance student performance in Chinese language education. The collected data was then subjected to both statistical and qualitative analysis, allowing for a comprehensive examination of the findings. The outcomes were meticulously delineated and evaluated, with a focus on elucidating their pedagogical implications for the field of Chinese language instruction in secondary schools.

Research Context and Participants

The research encompassed both public and private secondary schools located in a province in southern Thailand. The study population comprised 50 secondary schools, out of which 34 (33 public and 1 private) were selected based on the students' eligibility to pursue higher education in Chinese majors at a university level. From these shortlisted schools, 34 school principals were involved in the study, with a gender ratio

of 88.2% male to 11.8% female. The participants' ages ranged from 40 to 60 years old. Of the participating principals, 29 held master's degrees, while 5 possessed doctoral degrees. Most of the participants had been in their respective positions for a period of 5 to 10 years and had undertaken 19 observational visits to other Chinese language schools within Thailand. These visits, organised by the Ministry of Education, Hanban (or Confucius Institute Headquarters), or their own schools, aimed to facilitate knowledge exchange to enhance their own Chinese language education practices. Table 1 provides further details.

Table 1
Participants' characteristics

| Participants' Characteristics | | Frequency | Percentage |
|--------------------------------------------------|-----------------|------------------|-------------------|
| Gender | Female | 4 | 11.8 |
| | Male | 30 | 88.2 |
| Age range | 40—45 | 5 | 14.7 |
| | 46—50 | 2 | 5.9 |
| | 51—55 | 15 | 44.1 |
| | 56—60 | 12 | 35.3 |
| | | | |
| Education | Master's degree | 29 | 85.3 |
| | Doctoral Degree | 5 | 14.7 |
| Experience as principals (Years) | 5—10 | 18 | 52.9 |
| | 11—15 | 10 | 29.4 |
| | 16—20 | 3 | 8.8 |
| | 21—25 | 3 | 8.8 |
| | | | |
| Observation of Chinese language teaching (Times) | 5—10 | 19 | 55.9 |
| | 11—15 | 7 | 20.6 |
| | 16—20 | 4 | 11.8 |
| | 21—25 | 3 | 8.8 |
| | 26—30 | 1 | 2.9 |

Source. Own research.

Research Instruments

The research instrument employed was a semi-structured interview. Semi-structured interviews were conducted to glean qualitative data from the school principals. These interviews offer a blend of predetermined questions with the flexibility to introduce new queries as the interview progresses, maintaining a balance between structured and unstructured approaches. The interview questions were constructed based on the findings from the literature review section. Each interview covered teaching and learning management and educational activities, comprising 6 questions for each topic, as detailed in Table 2.

Table 2*Interview questions***Topic: Teaching and Learning Management**

1. What is your opinion on the management of teaching Chinese language in your school?
2. What are the problems and obstacles in the teaching and learning management in your school?
3. How will Chinese teaching help your school reach an international standard or internationalisation and success rates?
4. How does your school support Chinese teaching?
5. What are the approaches to improve and develop language teaching management in schools to be more efficient and effective?
6. How will the development of Chinese teachers affect the teaching system?

Topic: Education Activities

1. How does your school organise various Chinese language teaching activities?
2. How to make Chinese a feasible proposition for learners or their like to learn?
3. What is your opinion between teaching by Thai teachers and teaching by native speakers?
4. What activities does your school offer that develop students' skills?
5. What is the policy to improve the teaching quality and effectiveness of teachers at your school?
6. What are your expectations for teaching Chinese in your school?

Source. Own research.

Upon securing approval from the researchers' academic institution, data collection commenced. The research was initiated with an examination of secondary schools in southern Thailand that offered Chinese instruction. Subsequently, appointments were scheduled with school principals and heads of foreign language departments for survey distribution and interviews. Principals were surveyed and interviewed at separate intervals, with the data collection process spanning six months. Certain factors necessitated occasional postponements or interruptions of interviews and survey completion, such as time constraints and interruptions in the principals' offices. Both survey distribution and interview sessions typically lasted between one and two hours. Once data collection concluded, the researchers transcribed the interviews in preparation for data analysis.

Data Analysis

Narrative inquiry, as a qualitative research method, centres on the exploration and understanding of the stories or narratives individuals employ to make sense of their experiences. In this study, the interview data underwent a rigorous analysis using narrative inquiry research methodologies. After data collection, researchers transcribed and organised the narratives into a coherent format for examination while preserving the original narrative structure and language's integrity. Subsequently, researchers engaged deeply with the narratives, immersing themselves through repeated readings to gain familiarity with the content, context, and nuances, thereby acquiring a profound understanding of the stories.

Following this immersion, researchers identified fundamental narrative elements within each narrative, including plot, characters, settings, and themes, paying meticulous attention to the participants' storytelling techniques and language usage. Coding was then applied to uncover recurring themes, patterns, and motifs within the narratives. These codes had the capacity to encapsulate emotions, conflicts, transitions, and other pivotal narrative components. Furthermore, an analysis of the narrative structure was conducted, examining the sequencing of the stories (e.g., linear, or non-linear) and the employment of storytelling devices (e.g., flashbacks, foreshadowing) (Rabelo, 2022). Additionally, researchers examined the characters within the narratives, their roles, motivations, and contributions to the overarching storyline, as well as their interpersonal relationships. The researchers delved into the participants' interpretations of their experiences within the narratives, taking into consideration the broader social, cultural, and historical contexts that influenced the construction of these stories (Savin-Baden & Niekerk, 2007). Finally, researchers performed a comparative analysis, contrasting narratives from diverse participants to discern commonalities, disparities in themes, experiences, and perspectives, and to identify emerging patterns and trends within the narratives (Golombek & Johnson, 2021). The research findings were subsequently presented in a narrative format, prominently featuring participants' own words and excerpts to underscore critical facets of the analysis. Figure 1 depicts the narrative inquiry research analysis procedures.

Figure 1

Illustration of the data analysis procedures.



Source. Own research.

RESULTS

Table 3 presents the themes and topics resulting from the narrative inquiry analysis. In the finding presentation, the principals are coded with “P” followed by a number indicating their order in the recorded data.

Table 3

Themes and topics found in the interview data

| Teaching and Learning Management | |
|-----------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Themes | Topics |
| 1. Curriculum | a. Syllabus b. Course contents |
| 2. Knowledge sharing and networking | a. Forum b. Chinese educational and cultural event participation |
| 3. Teaching | a. Teaching method b. Teacher training c. Teacher support d. Native teacher employment |
| 4. Learning | a. Learning activities inside the classroom b. Learning activities outside the classroom |
| Educational Activities | |
| School support | a. School organised activities to practice Chinese b. School organised activities to boost student's confidence c. School Chinese learning support d. School organised Chinese contests e. Chinese exam-oriented activities |

Source. Own research.

Teaching and Learning Management

Curriculum

Syllabus. The national curriculum of Thailand has outlined the position of Chinese as a foreign language and the objectives of teaching students to communicate in Chinese. It is up to the schools to determine how it will be converted into a course syllabus. The school principals acknowledged that the schools had invited university professors and Chinese language specialists to teach them in creating educational policies for Chinese school subjects and designing Chinese curricula. The integration of Chinese culture and communicative Chinese skills into the Chinese curriculum was intended to lead to the standardisation of school Chinese subjects. They also partnered with overseas Chinese schools or institutions and embraced the professional standards

for Chinese teachers. All learning activities were connected with the “Thailand 4.0” economic trends so that students might profit in the future from being able to speak in Chinese for employment motives.

Many schools are still in the very early phases of creating their capacity to teach the Chinese language, but it is not difficult for me to influence the Chinese teaching policy at my school. For the first time, we invited university instructors and specialists to demonstrate how to implement the Chinese curriculum. After that, they requested feedback on the course. This curriculum now includes Chinese culture and communication skills. (P. 34)

I seriously studied the Chinese syllabus. I must understand the current state of China, the advantages for students, how to develop teachers and students, how to interact with Chinese schools or foreign institutions, and the standards for Chinese teachers. (P. 26)

Course Contents. Following students’ interests and aptitudes, teachers created the course material and learning activities. Teachers conformed with the basic criteria of the Chinese language policy throughout the process. Volunteers from China often visit their schools to teach students, which contributes to the creation of educational resources. Schools directed teachers to guarantee that students could advance to a higher level of Chinese subjects, pass the university entrance test for Chinese majors, and get employment in Chinese-related sectors.

I supported teaching and learning based on the curriculum established by the Thai Ministry of Education. There is a classroom for the Chinese special programme. We asked the Chinese scholar to elaborate on this matter. The objective of my Chinese was for students to be able to study at a higher level, such as a prestigious institution. In each semester, we had Chinese volunteers teach students. (P. 4)

The school-based course material and other activities on the interests and abilities of the students. In addition, students might choose an optional course to take. We expect that they will acquire the four main skills in Chinese, pass the admission test to a prominent institution, and get employment in the Chinese industry. (P. 13)

Knowledge Sharing and Networking

Forum. Schools established connections with higher education institutions and international schools engaged in Chinese language learning activities. Through these networks, teachers could enroll in Chinese courses and obtain certificates validating their proficiency in teaching Chinese. Knowledge-sharing events, such as seminars and workshops, were organised internally and across schools, facilitating the exchange of best practices and addressing common challenges. Additionally, teaching competitions were initiated to identify the most effective teaching approaches, with evaluations

conducted by university professors. For instance, one respondent mentioned, “The school has built a network for university collaboration. When the university has Chinese events, we would send teachers to attend, and they would get a certificate attesting to their proficiency in Chinese” (P. 5). Another participant highlighted, “Each semester, I let each teacher demonstrate their work/teaching method to their peers. The academic division organised a session for the exchange of knowledge by inviting education experts to share their perspectives” (P. 19).

Chinese Educational and Cultural Event Participation. Schools encouraged teachers to attend Chinese language and education courses offered by the Thai Ministry of Education and the Chinese Confucius Institute, since it was seen to be useful to teachers’ Chinese expertise. Every academic year, the Ministry of Education sends certain teachers to China on a study visit.

Teaching

Teaching Method. Active learning and the integration of technology/internet-based applications (e.g., Kahoot and Live Worksheet) were components of the employed teacher methods in Chinese. The method involved the elements of Chinese culture, e.g., Chinese calligraphy, paper cutting, and food. The advancement of communicative skills in Chinese was one of the teaching principles, especially in listening and speaking. Teachers considered students’ sociolinguistic knowledge of Thai in Chinese learning that combined aural/oral processing skills with visual processing skills. For example, “We concentrated on using teaching methods to bridge the sociolinguistic knowledge of Thai acquired by our students with their Chinese studies” (P. 6). “The native teacher educated students about Chinese culture, including calligraphy, paper cutting, and Chinese cuisine. Students could do the activities independently after class” (P. 20).

Teacher Training. Schools benefited from Chinese training and seminars on teaching and the use of technology in Chinese education. Teachers may be promoted if they do and publish research as well as develop basic technologies to aid student learning. The Thai Ministry of Education also offered Chinese seminars for teachers, both online and in person.

Teacher Support. The schools held monthly workshops on professional standards for Chinese teachers. There was a system in place where teachers assisted new teachers in settling in. When teachers planned to undertake classroom research in Chinese, principals were delighted. Nonetheless, schools appeared to rely on Chinese Confucius Institutes for Chinese teacher professional development.

Native Teacher Employment. Most of the schools managed to hire native and non-native Chinese teachers. Native teachers were usually volunteers who came at certain times. Some principals admitted that hiring native teachers could improve their school’s image of Chinese education. The Thai Ministry of Education and

the Chinese Confucius Institute assisted schools with finding native teachers and volunteers. The principals believed that having native teachers could benefit non-native teachers in terms of ensuring the correctness of their Chinese and training students for Chinese contests.

We also hire international teachers and Chinese volunteer teachers. Occasionally, we may rely on volunteer Chinese teachers from the Confucius Institute. As part of our strategic planning, we do this for short and long durations. (P. 15)

The school engaged both local teachers and Chinese volunteers due to their differing lengths of stay in Thailand. In addition, they might assist Thai teachers in preparing students for Chinese competitions. (P. 16)

Learning

Learning Activities Inside the Classroom. Every day, students did one Chinese word activity at noon. Students did Chinese vocabulary signs in front of the board in the class. Senior students had a chance to give a brief talk to junior ones. Occasionally, there were Chinese public speaking and singing contests; students' work exhibitions during Chinese New Year; and celebrations for the Chinese full-moon festival.

Learning Activities Outside the Classroom. Extra-curricular activities, such as Chinese summer activities and a Nakhon Si Thammarat Chinese field trip, were conducted. For some schools, there were regular Chinese contests held that invited other schools to participate. For a better school, a short Chinese camp in China was organised. Schools also had students participate in local activities during the Chinese New Year Festival and Vegetarian Festival.

Educational Activities. For educational activities, schools organised talk-show events with Chinese experts, established Chinese student clubs, and appointed teachers to supervise students' Chinese-related activities. Sometimes, Chinese students were invited to have conversations with the school students practicing tandem learning. The students could do Chinese rope braid and show it off to their parents. Some schools had a language laboratory for students to practice their foreign languages. If not, schools assigned the officers to install the Chinese font on each computer to practice Chinese typing. A simple Chinese corner was prepared to facilitate students' Chinese learning.

Chinese contests seemed to be one of the regular educational activities held by schools. The contests might involve Chinese speech contests, Chinese storytelling contests, and Chinese dumpling making contests. For critical thinking, debates in Chinese were created. Aside from non-academic activities, schools were involved in the administration of the Chinese Examination (HSK Level 4), which could allow students to continue in their Chinese major at the university level. At this point, tutoring classes were arranged by teachers and schools.

DISCUSSION

The qualitative findings revealed that the teaching of Chinese as a foreign language (CFL) in secondary schools in Thailand aimed to encourage students to utilise Chinese in their daily lives and to prepare them for future employment. Students' learning activities are guided by the Thai Ministry of Education's curriculum, which aims to improve students' Chinese skills in listening, speaking, reading, and writing. Nonetheless, the schools were aware of their limited knowledge of CFL teaching and learning management, so they invited university professors and Chinese language specialists to educate them on educational policies for Chinese school subjects, as well as the development of Chinese syllabus and course content. Partnerships with overseas Chinese schools or institutions and professional standards for Chinese teachers were established. Volunteers from China often visited the principals' schools to teach students, which contributed to the creation of educational resources. Chinese teachers at schools were directed to assist students to study a higher level of Chinese subjects, pass the university entrance test for a Chinese major, and secure employment in Chinese-related sectors. The results of the data analysis showed the dependency of schools on Chinese educational experts and the Confucius Institute in their CFL teaching and learning management. Such a tendency has been indicated by several studies (Ma et al., 2017; Moloney & Xu, 2015). The struggle with the development of CFL as a school subject has also been discussed by scholars in Australia (Orton, 2016) and New Zealand (Wang, 2021). This study's findings added that the school principals' experience could significantly determine the effectiveness of CFL teaching and learning in schools.

Interestingly, the principals did not mention translanguaging practices and CLIL, unlike what has been discovered in other countries (Huang, 2018; Lewis et al., 2012; Wei, 2018). In an Australian school, for example, students were more motivated, and learning was more engaging and exciting when teachers used a CLIL methodology blending language acquisition with high standards for subject learning (Harbon et al., 2016). Yet, the school principals reported about immersing CFL learners in a teaching method that merges Chinese characteristics, such as Chinese tone drill, Chinese calligraphy, and video conferencing with Chinese peers, as suggested by Wen Xu and Garth Stahl (2021). Teachers' teaching methods were focused on active learning and the integration of technology/internet-based applications where they could involve the elements of Chinese culture, e.g., Chinese calligraphy, paper cutting, and food. To maintain and upgrade teacher quality, the schools conducted or sent teachers to attend Chinese educational training and seminars and encouraged classroom-based research. Regular seminars by the Thai Ministry of Education and the Chinese Confucius Institute were regular events for these schools. Schools, however, were still embracing native speakerism, but they acknowledged that the employment of native teachers could benefit non-native teachers and students as well, as highlighted by Gu et al. (2021) and Wenxing Wang and Jeff Bale (2019).

The schools organised educational activities aimed at facilitating students' Chinese communication skills as well as understanding Chinese culture. Youjin Ruan et al. (2015) argue that it may be more vital to encourage learners to continue studying the language and encourage active participation than it is to improve their linguistic correctness and fluency in a particular situation. Fostering peer-to-peer conversation, creating tandem learning, establishing a Chinese club and corner, and participating in Chinese contests were among the educational activities Thai schools did in their Chinese programme. All these activities could enhance students' non-cognitive skills where they had a chance to grasp a deeper knowledge of the target language's cultural and micro-setting life experiences (Chen & Du, 2022). Chinese students were occasionally invited to the schools and had casual conversations with the students in them. The schools were aware of the use of video conferencing or internet-based applications that could connect their students with those in China, as urged by Sarah Pasfield-Neofitou et al. (2016). Aside from providing a foreign language laboratory, the schools changed their computers' language to Chinese to make students accustomed to typing in Chinese. Besides, students had a Chinese vocabulary learning activity at noon and did a vocabulary demonstration in the classroom. These activities were meant to ease student learning of Chinese characters, which are commonly difficult for foreign learners (Hsiao et al., 2015; Zhang & Reilly, 2015).

Implications of the Findings

The findings of this study can be implicated in formulating effective teaching and learning management and educational activities for Chinese subjects in schools outside of China. The existence of the Chinese Confucius Institute has been proven to be useful in guiding the development of the school's Chinese subjects. From the study's findings, there are three parties that play significant roles: the Ministry of Education, the Chinese Confucius Institute, and higher education institutions. The schools rely on these institutions for knowledge upgrades and teacher quality development through seminars and workshops, certification, teacher recruitment, student exchange, and so forth. The schools had forums of knowledge exchange among them, which they could use to hold competitive Chinese contests among their students. Cheng Aimin (2015) contends that despite the burgeoning interest in the Chinese language over the past three decades, Chinese teaching finds itself at a pivotal juncture characterized by an internationalization process unprecedented in its developmental history. Similar to English, Chinese risks diverging into distinct "Chineses" across different nations in the absence of a globally recognized framework for the Chinese language. This argument resonates with the findings of this study in a way that suggests due to globalisation, access to information is no longer an issue. Schools can reach Chinese institutions beyond the country's boundary on their own. Given the speed of this globalisation process

on education, Chinese subjects at schools will be useful for students' futures and, therefore, they should be continued to be developed.

Limitations of the Study

This study has several limitations that need to be acknowledged. First, the research findings are context-specific to secondary schools in Thailand. Therefore, caution should be exercised when attempting to generalise these findings to other educational contexts with different cultural and linguistic backgrounds. Second, the study primarily relies on self-reported data from school principals. While this data source offers valuable insights, it may be susceptible to biases or social desirability effects. Future research could benefit from the inclusion of multiple data sources, such as teacher and student perspectives, to provide a more comprehensive view of CFL teaching and learning in these schools. Additionally, the study did not extensively explore the perspectives and experiences of CFL teachers and students, which could have enriched the findings and provided a more holistic understanding of the challenges and opportunities in CFL education.

CONCLUSION

This study offers valuable insights into the teaching and learning of Chinese as a Foreign Language (CFL) in Thai secondary schools. It highlights the pivotal role of school principals in shaping CFL education and their reliance on external resources, including Chinese educational experts and the Confucius Institute. The study underscores the significance of active learning methods, cultural immersion, and the integration of technology in CFL programs. While there is room for improvement, particularly in exploring translanguaging and Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) strategies, this research lays the foundation for further investigation into effective CFL teaching and learning practices. Overall, the findings contribute to the understanding of CFL education in Thailand and offer potential avenues for future research and pedagogical enhancement.

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