A Study on Chinese Speaking Anxiety and Chinese Speaking Learning Strategies among Thai Chinese Language Learners

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ABSTRACT

Aim. This research aims to investigate the factors affecting anxiety in speaking Chinese, the level of anxiety and the use of strategies in speaking Chinese, and the relationship between anxiety and the use of strategy in speaking Chinese among Thai Chinese Language Learners.

Methods. This mixed-methods study investigates 155 Thai Chinese language learners using a questionnaire on speaking anxiety, strategies, and interviews.

Results. The findings reveal that test anxiety is the most significant factor influencing learners' overall anxiety. A correlation was found between speaking anxiety levels and strategy use: learners with low anxiety tended to employ affective and social strategies, while those with high anxiety relied more on compensation strategies. Additionally, a statistically significant negative correlation ($p < 0.01$) was observed between speaking anxiety and the use of speaking strategies.

Conclusions. Speaking anxiety and the use of inappropriate speaking strategies significantly affect the development of language skills among Thai Chinese Language Learners. To address these issues, teachers should adopt the role of a speaking consultant by providing tailored guidance on selecting speaking strategies that align with

learners' individual characteristics. Creating a friendly and non-threatening classroom atmosphere is crucial to reducing anxiety. Furthermore, allowing sufficient preparation time before speaking assessments and providing regular opportunities for conversational practice can help build learners' confidence in communication and foster sustainable motivation for learning Chinese.

Cognitive value. These findings can serve as valuable input for developing curricula and teaching methodologies tailored to enhance Chinese speaking skills among Thai learners.

Introduction

Language is a fundamental tool for communication, allowing individuals to convey messages and share understanding (Yashima et al., 2004). Language is also vital for education, knowledge acquisition, and career development. Teaching foreign languages is, therefore, a crucial factor in developing a country in various aspects, including economics, society, culture, and education. Recently, Thailand has been striving to enhance the foreign language proficiency of Thai learners. This is evident in the national education strategy, as outlined in the 8th National Education Plan, which mandates that curricula at all levels must include foreign language instruction. This is to prepare learners to face the rapidly changing global landscape (Komaratta, 2016).

Chinese is a language of paramount importance today, and its significance is expected to grow even further (Office of the Education Council, 2016). Recognising the importance of Chinese, the Thai government has authorised teaching Chinese as a foreign language since 1992 and has designated Chinese as the second foreign language for Thai. As a result, Chinese language instruction has been widely implemented at various educational levels (Institute of Asian Studies Chulalongkorn University , 2008). The aim is to equip Thai learners with Chinese language skills and enable them to communicate effectively internationally. However, in recent years, the effectiveness of Chinese language instruction in Thailand has not met expectations. The overall situation of Chinese language education in Thailand, particularly in public and private educational institutions, has not succeeded. Numerous challenges persist, such as a shortage of qualified teachers, inconsistencies in teaching standards (Manomaiwiboon, 2005), and a lack of language skills, especially speaking proficiency, which is currently a major issue for Thai learners (Thongthaengyai & Kao-ien, 2023). A significant reason for this is that most Thai learners are not immersed in an environment where a foreign language is used, limiting opportunities for speaking practice. Additionally, the unfamiliarity with the language often leads to anxiety and apprehension when communicating in Chinese. Research by Nuraqilah Nadjwa Miskam and Aminabibi Saidalvi (2018) indicates that foreign language anxiety, mainly speaking anxiety, is a significant problem

for many learners. Factors such as a lack of practice in a foreign language environment, unfamiliarity with the language, and fear of communication all contribute to this anxiety.

Furthermore, some research suggests that ineffective speaking strategies can hinder the development of speaking skills and increase communication anxiety among learners.

Mu-Hsuan Chou (2018) found that the use of ineffective speaking strategies, such as literal translation or code-switching, is significantly correlated with higher levels of speaking anxiety. Additionally, factors like fear of negative evaluation, low self-esteem, and cultural influences can all contribute to speaking anxiety in learners (Mukminin et al., 2015).

In the 20th century, a significant shift occurred in the history of foreign language education. Researchers began to emphasise the learner, focusing on studying learners' emotions and learning strategies (Hongyan, 2010). Peter D. MacIntyre and Robert C. Gardner (1994) found that studying emotional factors can enhance the quality of teaching and help learners become more responsible. Meanwhile, numerous researchers have demonstrated the significant role of emotional factors in language learning processes, with anxiety having a more profound impact than other emotional factors (Arnold, 2011). Several studies have also shown a correlation between anxiety and learning strategies (Aida, 1994). For instance, Chou (2018) investigated the relationship between speaking anxiety and using English speaking strategies, finding that speaking strategies serve as tools for communication and problem-solving in speaking. Conversely, Siti Nurshafezan Ahmad et al. (2022) found a positive correlation between specific communication strategies and fear of oral presentations among university students. Additionally, the research of Shiken Anzanni and Dian Novita Dewi (2022) and Le Thi Thuy Duong and Nguyen Huynh Trang (2023) revealed a significant relationship between speaking anxiety and speaking performance, indicating the impact of anxiety on language use.

In Thailand, research on language anxiety and the use of learning strategies among learners is still limited. For instance, Worawan Wongsriwiwat (2024) found that anxiety in learning English vocabulary influenced students' choice of English vocabulary learning strategies. Charoensuk Supaphon et al. (2022) discovered a significant relationship between language learning strategies and levels of language anxiety. Students who employed practice-oriented and application-based learning strategies tended to have lower levels of anxiety. In comparison, those who relied on memorisation and textbook-based learning often experienced higher levels of anxiety. Additionally, Papangkorn Kittawee et al. (2012) demonstrated that students with lower levels of language anxiety used language learning strategies more frequently than those with higher levels of anxiety, and the use of language learning strategies was significantly correlated with levels of language anxiety.

Previous research has predominantly concentrated on language anxiety and learning strategies in the context of foreign languages, mainly English, with limited attention given to Chinese language acquisition among Thai learners. Despite the increasing significance of Chinese in Thai education, the economy, and international communication, many Thai learners face challenges due to a need for more understanding regarding effective learning strategies. Although Chinese language programmes have proliferated across

educational institutions, the absence of pedagogical expertise and sensitivity to learners' needs has impeded the development of Chinese language proficiency. Speaking anxiety, a prominent issue among Thai learners of Chinese significantly hinders their communicative competence. Given the considerations above, the researcher seeks to investigate speaking anxiety and speaking strategies among Thai learners of Chinese. The study explores the factors contributing to speaking anxiety, the selection of speaking strategies, and the relationship between these variables. This research endeavours to understand the factors and severity of speaking anxiety experienced by Thai learners, as well as the strategies they utilise in learning spoken Chinese. The findings are expected to provide valuable insights for educational institutions offering Chinese language programmes, informing improvements in speaking curricula to more effectively address the needs of Thai learners and enhance their overall language proficiency.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Speaking Anxiety

Elaine K. Horwitz et al. (1986) characterise Speaking anxiety within language acquisition as a distinct type of anxiety stemming from verbal communication in a non-native language. This nervousness is most pronounced during public speaking or when addressing an audience. It is frequently linked to apprehension regarding adverse assessment and a deficiency in self-assurance concerning one's linguistic skills.

Speaking anxiety is a widespread problem among individuals learning a new language, which hurts their competence and overall experience in educational environments. In both English and Chinese contexts, a multitude of research has investigated several aspects of this phenomenon. A critical study conducted by Abdalaziz M. Toubot et al. (2018) investigated the levels and causes of speaking anxiety among English as a Foreign Language (EFL) students in Libya. The study found that communication apprehension, fear of unfavourable assessment, and test anxiety were the main contributors to language anxiety. Bikash Chandra Taly and Shamala Paramasivam (2020) conducted a study on speaking anxiety among postgraduate international students in Malaysia. The study found that students in English as a Medium of Instruction (EMI) settings had varied degrees of anxiety and used diverse coping procedures. The results above highlight the complex and diverse characteristics of speaking anxiety, which are affected by particular circumstances and variations among individuals. Research on EFL postgraduate students in a Chinese setting revealed that a considerable number of them expressed elevated levels of public speaking anxiety when presenting at foreign conferences. The main concern was the fear of receiving unfavourable feedback (Wei, 2022). Songyut Akkakoson (2016) observed a positive association between fear of negative assessment and anxiety levels among Chinese ESL students, which is consistent with

the findings of the present study. Both researches highlight the need to comprehend the cultural and situational factors that impact speaking fear, especially in formal educational environments. Research has shown that age significantly influences speaking anxiety, with younger students generally experiencing higher levels of public speaking anxiety (Gaibani & Elmenfi, 2016). The identification of communication apprehension, exam anxiety, and fear of unfavourable assessment as critical elements leading to anxiety in academic speaking classes is corroborated by Maria Eva Damayanti and ListyaniListyani (2020). Interactions between age and anxiety indicate that developmental aspects might impact how kids deal with difficulties in speaking.

Speaking Learning Strategies

Speaking strategies are actions taken by learners to make speaking easier, faster, more effective, and more enjoyable (Oxford, 1990). Proficiency in speaking is a cornerstone of foreign language acquisition. Selecting appropriate learning methodologies can enhance learners' oral skills and foster greater self-assurance in their communicative abilities. In recent years, there has been a notable increase in research on Chinese speaking practices, emphasising diverse pedagogical methods and learner experiences. A significant theme is using metacognitive practices to improve speaking proficiency among Chinese language learners. Yuh Huann Tan and Seng Chee Tan (2010) emphasise the efficacy of audio blogging and metacognitive scaffolding, demonstrating favourable outcomes in enhancing students' speaking skills. This corresponds with the findings of Weiwei Zhang et al. (2022), who employed a strategic competency inventory to evaluate metacognitive techniques in Chinese EFL learners, highlighting the significance of self-regulation in language learning. Furthermore, Chompunoot Putinatr and Paiboon Kiattikomol (2022) emphasise the significance of emotive elements in language acquisition, contending that conventional approaches frequently neglect the emotional dimensions of learning. Their research promotes technology-driven affective learning frameworks that assist pre-service educators in formulating successful methodologies for teaching Mandarin. Hong Zhou and Yufang Feng (2021) corroborate this viewpoint, demonstrating that systematic training in speaking tactics markedly enhanced the oral competency of Chinese high school students, indicating that focused teaching can yield improved results in language learning. Moreover, investigating specific speaking methods uncovers the intricate problems learners encounter. Jessie Zhou and Li-Shih Huang (2018) examined Chinese graduate students' communication tactics across many fields, highlighting the necessity for customised approaches according to the academic setting. Similarly, Li Jin (2012) investigated the evolution of complement response methods among study-abroad participants, emphasising the cultural aspects of language utilisation essential for efficient communication in a Chinese-speaking context. The incorporation of cultural and contextual

elements is vital for comprehending speaking methods. According to Peijian Paul Sun and Lawrence Jun Zhang (2020), individual variations, including motivation, anxiety, and cultural interest, significantly affect the speech output of multilingual learners in Chinese. This comprehensive approach is shown in the research of Chili Li et al. (2021), who examined the strategic use of Chinese as a second language learner through the lens of mediation theory, highlighting the varied array of tactics learners employ.

The Correlation between Speaking Anxiety and Speaking Learning Strategies

The relationship between speaking anxiety and speaking strategies has become a significant research focus among scholars, particularly in the context of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners. Speaking anxiety, often marked by fear and trepidation during verbal communication, can significantly impede students' speaking ability and overall language learning. Studies demonstrate that practical speaking skills can alleviate this anxiety, improving learners' confidence and competence. A significant discovery is that self-regulated measures, including positive self-talk and stress management approaches, are essential in alleviating speaking anxiety. Samah El-Sakka's research indicates that these tactics enhance speaking ability and markedly reduce anxiety levels in pupils (El-Sakka, 2016). This corresponds with the results of Xue Ting Tee et al., who performed a comprehensive study indicating that students utilising metacognitive and compensatory methods experienced reduced anxiety levels (Tee et al., 2020). Jayasri Lingaiah and Siti Norashikin Binti Ishak found preparation tactics essential for alleviating anxiety, indicating that students who prepare sufficiently generally report less anxiety during speaking activities (Lingaiah & Ishak, 2023). Furthermore, the setting in which speaking transpires might affect the tactics employed by learners. Chou's research demonstrates that students in diverse English-medium instruction (EMI) environments employ distinct tactics, with those utilising borrowing strategies, such as code-switching, reporting increased anxiety (Chou, 2018). This indicates that the selection of method is not only a personal preference but also contingent upon circumstance, which can intensify or mitigate anxiety levels. Abdu Rahim III Kenoh's qualitative study highlights the significance of practice and rehearsal as helpful coping strategies, asserting that familiarity with the speaking setting may markedly alleviate anxiety (Kenoh, 2021). Moreover, the emotional states linked to speaking anxiety might create a loop of negative reinforcement, wherein anxiety hinders performance, therefore exacerbating worry. Ebrahim Ghorban Mohammadi et al. identified an inverse association between language learning techniques and anxiety, suggesting that increased utilisation of strategies is associated with reduced anxiety levels (Mohammadi et al., 2013). The findings of Anastasia Ronauli Hasibuan and Ira Irzawati further corroborate this, indicating that even adept speakers may experience anxiety, hence underscoring the necessity of practical ways for controlling emotional reactions during speaking activities (Hasibuan & Irzawati, 2020).

Research Hypothesis

- Factors affecting anxiety in speaking Chinese among Thai learners include Communication apprehension, Test anxiety and Fear of negative evaluation.
- Thai learners of Chinese with different levels of speaking anxiety will choose to use different strategies when speaking Chinese.
- There is a significant correlation between anxiety in speaking Chinese and the choice of speaking strategies among Thai learners of Chinese.

Research Method

This study utilised a mixed methods approach, integrating quantitative and qualitative data collection, analysis, and interpretation within a single framework to examine a shared phenomenon (Leech & Onwuegbuzie, 2009). Quantitative data was obtained through a survey to align with the study's objectives and hypotheses. The survey targeted first- to fourth-year Chinese language students at Walailak University to identify factors influencing their foreign language speaking anxiety and its relationship with their chosen speaking strategies. To gain deeper insights into participants' views and experiences, qualitative data was collected through in-depth interviews, which were recorded and carefully analysed to enhance the overall findings.

Participants

This study employed purposive sampling to collect data, consistent with Alan Bryman (2016) definition of selecting individuals, institutions, documents, and other elements directly pertinent to the research question. This approach ensured high-quality data collection that was directly relevant to the study's objectives. The researcher surveyed 155 Thai undergraduate students enrolled in the Chinese language programme at Walailak University, ranging from first to fourth year.

Instruments

The researcher conducted a literature review to synthesise the steps and methods used in the study. The research instruments used in this study included a questionnaire on Chinese language speaking anxiety for Thai Chinese language learners, adapted from Horwitz et al. (1986) Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS), which focuses on speaking anxiety and is divided into three dimensions: communication apprehension, test anxiety, and evaluation anxiety. The questionnaire

on the use of Chinese language speaking strategies among Thai Chinese language learners was adapted from Rebecca L. Oxford (1990) Strategy Inventory for Language Learning (SILL), which categorises language learning strategies into two types: direct and indirect. Additionally, a semi-structured interview was employed.

PROCEDURE

This research primarily collected data through surveys to obtain comprehensive and high-quality information. The questionnaire was designed to collect quantitative data that could be analysed statistically. According to John W. Creswell and David Creswell (2017), a high-quality questionnaire is essential for establishing the reliability of research. This survey aimed to assess the levels of Chinese speaking anxiety and the choice of speaking strategies among Thai learners. The survey was conducted four times, covering students from each academic year, with one survey per year. Each academic year, 30 minutes were allotted to complete the questionnaire.

To gain additional in-depth insights into Thai learners' issues in speaking Chinese, the researcher employed semi-structured interviews for qualitative data collection. Eight questions were prepared to address relevant issues. The interviews were conducted individually, with each session lasting approximately 30 minutes.

DATA ANALYSIS

In the data analysis, the researcher used Statistical analysis software to analyse the data collected from the sample group. The process began with a descriptive statistical analysis of the respondents' general information to obtain frequency and percentage values. Then, the study variables were analysed using the mean and standard deviation. Additionally, anxiety levels and strategy selection for speaking were analysed using One-Way ANOVA. The relationship between anxiety and speaking strategies was further examined through Pearson correlation and Multiple Regression Analysis (MRA), with a statistical significance level set at 0.05. Finally, qualitative data from interviews were analysed using content analysis.
be utilised

RESULTS

The result of the study focuses on analysing speaking anxiety and the use of speaking strategies among Thai learners of the Chinese language. Data collection was conducted through questionnaires designed to evaluate factors influencing the level of speaking

anxiety and the patterns of strategy selection for Chinese language speaking. Additionally, interviews were carried out to gather qualitative insights from learners regarding their experiences and perceptions on the subject. The findings in the table below highlight the relationships between various factors affecting speaking anxiety and strategy selection. These results provide critical information that can to develop more effective teaching and learning approaches.

The data analysis from the sample group reveals that most respondents (93.55%) are female, with 34.19% being fourth-year students. Among them, 40% demonstrated Chinese language proficiency at the HSK Level 3, but as many as 45.16% did not specify their HSK level. Regarding spoken Chinese proficiency (HSKK), most respondents were at the beginner level or did not specify, accounting for a combined total of 95.48%. This highlights the need to enhance Chinese communication skills. Most respondents (52.26%) reported having only 1–3 years of Chinese language learning experience, and a significant majority (68.39%) have no Chinese heritage. Additionally, 62.58% of respondents were identified as introverted, which may impact their language learning, particularly in communication and speaking skill development.

Results of Quantitative Data Analysis from the Questionnaire Survey

Table 1

Factors Affecting Chinese Speaking Anxiety Among Thai Chinese Learners

Factors	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Communication Apprehension	155	3.09	0.87
Test Anxiety	155	3.16	0.88
Fear of Negative Evaluation	155	2.55	0.92

*Source.*Own research.

The analysis of factors influencing Chinese speaking anxiety among Thai learners reveals that Test Anxiety has the highest mean score of 3.16 (SD = 0.88), indicating that it is the most significant factor contributing to learners' anxiety. Most learners express concerns when required to participate in speaking tests on unfamiliar topics or those they need to practice adequately. Additionally, they exhibit anxiety about the possibility of underperforming in speaking evaluations. The second highest factor is Communication Apprehension, with a mean score of 3.09 (SD = 0.87). Learners reported feeling nervous when speaking Chinese without prior preparation or when communicating in public, which often leads to heightened tension, pressure, and potential forgetfulness or ineffective communication. Meanwhile, Fear of Negative Evaluation has the lowest mean score of 2.55 (SD = 0.92), suggesting that this factor has the least impact compared to the others. Overall, the findings indicate that most

learners experience a moderate level of speaking anxiety. These results highlight the necessity of developing targeted strategies to reduce speaking anxiety, particularly in testing and communication, to enhance Thai learners' confidence and effectiveness in using Chinese.

Table 2

The Level of Speaking Anxiety and the Selection of Speaking Strategies in Chinese Among Thai Chinese Language Learners

The Selection of Speaking Strategies	Level of Speaking Anxiety	Mean	Std. Deviation
Memory Strategies	Low	3.34	0.68
	Moderate	3.26	0.51
	High	3.18	0.62
Cognitive Strategies	Low	3.37	0.75
	Moderate	3.69	0.53
	High	3.34	0.70
Compensation Strategies	Low	3.80	0.75
	Moderate	3.46	0.67
	High	3.84	0.69
Metacognitive Strategies	Low	3.56	0.87
	Moderate	3.21	0.69
	High	3.25	0.71
Affective Strategies	Low	3.59	0.79
	Moderate	3.15	0.59
	High	3.14	0.81
Social Strategies	Low	3.94	0.83
	Moderate	3.55	0.72
	High	3.55	0.86

Source. Own research.

The analysis revealed a significant correlation between Chinese speaking anxiety levels and the selection of speaking strategies among Thai learners. Learners with low anxiety levels tended to employ a higher frequency of memory strategies (Mean = 3.34), metacognitive strategies (Mean = 3.56), affective strategies (Mean = 3.59), and social strategies (Mean = 3.94), reflecting the use of techniques to enhance confidence and reduce performance pressure. Conversely, learners with high anxiety levels relied more heavily on compensation strategies (Mean = 3.84), possibly due to attempts to mitigate language limitations by using substitutes or guessing meanings. Furthermore, learners with moderate anxiety levels exhibited the highest use of cognitive strategies (Mean = 3.69), suggesting their reliance on these strategies for language

processing and practice. These findings indicate that learners with varying levels of anxiety select different strategies to suit their needs and highlight the importance of providing appropriate strategy training, such as emotional support and structural skill training, to reduce anxiety and enhance long-term language learning outcomes.

Table 3

The Relationship Between Chinese Speaking Anxiety and Chinese Speaking Strategies in Thai Chinese Language Learners

Correlations		Chinese Speaking Anxiety	Chinese Speaking Strategies
Chinese Speaking Anxiety	Pearson Correlation	1	-.219**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.006
	N	155	155
Chinese Speaking Strategies	Pearson Correlation	-.219**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.006	
	N	155	155

Note. ** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)
Source. Own research.

A Pearson correlation analysis was conducted to examine the relationship between speaking anxiety and Chinese speaking strategies among Thai Chinese learners. The results revealed a significant negative correlation between the two variables at the 0.01 level

($r = -0.219$, $p = 0.006$). This indicates a weak but significant inverse relationship, suggesting that as speaking anxiety increases, the use of speaking strategies tends to decrease.

Table 4

The Results of Multiple Regression Analysis on the Dimensions of Chinese Speaking Strategies and Chinese Speaking Anxiety Among Thai Learners

Model	Unstandardised Coefficients		Standardised Coefficients	t	Sig.	95.0% Confidence Interval for B	
	B	Std. Error	Beta			Lower Bound	Upper Bound
(Constant)	3.561	.396		8.994	.000	2.779	4.344
Memory Strategies	-.098	.136	-.072	-.722	.472	-.366	.170
Cognitive Strategies	.160	.127	.138	1.260	.210	-.091	.410
Compensation Strategies	.379	.130	.306	2.927	.004	.123	.635

Model	Unstandardised Coefficients		Standardised Coefficients	t	Sig.	95.0% Confidence Interval for B	
	B	Std. Error	Beta			Lower Bound	Upper Bound
Metacognitive Strategies	-.124	.119	-.117	-1.048	.297	-.359	.110
Affective Strategies	-.429	.118	-.397	-3.651	.000	-.662	-.197
Social Strategies	-.124	.102	-.124	-1.207	.229	-.326	.079

Note. a. Dependent Variable: Anxiety score
Source. Own research.

The analysis revealed that compensation and affective strategies significantly influenced students' anxiety levels. Compensation strategies had a positive correlation with anxiety, suggesting that relying heavily on these strategies may increase anxiety due to feelings of pressure or inadequacy. Conversely, affective strategies had a negative correlation with anxiety, indicating that using these strategies reduced anxiety by enabling students to manage better their emotions and stress, such as through positive self-talk or relaxation techniques. Other strategies, including memory, cognitive, metacognitive, and social, did not significantly impact anxiety in this context. These findings highlight the importance of supporting students in using affective strategies to reduce anxiety and developing skills to decrease reliance on compensation strategies, which can lead to more effective learning and reduced long-term stress.

Results of Qualitative Data Analysis from the Interviews

The study revealed several insights based on interviews conducted with 25 Thai university students enrolled in a Chinese language programme, utilising eight structured questions. Regarding the significance of Chinese speaking skills, 80% of the respondents emphasised the critical importance of this skill, particularly in academic contexts, professional settings, business communication, and interpersonal relationship development. This underscores the essential role of Chinese speaking proficiency in various contexts.

Concerning the students' self-assessed levels of Chinese speaking proficiency, most respondents categorised themselves as having basic to intermediate skills, capable of communicating only simple sentences with limited complexity. A majority also expressed the necessity to enhance their skills further, particularly in pronunciation, grammar, and the appropriate use of vocabulary. When asked about their emotions in instances where communication was unsuccessful—such as when speaking Chinese but failing to be understood by peers or instructors—most respondents reported feelings of anxiety, embarrassment, and pressure. However, a subset of participants viewed such situations as opportunities for practice and improvement, highlighting that, despite

the negative emotions, effective strategies could turn these experiences into valuable learning moments. Factors contributing to speaking anxiety were primarily internal, such as fear of making mistakes and a lack of confidence. In contrast, external factors included unsupportive environments for practising Chinese, limiting opportunities for real-life communication. These conditions amplified anxiety when students needed to use Chinese in practical situations.

Regarding attitudes toward learning Chinese, 75% of respondents held positive views, perceiving Chinese language study as an opportunity for personal development. In contrast, 25% viewed Chinese as a challenging language to learn. Those with positive attitudes tended to experience less speaking anxiety and considered a constructive mindset a key facilitator in skill development. Avoidance behaviour was most evident in scenarios involving public speaking or communication with native speakers. Respondents noted that such situations induced pressure, making it difficult to construct sentences effectively, often due to concerns about correctness and fear of errors. Strategies to mitigate speaking anxiety predominantly centred on

self-regulation. Most respondents highlighted the importance of managing negative thoughts and engaging in consistent practice as effective approaches to reducing anxiety. Additionally, accepting and viewing mistakes as growth opportunities were crucial steps in building confidence and alleviating the pressure associated with speaking.

The findings indicate that Chinese speaking proficiency is vital to unlock various opportunities. However, speaking anxiety and environmental factors remain significant obstacles. Addressing these challenges through skill development, emotional management, and fostering supportive environments is essential for empowering learners and enhancing their confidence in speaking Chinese.

DISCUSSION

This study aims to identify the factors influencing Chinese language speaking anxiety among Thai learners, the levels of anxiety that impact their choice of speaking strategies, and the relationship between anxiety and speaking strategies. The findings indicate that the most significant factor causing speaking anxiety in Chinese learners is test anxiety, especially when learners are required to speak on unprepared topics or in public settings with a large audience, as well as anxiety related to speaking performance outcomes. These results align with Suciati (2020), who stated that speaking anxiety can arise from multiple factors, including test anxiety, which negatively affects academic achievement and communication skills in classroom settings. The findings are further corroborated by Heng-Tsung Danny Huang and Shao-Ting Alan Hung (2013), who demonstrated that test anxiety diminishes students' performance in speaking assessments. To alleviate such anxiety, it is recommended that learners be encouraged to express themselves through participatory activities that allow all students to use

Chinese to share opinions. Crucially, the role of teachers must also be considered. Excessive emphasis on speaking for assessment purposes can lead to heightened stress and accumulated anxiety, making students reluctant to communicate. Therefore, in speaking-focused instruction, teachers should act as advisors, supporting students when they encounter difficulties in speaking. Jiafan Su (2022) and Pairin Srisinthon (2024) emphasised the teacher's role as a language advisor in creating a safe and supportive learning environment, which fosters free expression and promotes learner-centred approaches. This approach helps reduce anxiety and is a critical factor in language learning. Similarly, Christian Lawrence N. Reyes (2022) highlighted the importance of addressing factors contributing to language anxiety, such as fear of communication and concerns about negative evaluation, by employing targeted teaching strategies. These methods underscore the positive outcomes of fostering a supportive and inclusive learning environment.

Furthermore, examining the relationship between the levels of Chinese speaking anxiety among learners and their choice of speaking strategies highlights key causal factors contributing to such anxiety. Chou (2018) explained that the selection of strategies is correlated with higher levels of speaking anxiety. This finding suggests that learners' choice of strategies is influenced by their anxiety levels. For Chinese language learners, the research revealed that learners with varying levels of speaking anxiety exhibit significantly different preferences for speaking strategies. Learners with low speaking anxiety tend to use memory strategies, metacognitive strategies, affective strategies, and social strategies, which reflect techniques aimed at building confidence and alleviating pressure during speaking tasks. Conversely, learners with high levels of speaking anxiety rely heavily on compensation strategies, likely as an effort to mitigate the impact of linguistic limitations by substituting words or guessing meanings. Iakovos Tsiplakides and Areti Keramida (2009) observed that highly anxious learners often adopt strategies that provide immediate relief from pressure. However, these strategies may not contribute to the long-term development of speaking skills. They also noted that anxious learners prioritise form over content, focusing more on accuracy than fluency. To reduce speaking anxiety among learners, creating a conducive classroom environment that fosters a stress-free atmosphere is essential. Such an environment lets learners feel relaxed and comfortable while practising speaking skills in small groups or pairs rather than under the pressure of formal assessments (Oteir & Al-Otaibi, 2022). If learners encounter unsupportive external factors, such as rigorous evaluations, it can lead to negative thinking, increased pressure, and heightened speaking anxiety. Hence, establishing an anxiety-free classroom is crucial for reducing foreign language speaking anxiety. Participatory learning approaches have also been shown to boost learners' confidence significantly. Farizatul Aini et al. (2022) found that group interactions can effectively alleviate speaking anxiety, providing learners a supportive platform to build their speaking skills.

This study also highlights a significant negative relationship between speaking anxiety and the use of speaking strategies among Thai learners of Chinese, consistent with the findings of David Shinji Kondo (1994) and Alhaji Galti and Zanna Tahiru (2016). These studies indicate that test anxiety, communication apprehension, and fear of negative evaluation all affect the use of speaking strategies. Specifically, as learners' anxiety increases, their use of strategies tends to decrease significantly. The findings underscore the importance of reducing speaking anxiety to encourage the adoption of more effective strategies in the language learning process. Reducing anxiety helps learners build confidence in communication and enables them to select strategies that facilitate long-term improvement in speaking skills. Creating an effective learning environment and encouraging learners to practice speaking in relaxed, pressure-free situations may be critical to alleviating anxiety and enhancing the ability to select appropriate strategies. Additionally, survey and interview results reveal consistent findings regarding the use of affective strategies, which have a negative impact on anxiety. Specifically, these strategies help reduce learners' anxiety by enabling them to manage emotions and stress better. Examples include cultivating a positive attitude, engaging in relaxation techniques, or adopting a positive perspective on challenges. El-Sakka (2016) emphasized the importance of affective strategies, such as positive self-talk and stress management, in reducing speaking anxiety. These strategies foster a positive emotional environment, enhance speaking abilities, and lower anxiety levels. Similarly, Chou (2018) explained that affective strategies reduce anxiety and increase learners' willingness to communicate in the target language. This dual effect highlights the critical role of affective strategies in promoting emotional well-being and communication competence.

CONCLUSION

Speaking anxiety and the use of inappropriate speaking strategies significantly affect the development of language skills among Thai Chinese Language Learners. To address these issues, teacher should adopt the role of a speaking consultant by providing tailored guidance on selecting speaking strategies that align with learners' individual characteristics. Creating a friendly and non-threatening classroom atmosphere is crucial to reducing anxiety. Strategies such as organising group activities, pairing learners for conversations, allowing students to practice speaking Chinese in a relaxed environment, offering constructive feedback on errors, and continuous encouragement can effectively alleviate anxiety. Furthermore, allowing sufficient preparation time before speaking assessments and providing regular opportunities for conversational practice can help build learners' confidence in communication and foster sustainable motivation for learning Chinese. These approaches have the potential

to significantly reduce learner anxiety, particularly in the context of Chinese language programs at Walailak University.

However, this study was conducted within the context of a single educational institution and did not compare speaking anxiety and communication strategies across other higher education institutions. Future research should emphasise comparative studies of speaking anxiety and communication strategies among higher education learners in southern Thailand. This would provide a more comprehensive understanding of the unique challenges faced in diverse contexts. Such comparative research could deepen insights into anxiety and the development of communication strategies among Chinese language learners, thereby supporting the design of more effective curricula and teaching approaches tailored to the southern Thai educational context.

Acknowledgements

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