

CHINESE LANGUAGE LEARNING STRATEGIES FOR THAI UNDERGRADUATE STUDENTS AT A HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTION, THAILAND

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Abstract : This study investigated Chinese language learning strategies of Thai undergraduate students' by means of a designed questionnaire at a higher education institution of Thailand during the academic year of 2017. Questionnaire of Chinese language learning strategies developed by pervious researcher were distributed to 206 Thai undergraduate students, and they were required to report to what degree they used each strategy in their learning together with their demographic information. The collected data was analyzed by descriptive statistics, t-test and one-way ANONA. Accordingly, the study reported the demographic information of the respondents, including their gender, age and study level ; revealed the four categories of Chinese language learning strategies that those Thai students used "frequently" in their learning, including learning Chinese by media, by communication, self-learning and class learning ; and also found that female students used the Chinese language learning strategies more than the male students ; the intermediate level students used more strategies than those pre-intermediate level students.

Keywords : Chinese learning strategies, Thai undergraduate students, Thailand Higher Education Institution

Introduction

Nowadays, the numbers of Chinese language learners are rising all over the world ; non-Chinese people are learning Chinese as foreign language on almost every continent. More than 40 million foreign people are learning Chinese ; this number is expected increase to 100 million within a few years (Li & Lynch, 2013).

In Thailand, according to Srisupha (2013), Chinese is as important as other foreign languages currently taught in Thailand, such as English, French, German, Spanish or Japanese. As Chinese people are associated with Thailand labor market at all sectors, Chinese language is important in contacting with people at all levels ; whether it is used in travel industries, to contact a sales business or with a joint venture with Chinese businessmen from the mainland, Taiwan, Hong Kong or Singapore to do business. The demand for people with knowledge of the Chinese language is therefore increasing. Chinese has been taught extensively both in Bangkok and upcountry, from kindergarten to elementary, secondary and university level, and both in private and public schools. By the year of 2013, the total population of students in public and private schools, in private institutes, in companies and elsewhere learning Chinese as foreign language in Thailand reached 8 million (Li & Lynch, 2013). Moreover, more and more Thai university learners also became interested in learning Chinese as a major, or as a minor in their tertiary education period as Uthaisangchai (2012) pointed. Many Thailand's higher education institution were providing Chinese courses including normal conversation, professional text preparation, or business, for both undergraduate and graduate levels, and learning Chinese became more popular among the hearts' of Thai learners now (Narueporn & Yang, 2013). Moreover, more and more Thai university learners also became interested in learning Chinese as a major, or as a minor in their tertiary education period as Uthaisangchai (2012) pointed. Many Thailand's higher education institution were providing Chinese courses including normal conversation, professional text preparation, or business, for both undergraduate and graduate levels, and learning Chinese became more popular among the hearts' of Thai learners now (Narueporn & Yang, 2013). However, the researcher realized that there was limited information and research to understand Thai learners who are learning Chinese as a foreign language at the higher education level, so as to improve the teaching.

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Based on 20 years of experiences of teaching Chinese as foreign language at a well-known Thailand's higher education institution, this researcher had observed that many Thai young learners including the undergraduate students, may not even realize what strategies they were using the language learning strategies in the process of learning Chinese, and to what degree their language learning strategies differed from each other according to their demographic factors. For this regard, this researcher believed that conducting this study could benefit not only the Thai undergraduate students, but also the teachers teaching Chinese at the Higher education institutions of Thailand, to be aware of the importance of Chinese language learning strategies and teach them to apply more and better strategies in improving Chinese language learning.

Research Objectives

1. To survey the Thai undergraduate students' demographic information at a higher education institution of Thailand.
2. To categorize and report to what degree the Thai undergraduate students using the Chinese language learning strategies at a higher education institution of Thailand.
3. To compare the Thai undergraduate students' Chinese language learning strategies according to their gender, age and study level at a higher education institution of Thailand.

Literature Review

Language is not only a tool for communication but also a tool for learning. Language can be considered as a cognitive ability to learn and use a complex communication system. People learn language for purposes of communication, study, socializing as well as many other functions. So it is not difficult to know the importance of language. In this modern world, many people not only learn one language, but also learn a foreign or second language. Recently, Chinese as a foreign language was becoming more and more popular in Thailand. There were several factors to push this situation, according to Liu & Ye (2015) as following : 1) Historical reason, there are many Chinese immigrants migrated to Thailand since Sukhothai Dynasty.

Chinese immigrants became the biggest minority group in Thailand gradually, this is a big population. 2) Political reason. China was became a powerful country in the world, it is involves in many worldwide event, especial in Asia, south-east Asia. Many Thai people believed China is the bright future that they would like to study Chinese, make it easier to communicate to Chinese people. 3) Economic reason, it is the most important reason as well. With the developing of China's economic growing, China is the largest market in the world ; many countries wish to share the economic benefit from China. Therefore they encourage their citizens study Chinese. 4) Chinese government popularize Chinese language and culture, they offer a big amount of money to encourage all countries' foreign study Chinese. They support the scholarship, free summer camp in China, free training for foreign Chinese teacher, sending volunteer Chinese teacher to many countries for teaching Chinese, opening Confucius Institute around the world for teaching Chinese language and culture. Within this situation, Chinese language became the hottest second foreign language in Thailand. There are so many different learning strategies for language learners. A practical study-skills book produced by Heaton in 1995 was the first primary source for conducting this study. That book provided lots of suggestions for learners on how to develop listening, speaking reading, and writing skills, together with the strategies of how to use a dictionary wisely, how to write better reports and articles, and how to study for preparing examinations well. Dickinson (1987) wrote in his book of Self-instruction in Language Learning that many teachers and educationalists see learning how to learn as the most basic and important educational objective, no matter what teaching or learning mode was adopted.

Rubin and Thompson (1994) also commended that to be a successful language learner ; a learner must be in control of the way he or she learns, which was very important in terms of learning efficiency. Rubin and Thompson (1994) listed several ways that learners could increase their own awareness of learning ; such as keeping a diary, talking to peers and teachers and assessing themselves, working through questionnaires about learner goals, monitoring, evaluating and revising, strategies for grammar, vocabulary, and the four language skills. All these strategies were provided in their book of How to Be a More Successful

Language Learner

Abbott (1987) had mentioned that « Learning is something people do all through their lives »(p45). However, there may be some learners who need guidance with the appropriate strategies that really work for them. Through what learning strategies the learners use, outside of the classroom, and how regularly they use them and whether they find them useful or successful, could let the teacher and learners know more about how our time was being spent outside the classroom with regard to language learning, and how we should do to improve our language skills rapidly. After reviewing few books in language learning field, this study aimed to investigate the learning strategies with which Thai undergraduate students used in their Chinese language learning at a higher educational institution in Thailand.

The results of this study could have implications for the introduction to Chinese language learning strategies and application in the real learning of the current Thai undergraduate students and teachers who were teaching Chinese as a foreign language at a higher educational institution in Thailand.

Participants

A total of 206 Thai undergraduate students, who currently study in Chinese Section Humanities and Language Division at a higher education institution of Thailand, were used as the participants for this study. The study was conducted in the 1st term during the academic year of 2017, at a higher education institution of Thailand.

Instrument

In conducting the study, a questionnaire consisting of 3 parts was distributed to the target undergraduate students. The details of questionnaire were listed as follows : Part I- Respondents were asked to report their demographic information, including their gender, age and study level. Part II- Respondents were asked to report their « Chinese learning strategies » based on what they do in the practice, and the students were asked to report to what degree they used for each strategy.

Each statement also had a 5-point for the respondents to choose. All returned questionnaires were used as the primary source of data for this study. The reliability of the questionnaire was reported as .91 by Ye's (2014) study, using Cronbach's Alpha. The value of Cronbach's alpha for this questionnaire reached .80 for this study.

Results

Based on the research objectives and analyzed data from instrument, the study had the following findings :

1. About the demographic information of the respondents

Analyzed the received data first report the demographics of the respondents as the beginning part of the findings, among total 260 respondents, the majority were the female students, as 86(42%) are male students, 120(58%) are female students ; Table 1 showed the details of the mentioned results.

Table 1 : Gender Information of the Respondents

Gender	Number	Percentage
Male	86	42
Female	120	58
Total	206	100

Table 2 showed that among all 206 participants, 129(62.6%) students are in the age of 19 years old or below, 73(35.4%) are in the age of 20-24, 4(2%) are in the age of 25 years old or above, as they were all study at undergraduate level, and most of them are the first or second year students, the age distribution was quite reasonable.

Table 2 : Age Information of the Respondents

Age (years old)	Number	Percentage
19 or below	129	62.6
20-24	73	35.4
25 or above	4	2.0
Total	206	100

Table 3 showed that among all 206 participants, 125(60.5%) were learning Chinese at the pre-intermediate level, which were the majority and most of the students were studying their first and second year at this institution, and the rest of students 81(39.5%) were learning Chinese at the intermediate level, they were usually the third or fourth year students at this institution.

Table 3 : Study Level Information of the Respondents

Study level	Number	Percentage
Pre-intermediate	125	60.5
Intermediate	81	39.5
Total	260	100

2. About Thai undergraduate students' Chinese Language Learning Strategies

The researcher categorized and reported to what degree the Thai undergraduate students' using the Chinese language learning strategies at the institution. Generally, there were four categories of Chinese language learning strategies that the undergraduate students used "frequently" when they were learning Chinese, including learning Chinese by media, by communication, self-learning and class learning. The mean scores of each category from the highest to the lowest showed in Table 4, which showed the strategies that the participants were most likely to use from the highest to the lowest, were learning English by media, by communication, self-learning and class learning.

Table 4 : Four categories of Chinese Language Learning Strategies

Chinese Learning Strategies			
Learning Chinese	Means	SD	Interpretation
By Media	4.05	.37	Frequently
By Communication	3.99	.46	Frequently
Class learning	3.91	.31	Frequently
Self learning	3.80	.43	Frequently
Overall	3.94	.39	Frequently

Table 5 showed the details of their Chinese language learning strategies in each category. As Table 5 showed, there were to total 20 strategies that the Thai undergraduate students used at this higher education institution, which belonged to four different learning strategies including class learning, self learning, learning by media and learning through communication.

Among those strategies, strategies such as "Study Chinese materials assigned by teacher ; Repeating and checking the words by themselves ; Use dictionary in the mobile phone or computer" were used very frequently. Strategies including "Study the textbooks from the teachers ; Reviewing and previewing what have learned from class ; Always try to prepare Chinese assignments well ; Silent practice (thinking in your head ; Memorizing the words daily ; Self-study in the library, dormitory or at home ; Listening to Chinese song ; Watching more videos/ movies in Chinese ; Write and contact friends

by emails, message others in Chinese ; Trying to use Chinese whenever possible ; Discussing/consulting Chinese language learning with a classmate in Chinese ; Chatting with friends online or phone in Chinese ; Practice Chinese with a native speaker ; Discussing Chinese language learning with a teacher” were used frequently by undergraduate students from this institution.

Moreover, some strategies like “Revising what have done in class ; Record the unknown words or language points in personal note-book ; Reading and studying e-books, Chinese news or announcement online” were also effective though the students used sometimes.

Table 5 : Details of Chinese Language Learning Strategies used by the Thai Undergraduate Students from the Institution

Chinese Learning Strategies			
	Means	SD	Interpretation
Class learning			
Study Chinese materials as assigned by teachers	4.51	.58	Very frequently
Study the textbooks from the teachers	4.03	.11	Frequently
Reviewing and previewing what have learned from class	3.51	.22	Frequently
Always try to prepare Chinese assignments well	3.51	.38	Frequently
Revising what have done in class	3.46	.61	Sometimes
Self learning			
Repeating and checking words by yourself	4.61	.44	Very frequently
Silent practice (thinking in your head)	4.50	.54	Frequently
Memorizing the words daily	3.56	.46	Frequently
Self-study in the library, dormitory or at home	3.53	.61	Frequently
Record the unknown words or language points in personal note-book	3.33	.25	Sometimes
By Media			
Using dictionary in the phone or computer	4.67	.39	Very frequently
Listening to Chinese song	4.33	.23	Frequently
Watching more videos/ movies in Chinese	4.33	.32	Frequently
Write and contact friends by emails, message others in English	3.52	.49	Frequently
Reading and studying e-books, Chinese news or announcement online	3.35	.51	Sometimes
By Communication			
Trying to use Chinese whenever possible	4.43	.50	Frequently
Discussing/consulting English language learning with a classmate in Chinese	4.31	.41	Frequently
Chatting with friends online or phone in Chinese	4.03	.23	Frequently
Practice Chinese with a native speaker	3.59	.68	Frequently
Discussing Chinese language learning with a teacher	3.56	.37	Frequently

3. Comparison of the Graduate Students' English learning Strategies according to their gender, nationality and age.

3.1 Use of Chinese language learning Strategies according to their gender. The researcher summed up the means of all 20 items, and compared the male and female students' Chinese language learning strategies using in Assumption university of Thailand and showed in Table 6. As the independent samples t-test showed, the p value was less than .05, which meant “there was a significant difference of the use of undergraduate students' Chinese learning strategies between the male and female students”. And female students used these Chinese language learning strategies more frequently than the male students.

Table 6 : Thai Undergraduate Students' Chinese Language Learning Strategies Use Compared with Their Gender

No.	Gender	Mean	SD	t-test for equality of Means		
				t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
1.	Male	3.44	0.97	-3.092	204	0.002*
2.	Female	3.69	0.63			

*Sig. < 0.05

3.2 Use of Chinese learning Strategies according to their Ages

The researcher also compared the students' Chinese language learning strategies according to their ages. As the researcher divided the students' ages into 19 years old or below, 20-24 years old, and 25 years old and above, therefore, one-way ANOVA was used for this test. As the significance of the F-test was .136, which was more than .05, so the conclusion for this comparison was "there was no significant difference of the Thai undergraduate students' Chinese learning strategies among different ages of them". Table 7 below showed the one way-ANOVA for the students' Chinese learning strategies according to different age groups.

Table 7 : One way-ANOVA for Thai Undergraduate Students' Chinese Language Learning Strategies Use Compared with different ages

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	1.506	2	.753	2.010	.136
Within Groups	96.301	204	.375		

3.3 Use of Chinese language learning Strategies according to their study level.

The researcher lastly compared the Thai undergraduate students' Chinese language learning strategies according to their study levels. As there were two levels for studying Chinese language at this institution including pre-intermediate and intermediate, the independent samples t-test was used for this comparison. As the significance of the F-test was .002, which was less than .05 ; therefore, there was a significant difference of the students' Chinese language learning strategies according to their study level. As observed, the students learning at intermediate level used more Chinese learning strategies than those learning at pre-intermediate level.

Table 8 : Thai Undergraduate Students' Chinese Language Learning Strategies Use Compared with Their Study Level

No.	Study levels	Mean	SD	t-test for equality of Means		
				t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
1.	Pre-intermediate	3.36	0.71	-3.568	204	0.001*
2.	intermediate	3.71	0.83			

*Sig. < 0.05

Discussion

The study found that there were four categories of Chinese language learning strategies that the undergraduate students used “frequently” when they were learning Chinese, including learning Chinese by media, by communication, self-learning and class learning. Among those strategies, strategies such as “Study Chinese materials assigned by teacher ; Repeating and checking the words by themselves ; Use dictionary in the mobile phone or computer ; Study the textbooks from the teachers ; Reviewing and previewing what have learned from class” were used very frequently. These also confirmed by Rubin and Thompson (1994), they recommended that learners should increase their own awareness of learning ; such as keeping a diary, talking to peers and teachers and assessing themselves, working through questionnaires about learner goals, monitoring, evaluating and revising, strategies for grammar, vocabulary, and the four language skills.

Other strategies like “Always try to prepare Chinese assignments well ; Silent practice ; Memorizing the words daily ; Self-study in the library, dormitory or at home ; Listening to Chinese song ; Watching more videos/ movies in Chinese ; Write and contact friends by emails, message others in Chinese ; Trying to use Chinese whenever possible ; Discussing or consulting Chinese language learning with a classmate in Chinese ; Chatting with friends online or phone in Chinese ; Practice Chinese with a native speaker ; Discussing Chinese language learning with a teacher” were used frequently by Thai undergraduate students from this institution. Moreover, some strategies like “Revising what have done in class ; Record the unknown words or language points in personal notebook ; Reading and studying e-books, Chinese news or announcement online” were also effective though the students used sometimes.

The above findings were consistent with the study of Abbott (1987). He mentioned that there may be some learners who need guidance with the appropriate strategies that really work for them, though different learners might use learning strategies the learners. However, strategies like learning outside of the classroom, and regularly use the language and practice it with teachers or native speakers, could help the learners get the language in a shorter time. According to Abbott (1987), to what degree, the learner spend time practicing the language beyond the classroom could influence their language learning achievement in terms of improving their language skills.

This study found the significant differences of the use of undergraduate students Chinese learning strategies according to the students’ gender and study levels, female students used these Chinese language learning strategies more frequently than the male students ; the students learning at intermediate level used more Chinese learning strategies than those learning at pre-intermediate level, though no significant difference of the Thai undergraduate students’ Chinese learning strategies among different ages of them. No previous study examined the relationship between the Thai students’ Chinese language learning strategies with the gender and studying level directly. However, few researchers studied the relationship between Thai students’ motivation of learning Chinese and their study level. Ye’s(2016) study of Thai HSK test takers from different schools of Thailand proved that students’ gender, studying level had effects on their motivation of learning Chinese. Li & Lynch (2013) found the relationship between motivation for learning Chinese and academic achievement among basic and advanced Level students studying Chinese as a foreign language at an International School in Bangkok, Thailand. Hou & Lynch (2016) also confirmed the correlation of motivation for learning Chinese according to their study levels. As motivation is a personal cognitive factor for learners that influences, and may influence the learners’ learning behavioral factors and learning strategies. Therefore, it was also reasonable that this study found significant differences of Thai undergraduate students’ Chinese learning strategies according to the students’ gender and study levels.

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