

A Study on Chinese Teachers' Competence, Challenges and Ability to Handle the Challenges at International Schools in Bangkok, Thailand

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Abstract

This research aimed to study the Chinese Teachers' Competence, teaching challenges and their ability to handle those challenges at International Schools in Bangkok. The research used a quantitative and qualitative mixed design. Questionnaires and interviews with 99 Chinese teachers from the 37 sampling international schools in Bangkok were conducted. The findings implied that international schools' Chinese teachers in Bangkok had a highly qualified profile; their competence including pre-instruction, presence, learning environment, students learning and professionalism was high. Students' diversity, classroom management, school support, parental involvement, selection of teaching materials were ranked as the Top five challenges that Chinese teachers faced in their classroom. It was also found that the Chinese teachers had the high ability of handling the challenges, and there were a positive correlation between the Chinese teachers' competence and their ability of handling these challenges.

Keywords: Chinese Teachers, Competence, Challenges, International Schools in Bangkok

Introduction

Recognizing the growing impacts of China in the world, more foreigners are learning Chinese to increase their access to people in China, which creates a 'Chinese fever' worldwide (Scrimgeour, 2014). As HANBAN Thailand's Office Report (2015) pointed, Thailand became one of the countries in Asia, which has the most Chinese language learners.

In Thailand, International schools used to focus on English language teaching solely, while recently, most of them were providing the Chinese course for their students. Though some schools might offer the Chinese language as an elective course, the number of students who are learning Chinese in international school is increasing rapidly in Thailand. Based on the analysis of Liu & Ye (2015), there were several factors to push this situation, including historical, political, economic reasons and so on. However, in the reality, it was observed that international schools in Thailand in fact were using the different textbooks, recruiting Chinese teachers with different standards, and applying different Chinese curriculums for teaching their students.

Meanwhile, as Ronnaphol (2013) stated, due to lack of Chinese speaking environment, good Chinese language textbooks (for Thai or International students), professional Chinese teachers who can understand both Chinese and Thai culture and students' diverse family background, Chinese language teaching in many schools might face a variety of challenges. She also mentioned this situation could also happen at international schools in Thailand, as the international schools used to focus more on their English curriculum (Ronnaphol, 2013). There were no lack of reports and previous studies about the English curriculum or English teachers at international schools, Bangkok; but do lack of reports and studies about the Chinese language and Chinese teachers.

Research Objectives

The research had the following five objectives: 1) To reveal the demographics profile of Chinese teachers at International Schools in Bangkok; 2) To identify the Chinese teachers' competence level at International Schools in Bangkok; 3) To investigate the Chinese teachers' teaching challenges at International Schools in Bangkok; 4) To assess Chinese teachers' ability to handle those challenges based on their self perceptions; 5) To study the relationship between the Chinese teachers' competence and their ability to handle the teaching challenges at International Schools in Bangkok.

Literature Review

Teacher Competence: The theory of Medley (1977) had been the most common theory about teacher competence among others. According to Medley (1977), teacher competence was viewed as any single knowledge, skill, professional value position, the professional of which is believed to be relevant to the successful practice of teaching. It also refers to 5 components of teacher competence. In this study, Medley's theory was employed as a major theoretical support. Therefore, these 5 components of teacher competence were mainstay based on which the researcher carried out.

As Medley's (1977) teacher competence theory divided teachers' competence into major components including pre-instruction, presentation, learning environment, student learning and professionalism. Herein the following part, the researcher would review these 5 components in details.

- 1) Pre-instruction: Teacher expectation and instruction planning is an important direction for teaching and achieving desired outcomes.
- 2) Presentation: Effective implementation of the instructional learning plan makes most effective use of the opportunity for all students to learn.
- 3) Learning Environment: A support, safe and stimulating learning plan makes most effective use of the opportunity for student learning and development.
- 4) Student Learning: Assessment and instructional adjustments enhances learners' success and desired learning results from teacher and student interaction.
- 5) Professionalism: Behavior and professional involvements, which extended beyond the classroom, better enabled teachers to assist students in the learning.

International Standards for Chinese Language Teachers: In the year of 2007, Office of Chinese Language Council International (Hanban) developed the Standard for International Chinese Language Teachers, in order to promote the professional quality and teaching level of international Chinese language teachers. This action was to satisfy the ever-growing demand for Chinese language learning in other countries.

The Standard includes: (1) Linguistic knowledge and skills; (2) Cultures and communications, (3) Theory of the second language acquirement and study strategy (4) Teaching methodology, (5) Overall quality. The Standard in overall describes the knowledge, competency and quality that an international Chinese language teacher should possess, aiming at a construction of a completed, scientific and normative standard system for international Chinese language teachers. This provided a basis for training such teachers, appraising their competencies and certificating their qualifications.

Previous Studies on Oversea Chinese Language Teaching and Its Challenges: Several previous studies on overseas Chinese language teaching and its challenges had been conducted in recent years, mostly in the west countries.

Hui (2012) conducted a study of Challenges native Chinese teachers faced in teaching Chinese as a foreign language to non-native Chinese students in U.S. classrooms, and she found that Chinese teachers need to be prepared to face the hurdles of having more

responsibilities in classroom management, inclusion of students with disabilities, and communication with parents in the U.S. classrooms and acquire knowledge and skills of American teaching pedagogies, classroom management and special education.

Zhu's (2015) study about Chinese language teacher in teaching Australian classroom, he reported several challenges that native-speaking Chinese language teachers encountered in Australian classroom, namely different educational culture, behavior management, unmotivated learners, insufficient understanding about students, low English competence for teaching purposes, time limitation, and unsupportive school context.

Zhu (2015) also found that Chinese language teaching in Australian schools conducted by teachers who were native speakers of Chinese was perceived as low in quality and inefficient to meet non-background speakers' needs. She believed this happened because the lack of the quality of teacher and the teachers' low competency and suggested to enhance Chinese teachers' capability and to satisfy non-background speakers' needs and perform effectively in Australian classroom.

Background of International Schools in Bangkok, Thailand: In Thailand, good international schools were belonged to International Schools Association of Thailand (ISAT). ISAT worked with all its international schools and the government ministry, to facilitate and supervise the international education in Thailand. ISAT in fact became a driving force for high education standards in the Kingdom.

In Thailand, most of the international schools were well-reputed; as their English curriculums were very strong and their employed English teachers were highly qualified, while their Chinese curriculums might be different from each other (Cai & Lynch, 2016). Among those international schools, there were some small international kindergartens, international elementary schools, and newly open international schools, which may only have one Chinese teacher (even a part-time teacher) for teaching the whole school for the sake of the school budget. Therefore, the information about the Chinese language curriculum, Chinese teachers' competence, their teaching challenges and ability of handling those challenges were limited.

Research Methodology

The research used quantitative and qualitative mixed method. Questionnaires were used firstly to determine the Chinese teachers' competence, and interviews were followed to investigate the teaching challenges.

Research Instruments

The researcher adopted Kavinda's (2014) Teacher Competence Questionnaire, which was developed based on Medley's (1977) teacher competence theory. Total 40 questions were used to determine teachers' competence around five components. The coefficient alpha value was reported as.83-.88 by the previous researchers such as Huyen (2003), and Kavinda (2014), and as.823 for this study.

Sample

The international schools used in this study were (1) from Bangkok; (2) teaching students age from 2-18 years old; (3) established before the year of 2015; (4) had full-time Chinese teachers; (5) recognized by ISAT. Based on the selecting criteria, 37 international schools were used as the sampling schools for this research, 99 the Chinese teachers from these 37 international schools were used as the participants of this study. Those newly opened, very small international schools were excluded based on these criteria.

Results

The demographics profile of Chinese teachers who are working at International Schools in Bangkok, Thailand

Table 1 reported the demographic profile of the Chinese teachers who are working at International Schools in Bangkok, Thailand. The demographic profile of Chinese teachers working at international schools showed the majority of them were female teachers, from educational major, with at least 5 years of experience and 2 teaching certificates, meanwhile, all the Chinese teachers are native speakers from China or Taiwan.

Table 1 The Chinese Teachers' Demographic Profile

| Demographic profile | | Percentage | Number |
|------------------------|---|------------|--------|
| Gender | Male | 16.2 | 16 |
| | Female | 83.8 | 83 |
| Educational Background | Bachelor degree | 52.5 | 52 |
| | Master degree | 47.5 | 47 |
| Major | Educational | 86.9 | 86 |
| | Non-educational | 13.1 | 13 |
| Teaching experiences | 1-3 years | 27.3 | 27 |
| | 4-6 years | 28.2 | 28 |
| | 7-9 years | 25.3 | 25 |
| | 10 years + | 19.2 | 19 |
| Certificates | Chinese language certificate | 22.2 | 22 |
| | Teacher certificate(from China) | 10.1 | 10 |
| | Teacher certificate(from Thailand) | 26.3 | 26 |
| | Certificate of Teaching Chinese as Foreign Language | 8.1 | 8 |
| | 2 or 3 certificates from the above types | 33.3 | 33 |

The level of Chinese teachers' competence at International Schools in Bangkok, Thailand

Based on Medley's (1977) questionnaire, Table 2 below showed the results of mean and standard deviation based on five components, which indicated the level of Chinese teachers' competence at International Schools in Bangkok, including each component. Accordingly, the level of Chinese teachers' competence was regarded as "high".

Table 2 Chinese Teachers' Competence at International Schools in Bangkok, Thailand

| Teachers' Competence | Mean | S.D. | Interpretation |
|----------------------|-------------|------------|----------------|
| Pre-instruction | 4.18 | .36 | High |
| Presence | 4.27 | .31 | High |
| Learning environment | 4.34 | .35 | High |
| Student learning | 4.17 | .36 | High |
| Professionalism | 4.38 | .38 | High |
| Overall | 4.27 | .23 | High |

The Chinese teachers' teaching challenges at International Schools in Bangkok

To study the Chinese teachers' teaching challenges, the researcher used a semi-structured interview with all the participants, based on the previous studies of Hui(2012), Ronnaphol(2013), and Zhu(2015). A checklist with different teaching challenges that the Chinese teacher may face was given to each teacher, and based on the teacher's perception

and real teaching situation; they chose, explained and added what they thought could be regarded as a teaching challenge and tell the researcher in the process of interview. The details of interviewed challenges were summarized and explained in the following Table 3.

Table 3 Summarized Chinese Teachers' Teaching Challenges at International Schools in Bangkok, Thailand

| Teaching Challenges | Details |
|---|---|
| Students' diversity | Very often students with different family backgrounds (from pure Thai, Thai-Chinese, Chinese family), students with different years of learning Chinese; and students with different parental supports (some learned from family or outside organization for years, some are not) learning together, which challenged the teacher |
| Classroom management | Due to students' diversity, but they are learning together in the same classroom, the classroom management as well as the activities arrangement, assignment and assessment setting challenged the teacher |
| School support | Some schools as their main curriculum is English, Chinese curriculum is neglected, not enough support from school activities management and extra curriculum design. |
| Parental involvement | As the students from different families, some parents can't speak Chinese at all, and the degree of focus, support and involvement are very different. |
| Selection of teaching materials | Teaching materials are more suitable for the Chinese native kids, not fit for the Thai kids who are learning Chinese as a foreign language, the recourses of learning materials for international school kids are limited. |
| Cultural difference | Cultural difference in the school |
| Language environment | Students only speak Chinese inside of the class, they speak English or Thai after class |
| Different expectation from parents and students | Parents expect the kids to learn more as the kid expect, or the kids were forced to learn by the parents |
| Conflict of learning and teaching styles | Conflict from students with different learning styles with teachers' teaching styles |

Based on the details of interviewed challenges and the teachers' rank, the researcher also listed the top five teaching challenges in Table 4.

Table 4 Top Five Chinese Teachers' Teaching Challenges at International Schools in Bangkok, Thailand

| Top Five Challenges | Percentage | Number | Rank |
|---------------------------------|-------------------|---------------|-------------|
| Students' diversity | 40.4 | 40 | 1 |
| Classroom management | 34.3 | 34 | 2 |
| School support | 30.3 | 30 | 3 |
| Parental involvement | 29.2 | 29 | 4 |
| Selection of teaching materials | 12.1 | 12 | 5 |

Chinese teachers' ability to handle those challenges at International Schools in Bangkok, Thailand

After knowing the detailed teaching challenges from Chinese teachers, the researcher also let them self-assess their ability of handling those challenges. Table 5 showed their self-assessed scores of means and standard deviations for their abilities to handle those challenges. Accordingly, the Chinese teachers' ability to deal with the teaching challenges based on their self-perception was regarded as "high", except towards the students' diversity, which was "moderate".

Table 5 Chinese Teachers' Ability of handling the challenges at International Schools in Bangkok, Thailand

| Ability of handling | Mean | S.D. | Interpretation |
|---|-------------|-------------|-----------------------|
| Students' diversity | 3.46 | .50 | Moderate |
| Classroom management | 3.67 | .55 | High |
| School support | 3.71 | .61 | High |
| Parental involvement | 3.63 | .69 | High |
| Selection of teaching materials | 3.80 | .57 | High |
| Others (Cultural difference/ Language environment/ Different expectation/ Learning-Teaching styles) | 3.75 | .54 | High |
| Overall | 3.65 | .44 | High |

The correlation between the Chinese teachers' competence and their ability to handle the teaching challenges at International Schools in Bangkok

The researcher also examined the correlation between the Chinese teachers' competence and their ability to handle those challenges at International Schools in Bangkok by use the Pearson product moment correlation coefficient. Table 6 presented the results of this part, which indicated that there were a moderate positive correlation existed between the Chinese teachers' competence and their ability to handle the teaching challenges at International Schools in Bangkok, Thailand.

Table 6 The Correlation between the Chinese teachers' competence and their ability to handle the teaching challenges at International Schools in Bangkok, Thailand

| Correlation | Ability of handling the challenges |
|-------------------------------------|--|
| Chinese teachers' competence | Pearson Correlation.569** Sig. (2-tailed).000 N 99 |

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Discussion

The results from the current study found the high qualified demographic profile of Chinese teachers. As the findings showed that many international schools of Bangkok, they employed the native female Chinese teachers, often with a master's degree, from educational major, with at least 5 years of experience, and 2 teaching certificates; this was consistent with the study of Cai & Lynch (2016), also matched with what the ISAT mentioned on its website, which was international schools in ISAT used the high education standards in the Kingdom. Then, the study identified the high level of Chinese teachers' competency at international schools in Bangkok, Thailand. The Chinese teachers had high competences in terms of pre-instruction, presence, learning environment, students learning and professionalism. Office of Chinese Language Council International (Hanban, 2007) developed the Standard for

International Chinese Language Teachers, in order to promote the professional quality and teaching level of international Chinese language teachers. As most international schools employed the Chinese teachers with Chinese teaching certificates from China or Thailand, the competency of those teachers were ensured.

Surely, Chinese teachers still faced some difficulties, including the challenges from students' diversity, classroom management, school support, parental involvement, selection of teaching materials. Hui's (2012) study about Chinese teachers' Challenges in U.S. classrooms also supported this finding, as she reported that Chinese teachers faced the challenges such as classroom management, inclusion of students with disabilities, communication with parents in the U.S. classrooms, acquiring knowledge and skills of American teaching pedagogies, and special education. Zhu's (2015) report on the challenges that Chinese language teachers encounter in Australian classroom also mentioned the similar challenges as this study.

This study result implied that the Chinese teachers' ability to handle these teaching challenges was "high"; and there was a positive relationship between the Chinese teachers' competence and their ability to handle the teaching challenges at International Schools in Bangkok, Thailand. Zhu's (2015) study about Chinese language teacher in teaching Australian classroom supported this finding as well. Zhu (2015) found that Chinese language teaching in Australian schools conducted by teachers who were native speakers of Chinese was perceived as low in quality and inefficient to meet non-background speakers' needs. According to her, this happened because the lack of the quality of teacher and the teachers' low competency, she suggested to enhance Chinese teachers' capability and to satisfy non-background speakers' needs and perform effectively in Australian classroom.

Conclusion

To summarize, this study mainly focused on the Chinese Teachers' Competence, their teaching challenges and ability to handle the challenges at International Schools in Bangkok, Thailand. The findings revealed that the Chinese teachers at international schools in Bangkok had a highly qualified profile with high competence. Though they still faced some challenges especially from students' diversity, classroom management, school support, parental involvement, selection of teaching materials areas, their ability of handling those challenges based on their own perceptions was high, which also reflected that they were confident to handle the challenges, and their confidence was very much related to their competence.

The study may have the limitation as it used the participants' perceptions from the questionnaires and interviews from the selected schools in Bangkok. However, findings presented in this study should reflect the exploratory nature of the study, the practical situation of Chinese teachers in international schools, Thailand.

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