Chinese Speaking Strategies as a Foreign Language: Success Stories from Thai Higher Education

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Chinese has become a prime foreign language in the educational policies of many nations, including Thailand. However, strategies for Thai students to successfully improve their Chinese, especially speaking skills, remain understudied. To minimize the knowledge gap, this quantitative study investigated Thai students' speaking strategies when studying Chinese, which provided successful outcomes. Data were collected from questionnaires administered with 114 students in four universities across Thailand. Results revealed that the most frequently employed from the six strategies were Compensation (direct, $\bar{X}=3.94$) and Social (indirect, $\bar{X}=3.81$). The remaining strategies were ranked in order as Memory ($\bar{X}=3.78$), Metacognitive ($\bar{X}=3.72$), Cognitive ($\bar{X}=3.71$), and Affective ($\bar{X}=3.54$), respectively. The results indicated that all strategies played crucial roles in learning to speak Chinese. The knowledge obtained in this study was projected to benefit educational stakeholders in Chinese language teaching (CLT), including teachers, learners, policymakers, and curriculum designers, when planning or designing teaching and learning activities for Chinese speaking in Thai contexts.

Keywords: learning strategies, Chinese speaking, Chinese speaking learning strategies, learning Chinese as a foreign language

INTRODUCTION

Learning a foreign language is now one of the essential 21st-century skills for global citizens. Chinese, besides English, is becoming increasingly popular and consequently significant. One of the reasons may be that China has become an influential economic powerhouse with continuing expansions in economy, urbanization, and technology. Consequently, the China-related proportion of global trades and tourism is growing, along with the increased demand for proficient communicators in the Chinese language. The United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) confirms the importance of Chinese by recognizing it as one of the official languages. Similarly, Mandarin Chinese is utilized as one of the six primary languages for communication by the United Nations (UN). With China's persistent economic, social, technological, and cultural expansions from past to present, Mandarin Chinese has become a crucial language in several regions, including Southeast Asia. As a result, more than 500 Confucius Institutes and 1,193 Confucius Classrooms have been established in 154 countries to propagate the Chinese language and culture (The Momentum, 2020). This phenomenon reflects that Mandarin Chinese is a top foreign language with sizable global learners no less than those of other languages, such as English, French, German, Spanish, and Japanese. In Thailand, Mandarin Chinese has become one of the foreign languages with increasing popularity in recent years, especially in the Thai labor market. The language has multi-level use cases in Thailand ranging from tourism activities,

business communication, to joint-venture negotiations involving Chinese guests and businesspersons from Mainland China, Taiwan, Hong Kong, and Singapore. With the current growth of China-related business landscapes, labor demand for speakers of Mandarin Chinese is also increasing (Rabob et al., 2016; Silarak, 2021). In response to the growing demand, several education institutions across Thailand have designed and provided Mandarin Chinese language curriculums, covering all levels of education, including kindergarten, elementary, secondary, and tertiary. Furthermore, some private language institutes have also offered Mandarin Chinese programs, targeting the general public.

Although Mandarin Chinese has been taught in Thailand for an extensive duration so far, public and private education institutions' overall administration of Mandarin Chinese curriculums in Thailand did not provide any substantial results worth noting as successful (Khanti, 2018; Ma, 2019). The notion is especially true when it comes to communication skills since Thai students reportedly lacked the confidence to use Mandarin Chinese in their daily and professional communication. One of the root causes for such reduced communication effectiveness is that these students had limited access to knowledgeable instructors. Another reason is that learners were not fundamentally ready and did not study Mandarin Chinese as a foreign language through a suitable instructional approach (Ma, 2019; Photip, 2020; Sanyham, 2018). Recent studies suggested that learning strategies are incredibly vital in language learning and should be appropriately designed and selected as they affect learning retention and enthusiasm, the keys to success in language learning (Clarke, 2018; Habók & Magyar, 2018; Pawlak, 2021; Wael et al., 2018). Furthermore, these studies indicated that learners with high language proficiencies were equipped for using a broader range of strategies and could use them more frequently than those with lower proficiency levels. Nonetheless, those with lower proficiencies could also improve their language if they were introduced to multiple learning strategies modified to suit their learning natures. Based on the issue, this study aimed to investigate the speaking strategies that Thai students employed, with successful outcomes, when studying Mandarin Chinese inside and outside of education institutions.

Language learning strategies

The term "learning strategy" has been brought up more frequently in educational publications (Atmowardoyo et al., 2021; Pawlak, 2021; Wael et al., 2018). Although the term was first coined in Cognitive Psychology, scholars across disciplines utilize learning strategies to study learning mechanisms and processes. Especially in language learning, most scholars agree that learning strategies are highly influential to every language learner. For example, Oxford (1990) suggested that "language learning strategies" refer to a method learners use to facilitate their learning by simplifying its process, speeding up the time taken, increasing learning enjoyment, taking control over learning direction, enhancing effectiveness, and associating with real-life application. Ideally, language learning strategies lead to improved language proficiency through greater self-direction in language learning (Amir, 2018; Oxford, 1990; Torralba & Doo, 2020). Based on the concept, language learning strategies are approaches that learners take to develop language skills inside and outside the classroom under personal conditions and suitability requirements.

Furthermore, many scholars have proposed components of language learning strategies. For instance, Rubin (1987) initially classified that there were direct and indirect language learning strategies. Within the "direct" category, there are six language learning strategy components, including (1) clarification/verification, monitoring, (2) memorization, (3) guessing/inductive, (4) inferencing, (5) deductive reasoning, and (6) practice. Similarly, there are two components in the "indirect" language learning strategies, including (1) creating opportunities for practice and (2) production tricks. In addition, O'Malley and Chamot (1990) introduced three domains of language learning strategies, including (1) metacognitive, (2) cognitive, and (3) social. This study used six language learning strategies based on Oxford's (1990) direct and indirect strategies. Consequently, there are three

components in the direct language learning strategy category. (1) Memory strategies involve creating mental linkages, applying images and sounds, systematic reviewing, and employing action. (2) Cognitive strategies deal with brain processes and involve practicing, receiving, and sending messages; analyzing and reasoning; and creating a structure for input and output. (3) Compensation strategies are used to solve problems when learners face communication constraints, and they involve guessing intelligently and overcoming limitations in speaking and writing. According to Oxford (1990), there are three components concerning the indirect language learning strategy category. (1) Metacognitive strategies are generally used to enhance learning effectiveness and success, and they include centering learning, arranging and planning learning, and evaluating learning. (2) Affective strategies purposely deal with emotional and attitudinal control to promote learning. They include lowering anxiety, self-encouraging, and taking care of the emotional temperature. (3) Social strategies are collectively a process that learners use when interacting with other social members. Furthermore, the strategies also promote a better understanding of language learning. More specifically, socials strategies include asking questions, cooperating with others, and empathizing with others.

Speaking strategies in Chinese language learning for Thai learners

Scholars across the globe have exhibited a strong interest in the strategies learners employ to improve Chinese (e.g., Gong et al., 2020; Weerasawainon, 2019) under the impression that their findings would reveal methods to apply and integrate such strategies into contexts where Chinese is taught as a foreign language (CFL). In Thailand, studies on Chinese speaking strategies are scarce. Lin & Ye (2016) explored Chinese language learning strategies of Thai higher education students by adapting Oxford's (1990) language learning strategies to survey students in six universities. The participants included students in Chinese for communication courses in three universities in Thailand (i.e., Khon Kaen University, Chiang Mai University, and Ubon Ratchathani University) and students in three universities in China (i.e., Minzu University of China, Capital Normal University, and Peking University). Based on shared success stories, most students in Thailand employed Affective strategies. On the contrary, Compensation strategies were the least selected. Furthermore, according to success stories shared by the participants in China, Social strategies were most frequently utilized, whereas Memory strategies were the least used. In addition, the study also reported that female students used more learning strategies to practice Chinese for communication than male students. Those studying Chinese for less than two years employed Chinese language learning strategies more frequently than those with more extended language learning experiences. Moreover, those with Chinese language proficiency test scores classified as Level 3-4 used learning strategies more often than those at Level 5-6.

Furthermore, Tang (2013) investigated Chinese speaking strategies employed by Thai and Korean beginners through questionnaires administered with Upper-secondary students in Thailand. Results showed that Social and Compensation were the most frequently utilized strategies. In contrast, Metacognitive and Memory were the least used strategies in this case. Similarly, Lu (2012) examined Thai students' speaking strategies for learning Chinese through questionnaires and disclosed that the most frequently used strategies were Compensation, followed by Cognitive and Social. The least used strategies were Affective and Metacognitive. Although these studies compared Chinese language learning strategies between students with high and low academic performance, there was a limitation involved since case studies were only derived from a few education institutions in certain regions. Consequently, the groups of research participants were not diverse, and the sets of data collection instruments were too similar. However, to provide more comprehensive knowledge of strategies for improving communication skills suitable for Thai students, this study collected data from several universities, covering the North, the Central, the Northeast, and the South of Thailand.

METHOD

Research contexts and participants

This quantitative study collected data from 114 Thai students in Chinese language programs from four universities in Thailand, including one in the South, the Central, the Northeast, and the North. These universities were chosen as the research sites because they were the first in their regions to offer Chinese language programs. Moreover, the universities are located in areas containing several foreigners, especially Chinese individuals visiting the areas for tourism, work, business, and further education. Therefore, students in the four Chinese language programs were perceived to have more opportunities to practice speaking Chinese inside and outside their classes with native Chinese speakers when compared to students in other universities. To obtain the participants, purposive sampling was employed. The inclusion criteria were that the students must (1) be in their Year 3 or 4 in a Chinese language program in a Thai university, (2) have high academic performance in Chinese courses with a GPA of at least 2.75 and at least a B letter grade in their Chinese speaking course, and (3) have been regularly participating in activities using Chinese as the primary language of communication in and off class.

Research instrument

This study collected data with questionnaires adapted from Oxford's (1990) Strategy Inventory for Language Learning (SILL). The justification for using SILL is that it is a reputable instrument for collecting data on language learning strategies. Furthermore, it has been extensively administered to extract data from foreign language learners (Bessai, 2018; Lestari & Wahyudin 2020; Syafryadin, 2020; Tieocharoen, & Rimkeeratikul, 2019). Nevertheless, some items from Oxford's (1990) SILL were modified specifically for this study to contextualize and align with research objectives. To increase reliability, the questionnaires were reviewed by three experts and revised according to their feedback. Subsequently, the revised questionnaires were administered in a pilot study with respondents of similar characteristics to the study participants. Obtained feedback from the pilot study was incorporated to refine the questionnaires once more before the final Cronbach's alpha validation. In general, Cronbach's alpha test offers reliability coefficients that indicate whether participants of the same group can produce a similar result when repeatedly taking the same questionnaires (Helms et al., 2006; Hogan et al., 2000). Cronbach coefficient values can range from 0 to 1 and be interpreted as from completely unreliable to absolutely reliable, respectively (Brown, 2001). Since Dörnyei (2007) regarded any value from 0.70 and higher as unreliable, this study's questionnaires obtained the Cronbach coefficient of 0.972 (highly reliable), passing the said cutoff.

More into the specifics, the questionnaires were constructed to contain two parts. Part 1 was designed to collect basic demographic data, including sex, educational institution, years in the program, years of experience in Chinese language learning, the most important reason for choosing to study Chinese, and academic performance in courses related to Chinese speaking. Part 2 of the questionnaires was designed to examine the Chinese learning strategies that the participants employ. Hence, 70 response items were included in this part based on the six strategy components of Megacognitive (10 items), Cognitive (23 items), Memory (12 items), Social (11 items), Compensation (7 items), and Affective (7 items). The response items were utilized in conjunction with a 5-point Likert scale, where 1 refers to extremely low, 2 to low, 3 to moderate, 4 to high, and 5 to extremely high. Means were interpreted in score ranges based on Srisa-ard's (2010) criteria of 4.51-5.00 to the most frequent employment, 3.51-4.50 to frequent employment, 2.51-3.50 to moderate employment, 1.51-2.50 to less frequent employment, and 1.00-1.50 to the least frequent employment.

Data collection and analysis procedures

The data were collected in 2020. Initially, Chinese language lecturers in each university were contacted via telephone to inquire about the possibility of collecting data online during the COVID-19 outbreak. Once the request was approved, the lecturers in charge of data collection received the questionnaires created in Google Forms, a request letter for permission for data collection, an information sheet containing questionnaire guidelines, and a consent form confirming participation in the study. Before collecting the data, the lecturers were informed about the data collection procedures, the research objectives, the data storage method, the data retention period, expected results, and their right to withdraw from the research at any time. Consequently, the lecturers filled out and signed the consent form confirming their participation. After the previous process, the lecturers responsible for collecting the data distributed the questionnaires online to the target participants within the predetermined time frame.

The obtained data were then analyzed in the Statistical Data Analysis Program (SPSS) using descriptive statistics (Dörnyei, 2007; Richard & Lockhart, 1994) in mean ($\overline{X}$), percentage (%), and standard deviation (SD). Subsequently, the employed speaking strategies for Chinese language learning were compared and tabulated. While analyzing, the data were kept confidential through an encryption mechanism in compliance with universities' data protection policies.

FINDINGS

Demographics

The total number of respondents was 114 selected from four universities in Thailand, including Prince of Songkla University, Hat Yai Campus (42.11%); Chiang Mai University (28.07%); Huachiew Chalermprakiet University (25.44%); and Khon Kaen University (4.39%). Most participants were female (N=104, 91.23%), and the remaining were male (N=10, 8.77%). The majority were in Year 3 in a Chinese language program (N=78, 68.42%), and the rest were in Year 4 (N=36, 31.58%). In terms of years of experience in Chinese language learning, most have studied Chinese for 5-6 years (37.72%), followed by those with 3-4 years (36.84%), more than 8 years (14.04%), and 7-8 years (11.4%) of experience. Their primary goals of learning Chinese were to expand career opportunities (87.72%), study abroad (5.26%), and keep in touch with international friends (1.75%).

Chinese speaking learning strategies employed by Thai students

This section discusses the results of the questionnaires by beginning with an overview of the top Chinese speaking learning strategies that the Thai students employed (Table 1). Following the overview, details of each learning strategy are presented in order from (1) Compensation, (2) Social, (3) Memory, (4) Metacognitive, (5) Cognitive, to (6) Affective (Tables 2-7).

Table 1
An overview of the Chinese speaking learning strategies employed by the Thai students

Strategy	$\overline{X}$	SD	Interpretation
1. Compensation	3.94	0.87	Frequent
2. Social	3.81	0.95	Frequent
3. Memory	3.78	0.94	Frequent
4. Metacognitive	3.72	0.91	Frequent
5. Cognitive	3.71	0.98	Frequent
6. Affective	3.54	0.99	Frequent
Average	3.75	0.94	Frequent

Table 1 suggests that the top three Chinese speaking learning strategies that the Thai students employed when studying CFL were Compensation ($\overline{X}$=3.94), Social ($\overline{X}$=3.81), and Memory ($\overline{X}$=3.78), respectively. Furthermore, the participants also perceived Metacognitive ($\overline{X}$=3.72), Cognitive ($\overline{X}$=3.71), and Affective ($\overline{X}$=3.54) as vital strategies affecting the development of their Chinese communication skills.

Table 2
Compensation strategies employed by the Thai students

Strategy	$\overline{\mathbf{X}}$	SD	Interpretation
5. You guess meanings from context clues when hearing unfamiliar words during a conversation.	4.33	0.79	Frequent
11. While conversing, you use body language instead of speaking when you cannot think of the words.	4.15	0.85	Frequent
35. While conversing, you ask others for the correct word when the word you have in mind is not the right one.	4.14	0.73	Frequent
29. If you do not know the word, you would use a synonymous word or the one with a similar meaning instead.	4.14	0.86	Frequent
41. You divert the conversation to a topic in which you know the vocabulary.	3.87	0.83	Frequent
23. You try to predict what others would say next in Chinese.	3.64	0.87	Frequent
17. You invent new words if you cannot think of the right words to use.	3.31	1.15	Moderate
Average	3.94	0.87	Frequent

The results suggested that the participants used the Compensation strategies most frequently ($\overline{X}$=3.94). Dimensionally, the most commonly employed sub-strategies within the Compensation strategies included guessing meanings ($\overline{X}$=4.33), using body language in conversation ($\overline{X}$=4.15), asking others ($\overline{X}$=4.14), and using words with the same or similar meaning ($\overline{X}$=4.14). These methods were the top choices the students used to deal with conversational situations when they faced unfamiliar words to facilitate the conversation with their interlocutors and reach desirable communication objectives. In addition, Table 2 also indicates that the participants also applied other sub-strategies such as changing subjects to a more familiar conversational topic ($\overline{X}$= 3.87), predicting the content or answers of the interlocutors ($\overline{X}$=3.64), and inventing new words and applying them during the conversation ($\overline{X}$=3.31) when practicing to speak Mandarin Chinese.

Table 3
Social strategies employed by the Thai students

Strategy	$\overline{X}$	SD	Interpretation
34. If you have questions or do not understand a conversation, you would ask the interlocutor to repeat or explain further.	4.12	0.83	Frequent
57. You are interested in learning the Chinese culture.	4.12	0.86	Frequent
40. You seek advice or assistance in learning Chinese from your friends.	4.10	0.92	Frequent
4. While conversing, if your interlocutors were speaking too fast, you would ask them to speak more slowly so that you could catch up.	4.04	0.94	Frequent
10. When talking to native speakers, you would ask them to help correct your Chinese.	3.91	0.96	Frequent
22. You ask a native speaker to help with your Chinese.	3.83	0.91	Frequent
28. You practice asking questions in Chinese.	3.66	0.99	Frequent
46. You seek advice or assistance in learning Chinese from your Thai lecturers.	3.63	1.01	Frequent
50. You seek advice or assistance in learning Chinese from a Chinese individual.	3.53	1.00	Frequent
16. You practice speaking Chinese with your friends.	3.52	1.03	Frequent
54. You seek advice or assistance in learning Chinese from Chinese lecturers.	3.44	0.97	Moderate
Average	3.81	0.95	Frequent

Table 3 points out that Social ($\overline{X}$=3.81) ranked second after Compensation among the most preferred strategies. Dimensionally within Social, most participants chose to ask interlocutors to repeat or explain further when they have a question or do not understand a conversation and were interested in learning the Chinese culture ($\overline{X}$=4.12). In addition, the results also suggested that sub-strategies, including asking for advice or help from friends ($\overline{X}$=4.10), asking interlocutors to speak more slowly ($\overline{X}$=4.04), and asking native speakers to help correct their language ($\overline{X}$=3.91), were significant contributions to improving their Chinese proficiencies. However, the participants used the sub-strategy of seeking advice or assistance from Chinese lecturers ($\overline{X}$=3.44) the least.

Table 4
Memory strategies employed by the Thai students

Strategy	$\bar{X}$	SD	Interpretation
39. You use radicals to help memorize sounds. For instance, characters with the radical of 马 create the sound mɑ (e.g., 妈 吗 骂).	4.12	0.98	Frequent
33. You use radicals to help memorize meanings. For instance, 亻 represents a person or human action or behavior.	4.03	0.99	Frequent
15. You associate the sound of a new word with an image associated with that word to help memorize vocabulary.	3.99	0.83	Frequent
56. You use the association of sounds and images to memorize words.	3.89	0.86	Frequent
9. You practice speaking with new words to improve your memory.	3.88	0.82	Frequent
3. You associate new matters learned in Chinese with existing knowledge.	3.79	0.80	Frequent
21. You memorize new words and phrases by imagining situations in which vocabulary might be used.	3.78	0.82	Frequent
59. You memorize new words in phrases or sentences.	3.74	0.90	Frequent
45. You use gestures to memorize new words.	3.69	1.14	Frequent
53. You memorize vocabulary as a collection of words sharing a similar meaning, such as colors, tastes, and clothes.	3.64	1.01	Frequent
27. You use Thai rhyming words to memorize new words.	3.47	1.18	Moderate
49. You review lessons regularly.	3.36	0.92	Moderate
Average	3.78	0.94	Frequent

The results revealed that Memory ranked third in the list ($\bar{X}$=**3.78**), and its most preferred sub-strategies included using radicals to help memorize sounds ($\bar{X}$=4.12), using radicals to help memorize meanings ($\bar{X}$=4.03), associating sounds of new words to images ($\bar{X}$=3.99)**,** and associating sounds and images to memorize vocabulary ($\bar{X}$=3.89), respectively. Furthermore, the sub-strategies that promoted successful CFL communication were applying new words in real-life communication ($\bar{X}$=3.88), associating new knowledge related to the Chinese language to existing knowledge ($\bar{X}$=3.79), and memorizing new words and phrases by imagining the circumstances in which such words might be used ($\bar{X}$=3.78), respectively. Nevertheless, the least employed sub-strategy in speaking practice was reviewing lessons ($\bar{X}$=3.36).

Table 5
Metacognitive strategies employed by the Thai students

Strategy	$\bar{X}$	SD	Interpretation
7. When listening to speeches in Chinese, you would pay attention and try to understand what they mean.	4.33	0.79	Frequent
51. If you make a mistake while speaking in Chinese, you will use that error to improve your next speeches.	4.12	0.73	Frequent
19. You are eager to find an effective way to enhance your Chinese speaking skills, such as reading and seeking advice from others.	3.94	0.76	Frequent
43. You learn Chinese with a purpose.	3.91	0.93	Frequent
47. You try to speak Chinese often as possible.	3.90	0.96	Frequent
1. You present a lesson by speaking in Chinese.	3.85	0.84	Frequent
31. You take note of your language mistakes and find reasons to explain such mistakes.	3.77	0.86	Frequent
13. You pay attention to unique Chinese conventions, such as how er ü is pronounced with a soft tone (轻声).	3.54	0.91	Frequent
37. You jot down important notes in a Chinese-speaking journal when you listen to conversations in Chinese.	3.02	1.18	Moderate
25. You set a schedule for studying and reviewing Chinese lessons.	2.79	1.09	Moderate
Average	3.72	0.91	Frequent

Table 5 indicates that Metacognitive ranked method fourth in the list ($\bar{X}$=3.72). Its top three sub-strategies were the participants regularly paying attention and trying to understand the meanings of the speeches they heard in Chinese ($\bar{X}$=4.33), learning from mistakes made while speaking Chinese and using such mistakes to improve their next speeches ($\bar{X}$=4.12), and finding off-class strategies to improve Chinese speaking skills autonomously ($\bar{X}$=3.94). Moreover, the results revealed that the least frequently employed sub-strategies were taking notes on usage patterns after hearing Chinese phrases ($\bar{X}$=3.02) and privately scheduling to study and review Chinese lessons ($\bar{X}$=2.79).

Table 6
Cognitive strategies employed by the Thai students

Strategy	$\overline{X}$	SD	Interpretation
67. You practice speaking by watching online media, such as Youtube and Tiktok.	4.30	0.86	Frequent
8. You try to memorize Chinese lines and usage patterns extracted from a conversation.	4.16	0.84	Frequent
44. You watch Chinese-speaking TV programs, movies, or series.	4.14	0.99	Frequent
65. You practice speaking by listening to music.	4.09	0.97	Frequent
14. You attempt to speak like a native speaker.	4.07	0.88	Frequent
66. You practice speaking by participating in classroom activities.	3.97	0.80	Frequent
48. You practice speaking Chinese by following strict grammatical structures.	3.89	0.82	Frequent
62. You practice speaking Chinese by thinking to yourself.	3.82	0.96	Frequent
55. You try to think in Chinese.	3.81	0.88	Frequent
32. You practice speaking by matching vocabulary and sentences with relevant situations.	3.68	0.79	Frequent
69. You practice speaking via a mobile application.	3.68	1.23	Frequent
20. You practice pronouncing high and low tones and speaking with paces in Chinese.	3.68	0.99	Frequent
2. You speak newly learned sentences several times to memorize them.	3.67	0.97	Frequent
52. During a conversation, you avoid literal translation.	3.65	0.85	Frequent
63. You practice speaking when traveling.	3.62	1.09	Frequent
68. You practice speaking in a group conversation.	3.61	1.00	Frequent
60. You apply new grammatical rules and phrases you learned when speaking in Chinese.	3.59	0.78	Frequent
26. You practice by speaking out loud after your lecturers.	3.57	1.07	Frequent
70. You practice speaking Chinese by teaching your friends.	3.54	1.08	Frequent
58. After class, you try to participate in Chinese-speaking activities.	3.33	1.05	Moderate
38. You begin to converse in Chinese as soon as your class sessions begin.	3.14	1.09	Moderate
61. You read printed materials and practice using the words and sentences you found in conversation.	3.14	1.19	Moderate
64. You practice speaking by playing games.	3.11	1.34	Moderate
Average	3.71	0.98	Frequent

The results suggested that Cognitive strategies ranked fifth in the preferred strategy list ($\overline{X}$=3.71). Table 6 reveals that the top three sub-strategies were learning and practicing to speak Chinese through online media ($\overline{X}$=4.30), memorizing Chinese dialogs and sentence patterns and applying them in real-life conversations ($\overline{X}$=4.16), and practicing to speak Chinese by watching Chinese-speaking TV programs, movies, or series ($\overline{X}$=4.14). Furthermore, the crucial sub-strategies that the participants used to enhance their Chinese speaking skills included listening to music ($\overline{X}$=4.09), trying to speak like a native speaker ($\overline{X}$=4.07), regularly practicing speaking in classroom activities ($\overline{X}$=3.97), practicing to speak by adhering to grammatical rules ($\overline{X}$=3.89), and practicing Chinese by thinking internally

($\overline{X}$=3.82). Nevertheless, the least used sub-strategy was using games as a tool for speaking practice

($\overline{X}$=3.11).

Table 7
Affective strategies employed by the Thai students

Strategy	$\overline{X}$	SD	Interpretation
42. You discuss with others your feelings towards learning Chinese.	3.68	0.92	Frequent
24. You reinforce your confidence when speaking in Chinese, although you occasionally make mistakes.	3.67	1.03	Frequent
18. You are not afraid to speak Chinese with Chinese lecturers or Chinese citizens.	3.60	0.94	Frequent
12. You are not afraid to speak Chinese with Thai lecturers.	3.58	0.90	Frequent
6. You are not afraid to speak Chinese with your friends.	3.58	1.04	Frequent
36. You keep calm when speaking Chinese.	3.52	0.90	Frequent
30. You praise or reward yourself if you perform well when speaking Chinese.	3.15	1.20	Moderate
Average	3.54	0.99	Frequent

Of all the strategies, Affective ranked last in the preferred strategy list ($\overline{X}$=3.54). Table 7 reveals that the most commonly used sub-strategies for skill development were sharing knowledge, experience, and feelings with others about learning Chinese ($\overline{X}$=3.68) and not being afraid to communicate in Chinese with (1) grammatical errors ($\overline{X}$=3.67), (2) with Chinese lecturers or Chinese citizens ($\overline{X}$=3.60), and (3) with Thai lecturers teaching Chinese and classmates ($\overline{X}$=3.58). Furthermore, the least employed Affective sub-strategies were self-relaxing while speaking Chinese ($\overline{X}$=3.52) and self-rewarding when performing well in speaking Chinese ($\overline{X}$=3.15).

DISCUSSION

Overall, the results confirmed that the participants employed the Compensation, Social, Memory, Metacognitive, Cognitive, and Affective strategies frequently ($\overline{X}$=3.75) in learning to speak CFL.

The six strategies were roughly grouped as direct and indirect (Oxford, 1990). The direct strategies are Memory, Cognitive, and Compensation. In relation to the direct strategies, this study discovered that

Compensation was the top choice among the participants practicing speaking Chinese ($\overline{X}$=3.94). Dimensionally, the top sub-strategies that the participants employed to solve problems when encountering unknown or unfamiliar words during the conversation were guessing the meaning, using body language, asking interlocutors directly, and using words with synonymous or similar meanings. These primary sub-strategies were utilized to deal with problems and obstacles arising from communication to prevent communication breakdown and ensure the achievement of communicative goals. The guessing sub-strategy falls within Compensation with two sub-categories, including "using linguistic clues" and "using other clues" (Oxford, 1990, p. 49). More specifically, learners use "linguistic clues" to apply existing knowledge of the language or other languages to make sense of unknown words or linguistic conventions. Furthermore, "other clues" include non-linguistic pieces of the puzzle, such as tone of voice, stress, intonation, and facial expressions. Besides, they can also

include other extractable non-language hints, such as life experience and situational and cultural knowledge. Several "other clues" could come in handy for learners when trying to comprehend unfamiliar words and expressions. These sub-strategies and sub-categories align with Wattanakamolkul and Praparkarn (2021) and Lu (2012), which discovered that the Compensation strategies were the most popular among Chinese language learners encountering problems related to unfamiliar vocabulary that emerged in conversations. Oxford (1990) also supported this notion by stating that Compensation strategies are essential for language learners at the beginning and intermediate levels. The reason learners enjoy utilizing these direct strategies is that they are an effective tool for solving "knowledge limitations in all four skills" as learners explore and attempt to produce a new language (Oxford, 1990, p. 90). Furthermore, Compensation allows learners to get by language limitations and fulfill communication purposes regardless of specific inabilities.

Furthermore, indirect strategies include Metacognitive, Social, and Affective. This study found that the Social strategies were most frequently employed by the participants when practicing Chinese speaking

($\overline{X}$=3.81). When the participants had communication problems or did not understand a Chinese conversation, they used three sub-strategies most frequently, and they included asking questions or asking interlocutors to repeat or explain further; trying to understand the points they did not understand by associating with the knowledge of Chinese cultures; and asking for help and advice from friends, native and non-native lecturers, and Chinese citizens to improve comprehensibility on the issues discussed. These sub-strategies allow learners to converse in Chinese with the understanding of Chinese cultures. In general, the Social strategies can support the participants' communication by providing essential cultural information obtained from asking questions, cooperating with others, and empathizing with others. To this note, Baker and Ishikawa (2021) and Oxford (1990) asserted that language is a social behavior used in communication between and among language learners and users and hence requires facilitation from carefully selected social strategies. As reported in this study, a fundamental social strategy is asking for clarification when not understanding and verification when fact-checking. With the Social strategies, learners can improve comprehension in communication as interlocutors are urged to input more information to create more meaningful conversations. On this note, the act of asking questions is exceptionally crucial and facilitative to learners' understanding and cognitive enhancement.

Furthermore, based on the results, obtaining cultural information through Social strategies helped enhance Chinese speaking competence, and hence, the strategies should be considered a fundamental instrument when teaching Chinese speaking lessons. According to Alakrash et al. (2021), Matsuda (2018), and Matthews and López (2019), it is vital for teachers to introduce learners to cultural content and encourage them to understand target cultures. This notion reflects the cruciality of incorporating target cultures into foreign language education because cultural knowledge is key to language proficiency development (Chen et al., 2021; Rose et al., 2021). Improving cultural awareness has two-fold benefits, including enhanced intercultural knowledge or cultural competence (Jin, 2015) and strengthened communicative competence (Lázár, 2015). This notion also confirms the findings of Jindapitak et al. (2022) and Marlina (2021), which stated that learners would gain communicative confidence, motivation, and competence when they are exposed to conversations with native speakers and knowledge of target language cultures. On the contrary, without understanding the interconnectedness between a language and its target culture, language users might risk creating communication errors and cultural mistakes that lead to misunderstandings and create communication breakdown. As noted by Forman (2014) and Shah et al. (2014), cultural understanding and familiarity allow learners to communicate in a foreign language more effectively by minimizing potential risks involved in communication.

In addition to the top two strategies, i.e., Compensation (direct learning, $\overline{X}$ =3.94) and Social (indirect

learning, $\overline{X}$=3.81), that the participants most frequently used and perceived as key factors for successful learning to speak Chinese, the results also indicated that the remaining four, i.e., Memory

($\overline{X}$=3.78), Metacognitive ($\overline{X}$=3.72), Cognitive ($\overline{X}$=3.71), and Affective ($\overline{X}$=3.54) also played crucial roles in enhancing Chinese speaking proficiencies. Furthermore, the results implicate that the six strategies were considered crucial and mutually contributed to developing Chinese speaking skills when the Thai students study Chinese. To this notion, Oxford (1990, p.17) asserted that there is no scientific method to quantify the values of these strategies and rank them in a hierarchical pyramid to determine which are more worthwhile than the others. Each strategy has its unique benefits, and some learners benefit more from a particular strategy than others. Hence, the six strategies should be used flexibly in combination based on learners' language acquisition goals (Chamot, 2005).

CONCLUSION

This study investigated Thai students' speaking strategies when studying Chinese with successful outcomes. The data were collected from 114 students in the four target universities across Thailand. The results suggested that the Compensation strategies within the direct strategy category were most preferred and frequently employed among all the six strategies. Similarly, Social was the top indirect strategy that the participants used, and it ranked second among the six. In addition, the remaining four were Memory, Metacognitive, Cognitive, and Affective strategies. Although these four strategies were less popular compared to Compensation and Social, their mean scores did not suggest that they were entirely insignificant. On the contrary, statistics showed that they were also frequently employed when learning to speak Chinese. On this note, it is safe to conclude that all the six strategies, direct and indirect, have contributed to the participants' success in improving their Chinese speaking skills to some extent. In other words, to excel at speaking Chinese, all the strategies are required and flexibly executed based on learners' educational contexts, readiness, and purposes according to their language and cultural backgrounds. The results of this study were perceived beneficial to a wide range of stakeholders in language education in Thailand, including students, teachers, policymakers, and curriculum designers related to CLT. Furthermore, the results could be applied as guidelines for teaching and training in Chinese speaking and planning and designing CLT policies and curriculum in the Thai context.

Nevertheless, it is also essential to note that this study only included a small number of participants. Hence, its results might not be adequate for generalization to other population groups in different educational contexts. Therefore, to paint a bigger picture of the CFL landscapes in Thailand, further studies are suggested to expand their population groups to cover multiple levels of education in Thailand: elementary, secondary, and tertiary. Furthermore, further studies are also suggested to compare their results with other studies with domestic and international scopes to compare and contrast the employment of speaking strategies in CLT across learner demographics. Furthermore, the mixed-methods design is also suggested for data collection through quantitative (e.g., questionnaires) and qualitative means (e.g., semi-structured interviews, focus group discussion, and classroom observations) as the design is considered a holistic data collection approach that would provide practical outcomes for bridging the knowledge gap.

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