

MOTIVATIONAL STRATEGIES – ENHANCING CHINESE LANGUAGE SKILLS.

MaythaveeSaksitphiphat

Instructor of Chinese, Secondary Demonstration School,

SuanSunandhaRajabhat University, Bangkok, Thailand

E-Mail: Maythavee.sa@ssru.ac.th

ABSTRACT

Currently the Chinese language has become one of ASEAN most used languages within the United Nations and it is a very important International language spoken throughout the world, because it is widely used as a means of communication for all kinds of international activities. Additionally, Thailand will become a member of the ASEAN Community and this will cause the Chinese language to play a more vital role in communication. Surveys have shown that Thai students' Chinese language skills still remain at a low level and thus the skills should be improved and developed urgently in order to compete with other countries. This article aims at presenting language learning and teaching strategies that motivate positive attitudes and perseverance in the learners to enhance their Chinese language skills.

Keywords: Motivational Strategies, Chinese Language Skills

INTRODUCTION

Chinese language skills cover the ability to apply the Chinese language in communicative settings, including speaking, reading, writing and listening. Additionally, a student's proficiency can be divided into 5 levels. Level 1: A person can use all four Chinese language skills to communicate and understand at a preliminary level. Level 2: A person can understand the essence of various contexts. Level 3: A person can use the Chinese language to produce grammar accurately. Level 4: People can comprehend idioms in figurative ways. Level 5: Proficient comprehension of the Chinese language similar to that of native speakers, with one applying all forms of rhetoric fluently and accurately and having deep expertise in their subject areas. (BussayamasSangngern, 2011) Therefore, teaching Chinese must include the objectives of students being able to use Chinese language skills to communicate properly and appropriately.

In 2015, Thailand became a member of the ASEAN Community. Many sectors believe that being a member of the ASEAN Community requires more adaptation from Thai people than what is occurring at present. According to Article 34 of the ASEAN Charter, the languages used in international ASEAN company work are Chinese and English (SomkiatOnwimon, 2012). This means citizens in the ten ASEAN countries have to use Chinese and English to communicate within their companies and employers. Apart from their national language, it is very important that Thai students learn and be able to use Chinese and English equivalently to other countries in the ASEAN Community.

Chinese Language in the Thai Educational Context

The Ministry of Education has continuously given priority to the development of the Chinese language by Thai youth, believing that by communicating effectively, Thai society will develop and progress as to meet international standards. (The Ministry of Education, 2011) Current research related to the overview of Chinese studies in Thailand, however, has

noticed current problems related to teaching and learning in Thailand at all levels of education. There are five different texts, for example, that all state the importance of six different factors as follows: curriculum administration and management, teaching media, instructors, learners, and cooperation with other agencies. Therefore, preparing students to learn and have Chinese language skills need to consider how to implement and improve these aspects to achieve success and improvement.

Currently, the number of educational institutions in Thailand at various levels which conduct Chinese language teaching and learning courses are as follows: Primary level at 769 schools, 707 government schools, 173 private schools, 82 universities and 152 non-formal educational institutes. Researchers at each level of the study present an overview of the problems and policy proposals for concrete development of the Chinese teaching and learning system in Thailand in all 6 areas. For example, proposing the Ministry of Education of Thailand to establish a central unit that is responsible for the management of the Chinese language teaching system at all levels or making plans and strategies to improve teaching methodologies and lesson plans.

In addition, it has also been proposed that the establishment of core Chinese language courses be created. This can be used collaboratively across the whole country to solve problems of discontinued teaching and learning curriculum as well as the lack of connection at each level. There is a push, currently, to propose to the government to provide a budget to support the construction of language laboratories in Chinese-language schools as a current lack of connection at each level is not ideal (Office of the Education Council, 2016)

Motivation and Learning Foreign Languages

The current state of society is dynamic (**socio-dynamics**). This view includes perspectives of the behavior of group interactions of individual group members as well as the study of the relationship between individual interactions and group level behaviors. The field of social dynamics brings together ideas from economics, sociology, social psychology and other disciplines and is a sub-field of complex adaptive systems and complexity science. For example, those interested in information from online media, Internet use and the use of modern communication tools make their worldview wider. Traditional teaching methods of teachers may not be able to meet the needs of these learners sufficiently, especially learners of foreign languages. Teachers need to have language teaching strategies that motivate learners to convince them of the learning process to be more effective. It has long been accepted in academic circles that motivation is a psychological element. That is important as learners without motivation become agitated and struggle. Motivation can be classified into the following two types: Intrinsic and External (Walker, Greene, & Mansell, 2006)

Intrinsic motivation is pleasure, or interest in activities that exists within an individual rather than from outside influences. It is the foundation of having enjoyment in performing an activity without any external incentives whereas individuals who are extrinsically motivated need rewards or function from punishment to engage in any activity. For students, rewards can be in the form of grades and marks in examinations. Fostering motivation is concerned with achieving the successful outcomes at the end of the process.

There are many studies that support both internal and external motivation used as ways to determine the success of Chinese language teaching. (Humaida, 2012; Brown, 2000; Dornyei & Otto, 1998). Gardner (1985) proposed that motivation is a complex variable and can be used to improve the behavior of learners to excel in acquisition of foreign languages. Two sub categories found here included 'Integrative motivation' meaning the wanting to learn foreign languages for communication with foreigners and 'Instrumental Motivation,' referring to the need to learn a foreign language. This would see a student learning for the reason of employment or higher salaries and research has shown that this tool is an important factor that directly affects learning Chinese. (Tamini & Shuib, 2009)

In reality, learning any foreign language requires a lot of effort, patience and attention to be fully effective. Therefore, learning Chinese requires students to review and practice every skill to become sufficient. Teachers need to create incentives for learners first so that learners have a clear learning goal. In principle, if students are motivated naturally and desire to be diligent, patient, and ready to practice and work hard, as well as to learn to improve one's ability to use Chinese, then as studies have found, academic achievement is improved significantly (Howchatturat&Jaturapitakkul, 2011; Liu, 2007; Kuiper&Tan, 2007). There is a relationship with motivation in the classroom as well if this desire is present (Cheng &Dornyei, 2007; Clement, 2006).

Factors that cause students to lack motivation to learn the language is the teacher behavior and methods, unfavorable classroom environment, uninteresting course and the student's attitude. (Brown, 2007; Keblawi, 2005) Therefore, this article would like to present a guideline for developing Chinese language skills of learners with two main points which are (1) Teachers must have strategies to create incentives for learning foreign languages using the concepts of Dornyei (1994, 2001a) and (2) strategies for self-language learning in order to enable the learners to be patient and attentive to their studies using the concepts of Oxford (1990). Teachers can use these as a theory to put into practice in the classroom with concrete results as follows

1. Strategies for creating incentives for studying foreign languages as follows: Dornyei (1994, 2001b) proposes that there are three levels of effective motivation for studying foreign languages: language level, learner level and the level of learning situations.

1.1 Language level refers to the attitudes of the learners regarding the culture of native speakers and their future success in using that language. The process at this level is explained by the concept of integrated motivation. The tool motivation mentioned earlier, based on Gardner's (1985) ideas states that students want to learn to communicate with foreigners for future career success.

1.2 Learner Level means the success and self-confidence of the learner, such as perceived L2 competence, self-efficacy, causal attributions, and language use anxiety. All of these can influence the emotional state of the learner. There is numerous research consistent with the above concepts, such as the study of Cong (2012) and Mill, Pajares and Herron (2007) stating that self-efficacy influences academic achievement. The results of the Matsuda and Gobel (2004) and Gregersen (2003) studies show that students with less anxiety are more likely to have better ability to use foreign languages.

1.3 Learning Situation Level means the situations related to classroom teaching are divided into three components:

3.1 Course-Specific Motivational Component: This includes interesting courses and course content, suitability and meeting the needs of the learner, such as the content in the lesson not being too easy or too difficult. The suitability of the student's background should be balanced with a reasonable challenge to achieve this.

3.2 Teacher-Specific Motivational Component: This is related to the behavior and personality of teachers, teaching methods, and assignments. Creating a classroom atmosphere and giving feedback to students about how their work is produced. Teachers should use psychology in teaching and choose modern and interesting teaching tools such as teaching through games or music, or teaching via the Internet (Al-Jarf, 2004,SupitchayaWongkumsai (Ph.D) &PrapitPhutthishart 2018). In addition, various ways of organizing images, contexts and activities in and out of the classroom are appropriate and having fun is important to motivate learners as well (Clement, 2006; Wong, 2005).For example, an instructor may provide an outside experience for the learner to build new experiences and knowledge, which will give students the opportunity to do different activities of interest. By not focusing on too many language rules the

students might be more enthusiastic and and curious rather than bored or depressed. Ultimately the goal is to have the opportunity to use the Chinese language in various contexts in simulated situations that are the closest to the actual situation.

3.3 Group-Specific Motivational Components: This encourages learners to have a clear learning goal, to work as a group and includes praise from the teacher. There are research results that show cooperative teaching and learning provides students with the opportunity to exchange knowledge with friends. Having joint responsibility results in better learning achievements as well (Ghaith, 2003; Kagan, 1995). These components can be summarized as a Model (Picture 1)

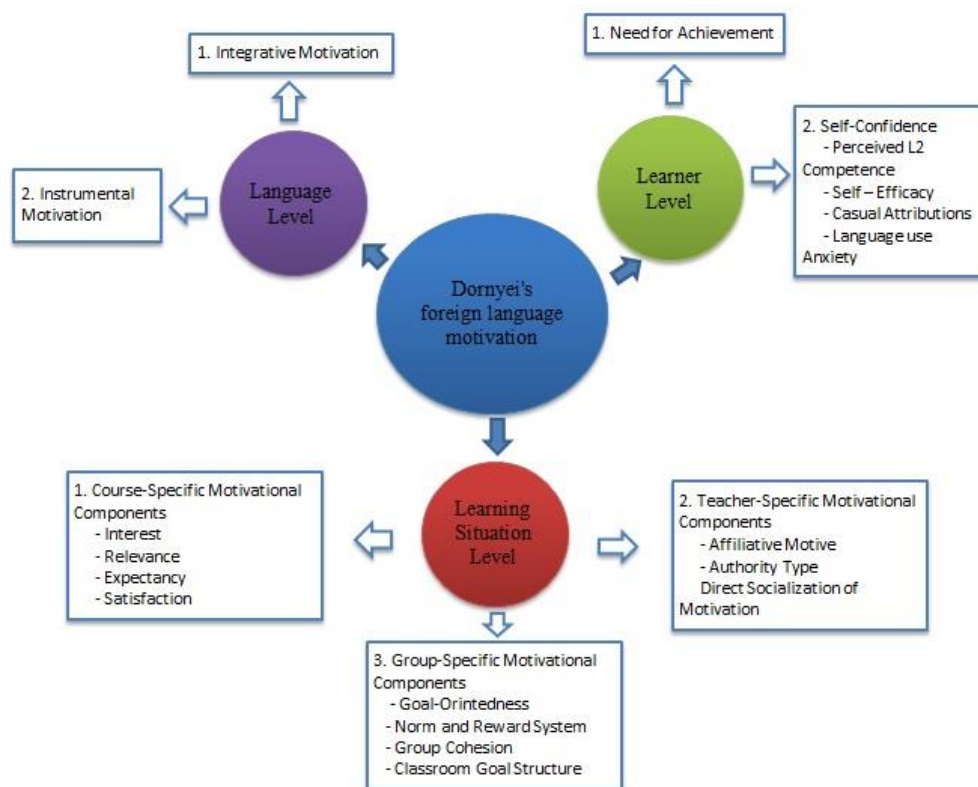


Figure 1 : Dornyei's foreign language motivation Model
Source: Adapted from Dornyei (2001b)

2. Foreign Language Learning Strategies of Learners

In addition to the teaching staff, teaching strategies must be used to create motivation for students. Teachers must also encourage learners to learn by themselves and be responsible as well as know how to use different learning strategies. In this case, we propose the foreign language learning strategy form of Oxford (1990) which can be divided into two types: direct strategies and indirect strategies.

> Direct Strategies

To have students use direct thinking about the language, consisting of three sub-strategies as follows:

1. **Memory Strategies:** This helps learners remember new words or vocabulary with classification methods, using repeated images, pronunciation, reviewing the use of symbols or drawing charts, etc. The research of Chularut and De Backer (2003) supports that charting has an effect on student performance.

2. **Cognitive Strategies:** A practice of analyzing the structure of words and sentences and a method of receiving-sending data, capturing the importance and conclusion, enable the

learners to connect their existing knowledge with new knowledge in order for the learners to better understand what they are learning.

3. Compensation Strategies: This is a method of guessing principles, such as choosing vocabulary that has similar meaning to new words that the learner does not know the meaning of yet.

> Indirect Strategies

This refers to a process that helps indirect language learning and consists of three sub-strategies as follows:

1. Metacognitive Strategies: A method of learning to help learners understand the thinking process and self-learning, such as learning, knowing, managing, and planning of study and self-assessment of learning.

2. Affective Strategies: A way to help develop confidence in students, which is a language learning strategy that includes the attitudes, motivation and values that influence language learning.

3. Social Strategies: This encourages learning methods by asking questions, and learning to work with others.

Both the direct and indirect strategies mentioned are supported by empirical studies, such as the Wharton (2000) which found that Singapore students with high academic achievement utilize language learning strategies more often than students with low academic achievement as well as Oxford's foreign language learning strategies. Dornyei's motivation for learning a foreign language has many consistent themes as well. In order to be effective in teaching foreign languages, both principles should be integrated into the teaching and learning process. In order to create motivation for learners, with the most important principle being that the teacher must create interest between the lesson and the learner, create satisfaction in learning, and build self confidence by encouraging learners to learn the culture of native speakers. To make an impression, if the learners have a positive attitude towards Chinese, this can create a foundation that will lead to motivation in studying and develop Chinese language skills more efficiently.

CONCLUSION

The Chinese language is becoming more important in the daily life of Thailand as it is a member of the ASEAN community. The Chinese language skills of Thai students, however, are still at a level that need to be improved compared to the potential of other international students. Therefore, preparing students so that they can use Chinese to communicate effectively is absolutely necessary. Chinese language teachers who want to achieve this goal should create both internal and external motivation in the learner. One method is by providing suggestions of the benefits of applying Chinese language skills to work. Additionally, educators can encourage integrated motivation and tool motivation as learners are interested, determined and have a good attitude towards learning Chinese. This can result in self-development and increase proficiency in using the Chinese language as expected. An important role in the development of Chinese language skills of learners depends on both the teacher and the learner in which the instructors use motivational teaching styles at all three levels: language level, learner level and the level of learning situations, such as giving students a positive attitude towards the culture of language input and creating a fun atmosphere in learning. The use of these teaching methods are attractive and more modern in terms of how they relate to the students. Challenging assignments and praise is more effective than criticism. For the students to be encouraged they need to have a good attitude towards learning Chinese and see the benefits from learning for themselves in the future. In addition, the instructor must encourage the learners to use the strategy to learn Chinese by themselves,

both directly and indirectly. If the instructor has applied both these teaching strategies and the learning strategies, this could result in more motivation for learners to develop Chinese language skills for daily use and their careers as well as integration into the ASEAN Community as well.

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