



Article

Active Learning and Professional Development: A Case of Thai Chinese Teachers

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Abstract: While Chinese has been taught as a school subject outside of China for decades, there is little research on how Chinese subjects are taught in secondary schools outside of China's mainland with regard to the use of active learning and the impact of professional development events on teachers' professional growth in classroom Chinese teaching. This article explored Thai Chinese teachers' use of active learning methods at public and private secondary schools in the south of Thailand. It also examined the impact of a government-administered Chinese teaching seminar on their professional development. A sequential mixed-methods explanatory design was employed, involving focus group interviews and pre- and post-tests. The phenomenological approach with thematic analysis was used to analyze the qualitative data from the focus group interviews, while the Wilcoxon test was run to compare the pre- and post-test data. Findings revealed the application of active learning with discussion and role-playing activities involving audio-visual materials. The pedagogy of Thai Chinese secondary schools has shifted from knowledge transmission through lectures to knowledge generation and transformation via dynamic learning activities. After attending the seminar, teachers' comprehension of active learning methods increased considerably ($Z = 3.740, p < 0.001$). However, teachers expressed concerns over the lack of innovative teaching techniques for teaching Chinese characters and the problems encountered by both students and teachers during the teaching and learning process. This study recommends that Hanban and the Thai Ministry of Education plan their seminars and workshops in a way that allows Thai Chinese instructors to continuously address their students' and their own deficiencies while they are engaged in active learning activities, and it calls for additional research on the use of active CFL methods in secondary schools outside of China.

Keywords: Chinese language teaching; Chinese as a foreign language; active learning; professional development; Chinese subjects



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1. Introduction

Since 2005, researchers in the field of Chinese language teaching have examined a wide range of topics, including language policy and planning, language learning and use, language pedagogy, teacher development, and language testing (Ma et al. 2017). However, a more recent study discovered that among the empirical studies on the teaching and learning of Chinese as a second or foreign language (CSL/CFL) that have been published in leading international journals, investigation of the teaching of Chinese outside China has been minimal (Gong et al. 2020). These restrictions may result from the lower number of empirical investigations undertaken outside of China's mainland as opposed to inside China (Gong et al. 2018). Studies investigating CFL in the settings of international students studying in China (Gong et al. 2021; Yang et al. 2021) and students with Chinese ancestry backgrounds are also proliferating (L. Wang 2022; Wen 2011). However, there are presently few studies explicitly examining methods employed to teach CFL in educational institutions overseas, particularly at secondary school levels.

The Chinese Ministry of Education has supported the teaching of Chinese in primary and secondary schools in countries other than China for decades. The Confucius Institute Headquarters (also known as Hanban, the Office of the Chinese Language Council International) is responsible for promoting Chinese language and culture abroad (Hanban 2004). Hanban has developed 548 Confucius Institutes and 1193 Confucius Classrooms in 154 countries and territories with over 1.8 million students (Hanban 2018) and has extended its Chinese teaching via education and cultural activities since its inception. According to Moloney and Xu (2015), the dominance of the English language has been challenged by the growing popularity of Chinese, which is widely taught as a foreign language outside of China. The significant growth of CFL education has been aided by increased government investment aimed at attracting many international students to study in China, the establishment of Hanban in other nations, and the expansion of research activities addressing critical issues associated with the teaching of Chinese as a foreign language (Ma et al. 2017).

Among the countries that have officially adopted Chinese as a school subject are Australia (Orton 2016), New Zealand (D. Wang 2021), and Thailand (Manomaiviboon 2004). The emergence of Chinese complementary schools, as well as the establishment of Chinese cultural and educational institutes, have all contributed to the promotion of Chinese as a global language in the UK (Hua and We 2014). The Chinese language has also been incorporated into US school curricula (Asia Society 2011), and at the present time, a lot of Chinese native speakers with various educational backgrounds and little teaching experience are recruited and placed in American K–12 classrooms following a brief period of cultural and pedagogical orientation (Chen et al. 2017). In Thailand, the national curriculum mandates that secondary school students choose two foreign languages to study, with Chinese being the most often selected option (Manomaiviboon 2004). It is believed that because of the fast expansion of the Chinese economy and the expanding commercial and cultural cooperation and exchanges between China and other nations, there will be a rise in interest in China and the Chinese language (Aimin 2015) and such circumstances have been visible in Thailand through the increasing demand for Chinese language teachers (Ewe and Min 2021).

Driven by the necessity for research and the global adoption of Chinese as a school subject outside of China, the current study investigates the perspectives of Thai Chinese language teachers and, in particular, the implementation of the active learning teaching method in Thailand. Thailand's National Education Reform Act of 1999 outlined the necessity of implementing active learning in the classroom because it would sustain lifelong learning (LLL) and assist students in developing their cognitive skills, also known as 'soft skills,' by improving critical thinking, problem-solving, and task-based learning skills in an active learning environment (Van De Bogart 2009). Recent studies have found that in Thailand, at a university level, applying active learning teaching methods along with ICT integration improves students' academic achievement (Waluyo 2020) and enhances students' learning motivation, attitudes, and skills at secondary school levels (Surakarn et al. 2020; Waluyo and Apridayani 2021). In the last two decades, the Thai Ministry of Education has held seminars and workshops on the understanding and practice of active learning for Thai Chinese language instructors (Ministry of Education 2017). However, there is still little known about how Thai Chinese school teachers utilize active learning and the extent of the impact of the government-administered active learning seminars on schoolteachers' active learning knowledge and skills. This study provides an answer to the following research questions:

1. How do Thai Chinese teachers teach Chinese subjects in secondary schools using active learning?
2. How does an active learning seminar impact their understanding of Chinese language teaching?

The results of this research are anticipated to have implications for the increased efficiency of Chinese language instruction in schools and the effectiveness of professional development for Thai Chinese language teachers.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Chinese Language Teaching

Essentially, the main goal of teaching Chinese as a foreign/L2 language is to develop and improve the students' Chinese skills, requiring teachers to find suitable teaching methods for their students, which may include activities both within and outside the classroom. In broader terms, all teaching methods may be divided into two broad categories: traditional and modern. The traditional passive view of learning involves situations in which material is delivered to students using a lecture-based format; in contrast, a more modern view of learning is constructivism, in which students are expected to be active participants in the learning process by engaging in discussion and/or collaborative activities (Carpenter 2006). Regarding the conventional style of education, lecture-based methods that compel students to learn only by listening to teachers is a form of instruction in which the teacher imparts subject-matter knowledge only by explanation and demonstration, while the student acts as a passive listener. Meanwhile, modern methods of teaching Chinese may include activities such as (1) discussion, where students exchange ideas to help solve a problem, encouraging students to think, speak, and democratize; (2) questioning-based learning management, a learning process that aims to develop students' thought processes (Meesin and Karnjanapun 2022); (3) pragmatics and role-playing (Dong 2018; Waluyo 2019); and (4) group-activity (Y. Zhang 2016). Technology incorporation has also been encouraged among Chinese language teachers, shifting from teacher-centered to learner-centered, e.g., Mei (2021) created a Chinese online teaching system using a mapping optimization methodology where students can explore various teaching materials independently within the created learning system, and Bian et al. (2020) present a novel approach for teaching Chinese in colleges based on the SNS (social network services) network platform, which develops a model of college Chinese teaching resources, enabling learners to create a learning community with their friends.

The use of various teaching resources, with or without the incorporation of technology, aimed at creating engaging learning activities for students is frequently what distinguishes modern methods of teaching Chinese from conventional ones. An example of a learning activity without technology involvement is using flashcards for Chinese vocabulary teaching and learning, as explored by Li and Tong (2019). Meanwhile, a review study by Lyu and Qi (2020) revealed that Chinese teaching also makes use of media, applications, and computer-assisted learning systems in L2 Chinese teaching and learning. Gong and Thaima (2020), for instance, examined the effectiveness of using educational media to teach Chinese vocabulary to Thai students. In this investigation, YouTube videos were utilized. The findings demonstrated that YouTube's variety offers students a more immediate and intuitive learning experience and encourages non-native students' interest in the language. In a high school, Haopeng and Satjahirut (2019) investigated the use of mobile apps for teaching Chinese vocabulary. The findings indicated that employing a mobile app to support the teaching of Chinese vocabulary may increase students' enthusiasm for learning the language. This research backs up the work that He and Liu performed in 2022, which showed that using mobile apps to teach Chinese as a foreign language online in an interactive way is both possible and useful from a theoretical and practical point of view.

Language instruction used to take place in conventional classroom settings when the time allotted for instruction and study was constrained for both teachers and students. The twenty-first century has brought along potent new technology that might enable students and teachers to get through these geographical and time restrictions. Programs for computer- and mobile-assisted language learning (CALL and MALL) have been tailored for use in this instructional process. Because the world is changing so swiftly, Chinese education management must also evolve.

On the other hand, it is important to underline some essential challenges in CLT, especially in secondary schools in Thailand. Students' difficulties communicating with native Chinese speakers is one of the challenges non-native Chinese language teachers, such as Thai Chinese Teachers, encounter while teaching the language. The challenges of teaching Chinese in Thai classrooms are commonly caused by the way that the students study. Most Thai students who study Chinese lack definite objectives and show little enthusiasm for the language. There are also such issues as mismatches between the textbook and the students' proficiency levels in Chinese. All of these tend to lead students to believe that Chinese is very difficult to grasp. Thus, a recent study by [Li et al. \(2022\)](#) suggests the inclusion of activities in the Chinese classroom that can positively stimulate students' interest in Chinese.

2.2. Active Learning and the Application in Chinese Language Teaching

Active learning methods are interactions among students and teachers in which two or more parties engage with each other during class. Active learning entails giving students the opportunity to actively discuss, listen, write, read, and reflect on the substance, concepts, problems, and concerns of an academic topic ([Zayapragassarazan and Kumar 2012](#)). It emphasizes students performing actions while learning because when students learn by performing something, they can readily detect, grasp, and endure learning ([Songserm and Tosola 2017](#)). Active learning teaching methods, such as group-oriented discussion methods, have been promoted in Thai language schools for Chinese learning and teaching, but the extent of the implementation, as well as teachers' knowledge about the method, is little known. This is believed to be an approach that can assist Thai Chinese teachers in meeting the demands of education management in the twenty-first century in Thailand ([Ministry of Education 2017](#)). Students are mainly involved in inquiry, reflection, meaning negotiation, case studies, and problem-based learning, among other open-ended, process-oriented instructional techniques ([Roessingh and Chambers 2011](#)).

Limited research has been conducted on the use of active learning in Chinese language instruction, particularly in the setting of non-native Chinese instructors instructing Chinese in secondary schools outside of China. Despite these limitations, the results of prior research on the use of active learning techniques may be split into two categories: active learning activities without technology integration and those with technology integration. [Shen and Xu \(2015\)](#) investigated instructional techniques, methodologies, and activities that promote active learning among beginning Chinese-as-a-second-language learners in vocabulary training. They discovered that after the lesson introduction and lecture, teachers engaged students in activities such as flashcards, bingo games, or picture–word match activities designed for individual and group competitions. Vocabulary exercises included filling in missing words in a sentence, replacing underlined words with target words, and producing phrases or sentences using target words. Pair and group work was conducted for problem-solving tasks to provide students with opportunities to work collaboratively. However, the majority of studies on the application of active learning in vocabulary instruction include technology-aided orthographic knowledge to increase students' awareness of semantic and phonetic radicals so that they can more effectively identify the sounds and graphic patterns among characters and make meaningful connections between the sounds, shapes, and meanings of characters ([Chen et al. 2013](#); [Xu and Padilla 2013](#)).

In preliminary research on the use of Internet Relay Chat (IRC) in teaching Chinese, [Xie \(2002\)](#) examined the viability of enhancing students' reading and writing abilities while facilitating the teaching and learning of the Chinese language. The students' involvement in three chat room discussion sessions (one preparatory, one semi-serious, and one serious), where they talked and wrote the whole time, constituted the active learning activities. WeChat was recently included by [Jiang and Li \(2018\)](#) in a CFL course to connect Chinese language learners from an Australian institution with Chinese native speakers who were studying abroad on the same campus. For ten weeks, the learner-native speaker pair was asked to complete weekly communication sub-tasks through WeChat. The students spoke

about how much they liked and appreciated using WeChat to engage with native speakers and ask and answer questions. In a different setting, Wang et al. (2018) looked at students in a beginner-level Chinese Foreign Language classroom to see if flipped teaching based on a MOOC affected their oral proficiency development and rate of progress, compared to a class-only baseline group, over the course of one semester, using the same syllabus. After the students watched the online module at home, the active learning exercises—which included language practice in pairs and groups—took place in the classroom. In several oral competence measures at post-tests, learners exposed to flipped teaching greatly outperformed the baseline group, according to the results, particularly in speech fluency, while their advantage in complexity and accuracy was less pronounced. Kahoot! has been utilized in classrooms to assist in teaching various topics, and the immediate feedback from classroom examinations has shown that it is effective (Li 2020).

The brief review mentioned earlier shows that active learning and its application in Chinese language instruction have attracted the attention of researchers and the Thai government over the past decade, and their adoption in classroom instruction, with or without the use of technology, has increased significantly. The present study contributes by investigating how Thai Chinese secondary school teachers implement active learning and how a government-administered active learning seminar influences their active learning knowledge, which will have a lasting effect on the teachers' Chinese language instruction in their respective schools.

3. Methods

3.1. Research Design

A sequential mixed-methods explanatory design was adopted in this study, allowing researchers to collect and analyze quantitative and qualitative data in two separate periods within a single study (Ivankova et al. 2006). The qualitative data were gathered through focus-group interviews with Thai Chinese secondary school teachers, who were asked about their experiences teaching Chinese as well as their knowledge and usage of active learning prior to attending the government-administered seminar. The study included phenomenological research design concepts in elaborating teachers' experiences on the study's subject, described as the study of lived experience: the world as we instantaneously sense it pre-reflectively rather than as we learn to grasp, classify, or reflect upon it. Phenomenology, as opposed to textual analysis, is concerned with explaining the phenomenological significance of experiences. Simply put, phenomenology is interested in the inquiry, 'How does this or that form of experience feel?' It seeks pre-reflective accounts of how humans see a world that is devoid of taxonomy, categorization, explanation, conceptualization, abstraction, or even meaning ascription (Van Manen 2017). Pre- and post-tests were then used to collect quantitative data.

3.2. Context and Participants

The study was carried out at nine public schools and one private secondary school in southern Thailand. It included 20 Thai Chinese teachers (15% men and 85% women), with 55% (11) having 1–5 years of experience and 45% (9) having 6–10 years. Of them, 35% (7) had master's degrees, while 65% (13) had bachelor's degrees. All the participants were informed about the research objectives, and their agreements were obtained prior to the data collection process. This research was also approved by researchers' institutional review board for ethical research conduct.

3.3. Research Procedures and Intervention

This research was conducted as part of a large Chinese language education initiative run by the Thai Ministry of Education. The Office of the Basic Education Commission (OBEC) and the Office of the Higher Education Commission (OHEC) collaborated to lead the initiative to enhance the quality of education and local development, with mentorship from higher education institutions (U-School Mentoring). This project provides outcomes

that align with the Ministry of Education’s (MOE) strategy for improving the quality of basic education in the nation. According to the 20-year national policy, the objective is to cultivate individuals who can guide the nation toward “security, prosperity, and sustainability” (Ministry of Education 2017).

Correspondingly, a two-day seminar for Thai Chinese secondary school teachers was arranged in the south of Thailand. Pre- and post-tests were used to assess teachers’ prior and post-seminar understanding of active learning methods. In each section, the speakers, who were university lecturers with expertise in Chinese language teaching (CLT) from renowned universities in Thailand and were previously engaged in several teacher training courses on CLT both at university and school levels, would give participants the opportunity to participate in activities related to their topic and provide feedback, such as: using technology to create educational content and materials to increase students’ interest and motivation; putting active learning techniques into practice when teaching Chinese characters; participating in group activities to share Chinese teaching experiences; and analyzing the strategy for Chinese character teaching and management.

3.4. Instrument and Measure

3.4.1. Pre- and Post-Tests

The first instrument utilized to gather data was the pre- and post-test, which was administered through email with a barcode before and after the seminar. It was developed by four speakers on their respective topics, with five questions on each topic. The test consisted of twenty multiple-choice questions, including questions regarding ideas about teaching Chinese characters, the use of technology to facilitate Chinese language instruction, the Active Learning process, and the design of active learning activities for teaching Chinese characters. These tests were designed to determine how much knowledge development teachers obtained as a result of attending the seminar. In relation to the employed sequential mixed-methods explanatory design, the participants were asked about the seminar’s impact on their active learning knowledge. The outcomes of the examinations—the pre- and post-test results, as well as the qualitative responses of the participants—would lead to the answer to the second research question. Table 1 shows some sample questions.

Table 1. Sample pre- and post-test questions.

| Question |
|---|
| 1. What are Chinese characters? A. Pictograph B. Ideograph C. Phonogram D. Paragraph |
| 2. What is Active learning? A. Teaching suitable for reading comprehension. B. Can be applied to the whole process of Chinese character teaching. C. Suitable for writing teaching. D. Contribute to the learning of brush strokes. |
| 3. Which is an asynchronous learning activity? A. The teacher instructs the students to search for images related to the learning content. B. Teacher divides into small groups for students to talk face-to-face. C. Teacher guides while students are discussing issues. D. Teachers talk and give advice one-on-one. |

3.4.2. Focus Group Interview

Focus group interview was conducted after the seminar. The online platform was selected for practicality since the teachers resided in different areas. The convenience sampling method was selected based on being the easiest for the researcher to access (Robinson 2014); in this study, researchers relied on the participants' willingness to participate in the focus group interview. Immediately after the seminar, researchers contacted all the participants. As a result, four teachers, one from a private school and three from government schools, participated in the interview, which lasted for three hours. Researchers provided 13 questions that were handed one by one to the group. The online interview was recorded and transcribed for the data analysis process.

The Chinese curriculum in Thai schools emphasizes reading and writing, which makes teachers focus on vocabulary learning and Chinese character writing, encompassing Chinese I, Chinese II, Chinese III, Chinese IV, Chinese V, and Chinese VI (Department of Academic Affairs 2003). Therefore, most of the interview questions specifically bring up the context of teaching the mentioned skills. Table 2 presents the interview questions.

Table 2. Interview questions.

| Questions |
|--|
| 1. What methods do you use to teach Chinese to learners? |
| 2. What proactive Chinese teaching methods do you know? |
| 3. What materials do you use to teach learners Chinese character writing? |
| 4. What teaching materials do you use the most? |
| 5. What is your problem with teaching learners to write Chinese characters? |
| 7. What are the problems encountered with Chinese character writing of learners? |
| 8. What methods do you use to teach Chinese characters to learners? |
| 9. Problems encountered by the instructor's own teaching process that affect the Chinese character writing of the learner. |
| 10. In what ways do you think you want to improve the teaching of Chinese character writing to learners? |
| 11. Feedback on proactive teaching and learning in Chinese character writing |
| 12. What proactive teaching methods will you use to teach learners to write Chinese characters? |
| 13. What do you think the seminar on active learning? and how does the seminar impact your knowledge on teaching Chinese characters using active learning? |

3.5. Data Analysis

The first research question sought to discover how Thai Chinese teachers used active learning to teach Chinese subjects in secondary schools prior to attending the administered seminar. To answer this question, this study analyzed the interview data using thematic analysis. To code and analyze the data, researchers used a set of concepts, ideas, or subjects from the literature. By assessing how meanings are coded and arranged to form themes, researchers establish the foundation for data analysis (Braun and Clarke 2019). The teachers were designated by the letter T followed by a sequence of numbers, such as T1 and T2. Table 3 displays the phases of the utilized thematic analysis, as outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006). Analysis was conducted using inductive coding, which permits the emergence of themes from the data (Creswell 2014).

To evaluate the impact of the active learning seminar, a sequential mixed-methods explanatory design was used. It enables researchers to gather and evaluate quantitative and qualitative data in two successive periods within a single study (Ivankova et al. 2006). The Wilcoxon test was used to compare the pre- and post-test data in this investigation since the sample size was less than 30. The significant value was established as <0.05. The interview data were then used to give further explanations for the quantitative analysis results.

Table 3. Phases of the thematic analysis.

| Phase | Description of the Process |
|-------------------------------|---|
| 1. Getting to know the data | Transcribing data, reading and re-reading the data, and writing down initial thoughts |
| 2. Generating initial codes | Coding important data characteristics in a systematic manner across the whole data collection and compiling data pertinent to each code |
| 3. Searching for themes | Organizing codes into possible topics and collecting all essential data for each prospective theme |
| 4. Reviewing themes | Creating a thematic ‘map’ of the analysis by checking if the themes function in connection to the coded extracts (Level 1) and the whole data set (Level 2) |
| 5. Defining and naming themes | Continuous analysis to fine-tune the specifics of each topic as well as the overall story the analysis conveys, resulting in unambiguous definitions and titles for each |
| 6. Producing the report | The last chance for analysis. Selection of vivid, engaging extract examples, final analysis of selected extracts, connecting the analysis back to the research topic and literature, and writing a scholarly report on the analysis |

4. Results and Discussion

4.1. Thai Chinese Secondary School Teachers’ Use of Active Learning

The Thai teachers affirmed that they had been using active learning methods in their Chinese classroom teaching. While they emphasized the use of active learning activities, there was evidence that the teachers were not expressly aware that the activities were active learning activities. For instance, a teacher said, “The teaching of Chinese with a focus on the students. Teachers do more than just instruct and explain. However, the emphasis is placed on students’ ability to think, practice, read, write, and talk” (T3). This response is consistent with the concept of active learning, which emphasizes students’ performing in order to learn because when students learn by performing something, they can readily detect, comprehend, and retain learning, providing students with the opportunity to actively discuss and listen, write, read, and reflect on an academic topic (Songserm and Tosola 2017; Zayapragassarazan and Kumar 2012). The term “active learning” was used to refer to several different activities, including role-playing and simulation, but it was never spelled out explicitly by some teachers. This may imply that the classroom pedagogy of Thai Chinese secondary schools has progressed from knowledge transmission through lectures to knowledge production and transformation through dynamic learning activities (Shen and Xu 2015). In this case, it is also possible that the teachers view active learning as a natural process where students need to be actively engaged both cognitively and physically through various classroom activities.

From the data analysis, several themes emerged, illustrating the teachers’ perspectives and implementation of active learning activities in their school classrooms:

4.1.1. Active Learning Activities

Discussion and role-playing activities involving audio-visual materials were recognized by the teachers. They perceived these activities to be meaningful in assisting students in having practical experience in using Chinese in conversations and sentence constructions and composition, as a teacher expressed, “My teaching emphasizes communication skills, leading by example, role-playing, and enabling students to explore material to build more communication-related knowledge in Chinese” (T4). To accommodate their classroom instruction, various teaching resources were utilized, including Chinese learning books, dictionaries, pictures, Chinese flashcards, slides, Chinese character writing practice, and YouTube videos. Internet applications, e.g., pleco, baidu, and zdic, were also utilized. Previous research has demonstrated that resources that do not involve the use of technology can be beneficial to active learning approaches (Dong 2018; Meesin and Karnjanapun 2022; Shen and Xu 2015; Y. Zhang 2016). However, previous research has only supported the value of using technology to aid orthographic knowledge in order to raise students’ awareness of semantic and phonetic radicals, which gives students the ability to comprehend

sound and graphic patterns among characters more quickly and gives them the ability to draw links between the sound, shape, and meaning of characters (Chen et al. 2013; Xu and Padilla 2013). The Thai Chinese teachers' use of internet-based applications should be further investigated because it can improve our understanding of the impacts of using applications in Chinese subjects at the school level.

4.1.2. Emphasized Chinese Skills

Although the teachers were informed about their classroom pedagogy's emphasis on the four main skills (listening, speaking, reading, and writing), their elaborate responses reflect a priority on the writing skill in terms of teaching Chinese character writing. This priority followed the national curriculum guidelines, emphasizing students' reading and writing abilities. When students improve their Chinese character writing, it enhances their Chinese reading ability as they see Chinese characters in texts. A request for more training on the use of media for teaching Chinese characters was made. Two teachers expressed:

Chinese calligraphy should be actively taught and studied since it is crucial and very advantageous for language learners. Because writing abilities depend on language understanding, students must also be proficient in speaking, listening, and reading. In accordance with the policy, OBEC places a strong emphasis on students' literacy skills. Therefore, proactive instruction of Chinese characters in Chinese characters is centered on students' capacity to succeed to the fullest in language acquisition. (T2)

It is crucial and essential for pupils to receive proactive instruction in Chinese calligraphy. To make it simple for students to understand and apply the fundamentals of writing, I would want to have approaches or media for proactive writing instruction that may be used with them. (T3)

Furthermore, the teachers elaborated on their active learning instruction for teaching Chinese characters. They would allow learners to practice writing Chinese characters as often as they can remember and bring Chinese character flashcards for students to practice guessing Chinese characters. They regularly planned their classroom activities, which they called an activity-based learning management process, where the role of the teacher would be gradually decreased and students' participation would be increased in building knowledge and organizing the learning system for writing Chinese characters by themselves using play puzzles, side letters, etc., as expressed in the interview extract below.

I instruct students in writing Chinese characters using an active teaching approach. Students participate in the classroom via the active learning method. It fosters teacher-student relationships and attempts to encourage students to engage in practical work. The teacher will offer guidance, instruction, oversight of methods, and a range of learning tools for the pupils. Along with listening to teachers' lectures, students are also encouraged to write. The use of media, vocabulary cards, and Chinese characters will be used to provide particular advice to those who write poorly and are not accurate in accordance with the writing principles. (T3)

The prevalence of related research on writing Chinese characters and language lends weight to these findings. The majority of research conducted in this area has concentrated on the teaching of writing in conjunction with Chinese character writing and vocabulary (Li and Tong 2019; Q. Zhang 2020). Haopeng and Satjahanut (2019) conducted research on the utilization of mobile apps for the instruction of Chinese vocabulary in a secondary school setting. The findings indicated that utilizing a mobile app as a pedagogical tool to aid in teaching Chinese vocabulary to students would increase the students' enthusiasm for learning the language. This study lends credence to the work of He and Liu (2022), who established that interactive mobile app-based online Chinese language training is not only feasible but also advantageous from both a theoretical and practical point of view.

4.1.3. Encountered Challenges

While active learning activities promote students' engagement, implementing the activities would not automatically make the learning process successful. As revealed in the interview data, there were challenges derived from both teachers and students. It was reported that secondary school students' interest in practicing writing Chinese characters was low. The recruited students did not possess good academic performance, affecting their perceptions of the importance of learning Chinese. Most Thai students considered writing Chinese characters difficult within their limited class hours. Nevertheless, the teachers admitted several problems derived from their limitations. For instance, the teachers' Chinese character handwriting is not appealing, the teachers' lack of experience in teaching Chinese characters, the teachers' lack of knowledge of Chinese character meanings, the teachers' lack of confidence in writing Chinese characters, and the teachers' lack of interest in improving teaching methods. One of the teachers responded:

The process of teaching students to write Chinese characters causes teacher issues. Teaching may not always reach all the students. Teachers are unable to stroll about and observe each student's writing practice. Furthermore, the school is a district school. Incoming students are not very competitive. As a result, students seldom perceive the value of learning Chinese since they believe that it will be useless in the future. Nonetheless, some students work hard in their studies. Students that work hard in class will obviously stand out from their classmates. They can listen, translate, properly answer questions, and speak Chinese. (T3)

Correspondingly, the teachers suggested that understanding the importance and benefits of learning Chinese characters should be thoroughly instilled inside students' minds prior to the implementation of practical learning activities. A good understanding may develop self-awareness and interest in acquiring language skills, leading to an improvement in learning motivation. According to Li et al. (2022), activities that might pique students' interest in Chinese should be included in the curriculum. Meanwhile, teachers should actively be engaged in their own professional development in the four main skills; these are common challenges for non-native teachers, such as Thai Chinese teachers.

4.2. Impact of Active Learning Seminar on Thai Chinese Secondary School Teachers

The collected data met the assumptions of continuous levels, and the distribution of the differences for the paired-sample t-test and the Wilcoxon signed-rank test was selected due to the small sample size. As shown in Tables 4–6, the results revealed that teachers' understanding of active learning methods improved significantly after attending the seminar ($Z = 3.740, p < 0.001$). The median post-test score was much higher than that of the pre-test. The SD values decreased in the post-test, suggesting that the seminar narrowed down the differences in understanding among the teachers, although the values were still indicating big discrepancies in teachers' understanding.

Table 4. Descriptive Statistics.

| Descriptive Statistics | | | | | | | | |
|------------------------|----|-------|----------------|---------|---------|-------|------------------------------|-------|
| | N | Mean | Std. Deviation | Minimum | Maximum | 25th | Percentiles 50th (Median) | 75th |
| pre-test | 20 | 10.55 | 3.268 | 5 | 19 | 8.00 | 10.00 | 12.75 |
| post-test | 20 | 16.55 | 2.929 | 10 | 20 | 15.00 | 17.00 | 19.00 |

Table 5. Pre- and post-test results comparison.

| | | Ranks | | |
|--------------------|----------------|-----------------|-----------|--------------|
| | | N | Mean Rank | Sum of Ranks |
| post-test–pre-test | Negative Ranks | 1 ^a | 5.00 | 5.00 |
| | Positive Ranks | 19 ^b | 10.79 | 205.00 |
| | Ties | 0 ^c | | |
| | Total | 20 | | |

^a. post-test < pre-test
^b. post-test > pre-test
^c. post-test = pre-test

Table 6. Wilcoxon signed-rank test results.

| Test Statistics ^a | | post-test–pre-test |
|------------------------------|--|---------------------|
| Z | | −3.740 ^b |
| Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed) | | 0.000 |

^a. Wilcoxon signed-rank test
^b. Based on negative ranks

Similarly, the interview data revealed the teachers' acknowledgment of the seminar's positive impacts on their active learning knowledge. Among these were chances for knowledge and experience exchange, which led to better Chinese teaching approaches and the establishment of Chinese language networks at the secondary school level. Nonetheless, the teachers continued to raise their worries about the teaching of Chinese characters and asked why training on the subject was lacking, as expressed:

The Ministry of Education has hosted a number of Chinese language seminars. Seminars on Chinese characters, on the other hand, are uncommon. Because of the information, I'm delighted I'll be able to attend this seminar. A Chinese teacher might bring activities and strategies learned from lectures to assist in constructing activities for teaching Chinese characters. This will let learners experience active learning while teaching, making the educational environment more fascinating. Students will be able to write Chinese with greater accuracy. (T3)

Studies on the positive effects of seminar or workshop programs on participants' knowledge growth have been conducted (Schmalenbach et al. 2022), but there are currently few studies on CFL at the school level. Through the Confucius Institute Headquarters, also known as Hanban, the Office of the Chinese Language Council International, which routinely holds seminars and workshops, the Chinese Ministry of Education has supported the instruction of Chinese in schools abroad (Ma et al. 2017). The results of this research enable us to understand that Thai Chinese teachers at secondary schools demand additional training on novel approaches to teaching Chinese characters for reading and writing. It is important to note that the government-administered seminar did not address specific pre-test questions that teachers could not answer correctly, which may be one of its shortcomings. Future research should take into consideration pre-test findings and adjust seminar content accordingly so that teachers' weaknesses can be addressed during the seminar.

5. Conclusions and Implication

This study investigated Thai Chinese teachers' use of active learning methods at public and private secondary schools in the south of Thailand and examined the impact of a government-administered Chinese teaching seminar on their professional development.

The findings showed that Thai Chinese teachers use a variety of active learning activities together with technology and non-technology-based learning resources. However, there were also concerns raised about the novel approaches to teaching Chinese characters as well as the difficulties faced by students and teachers. Therefore, the first implication of the findings is that Hanban and the Thai Ministry of Education should plan their seminars and workshops in a manner that would enable Thai Chinese instructors to continually address their students' and teachers' inadequacies while they are participating in active learning activities. In lieu of seminar preparations, preliminary data on the assessment of students' and teachers' needs, obtained through bottom-up approaches such as surveys and interviews, should be useful.

Second, to optimize the efficacy of active learning, schools must aid teachers in overcoming obstacles in the teaching and learning of Chinese characters. This study uncovered low motivation, low academic achievement, and low interest in learning Chinese in schools. Schools may present instances of Thai students who have been successful in learning Chinese, as well as the subsequent effects on their academic careers and futures. Providing reading materials and films that motivate pupils to study Chinese might also be beneficial. Prior to implementing practical learning activities, students' understanding of the significance and benefits of studying Chinese characters should be strengthened.

Lastly, teachers should be actively engaged in their self-professional development and inform stakeholders of what they require to achieve substantial results in their Chinese classroom instruction in schools. Learning from teachers in other schools in Thailand and overseas might motivate teachers to confront the obstacles they face.

Several limitations are acknowledged. This study did not involve classroom observation, which could have confirmed teachers' responses regarding their use of active learning. It also did not explore teachers' backgrounds, which might have caused teachers' limitations in using active learning in their pedagogical practices. This study could not engage teachers in a large enough number to allow researchers to perform more advanced statistical analysis techniques. Moreover, the focus group interview was conducted several months after the seminar concluded. The researchers sought to allow participants time to return to their teaching environments and reflect on or implement the knowledge gained during the seminar. Because of this gap, uncontrolled factors may have influenced the participants' reflections. If researchers conducted the interviews immediately following the session, the results might be different. Nonetheless, as part of the design research procedures, this action was performed.

The use of active CFL methods in secondary schools outside of China and the effects of ongoing Chinese seminars on teachers' professional development are still the subjects of few studies. Future study on this topic among secondary school teachers in other nations is also urged. It is also suggested that future studies utilize various data collection tools aside from surveys and interviews. Students may also need to be involved in learning how both teachers and students view active learning.

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