

Attitudes towards Chinese Language Learning: A Case of Thai Senior High School Students at a Private School in Bangkok

ทัศนคติที่มีต่อการเรียนรู้ภาษาจีนของนักเรียนชั้นมัธยมศึกษาตอนปลาย ในโรงเรียนเอกชนแห่งหนึ่งในกรุงเทพมหานคร

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to explore the attitudes towards Chinese language learning of Thai senior high school students (Grade 10-12), at a private school in Bangkok, and examined the effect of gender and learning programs on those attitudes. Purposive and convenient sampling method were applied to a total of 493 students who were, then, studying in two different learning programs, Chinese Language major and English and Mathematics major with a minor in Chinese. Two hundreds and twelve subjects were obtained and questionnaires, with a reliability value of 0.83, were administered. The statistical data analysis was conducted, using descriptive and inferential statistics, including One-Way ANOVA. A statistically difference found between gender and learning programs in that female students hold more positive attitudes towards Chinese language learning than their male counterparts, and that the students in Chinese Language Program hold more positive attitudes towards Chinese language learning than those in English and Mathematics with a minor in Chinese.

Keywords: *Learning Attitudes, Chinese Language Learning, Thai Senior High School Students*

บทคัดย่อ

งานวิจัยนี้มีจุดประสงค์เพื่อศึกษาทัศนคติที่มีต่อการเรียนภาษาจีนของนักเรียนชั้นมัธยมศึกษาตอนปลาย (มัธยม 4 5 และ 6) ของโรงเรียนเอกชนแห่งหนึ่งในเขตดอนเมือง กรุงเทพมหานคร เพื่อศึกษาอิทธิพลของเพศและโปรแกรมที่เลือกเรียนที่มีต่อทัศนคติในการเรียนภาษาจีนการวิเคราะห์ข้อมูลใช้สถิติเชิงพรรณนา และสถิติเชิงอนุมานด้วยการวิเคราะห์ความแตกต่างของ 2 กลุ่ม และการวิเคราะห์ความแปรปรวนทางเดียว ใช้การสุ่มตัวอย่างแบบเจาะจงและตามสะดวกของกลุ่มประชากร 493 คน ได้กลุ่มตัวอย่างจำนวน 212 คน ซึ่งเป็นนักเรียนที่เรียนโปรแกรมภาษาจีนเป็นสาขาเอกและนักเรียนสาขาภาษาอังกฤษ และคณิตศาสตร์ที่

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เลือกเรียนภาษาจีนเป็นสาขารอง ค่าระดับความเชื่อมั่นของแบบสอบถามอยู่ที่ 0.83 ผลการวิจัยพบว่า เพศ มีผลต่อทัศนคติการเรียนภาษาจีนโดยที่นักเรียนเพศหญิงมีทัศนคติเชิงบวกต่อการเรียนภาษาจีนมากกว่านักเรียนเพศชาย และโปรแกรมที่เลือกเรียนมีอิทธิพลต่อทัศนคติในการเรียนภาษาจีน โดยนักเรียนที่เลือกเรียนภาษาจีนเป็นสาขาเอกมีทัศนคติเชิงบวกต่อการเรียนภาษาจีนมากกว่านักเรียนในสาขาภาษาอังกฤษ และคณิตศาสตร์ที่นักเรียนเลือกเรียนภาษาจีนเป็นสาขารอง

คำสำคัญ: ทัศนคติต่อการเรียน การเรียนภาษาจีน นักเรียนไทยชั้นมัธยมศึกษาตอนปลาย

Introduction

Attitude is considered one of the most influential factors that affect second language learners' acquisition and learning process -- efforts, desires, and affection towards learning a target language (Baker, 1992). The attitudes towards foreign or second language learning can also affect individual learner seither positively or negatively. This, in turn, can cause success or failure to learners at any level of education (Harold, 1997; Liu, 2009; Lin, 2013; Verma, 2005).

When it comes to the second or foreign language in Thailand, among several 19 languages taught, English and Chinese have been included at every level of education (Tangyuenyong & Choonharuangdej, 2010). For four decades, Chinese language, in particular, has been offered as a foreign or second language, in both public and private schools, in different programs of study and levels, mostly, in senior high.

As mentioned earlier, attitudes towards a second or foreign language is salient to students' learning process and success. While students' gender (Alzahrani, 2008; Inal & Saracaloğlu, 2011; Kobayashi, 2002; Lai & Kuo, 2007) and educational or learning programs (Abiding, Pour-Mohammadi, & Alzwari, 2012; Al-Tamim & Shuib, 2009) were considered important to

identify students' attitudes towards a language, the focus of this study, thus, was on Thai students' attitudes towards Chinese language learning. Since Chinese language has been popularly chosen at the senior high school level, Grade 10 to 12, either as a major or minor, it would be significant to examine the effect of those Thai senior high school students' attitudes towards Chinese language learning. This is because those attitudes can cause either success or failure in pursuing future career or study.

This study, hence, put an emphasis on Chinese language learning attitudes of senior high school students, in a private school in Bangkok. At this particular school, Chinese language was offered as both a major and minor area. The outcomes of the study were expected to be beneficial, to both students and teachers, at senior high school levels, in that there sults would help them in achieving higher goals and levels of proficiency.

Research Objectives

The purpose of this study was to explore the attitudes towards Chinese language learning of Thai senior high school students at a private school in Bangkok, and to examine the effect of gender and learning programs on those attitudes.

Literature Review and Related Research

While attitude is defined as a mindset or tendency to act in a particular way according to individual's experience and temperament which includes thoughts, feelings, and action, it also helps us define our behavior towards the situation or object we encounter (Pickens, 2005). As ABC model of attitude suggests that attitudes are constructed around three components: affect, behavior, and cognition. While affect denotes the individual's feeling about an attitude objects, behavior involves the individual's intention towards an attitude object, and cognition accounts for the individual's beliefs about an attitude object (Zanna & Rempel, 1988).

Several researchers have agreed that attitude or willing to learn is the most prominent to carry since it allows for an internal positive experience to grow which, in turn, will help the learners become more successful in life (Dornyei, 2001; Hosseini & Pourmandnia, 2013; Sen, 2012). Also, it has been revealed that there were some positive correlations between attitudes and learning environment and atmospheres both inside and outside schools (Ellis, 1994; Gardner, Lalonde, & Moorcroft, 1985; Mill, 1960).

However, when it comes to attitudes towards language learning, several variables come into play. To name a few, those variables are attitudes towards the language itself, teacher's teaching methods, students' gender and educational program, parents' opinions and concern on their children's foreign language learning, and students' family backgrounds (Abidin, Pour-Mohammadi, & Alzwari, 2012; Eills & Barkhuizen, 2005; Fujiwara, 2012; Liu, 2009; Lin, 2013).

Research on the effect of attitudes towards the second or foreign language learning and the relationships between attitudes towards language learning and students' success has been carried out in various countries with different learning programs and levels of education (Arul, 1977; Fujiwara, 2012; Jowell, 2005; Kakkar, 2014; Lafay & Tsuda, 2002; Lin, 2013; Morita, 2013). Nevertheless, research on attitudes towards Chinese language learning, especially, of Thai students with different gender and learning programs is rare. Thus, the purpose of this study was to explore the attitudes towards Chinese language learning of high school students, at a private school in Bangkok, and also to examine the effects of gender and learning programs on those attitudes.

Research Methodology

The survey research design was used to identify the Chinese learning attitudes of Thai senior high school students of grade 10 to 12 at a private school in Bangkok. Purposive and convenient sampling method were employed to a total of 493 students who currently are studying Chinese in nine classes. Questionnaires were administered to a sample of 212 subjects majoring in Chinese language and English and Mathematics with a minor in Chinese language. The average ages were 15 to 18. While the students with a major in Chinese language must take five Chinese classes per week with a total of 250 minutes, the students with English and mathematic major with a minor in Chinese language have to take two classes with a total of 100 minutes per week.

A 19-item questionnaire was adapted from attitude questionnaires developed by Abidin, Pour-Mohammadi, & Alzwari, (2012), Al

Asmari, (2013), and Yu (2010). Part one of the questionnaire contained demographic information and part two was composed of attitudes towards Chinese language learning. Before being administered to the subjects, the questionnaire was translated into Thai by a Thai English teacher. A 5-Rating Likert – scale was applied to identify students' attitude toward Chinese language learning.

Based on Zaijonts's (2013), an alpha of 0.7 indicates acceptable reliability of the research instrument, 0.8 is high, and 0.95 is very high. A reliability test of a questionnaire was run using Cronbach's Alpha analysis and a high level of reliability was obtained at 0.83. The research questions were tested using descriptive analysis, Means, Standard Deviation, and One-Way ANOVA.

Results and Discussion

There were a total of 212 subjects which consisted of 143 female and 69 male students from Grade 10 (n=111), Grade 11 (n=34) and Grade 12 (n=67). Those subjects were majoring in English and Mathematics (n=146) and Chinese (n=66). However, due to the school's immediate changing teaching arrangement, at the time of data collection, Grade 11 students went to join extra-curriculum activities, and Grade 12 students were preparing for college entrance examination, which prevented them from participating in this study. Accordingly, the number of Grade 11 and 12 students were much less than Grade 10. (Table 1).

Table 1 Demographic Information (cross tabulation)

(n=212)

	Details	Frequency	Percentage
Gender	Male	69	32.55
	Female	143	66.98
Grade	Grade 10	111	52.36
	Grade 11	34	16.04
	Grade 12	67	31.60
Learning Program	Chinese	66	31.13
	English and Mathematics	146	68.86

A One-way analysis of Variance (ANOVA) revealed that there were statistically significant differences between male and female students' attitudes towards Chinese language learning at the level of ($p \leq 0.001$) on the following items, "I want to learn more about Chinese culture," ($p = .000$); "I like listening to Chinese music," ($p = .001$); "I have a favorable attitude towards

Chinese language," ($p = .000$); "Learning Chinese is really interesting," ($p = .000$); "I want to speak fluent and accurate Chinese like Chinese people," ($p = .000$); "I plan to learn as much Chinese as possible," ($p = .000$); "Chinese is as important as English," ($p = .000$); "Chinese learning is effective if Chinese is used outside the class as well," ($p = .000$); "Studying Chinese is important

to me because it will make me a more knowledgeable person,” ($p=.000$); “Studying Chinese is important to me because I think it

will someday be useful,” ($p=.000$); and “Studying Chinese is important to me because it will help me in the future career,” ($p=.000$). (Table 2).

Table 2 One-way ANOVA analysis of gender and students’ learning attitude towards Chinese language learning

($n=212$)

	Male		Female		F	P-Value
	M	S.D.	M	S.D.		
1. I want to learn more about Chinese culture.	2.99	0.95	3.82	0.83	42.821	.000***
2. I like watching Chinese movies.	2.83	1.34	2.69	1.17	.553	.458
3. I like listening to Chinese music.	2.04	1.05	2.57	1.15	10.404	.001***
4. I want to know more about Chinese people because it will help me speak Chinese correctly.	3.13	0.95	3.50	1.05	6.020	.015*
5. I want to learn Chinese so that I’m able to know Chinese people better.	2.96	0.90	3.27	0.99	5.006	.026*
6. I have admired the Chinese people.	2.96	1.20	2.97	1.07	.009	.924
7. The Chinese culture is attractive, interesting and worth to learn.	3.17	1.01	3.66	1.04	10.284	.002**
8. I have a favorable attitude towards Chinese language.	2.93	1.12	3.52	1.03	14.739	.000***
9. Learning Chinese is really interesting.	2.96	1.02	3.74	1.08	25.472	.000***
10. Learning Chinese is hard and difficult.	3.75	1.10	3.78	1.02	.022	.883
11. I want to speak fluent and accurate Chinese like Chinese people.	3.49	1.20	4.13	1.05	15.365	.000***
12. I plan to learn as much Chinese as possible.	3.22	1.00	3.94	1.03	23.203	.000***
13. Chinese is as important as English.	3.28	1.07	3.88	1.08	14.654	.000***
14. Chinese learning is effective if Chinese is used outside the class as well.	3.43	1.13	4.08	1.09	15.798	.000***
15. I feel happy when I study Chinese.	2.99	1.14	3.37	1.05	5.885	.016*

Table 2 One-way ANOVA analysis of gender and students' learning attitude towards Chinese language learning (continued)

(n=212)

	Male		Female		F	P-Value
	M	S.D.	M	S.D.		
16. Studying Chinese is important to me because it helps me participate more freely in the activities of Chinese.	3.33	1.05	3.66	1.04	4.470	.036*
17. Studying Chinese is important to me because it will make me a more knowledgeable person.	3.29	0.94	3.84	0.89	16.998	.000***
18. Studying Chinese is important to me because I think it will someday be useful.	3.33	1.04	4.01	1.05	19.258	.000***
19. Studying Chinese is important to me because it will help me in the future career.	3.36	1.12	3.99	1.03	15.981	.000***

***($p < 0.001$), **($p < 0.01$), *($p < 0.05$)

A One-way analysis of Variance (ANOVA) revealed that there were statistically significant differences between learning programs and students' attitudes towards Chinese language learning at the level of ($p \leq 0.001$) on the following items: "I like listening to Chinese music," ($p = .001$); "I want to know more about

Chinese people because it will help me speak Chinese correctly," ($p = .000$); "Learning Chinese is really interesting," ($p = .000$); "Chinese learning is effective if Chinese is used outside the class as well," ($p = .000$); and "Studying Chinese is important to me because it will help me in the future career," ($p = .000$). (Table 3).

Table 3 One-way ANOVA analysis of learning program and students' learning attitude towards Chinese language learning

(n=212)

Item	Chinese		Others (English & Mathematic)		F	P-Value	
	M	S.D.	M	S.D.			
	1.	I want to learn more about Chinese culture.	3.79	0.79			3.44
2.	I like watching Chinese movies.	2.95	1.23	2.64	1.21	3.079	0.081
3.	I like listening to Chinese music.	2.8	1.21	2.22	1.07	12.446	0.001***
4.	I want to know more about Chinese people because it will help me speak Chinese correctly.	3.8	0.79	3.18	1.07	17.664	0.000***
5.	I want to learn Chinese so that I'm able to know Chinese people better.	3.45	0.93	3.04	0.97	8.493	0.004**
6.	I have admired the Chinese people.	3.12	1.05	2.9	1.14	1.852	0.175
7.	The Chinese culture is attractive, interesting and worth to learn.	3.74	1.01	3.39	1.05	5.202	0.024*
8.	I have a favorable attitude towards Chinese language.	3.53	1.03	3.24	1.12	3.236	0.073
9.	Learning Chinese is really interesting.	3.91	1	3.29	1.12	14.549	0.000***
10.	Learning Chinese is hard and difficult.	3.86	1.04	3.73	1.05	0.790	0.375
11.	I want to speak fluent and accurate Chinese like Chinese people.	4.24	1.02	3.77	1.16	7.944	0.005**
12.	I plan to learn as much Chinese as possible.	3.95	1.16	3.59	1.01	5.399	0.021*
13.	Chinese is as important as English.	3.8	0.9	3.63	1.2	1.095	0.296
14.	Chinese learning is effective if Chinese is used outside the class as well.	4.29	0.87	3.68	1.2	13.789	0.000***
15.	I feel happy when I study Chinese.	3.52	1.17	3.12	1.04	5.952	0.016*

Table 3 One-way ANOVA analysis of learning program and students' learning attitude towards Chinese language learning (continued)

(n=212)

Item		Chinese		Others (English & Mathematic)		F	P-Value
		M	S.D.	M	S.D.		
		16.	Studying Chinese is important to me because it helps me participate more freely in the activities of Chinese.	3.83	0.94		
17.	Studying Chinese is important to me because it will make me a more knowledgeable person	3.89	0.99	3.55	0.9	6.022	0.015*
18.	Studying Chinese is important to me because I think it will someday be useful.	4.14	0.97	3.63	1.11	10.200	0.002**
19.	Studying Chinese is important to me because it will help me in the future career.	4.21	0.9	3.59	1.13	15.546	0.000***

***($p < 0.001$), **($p < 0.01$), *($p < 0.05$)

Conclusion and Discussion

The findings of this study indicated that it was essential to examine attitudes towards second or foreign language learning, and gender differences and learning programs were found to have strongly significant differences on attitudes towards Chinese language learning. That is female students at Grade 10 to 12 were more positive towards Chinese language learning than their male counterparts, while those majoring in Chinese Language program, hold more positive attitudes than the students in the program of English and Mathematics, with a minor in Chinese. The results are consistent with Eills (1994) and Abidin, Pour-Mohammadi, & Alzwari (2012) in that gender plays a prominent

role in second language learning and students' success. When it comes to learning program and attitudes towards Chinese language learning, it can be explained that any student who chose to enroll in any particular language program tended to hold more positive attitudes towards that language than those who chose to learn in other programs. In addition, the students who chose to study any foreign language on their own turned to hold more positive attitudes than those who were forced to do so (Dornyei, 1998; Lin, 2013).

According to the findings, the students' positive attitudes towards the second or foreign language learning should benefit them in that the language would bring more opportunities

(Liu, 2009; Lin, 2013) and success to one's life (Sen, 2012). For the teachers, being able to recognize students' needs and attitudes towards the target language will be beneficial in having appropriate teaching and learning approach and strategies in classes so that effective methods and activities could be managed.

To elaborate the students' learning of Chinese language, as found in this study, the teachers could motivate their students to pay more attention to what they learn. This can be done by encouraging the students to do research either in a group or as an individual on different contexts (e.g. culture) of Chinese. In so doing, those students would gain insights into both the Chinese's language and its people. After that, the information gained can be presented and shared with their teachers and classmates. As explained by some educators that the more the students get used to the language and its relevant contexts, the more proficiency in Chinese language they will receive, especially, from extra-curricular activities both inside and outside schools (Ellis, 1994; Gardner, Lalonde, & Moorcroft, 1985; Mill, 1960). In addition, in this study, although it has been shown that female students hold more positive attitudes towards Chinese language learning, Chinese teachers could find effective ways of teaching to raise male students' attitudes towards their language learning, so that both male and female students would achieve their desirable goals (Inal & Saracaloglu, 2011; Lai & Kou, 2007).

As this study has been done to enrich the research on Thai students' learning attitudes towards Chinese language learning, the future research can be done to explore different dimensions of Chinese language attitudes in different levels of education or areas of studies.

This study also serves as a reference for other future researcher to carry out studies on similar fields in learning attitudes towards Chinese or any other foreign languages. It can be expanded to a wider scope such as different private or public school (s) or different levels of education.

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