

AN INVESTIGATION OF ANXIETY OF THAI TEACHING IN CHINESE UNIVERSITIES

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ABSTRACT

Foreign language study has been increasingly important, as well as study of Thai language and culture by Chinese people which is getting more and more popular every year. The purpose of this research was to study anxiety problems and solutions of Thai teachers that experienced in preparing to teach Thai language in Chinese Universities. This research is a case study limited to 6 of Thai teachers from Chiang Mai University, Chiang Mai, Thailand, purposefully selected to conduct the individual interview process which was followed by the qualitative method. The In-depth interviews were undertaken with a range of teachers in Year 2018 to 2019. The data was analyzed manually by using Content Analysis after the data collection over. Both experienced teachers and non-experienced teachers felt anxious as the same which different factors come into play. Mostly, there are lots of negative feelings but anxiety experiences could be the driving force that made these teachers prepares more before going on to be Thai teachers in Chinese universities. It was not a bad experience only but was a very memorable once in a life time one for this teacher to share and guide future teachers.

KEYWORDS:Teacher,Anxiety,Language, Thai, Chinese

INTRODUCTION

Economic growth and a relaxed political policy allow for capital movement to Thailand. Furthermore, China's education policy and increasing investment into the Chinese labor market influenced Chinese students to study abroad, including Thailand. They come for both Thai language and other majors in accordance with their interests. Regardless of what major they are interested in, the Thai language is the key subject that needs to be learned for communication and survival in Thailand (MacPhee, D., Farro, S., &Canetto, S. ,2013).Throughout many past years, foreign language study has been increasingly important, as well as study of Thai language and culture by Chinese people which is getting more and more popular every year. Large numbers of students in the Thai language major are increasing every year. Numerous language institutions have made up their Thai language programs and offer Thai language classes as a foreign language in beginning level, medium level, and advance level. A lot of universities in southern part of China have their own Thai language programs. They additionally sometimes invite teachers from Thailand to teach in China. This makes demand for Thai teachers increase every year. As such, Thai culture and Thai language should be passed on efficiently, correct, and properly, which is essential to allow Chinese students to truly understand the Thai language. At the present time, those Chinese students can be found in various Thai universities in northern and central parts of Thailand. The universities' executives and students, through observation, also predict that the number of Chinese students will be increasing for many years. Thai Language is the most popular choice of Chinese students choosing it as their major in higher education (Horwitz, E., Cope, J.

,1989). Institutionally, the university in both countries was opening courses to realize the languages, political strategies, and cultures with the movement of teachers to go to Chinese universities in other side to teach the courses. Most Thai teachers come for teaching Thai as a foreign language which is accordance most. However, one problem which should be paid attention to is the problems of Thai language teachers that teach Thai language as a foreign language while they are teaching abroad. Some of those teachers are new graduates that have to work in a foreign territory (China). This may cause stress and anxiety due to the difference of social contexts. Those teachers might lack experience in dealing with problems in foreign countries. The fact shows that some of those teachers have to establish their own curriculum while they are teaching as a full-time job. This fact puts more burdens on those teachers, and causes them more stress and anxiety. Therefore, not so many scholars conduct research on the way those Thai teachers solve their problems although the issue is essential (Glesne, C., & Peshkin,1992).

Although there are numerous academic works, articles, research relating to study materials, condition and problems of Chinese students that learn Thai language as a foreign language, and curriculum of Thai language as a foreign language, none of them can directly answer those questions mentioned above.

METHODOLOGY

Scope of this research

This research is limited to a Thai teacher education in the China context so, this research study is generally a case study focused on 6 Thai Teachers who used to be a Thai teacher in China, purposefully selected to participate in this study. They all graduated with Thai Majors from the Department of Thai Language, Faculty of Humanities, Chiang Mai University, Chiang Mai (Province), Thailand and this research will take place at the Thai Department of Chiang Mai University, Chiang Mai, Thailand.

Research Instrument

Semi-structured interviews will be conducted in order to collect the in-depth information from six of Thai teachers who finished the course of Teaching Thai as a foreign language since in Chiang Mai province, Thailand. The semi-structured interview questions were conducted for two reasons. Firstly, the Thai teachers could easily express their feelings that were once in a life time of being a Thai teacher in Chinese universities, and the participant had more chance to get significant information from the participants. Secondly, these teachers could provide the participant with reliable and detailed data with regard to their photo activities, some part of their self-stories from diaries and notes which are regarded as the most powerful means in measuring and identifying anxiety that revealed internal feelings and reactions to their anxieties. Moreover, the participant will clarify the interview questions to prevent confusion when the participants answered them.

Therefore, the target samples are generally selected due to the matter of convenience, the accessibility of data collection and the In-depth interviews were undertaken with a range of teachers in availability of time and budget which the interview process was managed to the sample during the first semester of 2017 – 2018 academic year.

For the last stage will be observing stage to find the result of this study the observation also examines the participants' behaviors, practices, characteristics, attitudes and opinions (Paul & Jeanne, 2005). The observation has two teacher participants that allow the participant to do an observing teaching class. There were 2 teacher participants that allowed the participant to do an observation in their class for seeing the reaction between teacher and students and the participants many times conducted the observation, who were the teachers and student being observed, etc.

Participants

This research is a case study limited to 6 of Thai teachers from Chiang Mai University, Chiang Mai (Province), Thailand including 1 male and 5 females (all have anxieties experienced from preparing to teach in Chinese Universities), purposefully selected to conduct the individual interview process which was followed by the qualitative method. The ages of the participants ranged from 24 to 29 years old and they willingly participated in this research since their consent was verbally taken before collecting the data. All of the Thai teachers were selected for 3 common reasons.

1) They all are native Thai teachers.

2) They have to finished the course of teaching Thai as a foreign language and graduated from Thai Major from, Thai Department of Faculty of Humanities, Chiang Mai University, Chiang Mai (Province), Thailand, to make sure that they all are excellent in Thai Language and the

3) They used to be a Thai teacher in Chinese Universities and have experienced anxiety during the preparation period before going to teach in China (PRC).

Data collection of interview

The interview is a very helpful method in collecting qualitative data since the interviewer could ask the questions to obtain the information from the participants, and the interviewees could freely describe their personal information in detail (Creswell, 2005). Besides this, there are five various types of interview such as individual interview, focus group interview, telephone interview, electronic e-mail interview and open-ended questions on questionnaires (Creswell, 2005). The In-depth interviews were undertaken with a range of teachers in December 2018 and January to February 2019.

Data analysis

The data was analyzed manually by using Content Analysis after the data collection over. Interview and transcription of data followed in the qualitative research, analyzing data will be challenging so that participants have to immerse themselves into the data collected, trying to understand what is implied, interpreted and inferred in it.

RESULTS

Anxieties experienced of Thai teachers

Based on the interview of the participants number 1 and 3, the teachers worried about the same things which are health and weather, the participant number 3 showed us the photos of her in the Yunnan province while saying that *"I was worrying about the health problem much, this was because I was told that I would have to teach in both an urban university and another one in a rural area, so I would have to travel often... I need to face dust, wind and bad pollution."* However, participant number 1 also worried more about the food there as well.

Participant number 2, the only one male teacher in this research study, revealed that *"I was worrying whether or not I had or had done everything."* Participant number

5 also mentioned about the things that had or had been done to prepare everything in time.

Teacher participant number 4 mentioned about worries in many conditions such as, visa document, materials for teaching and the colleague. The interesting thing is the teacher illustrated that “I was worrying about what types of colleagues I will meet there and whether or not I will be able to get along with them, because I had previously met both good and bad colleagues.” So the point is the teacher who had wide ranging experiences with colleagues, then the experiences are a cause of her worries.

There was one participant which was the first participant who felt confident of teaching because the teacher has been teaching and working with Chinese student before the teacher revealed that “*I was confident that I was good with that. I am experienced on dealing with Chinese students because I used to work with Prof. S. and Ms.E.*” It is surprise that only one participant was sure that they can teach Thai well.

The participants that felt stressful were P2, P4, and P5. Following the interview results, the second and the fifth participants were felt happy at first because they would like to work however; both teachers still had bad feelings in afterwards. The second participant mentioned that “*I was firstly joyful. Then I got stressful when I was preparing many things about 2-3 weeks before going there because it was my first time travelling abroad. I did not know what to do, and even did not know whether.*”

By the analysis of the first interview question the 6 Thai teacher participants had many feelings they had to face with various anxieties experiences which they could not explain in direct words what were the anxiety problems or anxious feelings exactly. The participants got similar feelings for example, afraid, overthinking, worrying, fretful etc. which is similar to the theory of Emotions mentioned that and indicated the feelings of anxiety had come from various situations the teacher faced with similar or different circumstances.

Language Barrier

Although, the language barrier was not found in the literature review part because mostly the details focused on the general teacher but this research study was focused on a Thai teacher, who was teaching the mother language in a foreign country so the language must be significant to express and lecture the students who could or could not understand well in what they had learned was affected by the language barrier. Following the personal information of these 6 Thai teachers, they had no skills in Chinese so they mentioned that the language barrier is one of the sources anxiety in Teaching Thai as a foreign language in Chinese universities to Chinese students. However, the first participant did not mention that the language barrier as the main issue that conditions the anxiety, weather the first teacher participant also had no Chinese skills just like the others.

Environments

By following the interview this research study was different from the details of the literature which the participant was only including 3 main issues which were Weather, Health and Transportation because these were what the participant told the teacher. In contrast of the external factor in the literature review part, that only include the small picture of school environment but from the findings of interviews, it was about the environment outside the school too. For example, participant number 3 said “*I did think about the weather and health issues because I am allergic to weather. It is my*

regular illness.” Participant number 1 said that *“I have personal disease. I get cold easily and will get sick immediately if the weather gets cold. So, I worried a lot about health issue.”* Both of them have a regular illness so health issue would be the main point that they would worry and be anxious about. Also participant number 2 teacher is the only one that mentioned the *transportation* issue that *“I was also thinking about transportation in China because I heard from media that it is noisy and crowded which I personally don’t like it.”*

Pedagogy

Pedagogy is about many things for example it could be knowledge and competence of a teacher in their lesson as well but from the findings after the interview the pedagogy point to Classroom management which is the issue in this section that includes classroom Management. The size of class was related to the anxiety of the teacher as well. For example, the interview of teacher participant number3 revealed that *“I used to teach in Thailand before, but the class was not big like in a university. I will get nervous if I have to teach 30 to 40 students in a big classroom.”* These show that the class size affects management of the classroom by the teacher as well. Moreover, some universities in China still have big classes which is different from Thailand but some were smaller than the classrooms in Thailand, too. However, the participant had a chance to observe the class of teacher participant number 1 and allowed the participant to take a picture to keep the atmosphere and moment. From observing the class of teacher participant number 1, the class was of medium size, about 30-40 students in class. The participant was allowed to observe the class speaking for 45 minutes and the teacher allowed the participant to take the photos from the back only and kept quiet until the end of the class.

Materials

Participants number 4 and 6 mention that the materials were a cause of their anxieties. The Participant number 6 revealed that *“I was really afraid that I would not be able to teach what I did not know, such as “Thai Language for Business”. I was afraid that students would not be able to understand me also then I just prepare my own materials but only in Thai and English. Just in case they could understand me.”* Just as participant number 4 that created materials by herself, participant number 4 said *“I did not know how study materials looked like. Then I just prepare the material in 3three language by myself because I was worrying that I will not be able to understand the materials. I thought there was no Thai language. I concerned a lot.”*

Subjects

There is only teacher that was anxious with regards to the subject that the teacher was teaching which is the participant number 6, the teacher revealed that *“I did not know what to prepare first. My major concern was still on the subjects that I had never taught before. What made me nervous was also that I was informed those subjects only few days before going to China. I was really afraid that I would not be able to teach what I did not know, such as “Thai Language for Business”. I was afraid that students would not be able to understand me.”* As the dialogue has shown, the teacher always repeated the word of ‘afraid’ and ‘nervous’ and ‘concern’ words of emotion discussed in detail in chapter 2 which could mention that the teacher has an anxiety problem for sure with this issue.

Other Teachers expectation

For the answer to the research question number 2 which is *“What are the sources of anxiety experienced before becoming a Thai teacher in Chinese universities?”* There are

many factors that will influence their preparing and teaching the Thai language in Chinese universities, such as Chinese environments and cultures, Lack of experience, Classroom management, General gap between students and teacher as well as teachers and teacher, personal characteristics and language barriers.

DISCUSSION

Based on the data which were analyzed in the previous parts, it can be seen both the Thai teachers' anxiety as well as their ways out. As for the research on the Theory of Emotion, namely shows of various emotions of Thai teachers from preparing and teaching in Chinese universities which is feeling worried in relation to the emotion of anxiety most. Both experienced teachers and non-experienced teachers felt anxious as the same or different factors come into play. Mostly, there are lots of negative feelings during the preparations to teach in Chinese universities but there are also positive feelings too which is in contrast to the definition of anxiety Brown (2000) who defined anxiety as about something negative only. On the basis of the analysis of the interview, most interviewees think they have little experience in teaching Thai to Chinese students and they have never been abroad or to China (PRC) so they have no Chinese language skills which gave them little confidence to communicate with Chinese students and teachers there. In their view, preparing materials and subjects, the generation gap with the students, lack of teaching experience and teaching skills could not ensure they would teach well even if they are native Thai teachers who had finished the course of teaching Thai as a foreign language (TFL) from Chiang Mai University. It can be seen that these Thai teachers have less confidence and self-beliefs about teaching Thai successfully.

In term of the dimension of the basis of C. Robert Cloninger's research results, which were an evaluation of teacher anxieties, lack of experience of Thai teachers and school environments could made the Thai teachers not feel comfortable in the new environment and culture in the Chinese universities which may experience subjective feeling as anxiety in teaching Thai as foreign language in Chinese universities. According to the content analysis, a Thai teacher who has never attended a training course for teaching Thai to Chinese students is likely to have anxiety - in the real situation and have less self-esteem (self-confidence), particularly if it is the teacher's first time. However, this teacher may have less anxiety the next time the teacher attends a teaching class because he learned from this first mistake – this calls for behavioral learning (cognitive or affective activity that cannot be achieved with-out a certain degree of self-esteem, Brown , 1987).

On the basis of the content analysis of the interview, there is only one teacher that involuntary applied to be a Teacher in Chinese universities and that teacher had feeling of anxiety and anxiety experiences more than the others. However, all the participants have less feelings of anxiety after doing other things to deal with their anxieties. While the observed class of two participants found the previous anxiety and worries could be from any effects on the teacher with their teaching and controlling the class whether small or big size classrooms.

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