An investigation of English speaking problems of Chinese EFL students in Thailand

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ABSTRACT

This research aimed to investigate the speaking problems of Chinese students in Thailand. The researchers employed the mix-methodology paradigm to investigate the speaking difficulties which consisted of two approaches—questionnaires and semi-structured interviews to ensure the validity and credibility of the results. The questionnaires used for data collection included an open-ended questionnaire along with five key issues: a) grammar, b) fluency, c) vocabulary, d) pronunciation, and f) self-confidence together with an open-ended question. The interviews were conducted to examine and elicit the perceptions and speaking difficulties among the students who voluntarily participated in this study as the representative participants for the quantitative data. This study employed mean and standard deviation with a descriptive data analysis presentation in the data analysis stage. The results indicated the four main difficulties were raised: a) grammar, b) vocabulary knowledge, c) pronunciation and d) fluency, respectively. Furthermore, the students confirmed that grammatical usage tends to be the main problem concerning English speaking in both active and passive voice communication among the students based on the interview results. In an aspect of vocabulary knowledge, the majority of students acknowledged that lexical knowledge was the second essential knowledge when communication occurred for effective communication with foreigners in both informal and formal situations. In the aspect of pronunciation, the main problems were found in the intonation and self-confidence criteria because the students mostly faced anxiety about accurate pronunciations.

Contribution/ Originality: This research contributes to the field of language education by offering a comprehensive examination of the specific speaking challenges Chinese students face in a Thai university context. The combination of quantitative and qualitative methods with the identification of key problems adds depth and richness to our understanding of these difficulties.

1. INTRODUCTION

English has currently been the global language for international communication or de facto global language once the originated language or native language was not able to reach it (Huang, 2018) which corresponds with Rubdy and Saraceni (2006) who stated that it was the consequence of a global trend in the use of English as a global language for communication. In communication, language is considered a tool to express an idea, feeling, purpose or

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exchange an idea through words. Speaking was considered one of the most important skills in English communication since it is a direct communication between the interlocutors (Bozorgian & Kanani, 2017). A recent dominant study can be found in Lazarton's (2001) study which stated that the ability to communicate orally is equal to knowing the given language because speaking is the main means of human communication and also believes that spoken English is difficult since it is almost always accomplished through interaction with at least one interlocutor. It involves such factors as monitoring and understanding the other speakers, thinking about one's own contribution, producing the contribution and monitoring its effect, etc. When the interlanguage is not well-defined and understandable, a problem in communication usually occurs as Al Hosni (2014) stated that EFL students may face numerous problems in developing their speaking skills regardless of their linguistic knowledge. These problems can be traced back to their minimal direct exposure to the target language (Shumin, 2002).

According to Khamprated (2012), problems in communication can occur when the speaker lacks speaking skills which can be caused by many factors. The importance of both listening and speaking skills has been taught to students by both Thai and foreign teachers. The educators have tried to find a new method of teaching to help students improve their English communication skills instead of the old-fashioned approach of focusing on grammar to solve this problematic concern. Aleksandrzak (2011) similarly accepts that the wellspring of speaking ability issues in the EFL setting is the inadequate talking activities and opportunities in the EFL environment. EFL students do not only need to outfit themselves with adequate jargon and language structure learning but they also need to give due consideration to both accuracy and fluency (Hinkel, 2006).

Thus, the findings and implications of this study could be used as a guideline for lecturers who encounter foreign students and help them identify the problems of speaking in English in order to raise awareness among Chinese exchange students in Thailand. It will be useful information for designing curricula in English speaking classes and adapting teaching plans based on the research results. In this study, the causes of problems can be found in both the teachers and the students and it will be beneficial if the researcher can find appropriate or suitable solutions to help them both.

1.1. Research Questions

a) What are the English speaking problems of Chinese EFL students in Thailand?
b) What are the affecting factors for Chinese EFL students with English speaking problems?

1.2. Research Objective

- To investigate the English-speaking problems of Chinese EFL students in Thailand.
- To examine the affecting factors of Chinese EFL students in English speaking problems.

1.3. Significance of the Study

Since English speaking is considered one of the most significant skills for interlocutor communication, the significance of the study may shed light on the learner's self-development and academic success and promote employability because English is now rooted as the de facto global language. English would promote the learners for access to information for improving self-development, whether for specific skills or academic success. Nonetheless, speaking English has an impact on English learners' difficult experiences and has been a challenging experience for several decades since speaking skills are an integrated skill between syntax and lexical knowledge as well as the investment of English learners particularly those who study English as foreigners. This study would explore the difficulty and highlight affecting factors related to English speaking problems among Chinese students in a foreign context with authentic communication situations with the aim of being a guideline for English curriculum development and an in-depth understanding of English-speaking difficulty with EFL students. This might raise awareness among the EFL learner community such as university staff, lecturers, stakeholders,

policymakers and the targeted ELF learner to stimulate recognition of the difficulty from the perspective of speaking problems. Since the speaking skill was integrated, it might reflect some learner identity, perception and acquisition achievement and entail an understanding of the relationship between perceptions and reactions in English learning contexts. Additionally, the study not only aimed to resolve the communication capacity but also examine the psychological factors affecting English learners to promote their confidence and effective communication. The speaking problems should make people realized the importance of language learning experiences.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. English Speaking Skills

The four skills speaking, listening, writing and reading are acknowledged in all languages. The language that is generated by the learner (speaking and writing) is called "productive" and the language input (reading and listening) is called "receptive". Speaking is considered an active production skill (Widdowson, 1994). It is one of the four language skills that need to be developed in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) and English as a Second Language (ESL) students to communicate effectively in different contexts and it is the most important skill as it requires knowledge of pronunciation, grammar and vocabulary skills (Khamkhien, 2010). Speaking is a fundamental skill that is vital for cross-cultural communication in an increasingly globalized world. Hence, emphasizing speaking skills as part of English language proficiency is justified (Nunan, 2013, 2015).

Language teaching has a long history of helping learners develop "linguistic competence" which involves being able to generate the sounds, words and structures of English. In the mid-1970s linguistic competence became a component of "communicative competence" which refers to the "ability of language learners to interact with other speakers to convey meaning." (Savignon, 1991). In addition, communicative competence "requires an understanding of sociocultural contexts of language use" (ibid., p. 267).

Communicative competence consists of several important models such as sociolinguistic competence and using language in various contexts appropriately. In speaking skills, strategic competence refers to the ability to use language strategies to cover gaps in language ability. In cases where you do not know the word, you might need to explain its meaning. Another component is discourse competence, "how sentence elements are tied together" which consists of cohesion and coherence. Cohesion is "the grammatical or lexical relationship between the different parts of a sentence." Cohesion involves reference, repetition and synonyms whereas coherence involves "how texts are constructed" (Hynninen, 2016). In this study, English serves as the lingua franca when Chinese students converse with their native and non-native international peers and teachers.

2.2. The Speaking Process in Communication

Communication is processed by two or more people; the completed communication leads to the interlocutor's understanding. Communication is a transaction between the speaker and listener when they interact to receive and send information to each other.

Figure 1 illustrates the transactional view of communication. The top figure represents a linear view of communication in which the speaker speaks and the listener listens. The middle figure represents an interactional view in which speakers and listeners take turns speaking and listening; A speaks while B listens and then B speaks while A listens. The bottom figure represents a transactional view in which each person serves simultaneously as speaker and listener. At the same time, when sending messages, you are also receiving messages from your own communications and also from the reactions of other persons".

In speaking skills, communication problems can be caused by the communication processes and result in misunderstandings in receiving information and confusion, i.e. the students speak with their native teacher but the teacher misunderstands what they want to say or speaks with a non-native speaker who uses English as a medium

to communicate with their international friends. These can be considered language barriers that obstruct the English learners' communication process from being completed. In the next section, English as a lingua franca and English learning in China with Chinese EFL students will be discussed.
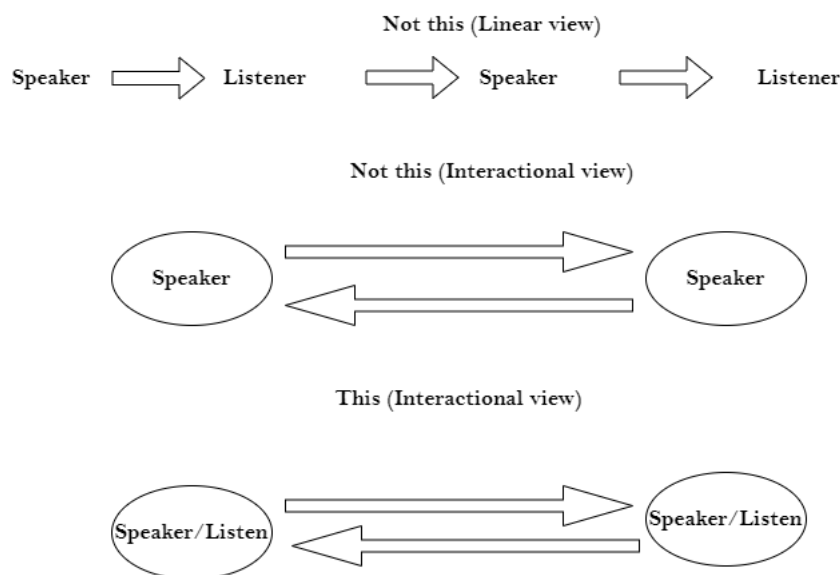

Figure 1. Transactional view of communication.

2.3. English as a Lingua Franca in China

According to the Oxford dictionary, a lingua franca is "a shared language of communication used between people whose main languages are different." Thomason (2001) gives a definition of a lingua franca that is "(a) language of wider communication for communication between groups who do not speak each other's languages, as well as between native speakers." A lingua franca serves as a middle language between people whose first language is different (Hynninen, 2016).

In China, English has become the language of communication with foreigners for business negotiation purposes since Deng Xiaoping launched the opening country policy (Williams, 2017). According to Baird et al. (2017), the development of English in China has led to four main strands. The first strand was associated with Chinese pidgin English. In early communication in English, the Chinese speakers used Pidgin English to communicate with foreigners who visited China for business and missionary purposes. The second strand focused on the pursuit of 'correct' English in China. This development pushed English learner skills to be close to native speaker English called Chinglish (Chinese English) (Hu, 2004). The third strand is a discussion on Chinese varieties of English when Chinese cultural ideas cannot translate to "authentic" English. Kirkpatrick (2010) and the fourth strand is regarding the legitimacy of Chinese speaker's use of English for intercultural communication when English contextualization is involved in Chinese intercultural communication and the widening gap with the first language. This resulted in ELF contexts becoming prominent in the Chinese language (Wang, 2018).

It is noticeable that English has a long history in China and is now prevalent throughout the country similar to the earlier studies. However, the feature of English as a lingua franca which serves as a mediator in cross-cultural communication has not continued (Baird et al., 2017).

2.4. English Learning and Teaching in China

At present, globalization changes conditions in both language learning and teaching. Globalization in language education in various countries is resulting from the dominance of English as a former colonial language which has now become a global language; however, language education can enhance understanding in local languages between the global and dialectic. In the 21st century , English language teaching in China began with the

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transition of education reform policy from liberalization contexts to globalization (Bolton, 2006). This resulted in English being introduced in secondary schools and higher education curricula as China opened the country's policy to be beneficial to language education in China.

In 2001, the Chinese government launched a policy in which English would be added and taught from the age of 8 or 9 onwards (Wang (2007) as cited in Bolton and Graddol (2012)). In both internal and external contexts of the school system, examinations are prioritized as being of high importance. English learning in schools leads to the significant step of improving language for domestic English purposes and pushing Chinese students to have high proficiency and success in education in a highly competitive world. The English language has the main influence in China especially in the higher education examination called the National College Entrance Exam (NCEE) (also known as gaokao) which is the pre-requisite standardized test that every Chinese student must pass for university admission. The NCEE is held annually in China and gets overwhelming interest from the Chinese every year. This situation suggests that English education has had significant growth in China (Bolton, 2010; Pinghui, 2018).

Jiang (2003) stated that "governments are encouraging their citizens to learn English, parents are persuading, even forcing, their children to speak it and college students are doing English at the expense of their majors". However, although the importance of English is widely acknowledged in China, Chinese students and teachers in educational institutes have faced English learning problems in class as the environment does not facilitate learning English and students lack opportunities to use English in real situations (Gil, 2008). In the past, China's education policy focused on reading skills and intensive reading as the core-program in the English learning program in secondary schools and universities (Rao, 1996). After reforms between 2004 and 2007, oral skills have become a higher priority (Pan, 2015). In a nutshell, the overall teaching objective shifted from developing students' ability to exchange information in English with reading as a priority to developing students' ability to use English in a well-rounded way with special emphasis on listening and speaking (Yang, Gu, and Liu (2013) as cited in Reinders (2015)).

2.5. The Speaking Problems for English as a Foreign Language (EFL) Students

In speaking skills, communication problems can be caused by communication processes and result in misunderstandings in receiving information and confusion. For example, the students speak with their native teacher but the teacher misunderstands what they want to say or speak with their non-native speakers who use English as a medium to communicate with their international friends. These can be considered language barriers obstructing the English learner's communication process from being completed.

Although the immense adjustment of the curriculum focused on oral skills in China, the classroom setting and preparation have not much changed and many Chinese English classes remain devoid of English speakers in class. As a result, students have less interaction and practice opportunities in class for speaking English, including classroom assessments of oral skills (Zhao, 2013). The main factors from teachers also influence oral skills learning and practice in the language class. One factor is that the teachers first taught the English language by focusing on other skills (Chen & Goh, 2011). Second, the classrooms in China contain a large number of students, so it takes a lot of time to handle and give students individual attention. The teacher is not able to give speaking opportunities to every student or even make sure that their pronunciation is correct (Chen & Goh, 2011). The third factor is time management as speaking activities and tasks consume a lot of time and the teacher is concerned about the rest of the content that they need to complete (Zheng & Borg, 2014). Another reason is student motivation in speaking English (Chen & Goh, 2011). In addition, there is a need for more visual aids to help students understand and have more fun learning English content (Pan, 2015).

Similarly, Xiuqin (2006) found the six main factors that affect the speaking skills of Chinese students. The six factors that affect Chinese students speaking skills are as follows: First, Chinese students are less proficient in English. The students struggle to understand what the teacher says in class. This problem affects their reaction and

participation. The students are not able to respond to the questions or ask for repetition of what the teacher says, therefore, the most common reaction in class is for students to keep silent and avoid making eye contact. In this situation, the Chinese try to avoid to "lose face" which means saying the wrong word or wrong grammar can cause them to lose face easily because their friends can evaluate them during speaking activities. This also caused students to be deprived of practice in a good atmosphere and great opportunities to learn English in class with peers. The second is students' fear of mistakes and ridicule. Students in English speaking classes usually feel anxious about making mistakes and receiving criticism from classmates. Thus, most students avoid speaking English by keeping silent. The English-speaking class inevitably has no mistakes. Fear of being laughed at may keep learners in their comfort zone. The third is the large class size. A large number of students can accelerate student anxiety, standing in front and speaking English can cause them to lose their "face" which is unbearable for the learners. The learner will try to avoid speaking on most occasions as it creates difficulties for anxious learners. The researcher said that "this problem cannot be easily solved at the university at present. Attempting to make the classroom atmosphere more relaxing and enjoyable for the students seems like a better way to reduce the anxiety level in students". The fourth is an unwillingness to take risks. When guessing is considered a strategy, taking risks in speaking, mistakes can be ignored and students can have greater exposure to the target language and increase language production. Their unwillingness to take risks in speaking can hinder their ability to handle difficulties in speaking classes. Guessing the wrong one can lead them to think that they are making a fool of themselves in front of others. And the best way to avoid this is to keep silent and away from participation and discussion. The fifth is the low tolerance for ambiguity. The student wants everything clearly explained with rules to follow. However, this contributes to their discomfort because developing the English language requires a great deal of uncertainty regarding meanings and references.

Sixth is competitiveness. This competitiveness and feeling nervous in front of the teacher and classmates cause them great anxiety and frustration. The students who are not very confident with their speaking skills always keep silent to avoid losing face; the perception of incompetence in speaking prevents them from actively participating in classroom activities.

Speaking fluently in the target language is the goal and motivation of second language learners in the class (Richards & Renandya, 2002). However, the learner faces difficulties in participating in speaking activities because of various problems, for example, grammatical usage, correct pronunciation, vocabulary or lexical knowledge and word form and its features (Fitriani, Apriliaswati, & Wardah, 2015; Hinkel, 2006). Lack of self-confidence and anxiety are problems also found in student's speaking classes. Lawtie (2004) states that a person's emotional state can affect speech; when a person feels confident and relaxed speech is always pronounced clearer. This is the most important element in oral communication.

2.6. Problems in English Speaking

Speaking in a foreign language is a competitive skill for the learner as it requires an integrated knowledge of grammar, vocabulary, pronunciation and spontaneous responses with selected appropriated words and sentences in proper contexts (Fitriani et al., 2015). Speaking problems can prevent them from learning languages and participating in class activities which results in students being weak in grammar, vocabulary and pronunciation. Another problem may come from psychological issues such as motivation, anxiety and self-confidence (Fitriani et al., 2015; Xiuqin, 2006). According to Richards and Renandya (2002), speaking a foreign language in public especially when surrounded by native-speakers can increase anxiety. Adults are usually concerned about being judged by others. Therefore, they are afraid of making a mistake because it refers to ignorance which could be seen as "losing face" in Asia particularly in China. The concern about making mistakes in adult learners or the fear of losing face can be psychological issues that impact their speaking performance.

2.7. Linguistics Problems

Linguistics is a scientific study of language. Linguistics is related to the analysis of language form, words and context. In general, the elements of linguistics consist of vocabulary, grammar and pronunciation. A lack of any of these elements can cause EFL students problems with their speaking abilities (Martinet, Leonard, & Elisabeth, 1964). The three main problems with speaking are as follows: 1) vocabulary, 2) grammar, 3) pronunciation (Richards, 2008). First, problems can occur when the speaker is unknowledgeable in vocabulary and correct usage in appropriate sentences. The second is grammatical problems. Grammar becomes a problem. When students cannot learn grammar when taught it (Celce-Murcia & Olshtain, 2000). Third is pronunciation. When English has become a global language to communicate with people worldwide, second or foreign language learners are required to pronounce English words or sentences like native-speakers. Correct pronunciation can lead to clear understanding in communication contexts. However, it can lead to misunderstandings in communication if the pronunciation is not clear or mispronounced. According to Deterding (2006) who conducted the research in Guangxi district, the people Republic of China, the study results showed that some English features are shared with all Chinese English speakers but some features are marked only in Guangxi district from which it can be inferred that even when speaking English, there are variations in the way Chinese people speak English. Han (2013) states that Chinese learners have problems with stress and intonation. Although Chinese and English are similar in terms of intonation, there are some differences between the two languages.

Psychological problems in speaking consist of two main problems: lack of self-confidence and anxiety. Lack of self- confidence can have several effects, for example, guilty feelings, being shy and turned inward, unrealistic expectations of perfection, a false sense of humility, fear of change or making mistakes, depression, etc. The lack of self-confidence can cause big problems if students still believe that their English-speaking skills are not good enough and feel anxious about their speaking skills. Consequently, the student will face difficulties in speaking English (Fitriani et al., 2015).

Anxiety can be a negative factor in learning a foreign language especially when speaking the language. Speaking is difficult because spontaneity requires responses without preparation to ensure the correctness of what he or she wants to communicate (Horwitz & Young, 1991). Students who suffer from anxiety tend to have difficulties concentrating and processing input which affects the output in negative ways. Consequently, they avoid participation and taking risks because they are anxious, troubled and frustrated during classes. Therefore, it can be considered the main obstacle to developing competence, particularly in speaking skills. In these situations students can be deprived of opportunities to practice language. When the students are nervous, it can cause them to make mistakes; if they are more nervous, they will make more mistakes. The more mistakes they make, the more nervous they will be and the less likely they are to perform well at speaking skills thus resulting in a vicious circle. The relationship between anxiety and speaking is not difficult to identify but the main concern is that anxiety can make the difference between success and failure in language learning (MacIntyre, 2002).

2.8. Studies Related to English Speaking in English as a Foreign Language (EFL)

Wang and Roopchund (2015) investigated Chinese EFL students' anxiety in asking questions in the class room in seven Chinese English learners with self-reflection about the difficulties that they faced during studies at a UK university with in-depth semi-structured qualitative interview methods. Anxiety can affect learners speaking performance and body interactions. The factors that were found in this research can be categorized into: 1) personal and interpersonal anxiety, 2) English language learning beliefs, 3) teachers' role in class, 4) students' characteristics, 5) students background knowledge and culture 6) questions and answer time. However, anxiety can be handled with the study results strategies as follows: 1) preparation 2) self-encouragement 3) peer support 4) relaxation 5) practice and 6) ignoring others' negative evaluations. The recommendations also noted that teachers should be

concerned with anxiety with respect to awareness of students, attitudes towards students, feedback to students and classroom administration.

Deterding (2017) examined the pronunciation of 24 students in the Guangxi Zhuang autonomous region in southern China by collecting data from 3 minutes of conversations. The results from features of pronunciation indicate that some features of English are common throughout China but some features are particularly predominant in Guangxi such as the omission of long and short vowels and the stressing of pronouns which can cause misunderstandings when communicating with native speakers (Deterding, 2017).

Hu (2017) studied Chinese EFL in English pronunciation from an aesthetic linguistics perspective. Aesthetics refers to the laws of aesthetic activity and the rules of creation and appreciation. The study was aimed at analyzing English pronunciation, intonation, sonority and rhyme to improve Chinese EFL in phonetic learning and raise aesthetic consciousness of the pronunciation in English.

3. METHODS

3.1. Participants

In this study, the participants consisted of ninety-three Chinese students who had registered to study in Thailand. The participants were divided into two groups based on the course curriculum: a) the fifty-seven Chinese students who enrolled in communicative English with native English speakers for a semester and b) the thirty-six Chinese students who used English as a communicative tool during study and conducting an internship with the private and public sectors in Thailand. In aspects of their English language skills and experiences, each of the students had various experiences before being exchanged in Thailand. Hence, it was assumed holistically that they had been studying English for six years and had equal English proficiency. The age range of the students was between 20 and 22 years old. The students had to study English as a foreign language in daily life and communicate with foreigners during their study in Thailand for 30 hours for two semesters on the university campus as a compulsory course.

3.2. Research Instruments

This quantitative research used a questionnaire to investigate students speaking problems from their perspectives. The questionnaires were distributed manually and the instructions and objectives of the study were explained before they were distributed to the students. The questionnaires asked about five close-ended problems and one open-ended question about the English speaking of Chinese students . Six-main areas of English problems for Chinese students are discussed. a) grammatical errors, b) speaking fluency, c) vocabulary knowledge, e) pronunciation, f) self-confidence, g) other problems (open-ended questions).

The study employed a semi-structured interview to collect qualitative data. In order to understand the participant's perceptions towards English speaking problems, an interview was conducted with the participants to reflect on their background and English language learning experiences and examine how these problems affect the ways that they deliver English speaking. To select the participants for the interview, the researchers have randomly chosen the voluntary participants who are willing to join the interview comfortably. In total, about 10 participants were asked to have an interview individually. An individual interview had been arranged either online or face-to-face at the appropriate time.

3.3. Data Collection

The questionnaires were administered to Chinese students to fill out. All instructions and objectives of the data were explained to the students. The questionnaire used only English to check students English comprehension. Additional information was also available during filling out the questionnaire and in person with the researcher after finishing the questionnaire.

3.4. Data Analysis and Statistical Procedures

The data from the completed questionnaire was analysed using SPSS to check the percentage, mean and standard deviation of each criterion in the English speaking problems of Chinese. The study results are presented in the table in section 4.

4. RESULTS

This chapter presents the study results from questionnaires based on Richards (2008) to examine the problems with the previous research. Five main areas of English problems for Chinese students are discussed. 1) grammatical errors, 2) speaking fluency, 3) vocabulary knowledge, 4) pronunciation, 5) self-confidence and other problems.

The study results revealed the English speaking problems of Chinese EFL students in Thailand with native and non-native speakers who were currently enrolled at the faculty of humanities and social sciences at Khon Kaen university. The results were based on the average of key indicators of the Best (1997) as follows:

1. 5.00-4.50 refers to strongly agree.
2. 4.49-3.50 refers to agree.
3. 3.49-2.50 refers to moderate.
4. 2.49-1.50 refers to disagree.
5. 1.49-1.00 refers to strongly disagree.

One hundred questionnaires were distributed to Chinese students manually and the instructions and objectives of the study were explained before distributing them to the students. The questionnaire asked about 6 close-ended problems and one open-ended question about the English speaking of Chinese students. The main problems facing English speaking Chinese EFL students can be categorized into six problem areas as follows:

1. Grammar is mainly moderate (3.21) (between 2.91 and 3.34).
2. Fluency is mainly moderate (2.71) (between 2.57 and 3.03).
3. Vocabulary is mainly moderate (2.68) (between 2.57 and 3.03).
4. Pronunciation is mainly moderate (3.10) (between 2.91 and 3.29).
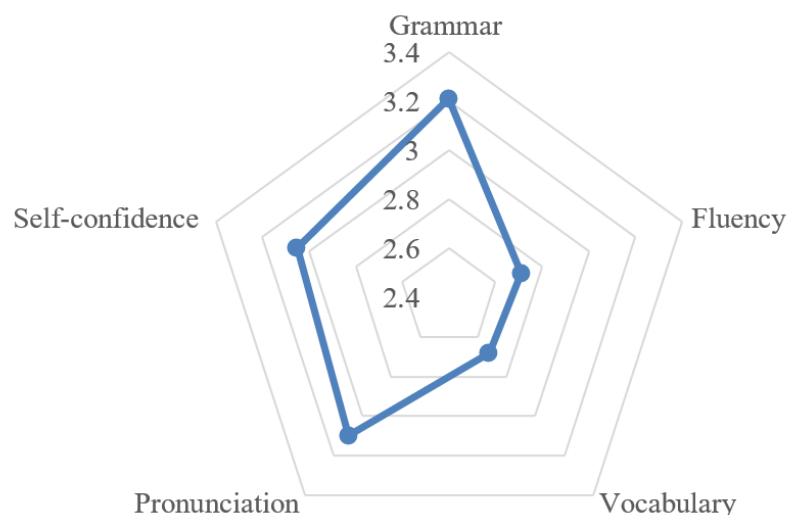5. Self-confidence is mainly moderate (3.05) (between 2.91 and 3.19).

Figure 2. English speaking problems of Chinese EFL students in Thailand.

The concise overview of a graphical analysis (see Figure 2) that focuses on the challenges faced by Chinese students learning English as a Foreign Language (EFL) in Thailand. This analysis aims to gain insights into students' opinions regarding these challenges by examining high-scoring areas.

Context of the study: This study aims to explore the specific challenges that Chinese EFL students face in Thailand. Understanding these challenges is crucial for teachers and policymakers to tailor their teaching methods and support systems to better suit the needs of these students.

Objective of the analysis: The primary goal of this analysis is to delve into the students' perspectives on their English-speaking challenges. The study seeks to gain insights into their strengths and weaknesses in learning English by focusing on areas where students score high.

The Graphical Representation: Figure 2 is a graphical tool used to illustrate these challenges visually. It employs two colored lines (blue and red) to represent different aspects of the students' English language proficiency.

The blue line: This line indicates the areas where students are excelling. Its approach towards one of the graph's corners signifies a high level of proficiency in a specific aspect of English. The closer this line is to a corner; the stronger the students' abilities are in that particular area. This could represent skills like grammar, vocabulary, pronunciation, listening, speaking, reading or writing.

The red line: In contrast, the red line illustrates the areas where students face the most difficulty. The farther this line extends from a corner, the greater the struggle in that aspect of English. This visual representation helps to quickly identify the key areas where students need more support and guidance.

Implications of the Analysis: By examining the proximity of these lines to the corners of the graph, teachers can identify aspects of English language learning that are most challenging for Chinese EFL students in Thailand. This information is vital for developing targeted teaching strategies that address these specific challenges and enhance the overall effectiveness of English language education for these students.

Broader impact: The insights gained from this analysis can inform not only teaching practices but also curriculum development, resource allocation and policy-making in the context of EFL education particularly for Chinese students in Thailand. It underscores the importance of a nuanced understanding of student challenges and strengths in language learning.

4.1. Part I: Grammatical Usage

Table 1 indicates the two main problems of Chinese students when speaking. In terms of grammar usage, passive and active voice usage are shown at 2.91. The speaking skills Chinese students were best at were plural forms and modal verbs as the averages were shown at 3.34. The main problem for Chinese students is passive and active voice usage in their speaking.

Table 1. The Chinese speaking problems in grammatical usage.

Grammar	Summary			
	Total	Mean	S.D.	Meaning
I can categorize parts of speech (i.e. noun, verb and adjective).	93	3.20	0.349	Moderate
I can use the singular form (i.e. boy, tomato, gas and tooth),	93	3.33	0.995	Moderate
I can use the plural form (i.e. boys, tomatoes, gases and teeth)	93	3.34	1.056	Moderate
I use the correct forms of verb tenses. (i.e. present, past and future tenses).	93	3.06	1.027	Moderate
I can use verb to be (is , am, are), verb to have (have , has, had) and verb to do (do, did, done).	93	3.34	0.918	Moderate
I am able to use word inflection (i.e. begin, began, begun).	93	3.18	0.961	Moderate
I can make active and passive sentences when speaking.	93	2.91	1.179	Moderate
I can make a question sentence.	93	3.34	0.880	Moderate

4.2. Part II: Speaking Fluency

Table 2 shows that the main problem of Chinese students concerning speaking fluency was hesitation during speaking as the lowest was shown at 2.57 in both moderate and disagree level which corresponds with the

percentage of pausing during speaking shown at 3.03. The table also shows that Chinese students are able to finish their speaking in a limited time as the average was shown at 2.72.

Table 2. The Chinese speaking problems in fluency.

Fluency	Summary			
	Total	Mean	S.D.	Meaning
I can speak English without a script.	93	2.65	0.917	Moderate
I have to stop many times when speaking.	93	3.03	0.983	Moderate
I can finish speaking in a limited time.	93	2.72	0.982	Moderate
I can speak in a long sentence.	93	2.60	0.934	Moderate
I can speak without hesitation.	93	2.57	0.937	Moderate

4.3. Part III: English Vocabulary

Table 3 shows that the main problem of Chinese students when speaking vocabulary is that they have insufficient words with the highest percentage at 50.5 % followed by choosing the appropriate words to speak with their friends. Table 3 indicates that the students have problems with their lexical knowledge of English.

Table 3. The Chinese speaking problems in vocabulary.

Vocabulary	Summary			
	Total	Mean	S.D.	Meaning
I can choose words to speak with friends appropriately.	93	2.65	0.917	Moderate
I can choose words to speak with and the teacher can speak politely.	93	3.03	0.983	Moderate
I know few choices of words.	93	2.72	0.982	Moderate
I can translate from Chinese to English before speaking.	93	2.60	0.934	Moderate
I can choose other words if the listener does not understand.	93	2.57	0.937	Moderate
I am able to speak slang words in English.	93	2.56	1.229	Moderate

4.4. Part IV: Pronunciation

Table 4 shows that the main problems with Chinese student pronunciation were about word intonation with the highest percentage at 2.91 in the moderate level. The second problem in pronunciation was the poor English accent and when speaking the student usually mumbles at 3.29 in both aspects.

Table 4. The Chinese speaking problems in pronunciation.

Pronunciation	Summary			
	Total	Mean	S.D.	Meaning
I can pronounce consonants correctly (i.e. water and father).	93	3.29	1.038	Moderate
I can pronounce ending sounds correctly (i.e. plays and played).	93	3.22	1.051	Moderate
I can pronounce – th, - sh, and –ch.	93	3.28	1.057	Moderate
I produce the wrong word intonation.	93	2.91	1.007	Moderate
I have a poor English accent.	93	2.97	1.165	Moderate
I mumble when speaking since I cannot say or pronounce.	93	3.29	1.038	Moderate

4.5. Part V: Self- Confidence

Table 5 shows that the main problems of Chinese students in terms of self-confidence was fear that others will not understand them when speaking with the highest percentage at 3.04 in the moderate level and feel pressured when have to speak English at 2.91. These two problems play a significant role in students speaking ability when they speak English in front of their friends and teachers especially when speak with native speakers. Chinese students seem to be less confident. This table infers that low self-confidence can have a negative effect on their speaking ability.

Table 5. Chinese speaking problems in self-confidence.

Self- confidence	Summary			
	Total	Mean	S.D.	Meaning
I feel pressured to speak English.	93	2.91	1.080	Moderate
I feel embarrassed when saying the wrong words.	93	3.08	1.106	Moderate
I have low confidence when speaking English.	93	3.04	1.122	Moderate
I am afraid to speak incorrectly while talking to others.	93	3.04	1.083	Moderate
I am afraid that others will not understand my pronunciation.	93	3.19	1.200	Moderate

4.6. Other Problems in Speaking English

1) I do not know the grammar.

2) I do not remember some vocabulary so sometimes I can't speak English.

3) I can not remember words with an inflection and don't know the grammar.

4) I cannot say what I want to say because I don't know grammar well enough.

5) I think English is very hard and I can hardly speak or understand spoken English.

6) I can not communicate with others in English. I am very worried about my English.

7) My accent is not standard and people do not understand some of my sentences.

8) Some were learning Thai and hadn't studied English in depth, sometimes English words are confused with Thai words.

9) The most common matter for Chinese student's English speaking is not being brave enough to speak with others. We should pay more attention to our English.

10) I want to speak English well but don't know how to.

11) When others speak English, I can not really understand all the words.

12) When speaking English, I think a lot and speak slowly.

In a nutshell, it was generally noticed that the highest mean problems of the EFL Chinese student agreed that they mostly faced the grammatical usage at 2.91 followed by the speaking fluency hesitation during speaking as the lowest was shown at 2.57 in both moderate and disagree level corresponds with the percentage pausing during speaking at 3.03, the vocabulary was that they have insufficient words showed the highest percentage at 50.5 percentage followed by choosing the appropriate words to speak with their friends. For word intonation, the highest percentage is 2.91 in the moderate level and the second problem in pronunciation is the poor English accent. When speaking, the student usually mumbles at 3.29 in both aspects. In the aspect of self-confidence, the majority of the students tend to fear that others might not understand them when speaking with the highest percentage at 3.04 at the moderate level and feel pressured when they have to speak English at 2.91. These two problems play a significant role in students' speaking ability when speaking English in front of their friends and teachers especially when speaking with native speakers.

Based on research question II, what are the affecting factors for Chinese EFL students with English speaking problems? The three main factors, grammar, vocabulary and self-confidence were confirmed from the excerpts from the semi-structured interviews as follows:

S1) Speaking is quite challenging for me since English needs to start with the most basic language. I have to improve my vocabulary and proficiency in English. However, the syntax compared to Asian languages, English grammar seems a bit more complicated.

S2) In China, many people learn English, so there are more opportunities to speak English and more resources such as music and movies. So, I can learn English at any time, such as by using English software to learn but sometimes it's so difficult because the word order in English is different.

S3) I think I should study English seriously and pay attention to the order, spelling of the words and consider the context because the spelling rules of the words are different as well as the letters which are completely different.

S4) I have barely time to study English but once I went to an internship, I felt like English was very important. When we attend a conference, sometimes, we have to use English. For me, it is difficult to remember the vocabulary and sentences in English songs and movies even though I often use them as a source for learning and practice.

S5) I like to learn English from movie series but I feel like I am not very confident when speaking English. I try to remember vocabulary before the class because it is not my mother tongue.

According to the data analysis from the interviews, it was obvious that English-speaking skills would help the researcher reflect on some aspects of language learning difficulty. With the five main types, grammar is a particularly prevalent problem in this study followed by vocabulary, pronunciation and self-assurance. Additionally, the learners believed that English was different from their mother tongue for communication, so they may need to make an investment in remembering the vocabulary and grammar to improve their self-confidence. Furthermore, the learners agreed that knowing some background knowledge would help convey effective English communication.

5. DISCUSSION

The study's results indicated that all students agree that English speaking problems are in the following areas: 1) grammatical errors, 2) speaking fluently, 3) vocabulary knowledge, 4) pronunciation, 5) self-confidence as the previous work investigated. The main problem of Chinese students speaking English referred to grammar and vocabulary and their lack of experience speaking English in real contexts. According to Celce-Murcia and Olshtain (2000), grammar becomes a problem when students are expected to learn it at once. The knowledge of grammar and vocabulary requires a lot of time to memorize and understand.

Pronunciation and intonation are important elements of speaking skills. Clear pronunciation makes the communication complete. However, mispronunciation can cause problems with understanding. Han (2013) states that Chinese learners have problems with stress and intonation. Although Chinese and English are similar in terms of intonation, there are some differences between the two languages. In Chinese, the final rising-falling intonation is used in yes-no questions whereas English uses a final rising intonation in a yes-no question. Therefore, some students tend to overgeneralize between the two languages.

Similarly, Han (2013) and Deterding (2006) noted that some English features are shared with all Chinese English speakers but some features are marked only in the Guangxi district which can infer that even when speaking English, some Chinese people speak English differently. Most Chinese EFL students faced problems with their self-confidence. Speaking in front of their friends and teachers caused them to feel uncomfortable and anxious. The findings showed that a lack of self-confidence can cause great problems if students still believe that their English is not good enough and feel nervous about their speaking skills. The student will face speaking difficulties (Fitriani et al., 2015).

Furthermore, the researcher found that Chinese students spoke English only in the classroom and had little interaction with other international students or native speakers apart from the research. They usually stay with Chinese students and use their native language to communicate with their Chinese friends. Consequently, their English-speaking skills tend to be inadequate and below standard requirements for English speech. Similarly, Cheng and Chen (2021) also mentioned that English pronunciation was one of the reasons for listening or speaking confidently failure in oral English classes.

Therefore, the study may help institutions, including universities, establish strategies to promote and raise knowledge about the kinds of problems based on the results. Furthermore, difficulties like self-confidence and anxiety were things that the students needed to be aware of. The ELF students would need to focus on their personal resources to support their coping mechanisms to deal with psychological matters since the results indicated that it has an impact on speaking difficulty.

6. CONCLUSION

The study's findings offer a nuanced understanding of the multifaceted challenges faced by Chinese students in mastering English. These challenges span across various dimensions of language learning, including grammatical usage, fluency, vocabulary, pronunciation and psychological factors.

1) Grammatical usage: A significant issue identified is the difficulty in navigating the complexities of active and passive voice constructions in English. This grammatical aspect poses a considerable challenge indicating a need for targeted instructional strategies to enhance understanding and usage.

2) Fluency: In terms of fluency, a notable obstacle is the tendency to hesitate during speech. This hesitation can disrupt the flow of communication and suggest an underlying uncertainty or lack of proficiency in the language.

3) Vocabulary: The study also reveals a deficiency in the students' knowledge of English vocabulary, particularly in the realm of informal spoken language. This gap highlights the importance of exposing learners to a wide range of vocabulary contexts, including colloquial and idiomatic expressions.

4) Pronunciation: Pronunciation difficulties, specifically in intonation are prominent among the students. This challenge is compounded by a lack of self-confidence with students expressing apprehension that their pronunciation may not be comprehensible to others. This fear often leads to embarrassment and reluctance when speaking further impeding their pronunciation skills.

5) Psychological factors: The psychological dimension plays a critical role in language acquisition. The findings indicate that Chinese students experience reduced anxiety when interacting within their peer group. However, this comfort within homogenous groups inadvertently limits their exposure to diverse linguistic environments. The tendency to remain within Chinese-speaking groups restricts opportunities for practicing and using English in varied contexts. This self-imposed linguistic isolation is identified as a key factor contributing to their difficulties with English speaking proficiency.

In a nutshell, these findings underscore the multifaceted nature of language learning challenges. They highlight the need for a holistic approach to teaching English to Chinese students that addresses grammatical, fluency, vocabulary and pronunciation issues while also considering the psychological barriers that impact language acquisition. Teachers can significantly enhance the speaking skills of Chinese EFL learners by creating a learning environment that encourages interaction beyond peer groups and focuses on building confidence and competence in various aspects of the English language.

The findings of the study underscore the imperative for grounding future research in an empirical assessment of the actual speaking abilities of Chinese students. It is essential that these students are acclimatized to conversing in English with both native and non-native speakers prior to the commencement of the research. This preparatory step is crucial in mitigating any potential anxiety that may arise from linguistic challenges, thereby ensuring a more accurate and authentic representation of their speaking skills.

Furthermore, it is recommended that a systematic approach be employed involving both pre- and post-tests to effectively gauge the progression and discernible differences in their English language proficiency. These evaluative measures should be designed to comprehensively assess the students' abilities before and after the intervention or study period. The pre-test will establish a baseline for their skills while the post-test will provide valuable insights into the extent of their development and the efficacy of the teaching methods or learning strategies employed during the course of the study.

Such a methodological framework will not only enhance the reliability and validity of the research findings but also contribute significantly to our understanding of the dynamics of language acquisition among Chinese EFL learners. This can inform pedagogical practices and curriculum design ensuring they are more closely aligned with the learners' needs and the challenges they face in mastering the English language.

The findings may help institutions, including universities, establish strategies to promote and raise knowledge about how to reduce adjustment issues for overseas students in the new culture based on the study's findings.

International students would need to focus on their personal resources to support their coping mechanisms in order to deal with the stressful period of cultural and psychological transition and to address the challenges of adjusting to the new culture. This would likely aid exchange students in overcoming adjustment issues like academic stress, housing challenges and physical health issues. These findings may improve our comprehension of how international students adjust to cross-cultural and re-entry situations.

Furthermore, difficulties like loneliness and cultural shocks are things of which the international student department in institutions needs to be aware. These issues need to be addressed throughout the orientation process, especially in the early stages of arrival in the host country regarding the future behaviours of international student departments in Thai universities. The findings show that social support and self-efficacy have a substantial impact on cultural and psychological adjustment.

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