

## Research Article

# RESEARCH ON THE QUALITY EVALUATION SYSTEM OF UNDERGRADUATE THAI TEACHING IN CHINESE COLLEGES AND UNIVERSITIES: CASE STUDY OF YUNNAN PROVINCE

Received: March 16, 2021

Revised: July 27, 2021

Accepted: July 29, 2021

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## Abstract

This study seeks to assess the teaching quality of Thai language teachers, find out existing problems in the teaching quality evaluation system in colleges and universities, and search for solutions to improve the quality of Thai teaching in Yunnan Province. Based on past evaluations of teaching quality, the fuzzy comprehensive evaluation method is used to establish a quality evaluation system. Nine institutions are selected as the research object. Through the study, the author hopes to provide reference for the establishment of teaching quality evaluation system for undergraduate students majoring in Thai in Yunnan. This study proposes an improved evaluation system that takes into account the situation in different classrooms.

**Keywords:** Undergraduate Teaching, Thai Major, Teaching Quality Evaluation, Evaluation System, Teaching Quality Reform

## Introduction

Driven by China's international and foreign development policies, exchange between China and Southeast Asian countries has expanded over the years, with China-Thailand relations serving as a model for bilateral relations. The two countries have always been close neighbors, with cultural and trade exchanges dating back to more than two thousand years ago. In 1975, Thailand and China established diplomatic relations, and after more than forty decades of development, the two countries have made great achievements in the realms of cultural, political, and economic and trade exchange. With the opening of the Trans-Asia Railway, the Mekong River shipping lane, Mankiw Highway and Kra Canal in recent years, exchange between Thailand and China became increasingly convenient. Noting the opportunities for bilateral cooperation in all fields, it is necessary and urgent to train practical talents versed in Thai.

As a small language that is spoken by 68 million people, Thai is not widely used in the international community (Chavanich, 2010) Constrained by Thailand's economic development and international competitiveness, Thai is not actively promoted in the international arena. Such development meant that Thai

was not an important part of the college curriculum in China. However, due to the rise of the tourism industry founded on the environment (Chavanich, 2010) cultural landscape and climate, Thailand began to develop and Thai culture and products spread around the world. Following cultural and economic exchange, interest in Thai increased. According to incomplete statistics, there are more than 30,000 Chinese<sup>3</sup> students studying in Thailand.

In response to the increasing demand for Thai professional talents, Thai language courses are offered in higher education institutions to satisfy student demand. As the closest city to Thailand, Yunnan boasts a large amount of trade and economic exchange with Thailand. Educators attach great importance to the training of Thai talent as the demand in Yunnan is higher than in other cities. In the fore mentioned ranking for teaching competitiveness in Thai, among the top fifteen schools, institutions in Yunnan account for seven of the top ten schools and two of the top fourteen schools in the province, amounting to a total of nine schools. Correspondingly, data shows that Thai language teaching in Yunnan contributes to two-fifth of all Thai language teaching majors in the country. To some extent, the level of Thai language training offered in Yunnan has a direct impact on the quality of Thai language teaching in China, and bilateral exchanges between China and Thailand.

Current data shows that colleges and universities in Yunnan have established a number of schools and programs for Thai and some are significant contributors to the teaching of Thai. However, in terms of the quality of teaching, institutions in Yunnan remains outside the top three of the competitiveness ranking. As other institutions in the country began to pay greater attention to language training in Thai, in the 2017 competitiveness ranking, only three colleges and universities in Yunnan sat within the top ten. The data exposes problems in the teaching of Thai in Yunnan province that may be uncovered and mitigated through the development of quality evaluation system. There is an urgency to establish an effective teaching quality evaluation system in Yunnan.

In the National Education Work Conference, CCP Party Secretary Xi Jinping established the talent training standards of institutions of higher learning in the new period and put forward new requirements to the task of talent training. From the feedback of graduates, the current state for talent training does not match social docking requirements, and the original teaching quality evaluation system does not seem to satisfy the demands for talented person by businesses and enterprises. As such, for colleges and universities, how to effectively evaluate the quality of teaching, determine the talent training scheme, and promote social talent is critically important.

Based on the current needs in social development and reform for improved teaching quality in colleges and universities, this study examines the teaching quality evaluation system, and takes the teaching of Thai language major in Yunnan province as a case study to explore the establishment and implementation of the evaluation system. This study aims to evaluate the quality of Thai teaching in undergraduate programs in nine colleges and universities in Yunnan. The author adopts survey, in-depth interview, case study analysis and the fuzzy comprehensive evaluation as the main methodologies. Referring to the national teaching quality evaluation requirements and standards, this study proposes a scientific and reasonable quality evaluation

system suitable for Thai language teaching in Yunnan. It is hoped that the proposed system can serve as a reference for the assessment of other small languages.

### Teaching Quality Evaluation in China

According to the definition given by China's Ministry of Education, colleges and universities are institutions of higher education that are under the supervision of the ministry or provincial education departments, including autonomous regions and municipalities. In 2016, there were 2,880 institutions of higher learning in China. Among the institutions, 2,596 regular universities (including 266 independent colleges) exposed an increase of 36 schools compared to the previous year. There were 1,237 undergraduate institutions of higher learning (an increase of 18 schools than the previous year) and 1,359 higher vocational/junior colleges (an increase of 18 schools than the previous year). On the graduate level, China currently hosts 793 graduate training institutions - 576 universities and 217 scientific research institutions (Xie & Liu, 2000). As an important training base for talents needed by society, colleges and universities play a vital role.

On April 22, 2016, Xi Jinping sent a congratulatory letter to Tsinghua University to celebrate the 105<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the university. Xi confirmed the importance of the development of higher education by stressing that "doing a good job in higher education is a matter of national development and national future (Liu, 2014)." Following the expansion of colleges and universities in China in recent years, the number of students grew steadily, from 6.31 million in 2010 to 7.95 million in 2017. While the increasing number of graduates in colleges and universities provide a large number of professional and technical personnel for society, the quality of talent cultivation and the quality of college and university teaching became the focus of all circles.

In 1994, China promulgated the Outline of China's Educational Reform and Development that proposed to establish educational quality standards and evaluation index bodies for all specializations on all levels. Since then, teaching quality evaluation has become an important part of the development of colleges and universities. As the state attached importance to the reform of college education and teaching, the education and teaching quality of schools became regularly promoted as well. After the 1980s, "teaching quality is the soul and life of education (Jin, 2016)" as advocated by the state and the education circle, became the guideline of implementing education reforms in colleges and universities.

In 2007, China's Ministry of Education issued "Some opinions of the ministry of education on deepening undergraduate teaching reform and improving teaching quality comprehensively". A series of requirements and ideas are put forward: schools should strengthen teaching quality monitoring, establish an internal quality assurance and evaluation mechanism involving employers, teachers and students, and form the evaluation system of curriculum system and teaching content, classroom teaching evaluation system, practical teaching evaluation system, leaders and teachers listening system, peer review system, students' regular feedback system and teaching supervision system, and strengthen the management of talent training process.

The content of education quality assessment was clarified and programmatic guidance formulated. However, an unified standard for the teaching quality evaluation system had yet to be established for colleges and universities.

On April 7, 2016, the Higher Education Teaching Evaluation Center of the Ministry of Education released a report series on education quality, which launched a new quality standard for higher education teaching. It was the first time in both China and the world to release such reports. Indicators such as the “five degrees” (social needs fitness; training objectives to achieve degree; teaching condition and support degree; teaching and quality guarantee effectiveness; students and social satisfaction) and the “three faces” - face modernization, the world and the future - were based on the experience of China’s higher education and drew lessons from the experience of international education quality evaluation. China in turn established a set of relatively complete, scientific, and reasonably new quality evaluation system with Chinese characteristics. As a new exploration into China’s higher education quality standard system, the reports provide guidance for the evaluation of teaching quality in colleges and universities while clarifying the importance the government attached to the quality evaluation system.

In 2016, the Ministry of Education issued Guidance of the Ministry of Education on Deepening Education and Teaching Reform in Colleges and Universities, which notes that in recent years, institutions of higher learning, especially central institutions of higher learning, have continuously promoted the teaching reform of education in colleges and universities, improved the quality of talent cultivation, and created many replicable experiences and practices that can be promoted in national universities. However, common problems such as relatively arcane educational and teaching concepts, imperfect mechanism, outdated and single content and methods, and weak practical teaching persisted in some universities. As Thai was a new language teaching content for institutions of higher learning, the construction of its teaching quality assessment was relatively slow. The college teaching quality evaluation system was a breakthrough point for unifying existent evaluation systems and establishing a language teaching quality evaluation system. Under the guidance of the new quality standard system, an effective evaluation of the Thai language teaching level in Yunnan was conducted to establish a scientific evaluation standard in line with local education.

## **Literature Review**

The quality evaluation of higher education is an activity that assesses the degree to which higher education activities can meet the needs of society and individuals (Liu, 2014)). It is also a process that assesses the actual or potential value of higher education activities. Under the guidance of national policies, higher education attaches importance to “improving the quality of personnel training” and “improving the level of scientific research.” Both goals are inseparable from teaching quality evaluation in colleges and universities. In light of abundant literature centered on teaching quality, this section highlights past research pertinent to the current study.

Alain De Beuckelae et al. (2012) have examined the factors that influence teaching quality from the perspective of inter-cultural mobility. The outcome was discussed in “The Role of Faculty Members Cross-

Cultural Competencies in Their Perceived Teaching Quality: Evidence from Culturally Diverse Classes in Four European Countries." Based on the empirical study of Belgium, France, Germany and the Netherland, the authors recognize the important influence of crossing cultures on teaching quality and its impact on personalities such as cultural empathy, open mindedness, emotional stability, social initiative and objectivity. From the cross-culture perspective, the authors discuss the reasons why foreign students would have doubts towards the quality of teaching. In another study, Andie Shane Webb (2012) emphasizes the effect of evaluation for the improvement of student learning and teaching quality. Webb notes that regardless of reforms in school management and curriculum design, the influence of education on students will not produce reversible transformations. Changes can only happen when teaching methods, the teacher's professional development, and the design and method for evaluating teaching quality are reformed.

Chen (2015) note that the four basic goals of the development of teaching evaluation are professional development, personal judgment, institutional development and status. In another study, based on considerable research Liu and Liu (2017) conclude that the objective of teacher evaluation decides the effects. The authors draw the conclusion that performance management and professional development are important objectives. Under the lead of so called "objective oriented theory", teaching evaluations adopt many approaches and methodologies, including teacher's self-evaluation, peer evaluation, administrative leadership evaluation, professional evaluation and student evaluation. Depending on the role of the evaluating subject, the effect on the evaluation varies. Every type of evaluation and result is part and partial and cannot be interpreted as standing for the whole of teaching quality.

In terms of the methodology for carrying out teaching quality assessment, the Student Evaluation of Educational Quality (SEEQ) survey is widely used. Designed and advanced by Marsh (1987), the survey consists of 9 dimensions: learning, enthusiasm, organization, group interaction, individual rapport, breadth, examinations, assignments and overall rating. Based on the dimensions, 32 indices are established. The survey is widely adopted in teaching practice and after 13 years in application, more than one million students and five thousand courses have been surveyed, with the result suggesting clear reliability.

With the increased impact of teaching quality and social need in higher education, the SEEQ survey can no longer cover the entire range of considerations in teaching evaluation. On the basis of SEEQ, researchers introduced new surveys. Wayne State University proposed the Student Evaluation of Teaching (SET) survey, which consists of four parts: basic condition of student, course and teacher evaluation, instructor feedback and diagnostic assessment, and open questions. The diagnostic assessment contains 8 dimensions: teaching passion, organization, group interaction, harmony, knowledge breadth, examination, assignment and reading material, and assignment amount and difficulty. Twenty-one indices are established upon the dimensions.

## Research Design

The author studies the quality evaluation system of undergraduate Thai education in regular colleges and universities by observing nine undergraduate colleges that offer Thai language as a sample in Yunnan Province. With the aim of designing a reasonable evaluation system for education quality, this study uses a self-

made questionnaire. Based on the outcome of previous research and the opinions of experts, dimensions that are involved in the research implementation process are analyzed and form the first indicator system. The demand for talent by enterprises and society is integrated to form an index content system which is the collection of reviews in the fuzzy comprehensive evaluation system. Expert opinions and requirements for weight analysis are combined to form the weight of the teaching quality evaluation indicators. The questionnaire is conducted in four colleges and universities offering Thai language proficiency exams in Yunnan Province to collect data for establishing the teaching quality evaluation system. The study seeks to understand the current development concerning the quality of classroom teaching in Thai in undergraduate colleges in Yunnan Province, clarify existing problems, and provide suggestions for improving the teaching of Thai in Yunnan Province.

The definition of Thai language teaching is similar to English language teaching, which refers to the process of teaching Thai to those who are or are not the first language speaker of Thai. Thai language teaching involves a variety of professional knowledge, including linguistics, second language acquisition, lexicology, sentence law, stylistics, corpus theory and cognitive psychology (Wang, 2016). In this study, the content of teaching involves the current teaching design of colleges and universities that offer Thai as a major. The institution has established a relatively complete professional teaching system that is supported by professional instructors who have at least one class of students and teaches in accordance with the stated teaching objectives. The target groups for study are undergraduate students, instructors and supporting administrating staff members.

In the evaluation system of education and teaching, primary indicators include the content taught, and teaching preparation, organization, design, attitude, ability and effects (Chen, 2015). The indicators are summed up in the categories of pre-teaching, teaching, and post-teaching. In the current domestic literature on the formulation of relevant national systems, pre-teaching focuses on the preparation of teaching. Preparation pertains mainly to the content, design and organization of teaching. Preparation as an indicator of the teaching system can be summed up as preparation of the teaching content. In this study, the execution of teaching and the instructor's attitude towards teaching translates into teaching design, teaching organization and teacher quality. Teaching effect, or the comprehensive performance and quality of students, is also included in this study.

Taking Thai language teaching in nine universities in Yunnan Province as the research object, the representative groups were selected to conduct open survey and interview. In the process of interviewing and visiting, we try our best to find out the different groups of nine colleges and universities to conduct interviews to understand the actual situation of Thai professional teaching. In order to deeply analyze the situation of Thai professional teaching quality evaluation system and grasp the current situation of Thai professional teaching quality, four representative universities (Yunnan University, Yunnan Normal University, Yunnan Minzu University, Qujing Normal College) were selected from nine universities for questionnaire investigation and analysis. Choosing student group, teacher group and teaching supervisor group, the author evaluates the teaching quality of 16 Thai teachers in four universities, and tries to find out the existing problems

in the Thai teaching quality evaluation system of Yunnan universities, and analyze the reasons, find out the solutions, provide the basis for improving the teaching quality of Thai major in Higher Education in Yunnan Province, and provide reference for the construction of teaching quality evaluation system of Thai major in other universities.

Based on past studies, the author adopted open survey and carried out interviews with supervisors in the state education department, administrative personnel in schools, and teachers. Specifically, the interviewed body includes 5 people from the Yunnan Department of Education, 9 people from the selected institutions (one representative from each institution) and 9 teachers. In addition, related employers in express delivery, tourism, hotel and accommodation, external trade and teachers training were also approached. Ten representatives were chosen from the five sectors. The author carried out in depth interview with all the aforementioned representatives at their site of work and recorded the interview based on the consent of the interviewee.

## **Result and Analysis**

The author evaluates the in-class teaching of 16 teachers of different courses in four colleges and universities, and carries out analysis based on the final evaluation and follow-up sample evaluation of different courses. Noting the feedback and suggestions for improving teaching performance in the returned questionnaire, a sense of the teaching quality evaluation in Yunnan at the moment is acquired. Thai language teaching for ordinary undergraduates in Yunnan Province has achieved obvious results under the strong support of the government and the attention of various universities, despite the persistence of many problems in the process of implementing Thai language teaching.

First, many teachers mention that while teaching, teachers can consciously highlight the key points of teaching, guide students to discover the challenges and find solutions, and allow students to practice problem solving. Such design effectively promotes the progress of the teaching class, and leads to the completion of the teaching plan and objectives. It is an effective reflection of the teaching design. Meanwhile, peer comments on shortcomings in the performance of Thai teachers are varied, yet there is strong agreement on many of the shortcomings. For example, many peers mentioned that the overall control over the class is quite weak and teachers are not very good at dealing with misconduct in the classroom.

In terms of teaching, when students do not understand, show a lack of interest, or fail to cooperate with others, they begin to divert their attention to their mobile phone, talk to other peers, or read novels, which affects the normal order of classroom teaching. However, the teachers do not deal with the situation timely and pay more attention to course progress and curriculum design and less attention to the efficiency of student learning. While actions may be taken to handle the situation, the outcome is usually ineffective.

Regarding the teaching of professional Thai teachers, there are two main suggestions. First, comments suggest that teachers should strengthen their interaction with students in class. While there are interactions between teachers and students in existing classrooms, the interaction is relatively shallow and do not allow students to engage in deep thinking. Student participation in the form of simple Thai dialogue and question-

and-answer remain superficial and lack depth. Second, comments also suggest that teachers should pay attention to arousing classroom atmosphere. In the survey, seven teachers mentioned that attention should be paid to improving the classroom atmosphere as some students are not very involved in class. Teachers should pay more attention to the situation and attempt to increase student enthusiasm.

In order to further analyze the differences in the evaluation of teaching supervision among the four selected schools and to judge the implication of the differences on the questionnaire survey, a multiple comparative analysis of the results of the survey is conducted. In terms of shortcomings, two developments are prominent. Professional Thai teachers are incapable of driving student enthusiasm in learning while lacking sufficient language refinement to link theory with practice.

The supervisor believes that the ability of teachers to connect theory with practice is insufficient as well. Particularly in practical courses, the chosen scene and content may not be closely related to actual situations students face. There is minimal innovation in teaching and the selected case studies are outdated. At present, excessive problems exist in the training of Thai professional teachers while innovation and relevance are not obvious in actual teaching.

Analysis of the data also suggests that the evaluation scores for different teaching quality evaluation subjects are different. Such condition is manifested in the fact that the teaching evaluation of teachers and teaching supervisors has the tendency to emphasize teaching objectives, teaching design and implementation of teaching organization while students pay more attention to the actual teaching process and their own practice. Through classroom teaching, students hope to acquire the ability to cope with work practice, especially after students have participated in social practice and part-time social work.

Through the data analysis and comparison of three different evaluation subjects of teaching quality, this study finds that the emphasis of student evaluation on teaching quality is different from that of teachers and supervisors. There are significant differences in data result. In the analysis of students as evaluation subjects, compared with the other two groups, the scores for teaching quality evaluation are lower, and more attention is paid to the practical aspects of Thai teaching such as teacher-student communication and teaching effectiveness. This is not only reflected in data analysis but also in the quality of teaching. Questionnaire surveys and student interviews, including the analysis of graduate follow-up survey data, show that students are keen on developing skills in Thai language teaching, just as students of automobile maintenance know the steps for repairing – identifying the problems and knowing the means and methods for dealing with the issues.

In terms of the evaluation by peers and supervisors, examination of teaching quality is more about the teaching content, teaching design and organization. Based on the examination, one can judge whether the instructor has a clear teaching purpose and teaching design, ideas and organization. Regardless of effectiveness, the evaluation is not concerned with conditions in the teaching environment such as the degree of fulfilling teaching objectives, the coherence between teaching plan and student progress, and the reasonability of practical arrangements. Hence in the process of evaluating teaching quality, one sees more concern for teaching content and organization while the concern for teaching quality is limited. Regarding student interaction with teachers, the response is more from the perspective of teaching design and organization

than from the needs of work, therefore in the overall evaluation, its score is higher than that of the student group. The requirements for teaching supervision are more stringent, which makes the score slightly lower than that of peer evaluation.

The analysis suggests an additional situation that teachers and students do not engage each other and the two groups do not share a channel of effective and smooth communication. Teachers pay more attention to whether teaching conforms to teaching plans and standards while students pay more attention to the knowledge and skills they want to learn, especially in the case of college students. Many students are not clear about the content of the textbook and only pay attention to how much their Thai ability has improved after a class (Ellis, 1993). Evaluation on teaching quality is inevitably difficult when teachers and students do not share the same objectives. From the point of view of practical application, evaluation does not only concern peers and supervisors but also necessarily include the needs of students. Once education is separated its main beneficiary, it will deviate from the original intention of putting the receivers of education first.

Both teaching supervisors and students mention the need for improvement in the teaching design and organizational ability of Thai teachers, in order to effectively apply experience to practice, establish prestige among students, and let students recognize the teaching methods and content. The overall student score for teaching quality is 64.758, which suggests that students are not satisfied with received teaching performance at present. Students consider the attention given by teachers to students and effective interaction between teachers and students as a part of the assessment, while the qualification, language expression and professional level of teachers are basic qualities that are not too important for the evaluation. The issue of mobilizing classroom atmosphere and interaction between teachers and students have been mentioned many times in peer evaluation and supervisor evaluation, suggesting shortcomings in current teaching design and organization. The result of the data survey confirms the fact that there continues to be room for improvement in the teaching design and organizational ability of Thai professional teachers.

## Conclusion

In this study, survey, interview and fuzzy comprehensive evaluation are used to analyze the teaching quality evaluation system for Thai majors in colleges and universities in Yunnan. Through conducted survey and interviews, this study draws two insights. First, noting shortcomings in the original evaluation system, this study proposes an improved system that is more suitable (see appendixes), considering the current situation in classrooms. The proposed system notes the difference in evaluating different subjects. In the system, data for the evaluation of teaching organization and content is more abundant. Second, there are obvious shortcomings in teaching design and organization among Thai language teachers as exposed by supervisors and students. While overall data suggests that efforts have been made to carry out reforms toward Thai teaching in colleges and universities, much room remains for improvement. In light of current developments, the author suggests that teaching quality can be improved in three aspects: correct the existing evaluation system, improve the evaluation guarantee mechanism, and strengthen cooperation between the school and the private sector, in order to realize effective connection between talent and society and promote reform in Thai teaching.

In order to promote the teaching quality reform, the author argues for the establishment of a solid evaluation system and guarantee mechanism to ensure the effective completion of various indicators. In terms of teaching practice, while one regularly verifies and corrects the existing teaching quality indicators, through the same process, teachers can also gain an understanding of their shortcomings in teaching preparation and implementation. Improved teaching is grounded on making gains on issues such as teaching according to aptitude, combining theory with practice and increasing interaction between teachers and students. Teaching consciousness should be supported by practice, in order to meet the practical need of students and realize cooperation between the school and private sector. This not only improves the current teaching practice of Thai major, but also provides practical support for improving the teaching quality evaluation system effectively (Bonbaum, 2008).

#### Appendix 1: Peer/Student Evaluation Questionnaire

Dimension	Index
Content	1.The content is rich and suitable for students. 2.The main points and challenging points are clearly laid out. 3.The content is connected with current developments and social needs. 4.The content stimulates student learning and development.
Design	1.The teaching design is suitable for students. 2.The teaching design is focused and suits the practical needs of students. 3.Teaching methods are diverse and current technologies are applied. 4.Theory and practice are closely integrated.
Organization	1.The instructor can effectively moderate the classroom atmosphere. 2.Students are involved and interact with the instructor naturally. 3.Time is well distributed. 4.Groups effectively exploit new teaching methods and technologies.
Quality	5.The instructor is physically and emotionally well in the teaching process. 1.The instructor is proficient and professional. 2.The language expression is accurate. 3.The instructor is well trained in Thai and can use the language in a way that is comprehensible for students. 4.The instructor is trained in modern teaching methods. 5.The instructor is experienced and excels in theory and practice.
Effect	1.The teaching objectives are effectively achieved. 2.The practical language ability of students is clearly improved. 3.The practical issues that students face when using Thai are resolved. 4.Students are well trained in comprehensive ability.

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