

EFFECTS OF TASK-BASED LANGUAGE TEACHING ON THAI KINDERGARTEN 3 STUDENTS' CHINESE SPEAKING SKILLS AND CONFIDENCE: A CASE STUDY OF A TRILINGUAL SCHOOL IN BANGKOK*

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Abstract

Task-based language teaching (TBLT) is central to goal-oriented activities that students use their previously learned target language knowledge to accomplish a real outcome. This experimental study implemented TBLT to enhance Thai kindergarten 3 (K3) students' Chinese speaking skills or ability to use 80 Chinese vocabulary they circularly learned in their kindergartens 1 and 2 to express themselves verbally and meaningfully and their confidence in speaking Chinese, characterized by their learning behaviors. A sample group of 14 students at a trilingual education school in Bangkok was conveniently selected for the one group pretest-posttest design. A 16-week lesson plan from May to September, 2022, Chinese speaking tests, weekly assessments and video records of the entire teaching and learning processes for the purpose of inter-rater reliability were instruments that tested the first hypothesis, and data through the video records were used to test the second hypothesis. Data analyzed by paired-t test confirmed the first hypothesis in that TBLT could affect the students' Chinese speaking skills positively with a significant difference at .000 ($P < 0.05$) and that game tasks gave them more chances to speak Chinese. Data analyzed by a frequency distribution supported the second hypothesis in that TBLT could affect their confidence in speaking Chinese gradually and positively, which manifested in their active responses to the researcher and discussions with their group members, their enthusiasm to observe how to do different tasks and willingness to ask the researcher for help and assist others during the lessons they liked and the tasks that suited them. These findings suggested that TBLT enabled the K3 students in the present context to use their learned Chinese vocabulary in previous years to express themselves verbally and meaningfully with confidence. The implementation of TBLT for K2 and K3 students at the target school was also recommended.

Keywords: task-based language teaching; Chinese speaking skills; confidence; Thai kindergarten students

Introduction

In Thailand, although Chinese is not yet a compulsory subject, Fu (2021) reports that at least 2,000 schools at all levels currently offer Chinese courses with over 1 million students, ranking first among less developed countries. Since more than 60% of them are students of kindergartens and primary schools (Li, 2021), learning Chinese successfully in a Thai social context where exposure to Chinese mostly occurs in the classroom can be a great challenge for them. Past studies (e.g., Guo, 2019; Xie, 2019; Yao, 2019; Jiang, 2019; Lin, 2019) reveal importance of using appropriate teaching methods to enhance Thai kindergarten students' Chinese speaking skills, and once they improve the skills, they feel confident.

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Take a trilingual education school in Bangkok, where it provides Kindergarten 1 (K1), Kindergarten 2 (K2) and Kindergarten 3 (K3) students with Thai, English and Chinese, an example. The school adopts the 'YCT Standard Course 1' Book to teach Chinese as a third language (L3) to all students of K1, K2 and K3 for one hour per week because it is based on Youth Chinese Test level 1 (YCT-1), an international standardized Chinese language proficiency test for young foreign learners' reading and listening skills. The book contains 8 topics with 80 Chinese vocabulary of YCT-1, taught for an entire academic year to mainly help the students pass the test. Seventy vocabulary covering 6 topics and classroom language expressions were taught in the first term and these would be taught again in the second term along with 10 new vocabulary of two other topics.

Thai or English is used as a medium of instruction in the Chinese class because they have already acquired these two languages and can understand the instruction well. After learning Chinese from the same book for two years in their K1 and K2, students of K3 are expected to pass YCT-1 (mastering 80 commonly used words and related simple grammar in Chinese with ability to further study) or reach the stage of speech emergence (having both basic Chinese listening comprehension and oral Chinese skills with a few errors in grammar and pronunciation).

Despite the above mentioned school policy, the researcher, a native Chinese teacher at this school in 2021, found that K3 students could not use the 80 Chinese vocabulary they learned in their K1 and K2 to express themselves verbally and meaningfully in the Chinese class. They also looked bored and lacked confidence perhaps because they were given less chance to practice their speaking skills to help them reach the stage of speech emergence. Thus there was a need to find an appropriate teaching method that could enhance their Chinese speaking skills and confidence in speaking the language.

Task-based learning (TBL) as a teaching method or task-based language teaching (TBLT) proposed by Willis (1996) can be suitable for K3 students who are naturally curious and enthusiastic in learning something since it is seen a practical compromise between spontaneous language acquisition and goal-directed language teaching for them to explore the world and work with peers (Van den Branden, Van Gorp & Verhelst, 2009), their anxiety can be lower; their confidence in speaking skills can be gradually improved right from the start of the pre-task stage to the end of language focus stage (Subekti, 2020).

Research Objectives

To investigate the way in which TBLT affected the following:

1. Thai K3 students' Chinese speaking skills.
2. Thai K3 students' confidence in speaking Chinese.

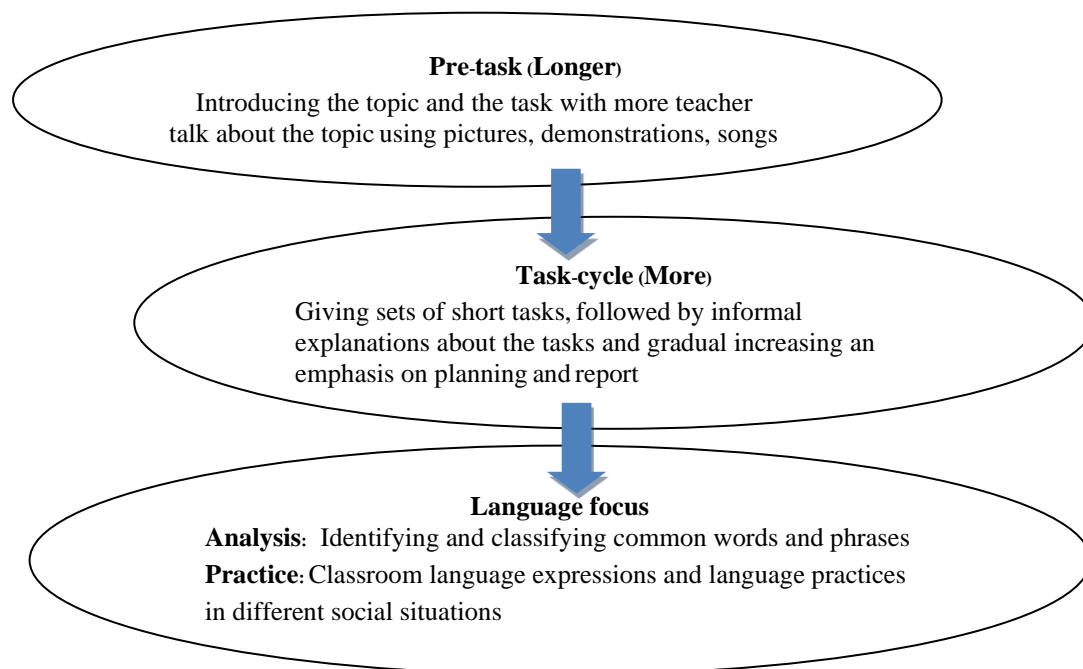
Related Literature Review

Willis' (1996) TBLT model commonly used to teach older learners is central to a goal-oriented activity students use their learned target language knowledge to accomplish a real outcome through listing, ordering and sorting, solving a problem, doing project or sharing and comparing experience (pp.23-27). These tasks can be adapted for use with younger learners. Listen-and-do tasks, classifying tasks and puzzles tasks are other tasks suitable for younger learners up to the age of eleven or twelve as well. Through tasks in three sequential stages, younger learners as language beginners can also gain confidence in using the target language as they are given plenty of opportunities to interact with their friends in the target language in

pairs and/or small groups without banning use of their mother-tongue (p.130). It should be noted that TBLT can encourage young beginners to achieve whatever they can, regardless of their little target language knowledge, as they have enough ability to understand and cope with doing the task-based activities, and they can use their learned vocabulary and sentences in a meaningful way. It is important not to expect them to communicate in the target language perfectly (pp. 118-130).

The three sequential stages that involve the tasks are pre-task, task-cycle, and language focus. In the first stage of pre-task, the teacher spends a longer time than in the original model for older learners to introduce the topic and the task using pictures, demonstrations and songs to the students to review the vocabulary they previously learned and help them understand how to do the task in the next stage. In the second stage of task-cycle, the teacher gives students more sets of tasks and informal explanations about the tasks so as to keep them interested. After the students complete the tasks in groups, the teacher guides them how to do the short planning and report until they accomplish it so that they can report the results in front of the class with confidence. In the final stage of language focus, the teacher firstly identifies and classifies common words and phrases to the students to help them be more aware of language features they have already experienced in the second stage such as singular and plural forms and basic sentence patterns for language analysis. Then the teacher teaches some useful classroom language expressions in the target language and lets them practice the Chinese vocabulary used in different social situations so that they can transfer this language exposure to their own knowledge. Willis' (1996, p.116) TBLT model for young language beginners shown in Figure 1 was used to design lesson plans and implemented as a treatment or an independent variable in this study.

Figure 1 Willis' (1996) TBLT model for young language beginners

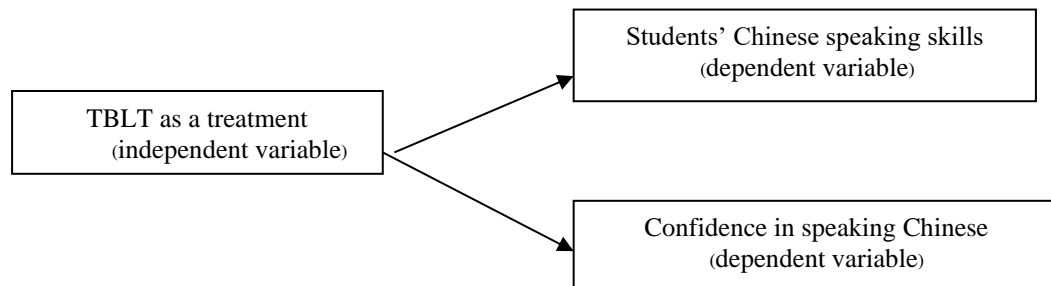


Chinese speaking skills and confidence in speaking Chinese were dependent variables in this study. The former referred to the ability the K3 Thai students used Chinese vocabulary they learned in their K1 and K2 to express themselves verbally and meaningfully. The latter referred to the K3 students' learning behaviors in those three sequential stages that characterized their confidence mainly adapted from studies by Subekti (2020), Jo (2019) and Chen (2019). They include: active responses to the researcher and paying attention to how to do the task enthusiastically (in the pre-task); active discussion with group work, willingness to ask for teachers' help and giving help to other classmates and active report on the tasks (in the task-cycle); and willingness to correct their mistakes and cheerfulness to practice (in the language focus).

Previous studies in different contexts that applied Willis' (1996) TBLT to enhance foreign students' Chinese speaking skills revealed positive findings and suggestions. For example, in America, game tasks gave the best teaching results among other tasks, namely role play and handmade for primary school students (Ding, 2018). In Korea, university (Gu, 2017) and primary school students (Jo, 2019) were encouraged to speak Chinese and enjoyed completing the activities of different topics because they liked the topics being taught and were given more time to practice speaking Chinese, which built up their confidence. Zou and Ning (2020) conducted their study with primary school students in Hungary and Ma (2021) with international college students in China had the same suggestions that when preparing lesson plans and designing tasks for the beginning level of oral Chinese teaching, it was important for teachers to consider their students' learning abilities and characters as well as teaching materials or content of the book so as to keep them engaged in all the learning stages. In Thailand, teachers of primary school (Chen, 2019) and of university (Zhang, 2019) designing different types of tasks suitable for their own students' Chinese level and learning characteristics gave the best outcomes.

For Thai kindergarten students' Chinese speaking skills learning in Thai contexts, past studies (e.g., Guo, 2019; Xie, 2019; Yao, 2019; Lin, 2019; Jiang, 2019) applied other teaching methods like games, pictures, situational topics, themes and total physical response to encourage them to speak the language and help them enjoy learning it. Those studies showed the same results in that during the process of Chinese learning, the students became more confident in speaking Chinese since they improved their Chinese speaking skills and were interested in learning it. In fact, it is difficult to find research implementing TBLT in a Chinese speaking class of kindergarten as Li (2021) reports that it is a new trend for kindergarten learners to study Chinese in Thailand. Only one study by Wang and Liu (2020) using Willis' (1996) model to enhance Chinese kindergarten students' English learning in China was found, reporting that TBLT was suitable for the students to learn English as it could cultivate their interest and satisfaction in language learning.

The above mentioned past findings revealed that TBLT not only improved language learners' ability to learn the target language at varied levels from kindergarten to university but also established their confidence in their speaking abilities. Therefore, it was an urgent need of implementing Willis' (1996) TBLT to find out if it could positively affect the Thai K3 students' ability to use Chinese vocabulary they learned in their K1 and K2 to express themselves verbally and meaningfully (Chinese speaking skills) and their learning behaviors in each stage of doing the tasks characterizing their confidence. The conceptual framework of this study was shown in Figure 2.

Figure 2 Conceptual framework**This study hypothesized that:**

H1: TBLT could affect Thai K3 students' Chinese speaking skills positively.

H2: TBLT could affect Thai K3 students' confidence in speaking Chinese positively.

Research Methodology

The one group, pretest-posttest design was used in this experimental research. Convenience sampling method used to select the sample group included 14 K3 students who were enrolled in the trilingual education school during May and September, 2022 and have learned Chinese from the same book for two years in their K1 and K2. This group had similar characteristics to the K3 students the researcher taught in 2021 in that they could not use the 80 vocabulary they learned in previous years to express themselves verbally and meaningfully although most of them passed YCT-1.

A 16-week lesson plan, video records, Chinese speaking tests, weekly assessments and observations were research instruments.

1. The 16-week lesson plan used as the treatment was designed covering the entire term (one hour per week) based on the TBLT for young language learners with different types of tasks: listing, classifying, ordering and sorting, solving a problem, games and hand-made. In the pre-stage, the researcher introduced the topic from the 'YCT Standard Course 1' Book using pictures, videos and songs to the students. English and Thai were used to give instructions for the task with a Chinese Thai teacher's help to guide the students to understand how to do the task. In the task-cycle, the researcher explained how to do the sets of tasks to the students and walked around the classroom to give them help. After finishing the tasks, they were guided how to do the planning and the report until they could do it by themselves. They were also encouraged to help each other and/or ask for help in Chinese; the Thai language was allowed when they were doing the tasks. After reporting to the class, they were given positive feedback. In the language focus, they were guided to identify and classify basic Chinese sentences based on conversations they have learned in the beginning of the class. Then they were taught some classroom language expressions and guided to do language practice through a role-play, a display, and a story-telling.

The topics for the lesson plans adopted from the book included 6 topics (personal information, body parts, family members, dates, places, and animals) with required 70 vocabulary and classroom language expressions for the first term as shown in Table 1.

Table 1 The topics and vocabulary of 16-week lesson plan

Week	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
Topic	Personal information	Personal information and body parts	Personal information and body parts	Family members	Family members	Family members	Date	Date
Main vocabulary	你 (you) 我(I) 什么 (what) 叫 (be called) 岁 (year old) 一 (one)..... 十 (ten)	你 (you) 我(I) 他 (he) 是 (to be) 谁 (who) 眼睛 (eyes) 个子 (height) 鼻子 (nose) 耳朵 (ears) 头发 (hair) 手 (hand) 脚 (foot) 高 (tall) 不 (no) 大 (big) 小 (small)	你 (you) 我(I) 他 (he) 是 (to be) 认识 (know) 不 (no) 中国人 (Chinese people) 头发 (hair) 眼睛 (eyes) 耳朵 (ears) 鼻子 (nose) 手 (hand) 脚 (foot) 个子 (height) 高 (tall) 大 (big) 小 (small)	这 (this) 是 (to be) 我的 (my) 你 (you) 家 (home) 有 (to have) 他 (he) 她 (she) 口 (measure word) 人 (people) 哥哥 (older brother) 姐姐 (older sister) 爸爸 (father) 妈妈 (mother) (mother)	他 (he) 她 (she) 有 (to have) 没有 (don't have) 哥哥 (older brother) 姐姐 (older sister) 爸爸 (father) 妈妈 (mother) 家 (home) 口 (measure word) 人 (people)	这 (this) 是 (to be) 我 (的) (my) 姐姐 (older sister) 哥哥 (older brother) 爸爸 (father) 妈妈 (mother) 和 (and) 爱 (love) 家 (home) 有 (to have) 一 (one)..... 十 (ten) 口 (measure word) 人 (people)	今天 (today) 明天 (tomorrow) 几 (how many) 月 (month) 号 (number) 星期 (week) 星期一 (Monday) 星期天 (Sunday)	你的 (your) 我的 (my) 他的 (his) 她的 (her) 是 (to be) 几 (how many) 月 (month) 号 (number) (number)
Week	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16
Topic	Date	Places	Places	Places	Animals	Animals	Animals	Review
Main vocabulary	你的 (your) 我的 (my) 是 (to be) 几 (how many) 月 (month) 号 (number)	你 (you) 我 (I) 去 (to go) 哪儿 (where) (this) 那 (that) 商店 (store) 医院 (hospital) 学校 (school) 警察局 (police station) 家 (home)	商店 (store) 医院 (hospital) 学校 (school) 警察局 (police station) 家 (home) 你 (you) 我 (I) 他 (he) 她 (she) 去 (go) 在 (at)	我 (I) 在 (at) 家 (home) 医院 (hospital) (hospital) 商店 (store) 学校 (school) 警察局 (police station)	大象 (elephant) 长颈鹿 (giraffe) 猫 (cat) 狗 (dog) 鸟 (bird) 鱼 (fish) 小 (small) 大 (big) 这 (this) 是 (to be) 什么 (what) 喜欢 (like)	这 (this) 是 (to be) 长颈鹿 (giraffe) 大象 (elephant) (at) 那儿 (there) 小 (small) 大 (big) 猫 (cat) 狗 (dog) 鸟 (bird)	这儿 (here) 有 (to have) 猫 (cat) 狗 (dog) 小 (small) 鸟 (bird) 鱼 (fish) 大象 (elephant) 长颈鹿 (giraffe)	我 (I) 叫 (be called) 一 (one).... 十 (ten) 眼睛 (eyes) 大 (big) 是 (to be) 月 (month) 号 (number) 这 (this)
Week	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16
Topic	Date	Places	Places	Places	Animals	Animals	Animals	Review
			哪儿 (where) 那儿 (there) 这儿 (here)			鱼 (fish) 我 (I)		我的 (my) 爸爸 (father)

						喜欢(like) 不(no)		喜欢(like) 大象 (elephant)
Main classroom language expressions	这是什么? (What's this?) or not?) 不是。(No) 不对。(Wrong) Please hands up) 大声读。(Read it out loud) 懂了(yes) / 不懂 (No)。 同你的组员一起讨论, 设法解决。(Discuss with your group members and try to solve) 你们有十分钟。(You have ten minutes) 这个用中文怎么说? (How to say it in Chinese) 有请下一组。(Next group please) 提问时间 (Question and answer time)	那是什么? (What's that?) 再说一遍。(Say it again) 小声读。(Read in a whisper) 请安静! (Be quiet) 报告开始。(Reporting time) 非常棒! (Excellent)	是不是? (Yes or no?) 跟我读。(Repeat after me) 你们听懂了吗? (Do you understand?) 我有问题。(There is a question)	对不对? (Right)				

2. During the 16-week lesson plan, a video recorder was used to record the whole processes of teaching, learning, assessing and observing. The records were also employed for the purpose of inter-rater reliability of the students' Chinese speaking tests, weekly assessments during the language practice and their learning behaviors that characterized confidence in speaking Chinese.

3. A Chinese speaking test used as the pre-test and post-test had three parts with content selected from the Official Examination Papers of YCT Speaking (Hanban, 2012), in line with the lesson plans. Its format adapted from YCT-koushi Elementary Level Test was suitable for testing the first hypothesis because each part could measure the K3 students' ability to use the Chinese vocabulary they learned in their K1 and K2 to express themselves verbally and meaningfully. In the first part, 'listening then repeating', they first listened to each sentence and then repeated it. In the second part, 'post-listening answer', they were asked each question and answered one by one shortly. In the third part, 'look at the picture and speak', they looked at each picture and talked about it in Chinese. The format was shown in Table 2.

Table 2 The Chinese speaking test format

Type of Test	Quantity	Scores (points)	Time (minutes)
Listening then repeating	5	5	2
Post-listening answer	5	10	3
Look at the picture and speak	5	15	10
Total	15	30	15

The Oral Chinese Proficiency Test (HSKK) rubric was adapted for the Chinese speaking rubric (Li, 2018), displayed in Table 3.

Table 3 Chinese speaking test rubric

Chinese Speaking Rubric			
Types of test	Descriptions		
Listening then repeating	1 point: Students could repeat the whole sentence comprehensibly.	0.5 point: Students could repeat the sentence partly.	0 points: Students could not repeat the sentence.
Post-listening answer	2 points: Students could understand the question well and answer comprehensibly in a basic Chinese sentence.	1 point: Students could understand the question and answer comprehensibly with some key vocabulary.	0 point: Students could neither understand the question nor answer it comprehensibly.
Look at the picture and speak	3 points: Students could talk about the picture comprehensibly using Chinese vocabulary related to the content of the picture to produce at least three sentences with a few errors of grammar and pronunciation.	2 points: Students could talk about the picture comprehensibly using Chinese vocabulary related to the content of the picture to produce less than three sentences with a few errors of grammar and pronunciation. 1 point: Students could talk about the picture comprehensibly by only using some key vocabulary related to the content of the pictures.	0 point: Students could not use Chinese vocabulary to talk about the picture comprehensibly.

4. Weekly assessments adopted from the stage of speech emergence (Hill & Flynn, 2006) was used each lesson in the language practice of the final stage of task to triangulate the pre-and-post test results. The assessments were conducted through the video records based on the rubric in Table 4.

Table 4 Weekly assessments for each lesson

Weekly Assessment Rubric during the Language Practice (Lesson ____)												
0 point means 'rarely happening' ; 1 points mean 'sometimes happening' ; 2 points mean 'always happening'												
Student No. (____)	Understand the Chinese vocabulary which is used in the practice.			Do the practice in Chinese with simple sentences.			Achieve the learning goal.			Speak Chinese with a few errors in grammar and pronunciation.		
Scores	0	1	2	0	1	2	0	1	2	0	1	2

5. Observations were conducted through the video records to see the K3 students' learning behaviors that characterized their confidence in every stage shown in Table 5.

Table 5 Observations for students' learning behaviors in each lesson

Lesson ()	Pre-task				Task-cycle						Language Focus			
Student No. ()	Respond to the researcher actively as they understand the topic.		Observe how the researcher does the task with enthusiasm.		Discuss with peers in the group actively as they could understand how to do the task.		Ask for teachers' or peers help without hesitation. /Willing to help other peers.		Report the tasks actively by raising their hand.		Correct their language mistakes guided by the researcher with willingness (responding actively)		Practice the language cheerfully by raising their hand as they have confidence to complete the practice.	
	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No

The mean score of items-objective congruence (IOC) index rating of all instruments was 1.00, an acceptable level of validity approved by three experts.

Data collection was carried out after the approval of the University Ethics Review Board, two consent letters were sent to the students and their parents who then permitted the experiment, and the letter of placement was successfully accepted by the target school. After that, the students first took the pre-test, received the treatment of 16-week lesson plan and then took the post-test which was the same as the pre-test. These whole processes were video recorded.

For data analysis, data collected from the pre-test and post-test were statistically analyzed by paired t-test. The difference between the K3 students' pre-test and post-test scores was significant if the "P" is less than 0.05. The data from the weekly assessments were analyzed by rating scales and interpreted based on the criteria in Table 6.

Table 6 Interpreting criteria of learning results

Rating Scales	6-8	3-5	0-2
Degree of the learning results	Excellent	Good	Moderate

Data from the observations were analyzed by a frequency distribution used to count occurrence of their learning behaviors characterizing their confidence in each stage during the 16-week lesson plan and interpreted based on the criteria adapted in Table 7.

Table 7 Interpreting criteria of learning behaviors characterizing confidence

Frequency	7	4-6	1-3	0
Descriptive Rating	Always	Often	Seldom	Rarely
Meaning	High confidence/ Positive effect	Moderate confidence/ Positive effect	Slight confidence/ Negative effect	Diffidence/ Negative effect

Results

1. Table 8 showed the results of the 14 K3 students' Chinese speaking skills. All of them scored higher in the post-test.

Table 8 Scores of the Chinese speaking pre-test and post-test

Student No.	Pre-test Score	Post-test Score	Variation
1	15	20	+5
2	10.5	18	+7.5
3	20	26	+6
4	12	17	+5
5	15	25	+10
6	11.5	16	+4.5
7	17	26	+9
8	11	18	+7
9	15	22	+7
10	11	17	+6
11	9	11	+2
12	15.5	22	+6.5
13	16	21	+5
14	8	13	+5

Table 9 showed the paired t value of all the 14 students' pre-test and post-test scores was -11.471 and the significant value was .000 ($P < 0.05$). Thus there was a significant difference between them.

Table 9 Paired samples test

Paired Samples Test									
		Paired Differences					T	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
		Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference				
					Lower	Upper			
Pair 1	Pre-test Score - Post-test Score	-6.1071	1.9921	.5324	-7.2573	-4.9569	-11.471	13	.000

The results of the weekly assessments were as follows: (1) Students 1, 3, and 7 consistently achieved excellent learning results in each lesson. (2) Students 5 and 9 achieved excellent learning results in each lesson except one lesson that showed moderate results. (3) Students 2, 4, 6, 8, 10, 12, 13 and 14 achieved excellent learning results in some lessons. (4) Student 11 achieved good learning results in some lessons. (5) All 14 students resulted in excellent and good levels in the last lesson that used a game task for the language practice. All these results supported the score differences between the pre-test and post-test.

2. Data collected from the observations showed the following results: (1) Students 1, 3, 5, 7, 8, 9, 12 and 13 developed themselves from being moderately confident learners to being highly confident learners during Lessons 1 and 16. (2) Students 2, 6 and 10 developed themselves from being slightly confident learners to being highly confident learners during Lessons 1 and 16. (3) Students 4, 11 and 14 developed themselves from being slightly confident learners to being moderately confident learners during Lessons 1 and 16.

Discussion

H 1: TBLT could affect K3 students' Chinese speaking skills positively.

The results confirmed the first hypothesis, for all the 14 students scored their post-test higher than their pre-test with the significant value of .000 ($P < 0.05$), which indicated positive effects of Willis' (1996) TBLT as the treatment on their Chinese speaking skills. In line with the weekly assessments, 13 of them could reach the stage of speech emergence in Chinese as they were able to understand the Chinese vocabulary used during the language practice, do the practice in Chinese with simple sentences, achieve the learning goal, correct their language mistakes guided by the researcher with willingness and practice the language cheerfully by raising their hand with confidence in completing the practice. One student, who had a poor foundation of Chinese vocabulary, tended to be nervous to do the individual practice and only made progress in using previously learned Chinese at the end of the treatment, could not yet reach this stage, consistent with the pre-test and post-test result of two. Three students had excellent learning results throughout the treatment due to their solid foundation of Chinese vocabulary and active responses and discussions to do the tasks and practice.

Eleven students' learning slowed down at the beginning of the task of some topics to use Chinese vocabulary verbally and meaningfully, but they could cope with it faster toward the end of the language practice. It can be said that the use of TBLT for young language beginners like kindergarten students could help them gradually improve their Chinese speaking skills once they were given more chances to practice their Chinese speaking through lesson plans and tasks considerably prepared and designed (Zhang, 2019; Chen, 2019; Zou & Ning, 2020; Ma, 2021) with the main goal enabling them to use their learned Chinese vocabulary successfully. In addition, all students were able to speak Chinese well in Lesson 16 which included a game task as the language practice, similar to Ding (2018) demonstrating that game tasks could make the best results for American primary school students to learn Chinese speaking skills.

Both findings from the tests and the weekly assessments provided evidence in parallel with Van den Branden, Van Gorp and Verhelst (2009) that 5 and 6 years old children were keen to explore the world and had a great passion to complete the tasks, and that TBLT was suitable for kindergarten students to learn the target language in the classroom or as a foreign language.

H2: TBLT could affect K3 students' confidence in speaking Chinese positively.

The results confirmed the second hypothesis since all the 14 students developed their confidence throughout those 16 lessons gradually and positively. From Lessons 1 to 16, eight students improved their confidence from a moderate level to a high level, for young learners needed time to be familiar with TBLT and gain confidence to do the task in each stage. Once they became accustomed to the teaching, they engaged themselves in activities with confidence throughout the lessons (Willis, 1996). It can be said that TBLT could encourage young learners to speak Chinese and enjoy doing various types of tasks in different topics and similar to Jo

(2019) that their confidence in speaking Chinese was built when they devoted their enthusiasm to the topics they liked.

In addition, three students appeared slightly confident in some lessons partly because they were quiet in the class at the beginning of the treatment and had poor Chinese vocabulary knowledge on some topics. It may also be that the task was not suitable for their Chinese level and learning characters which could make them lose interest and confidence to do the task (Zhang, 2019; Chen, 2019). However, their slight level of confidence increased to a moderate level for the rest of the lessons because they were allowed to use their mother tongue to discuss with their group members during the process of doing the tasks with the target language help from their classmates and the researcher. Thus they gained confidence to join the tasks enthusiastically (Willis, 1996).

At the end of the treatment, eleven students appeared to have high confidence while three of them had moderate levels due to their active responses to the researcher and discussions with their classmates in group work, enthusiasm to observe how to do different tasks and willingness to ask the researcher for help and assist others during the lessons they liked and the tasks that suited them. It could be said that TBLT as a teaching method could improve this group of Thai K3 students' confidence in Chinese speaking skills in line with Subekti (2020) who pointed out that the model could boost young learners' confidence.

Conclusion

While teaching Chinese to Thai kindergarten students in Thailand remains a new trend and research applying TBLT in the Thai Chinese classroom is rare, the present study implemented Willis' (1996) TBLT model for young language beginners as the treatment for the entire term of 16 weeks provides teachers of Chinese at the target school with positive findings. The model comprised three sequential stages of pre-task, task cycle and language focus with activities considerably designed to meet the needs of the target group of 14 Thai K3 students to use the 80 Chinese vocabulary of YCT-1 they have learned from the same book for two years in their K1 and K2 as an L3 in the Chinese class for one hour per week to express themselves verbally and meaningfully (Chinese speaking skills) or reach the stage of speech emergence)having both basic Chinese listening comprehension and oral Chinese skills with a few errors in grammar and pronunciation (with confidence in speaking it. The 16-week treatment that was central to goal-directed tasks or activities could affect their Chinese speaking skills and confidence positively because they were given more time or chances to be active and enthusiastic learners with willingness to ask for help and assist other classmates and practice the language cheerfully, which were learning behaviors characterizing their confidence. Game tasks appeared the most suitable for this target group. The use of Thai or their mother tongue could also facilitate some students' learning processes that the model could gradually boost young learners' confidence right from the start of the task to the end of the language focus.

Recommendations

It is firstly recommended that teachers of Chinese at the target school extend the experiment to K2 students as they have already learned the 80 Chinese vocabulary circularly from the same book for a year in their K1 to see if they can recognize all the Chinese vocabulary and use it to express themselves comprehensibly. Secondly, for future studies, this experimental research was a case study for the target school, so Willis' (1996) TBLT model for young language beginners can be further developed and implemented for K3 students in the second term. Other

researchers who teach Chinese in a similar context can implement this model to enhance their kindergarten students' Chinese speaking skills and confidence in speaking Chinese.

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