

The Development of a Task-Based Chinese Speaking Instructional Model for Chinese as a Foreign Language Learners in Thailand

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Abstract

This research aimed to (1) develop a task-based Chinese speaking (TBCS) instructional model to enhance the Chinese speaking skills of beginner-level Thai learners studying Chinese as a foreign language (CFL), (2) implement the developed TBCS instructional model with beginner-level Thai CFL learners for refinement, and (3) evaluate the suitability of the developed model by seeking experts' opinions. The participants of this research included 5 experts specialized in instructional model design and teaching Chinese as a foreign language, as well as 22 beginner-level Thai CFL learners enrolled in a Chinese program at a public high school in Thailand. Research instruments included the TBCS instructional model with 12 lesson plans and the expert evaluation form. The collected data were analyzed by using mean, standard deviation, and percentage. The research findings revealed that (1) the developed TBCS instructional model consisted of 7 key elements: goals and assumptions, teaching procedures, learning environment, principles and reactions, support system, application, and instructional and nurturant effects, with the teaching procedures comprising of 4 major steps: activate prior experience, build language skills, carry out tasks, and deepen understanding, (2) the students had successful speaking performance after studying through the developed model, and (3) the suitability of the developed TBCS instructional model was evaluated by experts at the highest level.

Keywords: task-based Chinese speaking (TBCS), instructional model, Chinese as a foreign language (CFL)

1. Introduction

The Basic Education Core Curriculum of Thailand included foreign language learning as one of the 8 learning areas required to achieve learners' balanced development, based on the principles of development of learners' brains and multiple intelligences. To be more specific, the bodies of knowledge, significant skills, and characteristics of foreign language learning are described in the Core Curriculum as "knowledge, skills, attitude, and culture in foreign language application for communication, seeking further knowledge and livelihood" (Ministry of Education of Thailand, 2008, p. 252). In terms of foreign language speaking skills, high school students in Thailand are supposed to use speaking to communicate about themselves, show their needs and feelings, offer and provide assistance, ask for and give data, describe, explain, compare, and express opinions continuously and appropriately in real situations or simulated situations in the classroom, school, community, and society (Ministry of Education of Thailand, 2008). It is obvious that speaking plays an essential role in conveying meanings and expressing opinions in communication.

Learning Chinese has been gaining momentum in Thailand with the extensive cooperation and exchange between Thailand and China. There is a high demand for people with knowledge of the Chinese language in various fields, such as business, tourism, and education. According to Srisupha (2013), Mandarin Chinese is taught extensively in both Bangkok and upcountry, from kindergarten to university level in both private and public schools. The learning of the Chinese language has become as significant as learning English in Thailand (Masuntisuk, 2009). However, Thai CFL learners often face challenges in developing their Chinese speaking skills. Research papers have highlighted the lack of opportunities for speaking practice in class, the use of ineffective teaching methods, and the dominance of written tests, all of which hinder the development of Chinese speaking abilities in Thai CFL learners (Malasri & Wei, 2017; Saepun et al., 2017; Cao, 2016). These issues call

for improving the teaching methods and creating an effective learning environment that promotes Chinese speaking proficiency among Thai CFL learners.

Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) uses tasks as a means of promoting authentic and meaningful communication among students, with the goal of enhancing their language proficiency. This approach has been widely recognized as an effective method for creating real-life scenarios in the classroom, which encourages the use of genuine language and fosters the development of students' language skills (Ellis, 2003; Nunan, 2004; Willis, 1996; Samuda & Bygate, 2010; Skehan, 1998; Long, 2015). The focus is on the meaning of linguistic expressions and the exchange of information, which allows for sufficient input and output of language within limited class time. As students work to complete a task in class, they have abundant opportunities to negotiate for meanings. Such interaction is thought to facilitate acquisition as learners have to work to understand each other and to express their own meaning (Larsen-Freeman, 2000). TBLT is therefore considered to be an effective approach for enhancing the speaking skills of CFL learners.

Instructional Design (ID) is a discipline aimed at improving the development, delivery, and evaluation of instruction and instructional practices (Brown & Green, 2016). Gustafson (1996) identifies 4 key functions of Instructional Design: analyzing what is to be taught/learned, determining how it is to be taught/learned, conducting tryouts and revisions, and assessing learning outcomes. Various instructional design models exist to provide step-by-step guidance and a general framework for solving learning problems and facilitating knowledge acquisition. These models can be adapted to suit specific contexts and the learning needs of students. In our case, the objective is to improve Chinese speaking skills for Thai CFL learners using a task-based teaching approach. To achieve this goal, instructional designers must translate learning theories and problems into concrete educational goals, teaching contents, materials, and strategies. Following the guidelines of an instructional design model, designers systematically create detailed steps and procedures.

Above all, Task-Based Language Teaching focuses on creating an authentic communicative context for language learning, increases the input and output of language for students, fully considers and needs and wants of students, and promotes learning interests for students by shifting their attention to communicative outcomes of tasks. It is considered effective in enhancing the Chinese speaking of students. On the other hand, instructional design provides systematic guidance on creating teaching materials and learning experiences to ensure that the objective of enhancing Chinese speaking abilities can be achieved. With the combination of the above two approaches, the present study aims to address how a task-based approach to teaching can be guided by the principles and procedures of instructional design to create an engaging learning experience for Thai CFL learners to effectively boost their Chinese speaking abilities.

2. Research Objectives and Hypothesis

The following research objectives have been identified:

- 1) To develop a task-based Chinese speaking (TBCS) instructional model to enhance the Chinese speaking skills of beginner-level Thai learners studying Chinese as a foreign language (CFL).
- 2) To implement the developed TBCS instructional model with beginner-level Thai CFL learners for refinement.
- 3) To evaluate the suitability of the developed model by seeking experts' opinions.

The following research hypothesis has been proposed:

H1: The suitability of the developed task-based Chinese speaking (TBCS) instructional model to enhance the Chinese speaking skills of beginner-level Thai learners studying Chinese as a foreign language (CFL) is evaluated to be at a higher level.

3. Methodology

3.1 Population and Sampling

In this study, the research population involved a total number of 278 upper-secondary Chinese-major CFL learners in the public schools of Mueang Ubon Ratchathani District of Thailand, whose Chinese language proficiencies were at the beginner level. The sampling group was an intact class of 22 Mathayomsuksa 5 students enrolled in the Chinese Program during the first semester of the academic year 2003 at Benchama Maharat School, selected by purposive sampling.

The participants who are responsible for evaluating the developed TBCS instructional model were 5 experts, 1 from a Chinese university and 4 from Thai universities, in the field of instructional design and teaching Chinese as a foreign language.

3.2 Research Instruments

Research instruments of the present study included the TBCS instructional model with 12 lesson plans and the expert evaluation form.

The TBCS instructional model was developed by studying and synthesizing relevant theories of TBLT (Ellis, 2003; Nunan, 2004; Willis, 1996; Skehan, 1998; Long, 2015), instructional design (Brown & Green, 2016; Gustafson, 1996) and models of teaching (Joyce & Weil, 1996). The 12 TBCS lesson plans were designed after considering the 6 elements of task-based lessons proposed by Long and Norris (2000): a needs analysis, identification of target task types, developing tasks, sequencing tasks, implementing tasks, and assessment. The main tasks and sub-tasks of the present study, covering 3 main theme topics of buying and paying for goods, ordering food, and asking for and giving directions, were identified, designed, and sequenced to follow a progression from less to more complex and difficult tasks, allowing students to gradually build their Chinese speaking skills. The criteria of assessments of the main tasks were scoring rubrics designed by the researcher based on task fulfillment and communication effectiveness.

The expert evaluation form was carefully created by the researcher to ensure a comprehensive assessment of the TBCS instructional model. It was intended to gauge expert opinions with 25 statements across 7 distinct categories: the background, theories and concepts, principles, objectives, contents, teaching procedures, and assessments, each one with a five-point rating scale (5 = strongly agree; 4 = agree; 3 = neutral; 2 = disagree; 1 = strongly disagree).

3.3 Data Collection and Analysis

To collect research data, first, a tryout was conducted to evaluate the feasibility of the key teaching steps and to discover the possible weaknesses in the design, based on the effect of teaching and responses from the students. The participants were taught the TBCS lesson plans on 3 different topics, engaged in in-class activities, and performed corresponding tasks as required. The researcher recorded, graded, and analyzed their performances using designed rubrics with the expectation that the average percentage of mean scores could reach the threshold of 60% or higher in task-based language assessments (Nielson, 2014). After tryout, the instructional model was refined to enhance its instructional design and increase its potential influence on learning outcomes.

Second, after the refinement of the TBCS instructional model, it was sent to 5 experts in the fields of instructional systems design and teaching Chinese as a foreign language, together with the expert evaluation form. Quantitative data from the experts, namely mean scores in the rating scale were interpreted based on the following criteria (Boonchom Srisa-ard, 2010), as presented in the following table:

Table 1. Scoring range interpretation of the Likert scale of the expert evaluation form

| | Value | Mean Range |
|----------------|-------|------------|
| Highest level | 5 | 4.51–5.00 |
| Higher level | 4 | 3.51–4.50 |
| Moderate level | 3 | 2.51–3.50 |
| Lower level | 2 | 1.51–2.50 |
| Lowest level | 1 | 1.00–1.50 |

4. Results and Discussion

4.1 Results of the Development of the TBCS Instructional Model

After synthesizing theories of TBLT (Ellis, 2003; Willis, 1996), instructional design (Gustafson, 1996), and models of teaching (Joyce & Weil, 1996), the task-based Chinese speaking instructional model was found to consist of 7 elements and 4 teaching procedures, as illustrated in Figure 1.

(1) Goals and assumption

The goals and assumption of the TBCS model to enhance Chinese speaking skills for upper secondary school CFL Thai learners consist of the principles and objectives. The principles include appropriate challenge, authentic task, learner engagement and collaboration, scaffolding and recycling, and evaluation and reflection. These principles ensure that the learners are motivated, challenged, and supported throughout the learning process. The objectives of the TBCS model are to expand vocabulary related to target situations, strengthen understanding and use of grammar structures related to target situations, develop speaking proficiency in Chinese with a focus on complexity, accuracy, and fluency, communicate effectively by exchanging data and

information, expressing opinions with proper reasoning, and build confidence and motivation to actively engage in Chinese speaking. By following these principles and objectives, the TBCS model aims to provide a comprehensive learning experience for upper secondary school CFL Thai learners to improve their Chinese speaking skills.

(2) Teaching procedures

The TBCS instructional model incorporates 4 distinct teaching steps:

- 1) Activate prior experience: connect new topics with students' existing knowledge and experiences.
- 2) Build language skills: introduce relevant vocabulary and sentence patterns, helping students identify rules and patterns.
- 3) Carry out tasks: engage students in meaningful tasks related to the topics, applying their language skills.
- 4) Deepen understanding: encourage reflection, assessment, and sharing of performance to enhance comprehension and identify areas for improvement.

Each of these procedures is grounded in relevant educational theories and models. Step 1 corresponds to the principle of "activation" from the First Principles of Instruction (Merrill, 2012), asserting that learning is promoted and facilitated when learners' relevant previous experiences are activated. Step 2 aligns with the elements of "exploration" and "modeling" from the theory of cognitive apprenticeship (Collins et al., 1988), emphasizing students' active exploration and teacher's explicit demonstrations with the use of multiple representations and relevant media to enhance the learning process. Step 3 is consistent with the theory of "application" (Merrill, 2012), stressing the importance of applying newly acquired knowledge and skills to solve problems. Step 4 draws from the "part-task practice" component of the Four-component Instructional Design Model (Van Merriënboer, 1997), which involves providing learners with practice items that focus on specific recurrent aspects of the language to promote rule automation and strengthen learners' ability to automatically apply language rules and patterns. By aligning with established theoretical frameworks, the TBCS model aims to provide a solid foundation for effective language instruction.

(3) Learning environment

The TBCS model creates an engaging and learner-centered environment for CFL Thai learners. It incorporates Task-Based Language Teaching principles, providing appropriately challenging tasks that reflect real-life situations. The model encourages active engagement, collaboration, and peer interaction. Supportive techniques and recycling of language aid learning. Evaluation and reflection opportunities enable students to assess progress and set goals. This model fosters an effective and meaningful Chinese speaking learning experience for CFL Thai learners.

(4) Principles of reaction

In the context of the TBCS model to enhance Chinese speaking skills for upper secondary school CFL Thai learners, the teacher roles are mainly task designer, learning resource provider, activity facilitator, guide of learning, and recorder and evaluator. The learner roles are mainly constructor of knowledge, active learner, challenge taker, collaborator, and reflector.

(5) Support system

The support system in the TBCS model includes diverse learning situations, reflective practices, timely feedback, multimedia resources, and collaborative learning. It aims to facilitate language development, self-assessment, performance improvement, motivation, and a supportive learning environment.

(6) Application

In the application of the TBCS model, the teacher must provide clear instructions, create a supportive learning environment, offer diverse practice opportunities, incorporate formative assessment, and promote learner reflection. These strategies enhance effective Chinese speaking skills development.

(7) Instructional and Nurturant Effects

The TBCS model combines instructional and nurturant elements to provide a comprehensive language learning experience, offering both direct and indirect effects on learning. The direct effects of the developed model are the development of speaking proficiency in Chinese, with a focus on complexity, accuracy, and fluency, effective communication, including the exchange of data and information, expressing opinions with proper reasoning, expansion of vocabulary related to target situations, and strengthening understanding and use of grammar structures related to target situations. The intended indirect effects are building confidence and

motivation to actively engage in speaking Chinese, and engaging students in collaborative activities by fostering an interactive learning environment where they can exchange ideas, share perspectives, and develop their Chinese speaking abilities while building teamwork and interpersonal skills.

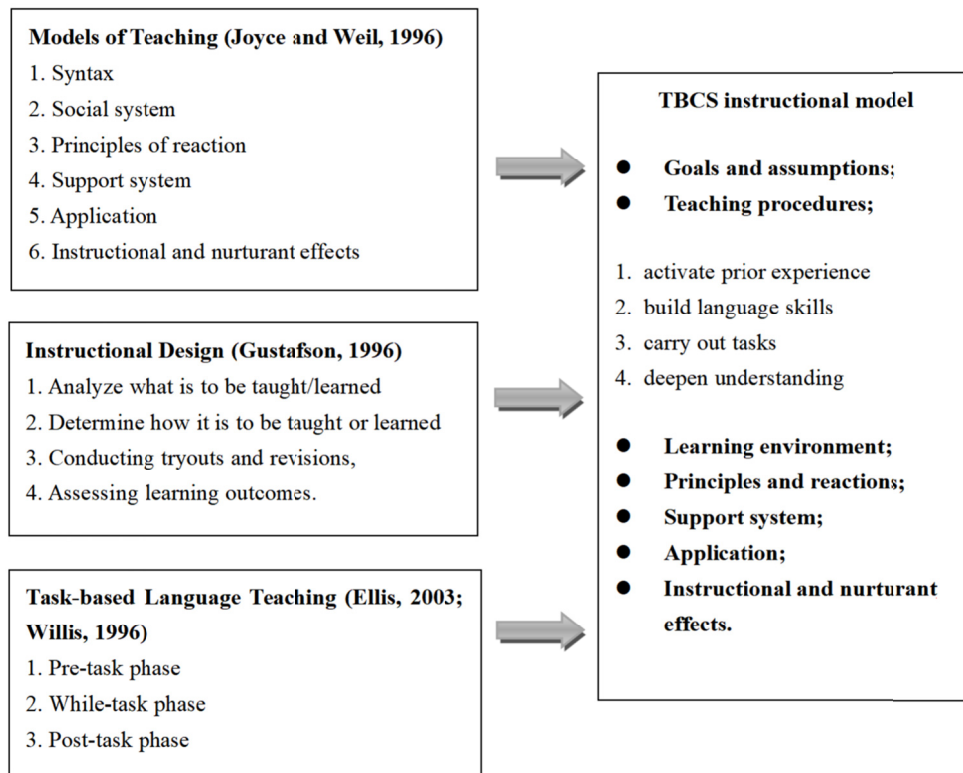


Figure 1. Task-based Chinese speaking instructional model to enhance Chinese speaking skills

4.2 Results of Model Implementation

Results of the test scores in task-based assessments during model implementation are presented in Table 2.

Table 2. Results of the test scores in task-based assessments during model implementation (N=22)

| Task-based assessments | Test score | | |
|---|------------|---------|------------|
| | Full score | Average | Percentage |
| Topic 1: Buying and paying for goods | 5 | 2.32 | 46.36 |
| Topic 2: Ordering food | 5 | 2.75 | 55.00 |
| Topic 3: Asking for and giving directions | 5 | 3.09 | 61.82 |

As suggested by Table 2, the assessment of topic 1 yielded an average score of 2.32 (46.36%) for all 22 students, which fell below the expected threshold of 60%. It is important to note that these unsatisfying results were not entirely unexpected. The purpose of the tryout was primarily to identify the appropriateness of teaching implementation rather than achieving optimal learning outcomes. Through careful analysis of students' performances and observations of their learning behavior, several shortcomings in the TBCS model have been identified:

- 1) Inadequate pre-listening preparation prevented students from understanding the sample dialogues;
- 2) The New Words List lacked Thai explanations for the words;
- 3) Students struggled with the rate of speech in the sample dialogues;
- 4) When students were expected to self-correct their oral production, their limited linguistic competence prevented them from effectively making corrections.

The assessment of Topic 2 yielded an average score of 2.75 (55.00%), which still fell below the expected level of achievement of 60% or higher. Through thorough analysis of students' performance and observations of their learning behavior, more shortcomings in the TBCS model have been identified:

- 5) Some students encountered unfamiliar words that were not included in the provided New Words List;
- 6) Some students still struggled to understand the sample dialogues even with the reduced speed of speech;
- 7) Some students faced difficulties in initiating and maintaining speaking in the sub-tasks even with requirements written in Thai;
- 8) Some students lacked the skills necessary to actively participate in the main task conversation.

The assessment of Topic 3 yielded an average score of 3.09 (61.82), successfully meeting the expected achievement level of 60% or higher scores. While the results were generally satisfactory, some problems emerged during the learning process, requiring more attention for further improvement of the TBCS model:

- 9) The allocated time to complete the main task was insufficient for some students;
- 10) Students were distracted by noise caused by all students playing their recorded speech simultaneously during self-transcribing;

The satisfactory results in the last assessment indicated students' improved performances in terms of task fulfillment and communication effectiveness, which was consistent with the research findings of Willis (1996), who highlights the advantages of Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) in promoting students' confidence, meaningful interaction, purposeful language use, and development of communication strategies. This further emphasizes the significance of addressing language standards and providing learners with opportunities to enhance their speaking abilities communicatively and purposefully. The results of the tryout also informed the adjustments to the course design. Based on the identified areas for improvement, revisions were made to the instructional model, such as revising instructional materials, refining learning activities, modifying test specifications, and improving the overall instructional approach. These adjustments could enhance the effectiveness and address the identified weaknesses of the TBCS instructional model. The detailed revisions after the model implementation are listed below:

- 1) Present students with visual aids and provide an overview of the sample dialogue scenario before listening;
- 2) Include Thai explanations for the new words;
- 3) Adjust the playback speed of the sample dialogue to 0.5x using the audio-editing software of Audacity;
- 4) Facilitate active monitoring during the self-correction process to offer timely assistance by the teacher;
- 5) Encourage collaborative problem-solving among students by consulting dictionaries or other resources to address unfamiliar words;
- 6) Provide students with additional support by sharing the audio files of the sample dialogues via social media, allowing them to listen to the material repeatedly outside of class;
- 7) Offer clear demonstrations and instructions of the sub-tasks from the teacher;
- 8) Offer clear demonstrations and guidelines of the main task from the teacher;
- 9) Offer students the opportunity to complete the main task outside of class time if they were unable to finish it in time;
- 10) Allow students to bring their earphones or headsets when transcribing;

4.3 Results of Expert Evaluation Form

Detailed results of experts' feedback in the expert evaluation form are presented in the table below.

Table 3. Results of expert evaluation form

| | Items | Mean | SD | Interpretation |
|---------|---|-------------|-----------|-----------------------|
| | Background | | | |
| 1 | The model clearly identifies the instructional context. | 4.40 | 0.55 | Higher level |
| 2 | The rationale for developing the model is reasonably justified. | 4.60 | 0.55 | Highest level |
| 3 | The background is properly explained with clear language. | 4.40 | 0.55 | Higher level |
| Sum | | 4.47 | 0.52 | Higher level |
| | Theories and concepts | | | |
| 4 | The theories and concepts used as the foundation of the model are valid. | 4.40 | 0.55 | Higher level |
| 5 | The implementation of concepts is appropriate. | 4.60 | 0.55 | Highest level |
| 6 | The theories and concepts are properly explained with clear language. | 4.40 | 0.55 | Higher level |
| Sum | | 4.47 | 0.52 | Higher level |
| | Principles | | | |
| 7 | The principles are clear and effectively stated. | 4.40 | 0.55 | Higher level |
| 8 | The principles are consistent with the underlying concepts and theories. | 4.60 | 0.55 | Highest level |
| 9 | The principles are properly explained with clear language. | 4.60 | 0.55 | Highest level |
| Sum | | 4.53 | 0.52 | Highest level |
| | Objectives | | | |
| 10 | The objectives are clear and well-defined. | 4.40 | 0.55 | Higher level |
| 11 | The objectives are consistent with the principles. | 4.60 | 0.55 | Highest level |
| 12 | The objectives are properly explained with clear language. | 4.60 | 0.55 | Highest level |
| Sum | | 4.53 | 0.52 | Highest level |
| | Content | | | |
| 13 | The instructional content effectively addresses the learning needs of the students. | 4.60 | 0.55 | Highest level |
| 14 | The content of instruction is aligned with the objectives. | 4.40 | 0.55 | Higher level |
| 15 | The instructional materials reflect language use in authentic situations. | 4.40 | 0.55 | Higher level |
| Sum | | 4.47 | 0.52 | Higher level |
| | Teaching procedures | | | |
| 16 | The instructional design effectively activates students' prior experience, connecting their existing knowledge to the topic of interest. | 4.60 | 0.55 | Highest level |
| 17 | The teaching procedures successfully guide students in building their language skills by introducing relevant vocabulary and sentence patterns. | 4.40 | 0.55 | Higher level |
| 18 | The tasks and activities implemented in the instructional design encourage students to actively participate and apply their language skills in meaningful ways. | 4.40 | 0.55 | Higher level |
| 19 | The instructional design effectively deepens students' understanding through language recycling, reflection, and assessment. | 4.60 | 0.55 | Highest level |
| Sum | | 4.50 | 0.51 | Higher level |
| | Assessments | | | |
| 20 | The assessments promote active engagement and participation among learners during the lessons. | 4.40 | 0.55 | Higher level |
| 21 | The formative assessment provides valuable insights into learners' communication effectiveness. | 4.60 | 0.55 | Highest level |
| 22 | The summative assessment effectively measures the overall speaking proficiency of learners. | 4.60 | 0.55 | Highest level |
| 23 | The assessment criteria are clear and reasonable. | 4.60 | 0.55 | Highest level |
| 24 | The assessments provide constructive feedback that helps learners identify areas for improvement. | 4.60 | 0.55 | Highest level |
| 25 | The summative and formative assessments together provide a comprehensive evaluation of learners' speaking abilities. | 4.80 | 0.45 | Highest level |
| Sum | | 4.60 | 0.50 | Highest level |
| Overall | | 4.52 | 0.50 | Highest level |

Table 3 suggests an overall mean score of 4.52 (SD = 0.50) among all items, indicating the highest level of recognition by the experts for the suitability of the developed instructional model to enhance the Chinese speaking skills of beginner-level Thai CFL learners. For the analysis of the 7 categories of the model, mean scores were also generally high, ranging from 4.47 to 4.60 with the highest mean score being assessment (mean = 4.60, SD = 0.50), principles (mean = 4.53, SD = 0.52), and objectives (mean = 4.53, SD = 0.52). Overall, the experts agreed that the model's background, theories and concepts, principles, objectives, teaching content, teaching procedures, and assessments were appropriate and effective in enhancing Chinese speaking skills among Thai CFL learners. Such recognition of the TBCS instructional model can be attributed to a systematic approach to its instructional development, guided by prominent educational theories and models. Instructional design, as Branch (2017) defines, provides a systematic framework for creating educational materials consistently and reliably. Within this framework, instructional models play a crucial role, serving as conceptual tools that guide the development of high-quality teaching and learning materials (Branch & Kopcha, 2014). These models offer simplified representations of complex processes, allowing for the identification of general principles applicable across various contexts.

5. Conclusion

In conclusion, the current study could contribute to the field of instructional development by providing empirical evidence of how a task-based approach to language teaching can be combined with principles of instructional design to solve the problem of speaking weakness of Thai CFL learners.

The task-based Chinese speaking (TBCS) instructional model for enhancing the Chinese speaking skills of Thai CFL learners consists of 7 elements: (1) goals and assumptions, including the principles and objectives of the model, (2) teaching procedures, consisting of 4 steps, activating prior experience, building language skills, carrying out tasks, and deepening understanding, (3) learning environment, which refers to an engaging and learner-centered environment for CFL learners, (4) principles and reactions, which are the roles assumed by teachers and learners, (5) support system, including diverse learning resources, (6) application, which is the model's utility applied by the teacher, and (7) instructional and nurturant effects, which are the direct and indirect effects on learning.

According to the results of the developed model implementation, students' speaking performances successfully surpassed the threshold of 60%. The results of expert evaluation suggest that the suitability of the model was recognized at the highest level (mean = 4.52, SD = 0.50).

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The data that support the findings of this study are available on request from the corresponding author. The data are not publicly available due to privacy or ethical restrictions.

Data sharing statement

No additional data are available.

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