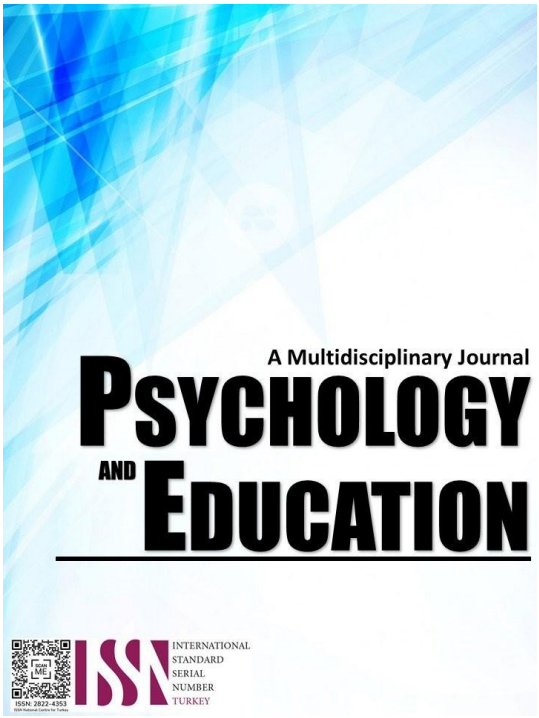
FILIPINO LEARNERS' EXPERIENCE IN LEARNING CHINESE LANGUAGE



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Research Article

Filipino Learners' Experience in Learning Chinese Language

Diana B. Cea,* Annabelle N. Diaz
For affiliations and correspondence, see the last page.

Abstract

Learning a foreign language offers numerous cognitive, professional, and cultural benefits while also presenting certain challenges. Acquiring a new language enhances cognitive abilities, improves memory, and boosts problem-solving skills. It also increases career opportunities, facilitates cross-cultural communication, and enriches personal experiences. However, language learners often face difficulties such as complex grammar rules, pronunciation barriers, and vocabulary retention. The learning process requires consistent practice, patience, and effective strategies, including immersion, technological tools, and a growth mindset. Anchored to the research question, this phenomenological study revealed that themes were generated in response of the learners to the analysis made by the researcher which included the difficulty on the linguistic competence, and the fear to communicate well the language. The findings supported the need to push the Chinese literacy program in the teaching and learning process in Sun Yat Sen Elementary School. As the school engages learners in the Chinese curriculum, the research reflection requires integration of the program that observes a more consistent inclusive practice.

Keywords: *chinese language, filipinos, literacy, experience, learning*

Introduction

Chinese has grown in importance over the past ten years and is now taught and learned globally as an international language (Gong, Gao, & Lyu, 2020). A growing number of international students are choosing to study in China and pursue their education in Chinese, as immersion in a foreign country is widely regarded as one of the most effective ways to acquire a new language

Nearly half of the 492,200 international students enrolled in Chinese tertiary institutions in 2018 were learning Chinese as a second language, representing 196 different nations and regions (Xinhuanet, 2019). While it is commonly assumed that study abroad students will have ample opportunities to interact with the host culture and language, they often struggle to achieve meaningful engagement in local communicative contexts.

With globalization causing the demands for quality learning, some private and public schools today are becoming more diversifying and challenging (Lonsmann & Kraft, 2018) in the hope of producing globally competitive and multiliterate learners.

In its local setting based on observations, Sun Yat Sen have established and mandated itself in the academic studies the speaking of other languages like Chinese and English in spite having learners with Filipinos. Its offering paved the way to exposing its cultural aspects and interests, however, learners and teachers continue to experience difficulties in learning Chinese language.

With the foregoing research, it was interesting to study as learning the other language becomes an attention to some private schools, peoples' views, and other institutions considering that second language is commonly used nowadays. The literature reviewed as mentioned above are reasonable sources to contemplate as those offered implication on the linguistic dimension itself, its language structure and most importantly on the cultural dimension of the language-speaking community. Some of the initial studies reviewed were included in the present, however, supported with a broader body of literature. It was for those reasons that this study was conducted to determine the experiences of the Filipino learners in Sun Yat Sen the learning of Chinese language.

Research Questions

This phenomenological qualitative research aimed to explore the lived experiences of Filipino learners in learning Chinese language in Surigao Sun Yat Sen Elementary School. It also aimed to identify the specific difficulties they encountered and provide insights into the nature and cause of these difficulties as well as the strategies that learners use to cope with them.

Literature Review

Chinese Language as Global Competency Tool

Gong, Lai, & Gao (2020) emphasize its continued rise today of Chinese language boosting the global economy due to its growing appeal among non-native Chinese speakers. Various factors, including economic, cultural, security, and political reasons, have led numerous countries, particularly in the Middle East and beyond, to incorporate Chinese as a foreign language (CFL) into their educational frameworks.

In a broader context, foreign language learning is influenced by the learners' natural language, and the extent of this cross-linguistic influence is highly dependent on the structural interaction between the two languages (Benson, 2022).

This study further believes that language serves not only as a means of communication but also as a bridge between cultures, promoting

mutual understanding and equipping young learners to succeed in a globally connected world. The research approach to second language acquisition highlights that learners at an early age is the ideal time to lay the groundwork for bilingualism and cultural fluency. Drawing influence from the Chinese curriculum, it emphasizes child-centered, inquiry-based learning which fosters critical thinking and global-mindedness. Zhang, Huan & Bian, Zhengjie & Ma, Jiaqi & Xue, Fangyue. (2024) punctuated that the Chinese education industry has seen significant changes in recent years both traditional and online brand of teaching. Its standardization and popularization of modern Chinese represents its evolution and development as a language. It has also reached the promotion of Putonghua as one of the most widely spoken languages, basing from Beijing dialect which helps people from different regions to communicate better, to reduce dialect barriers, and to facilitate national and international communication.

With its dynamism, 'Chinese' as a foreign language, aims to support and enhance the teaching and learning of foreign languages. Eberhard et al. (2021)emphasized that is commonly used to refer to 'Standard Chinese', with language varieties. Chan, Woore, Molway, & Mutton (2022) also supported that Chinese languages are 'simplified' and 'traditional.' The simplified characters are commonly linked with spoken Mandarin, which has become the standard written form in the People's Republic of China (PRC), Malaysia, and Singapore—making it the primary focus for most learners of Chinese as a Foreign Language (CFL) around the globe.

As this language is widely used, Chinese influence on some learners is inevitable. Kaohongshu (2021) emphasized that acquiring Chinese language proficiency allows individuals to communicate not only with nearly one billion native speakers but also with a growing global community of learners. Mastery of Chinese provides access to China's rich historical and cultural heritage and serves as a key to understanding modern Chinese society. It enhances the travel experience in China by enabling deeper interaction with local people. Furthermore, learning Chinese opens doors to Chinese literature, cinema, music, calligraphy, and painting, offering fresh cultural perspectives. From a professional standpoint, Chinese language skills represent a strategic investment in one's career, aligned with the global economic shift toward East Asia. With China projected to surpass the United States as the world's largest economy by 2030, opportunities for foreign professionals to work in China or engage with Chinese businesses worldwide are expanding. Consequently, demand for multilingual professionals fluent in Chinese is rising across sectors such as marketing, communications, and international business.

Chinese as a Second Language Acquisition

Speaking the Chinese language is often considered a significantly more challenging skill compared to writing, listening, and reading. Its role in oral communication is both widespread and inherently complex, making it an essential component in the teaching and learning process, particularly in schools where foreign language education is institutionalized. Speaking proficiency goes beyond that and the ability to communicate clearly and effectively with what has been learned sometimes become challenging to some.

According to Espinosa (2021), as learners are increasingly exposed to integrated learning, the processes of gaining recognition, achieving mastery, developing intellectual skills, and becoming familiar with the content gradually become normalized. Through the incorporation of it in the daily instruction, their cultural awareness increases. Moreover, their pedagogical knowledge continues to thrive as the second language like Chinese is harnessed at the same time (Zhang et al., 2019) giving a new form of reading skills and comprehension for learning (Tunmer & Hoover, 2019).

The local language becomes secondary as the second language is given more emphasis in classes connecting with other national and other identities (Apolonio, 2022). Gempeso and Mendez (2021) affirmed learning it improves multiculturalism and a brand of new identity (Dimaculangan & Gonzales, 2020).

For other Filipino learners, learning the Chinese language opened windows of opportunities to get acquainted and it is essential for learners to develop language skills that are integral, logical, and practical for effective participation in society (Chin, 2021; Chiatoh & Chiatoh, 2021). Building competence in speaking and critical thinking is particularly important (Draper, 2019), as it enhances their overall understanding of the Chinese language. Moreover, integrating these skills equips learners to navigate and comprehend unfamiliar cultural and linguistic contexts (Saneka & de Witt, 2019).

Contrastive Analysis Between Chinese and other Languages

Languages can be viewed as living entities—they emerge, evolve, and, at times, disappear. Historically, numerous languages have vanished either through extinction or by transforming into new, derivative languages. In the modern era, the processes of globalization and, notably, colonialism have accelerated the rate and scale of language loss. The dialects and languages of the Philippines are also vulnerable to this threat, largely due to the negative perceptions and attitudes held by teachers, learners, and parents, as demonstrated in multiple studies.

A substantial body of research explores the causes of speaking difficulties among Filipino learners. According to Rabab'ah (2018), these challenges stem from various factors, including the linguistic strategies employed by teachers, the curriculum design, and the learning environment.

Misbah et al (2017) believed on the insufficient vocabulary of teachers, additional factors include the learner's family socio-economic status, anxiety related to making mistakes, fear of criticism, as well as linguistic and psychological influences.

In the Philippines, Filipino learners enrolled in some Chinese schools raised several problems in its effects to the teachers, parents, and to the implementation itself. Parba (2018) on his study conducted that the use of other language received a negative feedback from the teachers and parents as this must be practiced at school and home. Likewise, Quintero (2018) on his study about providing resources include the lack of printed learning materials in Chinese.

Dealagdon (2021)found out that the learning of the Chinese language and even other languages showed the difficulty in understanding other words, in comprehending instructions, and in translating. It was also found out that natural speakers of Chinese found also difficulty in assisting Filipino learners and even from teachers who are not immersed in the second language and in referencing, strategies include internet research, repetitive instruction, conversational practice, active participation in discussions, translation exercises, recording, use of infographics, positive reinforcement, and involving family members for support.

Tundag, et al. (2020) believed that the translation can also be a serious problem, while giving of exercises and activities were regarded as moderate problem. However, interventions showed positive results based on the studies of Baquiller & Abellon Jr. (2021) like repetitive instruction.

In spite the challenges, efforts have been made by teachers to learn the language (Reid, 2018). Mila, Mariscal, Lofranco, Macanim, & Bonifacio (2021)believed on integrating various types and forms of media, an d encouraging the learners to use the language and appreciation (Flores, 2020).

Curriculum Design in Chinese Learning

Chinese characters have proven to be the most difficult part of the language for other learners. The debate over whether to teach Chinese characters to beginners, and how to do so, has been ongoing since the 1930s. In the study of Zhang (2024), the widespread use of computers and tablets has added complexity to the integration of Chinese characters in the curriculum which paved the identification of the character instruction and content of teaching.

Tang & Wang (2021) added that elementary and middle schools in China implement a specialized curriculum that is comparable to the social studies curriculum found in nations such as the U.S. and Australia. In addition to instruction on fundamental characters, pronunciation, grammar, and structure, moral education is provided to help students navigate issues of morality and values, enhance their social comprehension and ability to achieve social mobility, thereby ensuring their growth into responsible citizens. Known as the new curriculum reform, China's eighth phase of national curriculum reform for basic education (1999–present) represents its most ambitious effort since the establishment of the People's Republic of China (PRC) in 1949. This new reform advocates for moral and values education. By adopting and adapting elements of social studies from Western countries, the curriculum aims to fully reflect modernity, openness, and a cosmopolitan perspective while preserving unique Chinese traits.

Through its curriculum reform, the Chinese National Curriculum promotes a holistic, cross-disciplinary method that nurtures curious thinkers instead of just focusing on exam preparation. Although assessments continue to play a crucial role in Chinese education and advancement, the majority of schools now recognize the necessity of fostering well-rounded individuals.

Synthesis. The use of the other language according to authors as mentioned in this study provides the idea of recognition, foundation of learning , literacy mastery, intellectual skills, familiarization, and cultural awareness. Further, its use reconnects with personal learning or regional or international identities, integral, logical and effective to use as they partake in the society to improve speaking and critical thinking skills in the community.

While learning the other language yields positive benefits, the stumbling blocks on learning Chinese language continue to spike due to factors like cultural hegomonization, attitude of parents, modernization and migration. In the Philippines, several problems among teachers on learning the language include the difficulty to learn, lack of learning materials, difficulty in understanding words, instructions, pictures, translation, managing behavior of learners, and the struggles in assisting child. However, in spite difficulties revealed intervention designed by teachers like the idea on contextualization.

Thus, the literatures reviewed would help the present study in understanding the difficulties of the learners and teachers to its second language implementation as used in classroom instruction due to numerous challenges. The outcomes of this study include providing proposed plans to the current problems of the private school like Sun Yat Sen in Surigao City in the delivery of instruction for Filipino learners enrolled in the institution.

Methodology

Research Design

Since this qualitative research examined the challenges faced by learners in preserving the Chinese language, the Colaizzi method of descriptive phenomenology was employed to analyze the experiences concerning the difficulties in delivering instruction and content at Sun Yat Sen Elementary School, as well as the contextual factors affecting teaching and academic performance.

According to Neubauer, Witkop, & Varpio (2019), grasping phenomenology using the Colaizzi method involves comprehending the significance of human experiences in relation to both what was experienced and how it was perceived. The research design was

appropriate as participating in phenomenological research necessitated to understand the broader context of the experience. The procedures, along with the process of phenomenological research, was conducted for SY 2024-2025.

Following the method, this research further necessitated the informants to share their own experiences, and the reality, in order to gain sufficient understanding of the phenomenon being studied. One person's experience or knowledge of a phenomenon can be entirely different to another's, and this can arise from previous lived experience.

Respondents

The study covered 10 Filipino-Chinese learners from Grades 1-6 enrolled in Sun Yat Sen Elementary School. They were chosen base on their willingness to participate.

Instrument

The primary data collection method employed was a semi-structured interview, which facilitated the collection of in-depth insights into participants' perspectives and experiences related to the issue. The instrument was definitive as this focused on a narrow range of topics, and the probing questions provided more depth and detail, while follow-up questions were used to achieve richness by delving into keywords, ideas, and themes. The questions were crafted or even taken based from the existing literature. All those questions were validated to meet the condition for this study.

The interview protocol consisted of a grand tour question followed by a series of open-ended questions specifically designed to address the research question. A set of core questions was prepared, while allowing for flexibility through follow-up questions. These follow-up questions were used to seek clarification, to explore themes further, and to delve into specific aspects of the responses. The probing questions helped achieve a richer, more detailed understanding of the participants' insights, particularly around keywords, recurring themes, and significant experiences.

The tool was validated by experts of Surigao del Norte State University or outside of the school's preference as this was important to guarantee the quality of the data to be collected, its reliability, and validity as well of the questions developed.

Procedure

There were certain procedures followed in the conduct of this research study. First, a letter was sent to the respondents like learners and parents informing them on the conduct of the study. Informed consent was given to the participants on their involvement. The approved letter from the learners and parents and validated research instrument from the experts were retrieved after its administration.

In carrying out this research, several ethical factors were considered critically important to safeguard the rights of participants and uphold the integrity of the research.

To begin, a formal request was made to officials at the university and graduate school seeking authorization to conduct the study. This request detailed the study's aims, scope, and ethical considerations, ensuring alignment with institutional policies and regulations.

Next, once permission was obtained, consent was secured from the informants. Following their selection, these learners were informed about the study, its goals, and their rights as participants.

In the analysis of the data gathered, the Colaizzi method of phenomenology was used in understanding the lived experience which starts from knowing the phenomenon and proceeding thoroughly and conscientiously to arrive at an interpretive framework. As presented in the study of Lindseth & Norberg (2022), the analysis of the data gathered includes the following processes like (1) each of the transcripts were read, and re-read, in order to obtain a general senses about the whole content; (2) significant statements that relate to the phenomenon under study were extracted from transcripts; (3) formulated meanings were derived from transcripts; (4) formulated meanings were derived from significant statements; (5)organization of formulated meanings into clusters of themes; (6) integrating of findings into an exhaustive description; (7) description of the fundamental structure of the phenomenon; and (8) validation of the findings from the study participants.

Data Analysis

The data gathered from interviews were analyzed using Colaizzi's (1978) method for phenomenology. After the verbatim transcription, the following steps were followed:

Initially, each transcript was reviewed several times to develop a thorough understanding of the entire content. At this stage, the researcher concentrated on the lived realities described by the informants, setting aside any personal thoughts, emotions, or interpretations that might emerge.

Next, significant statements related to the phenomenon being studied were identified and recorded on a separate sheet, along with their corresponding page and line numbers. This part of the analysis involved extracting meaningful phrases that reflect the lived realities of the learners. These statements were documented separately and organized by their transcript references, including page and line numbers for easy identification.

From these significant statements, meaningful insights were derived. Each key insight was grouped into a specific category that captures its essence. The researcher then compared these new interpretations with the original statements to ensure that the descriptions remain consistent and true to the informants' lived realities.

The meanings identified from the data were first organized into categories, which were then grouped into clusters of related themes. After reaching an agreement on these meanings, the process of categorizing them into a coherent structure began. Each theme cluster was carefully labeled to reflect the shared meanings within the group. Subsequently, related clusters addressing specific aspects of the research focus were combined to form clear and distinct thematic constructs. To ensure the validity and accuracy of these themes, the findings were reviewed and confirmed with the assistance of a qualitative research expert.

The study's findings were woven together to create a comprehensive description of the phenomenon being investigated. After consolidating all the themes identified in the research, extracted a complete picture of the phenomenon.

Next, the researcher consulted with an expert who reviewed these findings to ensure they were rich and thorough, providing a detailed account of the results. During this phase, also refined the findings by eliminating any redundant, inaccurate, or exaggerated descriptions from the overall structure.

Finally, to validate the findings, sought feedback from the research informants. This involved sharing the results with them and discussing how they align with their own lived realities. The researcher facilitated the process to ensure that informants had the opportunity to approve the findings before they were formally presented.

Results and Discussion

This parts presents the results and discussion of the study following the questions in the Problem Statement which primarily sought answers on the difficulties of the learners in the Chinese language.

The data analysis followed Colaizzi's (1978) descriptive phenomenological approach. All the transcriptions of the informants were read repeatedly and thoroughly by the researcher to obtain a full understanding of the informants' revelations during the data gathering procedure.

Experiences in Learning the Chinese Language

Effective foreign language learning greatly depends on the learner's ability to comprehend the language.It is viewed as one of the most difficult learning events that the informants revealed. This study involved the experiences of learners which included immersing critically the language used for instruction which sometimes affected their day-to-day experiences.

Following the constructed interview items and the processes of phenomenology using the Colaizzi method, themes were generated in response to the analysis made by the researcher which were presented in Table 1 below.

Following the analysis process outlined by Colaizzi (1978), the initial three stages were implemented: reviewing the transcripts, identifying significant statements, and formulating meanings based on those statements. Significant statements were selections from the transcripts that pertain to the research topic; the reasons why these learners were selected for interview. After deriving meanings from these statements, they were organized into clusters of related ideas, which formed the foundation of the six themes. This process required a considerable investment of time to ensure that each theme title accurately reflected all associated statements, ultimately leading to the identification of five key themes.

Table 1. *Themes Generated*

Emergent Themes	*Formulated Meanings*
Difficulty on the linguistic competence	• Use of the right words in the right order with correct pronunciation • Use of words in speech and in expression
Fear to communicate the language well	• feeling of being afraid and nervousness
Difficulty on pronunciation	• Producing correct tones • Mispronouncing words' tones • Learning pitch variations
Difficulty in learning characters	• Demanding time • Knowing radicals, shapes, and other traditional characters • Knowing art and aesthetics
Difficulty on the vocabulary and grammar	• Involving specialized terms • Integrating technical and scientific vocabular
Attitude towards Chinese learning	• Daunting but with consistent practice and immersion becomes easy

Table 1 above showed the themes generated based on the clustered meanings. As part of this immersive experience from the learners, responses showed the nuances and vitality while learning another cultural perspective. This exposure to bilingualism among learners of Sun Yat Sen Elementary would prepare them to communicate effectively and collaborate across cultures in the future in spite the experiences and difficulties being encountered. Emerging themes developed in this research study included the difficulty on linguistic

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Research Article

competence, fear to communicate the language well, difficulty on pronunciation, difficulty in learning characters, difficulty on vocabulary and grammar, and attitude towards Chinese learning.

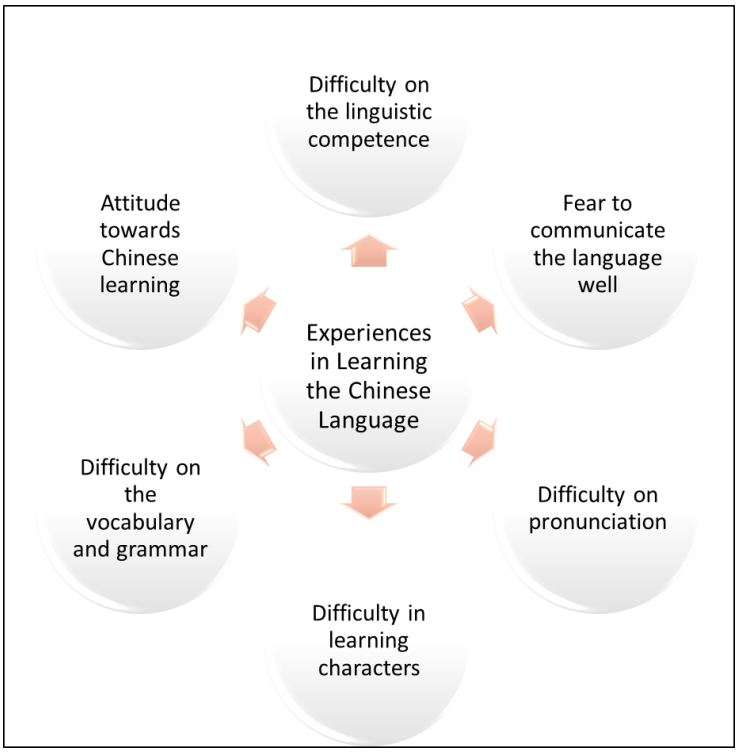

Figure 1. *Emergent Themes based from the Formulated Meanings*

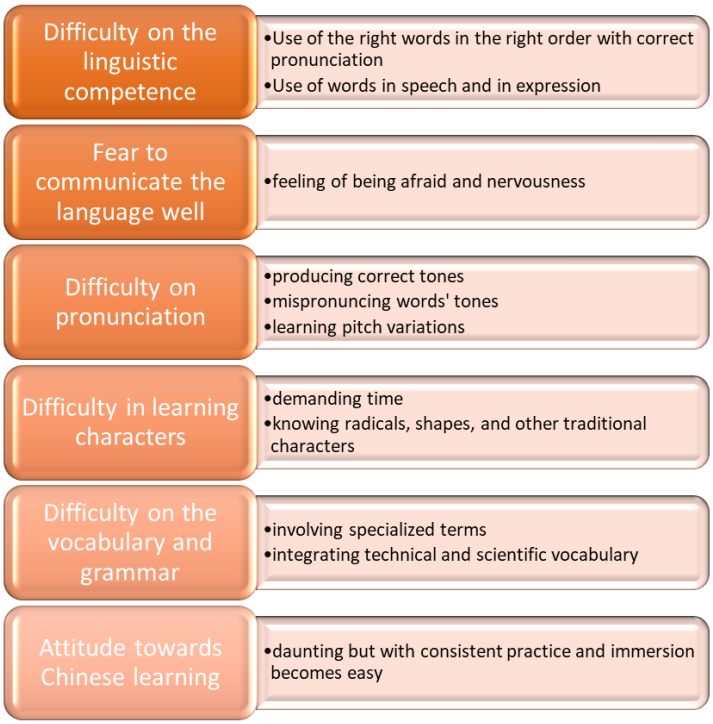

Figure 2. *Formulated Meanings based from Significant Statements*

Difficulty on Linguistic Competence

The theme "difficulty on linguistic competence" was one of the themes generated, based from significant statements, formulated meaning, and clustered meaning. In keeping with the phenomenological approach to this study, it is important to note that whilst the theme was produced from all of the transcripts, the informants had shared similar responses emphasizing linguistic competence which clearly shows the expression and interpretation of concepts, thoughts, feelings, facts, and opinions in order to perform oral and written

discussions. Below showed a sample on how the generated theme was developed from the significant statements of the informants, formulated meanings, clustered theme, and emergent theme.

Table 2. *Sample Process on the Theme 1 Generated*

Significant Statements	*Formulated Meaning*	*Clustered Meaning*	*Emergent Theme*
As a grade 1 pupil, I think that the use of Chinese language in school is very fun and interesting, but difficult	Having fun and interesting		
When I need to clarify things with my Chinese teacher, I simply raise my hand and ask her to explain more about the topic.	Clarifying question		
Learning the Chinese language is difficult activities.	Having difficulty		
There are things that I need to learn because of its difficulty but it helps me improve my academic performance	Having difficulty, but proving improvement	Understanding Linguistic competence	Difficulty on linguistic competence
Difficult but by always making things interesting for me, and helps me stay active	Having difficulty but interesting to learn		

In the studies of Amoah & Yeboah (2021), grammatical and oral competence were both difficult to achieve on its first setting of learning the language. These findings showed consistency as learning the Chinese language was fun yet difficult for some of the learners like the grammar, pronunciation, and vocabulary.

This critical incident proved that learners had the difficulty also in the accuracy of the language elements. In most cases, the use of the right words in the right order with the correct pronunciation was fun yet challenging and the learners of Chinese were faced with the dilemma of when to use a word or phrase correctly in a speech and this makes them hesitant to express themselves. One of the learners said

I had a problem sometimes on the expression and interpretation of concepts, but my thoughts, feelings when speaking Chinese are hard to explain. I deal with my classmates but still I am having difficulty.

In the attempt to answer the first question, the difficulty on the linguistic competence emerged to be one of the themes in the analysis as this study disclosed how the second language affected their learning and academic performance positively and negatively. In an interview with the one of the learners, having fun while learning Chinese was difficult which he said

As a grade 1 pupil, I think that the use of Chinese language in school is very fun and interesting. When I need to clarify things with my Chinese teacher, I simply raise my hand and ask her to explain more about the topic. Learning the Chinese language is difficult but it helps me improve my academic performance by always making things interesting for me, and helps me stay active in activities.

Speaking Chinese among the learners of Sun Yat Sen Elementary School was fun, interesting as a general viewpoint. For them, the way of expressing the language was challenging as an interactive medium in the academic discussion, however, there were some who found it difficult as disclosed by one of the participants like "It feels hard because of the new words that I didn't know yet but it is also exciting because we can learn Chinese words and its meaning." Another learner said

I ask the teacher straight away. Sometimes I ask my dady when I get home and try to ask translations for anything foreign that comes up. For example, I ask my dad the Chinese word for clouds if I am staring at the sky. At school, I ask the English equivalent of Chinese word that I don't understand.

Fun yet challenging as it was, speaking the second language learned through mouth of others was still difficult especially for Filipino learners whose first language is Surigaonon and English. Florez (2019) viewed speaking as an interactive process of constructing meaning, where both its form and significance are shaped by the context, the participants, their experiences, the environment, and the purpose of the communication. Evident in the responses, the speaking skills among the learners is therefore good which supported common responses in the interview

A for awesome. I think it's awesome being the only school in Surigao to teach Chinese language. B is for brain exercise. Being bilingual , we learn to be flexible and open minded. C is for creativity and cultural awareness-it helps us connect with our Chinese heritage. Creativity is important for kids. D is for development which means it helps with our personal development for a better society.

While Chinese language becomes a form of communication to some of the learners, the ideas, thoughts, feelings, and emotions with other people of some Filipino learners were not an easy thing to do. They needed to learn web of vocabularies, and or knowing more semantic and grammatical rules. As said by one of the learners,

The complex or difficult Chinese helps my brain become flexible. My memory , problem-solving and creativity were enhanced. My hand-eye coordination was improved too because the Chinese writing activity exercised my coordination. When I was younger, I had speech and fine motor delay, I was referred to a speech and occupational therapy so I am happy that since coming to Sun Yat Sen ,I

have improved a lot.

Zhang (2019) explained that speaking continues to be the most challenging skill to master for most English learners and learners of other languages, with many still struggling to communicate effectively in spoken English. The difficulty in speaking is often influenced by specific situations and circumstances that may cause discomfort.

Fear to Communicate the Language Well

The second identified theme involved the informants' fear to communicate the language well. Significant statements and their interpreted meanings collectively contributed to this overarching theme. Despite subtle variations, participants generally expressed similar experiences regarding the challenges of learning the language. In keeping with the phenomenological approach to this study, it is important to note that whilst the theme was produced from all of the transcripts, the informants had shared similar responses emphasizing the fear to communicate which clearly shows the anxiety in interacting, speaking, presenting, and expressing opinions which could affect performance, confidence, and even relations. Below showed a sample on how the generated theme was developed from the significant statements of the informants, formulated meanings, clustered theme, and emergent theme.

Table 3. *Sample Process on the Theme 2 Generated*

Significant Statements	*Formulated Meaning*	*Clustered Meaning*	*Emergent Theme*
I don't feel comfortable that the medium of instruction will be Chinese	Feeling discomfort	Feeling of being afraid	Fear to communicate the language well
I cannot speak Chinese fluently and even if my grandfather is Chinese I still cannot speak, write and understand Chinese.	Having fear		
Since my grandparents are Chinese and my older brother had learned speaking Chinese already, I can ask them anytime if I don't understand my teachers.	Seeking questions		
Another one is, I sometimes open Youtube videos that has Chinese tutorials to check my learning	Seeking help through social media		
The Chinese language made me study and review more to improve my academic performance and because I love to learn Chinese language, I am determined I can do it.	Showing positivism		

In the study of Brown(2021), the root cause of some learners to speak is fear. In the same token, Dil(2019), Gebhard (2020) shared that anxiety showed one of the greatest impediments in speaking. Heron (2015) also argued that anxiety serves as a negative factor that disrupts the learner's ability to master a skill, particularly speaking. It triggers feelings of fear and nervousness, which often hinder the learner's progress toward oral proficiency. One of the learners said that

I don't feel comfortable that the medium of instruction will be Chinese because I cannot speak Chinese fluently and even if my grandfather is Chinese I still cannot speak, write and understand Chinese.

In support to this generated theme, Zhao(2017) believed that communication apprehension is just but normal when learning the second language. The learners' low ability in this aspect, in many cases, causes anxious feelings among them. This apprehension tends to cause speaking problems for some of the learners, however, this anxiety was dealt positively with support from parents and grandparents to gain competence. Learners said that asking from other people is a support to learning the language.

Since my grandparents are Chinese and my older brother had learned speaking Chinese already, I can ask them anytime if I don't understand my teachers. Another one is, I sometimes open Youtube videos that has Chinese tutorials. The Chinese language made me study and review more to improve my academic performance and because I love to learn Chinese language, I am determined I can do it.

Elia and Irianti (2015) viewed shyness as an emotional state characterized by feelings of agitation, uneasiness, or awkwardness that individuals experience when performing tasks, engaging in conversations, or interacting with others—particularly in unfamiliar settings or with unfamiliar people. Harmer (2017) emphasized that to reduce shyness, teachers should consider each learner's strengths and weaknesses in order to develop teaching methods that accommodate all students in the classroom. Equally important, learners need to be motivated both internally and through support from others. This is because motivation is long been identified as one of the major factors affecting the learning of the language.

I feel like it's only a little hard especially when some of the words are new to me or I just forgot the word. I just tried to understand them when they are speaking in Chinese or I just ask my classmates what she say but I mostly try to understand what she say. My academic performances in Chinese is just listen, learn then study it.

The investigation also gained a considerable momentum which yielded also important themes on other unique challenges, most notably

on the pronunciation, characters, grammar and attitude. The present study constituted a step to learning emerging challenges towards embracing the culture of the school by expanding knowledge and consideration to learning the Chinese language. With the growing demands to teaching towards achieving quality learning, the escalating challenges related to this study were undertaken.

Difficulty in Pronunciation

Teaching Chinese as a second language is a rewarding but demanding task for learners. This another emergent theme was the difficulty to learn Chinese as used in the instruction. In keeping with the phenomenological approach to this study, it is important to note that whilst the theme was produced from all of the transcripts, the informants had shared similar responses emphasizing the difficulty on pronunciation which clearly shows learning structural context. Below showed a sample on how the generated theme was developed from the significant statements of the informants, formulated meanings, clustered theme, and emergent theme.

Table 4. *Sample Process on the Theme 3 Generated*

Significant Statements	*Formulated Meaning*	*Clustered Meaning*	*Emergent Theme*
When I started learning Chinese, I was surprised by how much tonal complexity impacted the learning process.	Knowing tonal complexity	Producing correct tones	Difficulty on pronunciation
Many of us, especially those whose native languages lack tonal distinctions, struggle to adjust.	Lacking tonal distinctions		
They often say that they find it difficult to hear and produce the correct tones.	Having difficulty to produce tones		
It's important to create engaging activities that focus on pronunciation and train their ears to the subtle tonal differences	Training to tonal differences		

For learners interviewed, it was found out that they had the difficulty on producing correct tones. Mispronouncing a word's tone can sometimes lead to misunderstandings or meaning configuration. This aspect of requires learners of Sun Yat Sen Elementary School to develop a keen ear for pitch variations especially they were non-native to Chinese and to master the pronunciation was the only way to be understood. One of the informants said

When I started learning Chinese, I was surprised by how much tonal complexity impacted the learning process. Many of us, especially those whose native languages lack tonal distinctions, struggle to adjust. They often say that they find it difficult to hear and produce the correct tones. It's important to create engaging activities that focus on pronunciation and train their ears to the subtle tonal differences.

The above generated theme indicated that in learning a second language, one essential skill that every learner must acquire is the ability to speak. However, this was not evident as some learners struggled to grasp it, developing their speaking ability only gradually. Other components, such as listening, typically follow later in a conversation.

As emphasized by Amoah & Yeboah (2021), mastering the speaking skill is the most crucial element in the journey of learning a second or foreign language, and its effectiveness is gauged by the ability to engage in conversation in that language. Speaking involves articulating language verbally or conveying information and expressing one's emotions through spoken words. It is an interactive process of creating meaning, where both the form and significance rely on the context, the individuals involved, their backgrounds, the setting, and the intent behind the speech.

Fang (2022) added that the speaking skill of a learner is defined as the capacity to articulate thoughts through verbal communication. It serves as the ultimate means of interaction, enabling learners to share ideas, opinions, feelings, and emotions with others. Nonetheless, for many who are learning a language, speaking in the target language can be quite challenging. It demands more than just a collection of vocabulary or a thorough understanding of semantic and grammatical rules. For the majority of English learners, speaking remains the most challenging skill to master, and many still find themselves unable to communicate verbally in English. The difficulty in speaking is more likely influenced by specific situations and circumstances that can lead to discomfort.

Difficulty on Characters

This another theme emerged as one of the challenges that revolved around the intricate world of Chinese characters and the art of writing them. In keeping with the phenomenological approach to this study, it is important to note that whilst the theme was produced from all of the transcripts, the informants had shared similar responses emphasizing the difficulty on character learning, its art and aesthetics. Below showed a sample on how the generated theme was developed from the significant statements of the informants, formulated meanings, clustered theme, and emergent theme.

In the research conducted by Haung, Tseng, Chang, Chen & Sung (2022), there is a pressing requirement for a text analysis system aimed at evaluating the complexity of composing components for characters, particularly focusing on the performance of Chinese learners. This system would involve (1) assessing a text to determine its difficulty in relation to Chinese characters; (2) breaking down characters into their components and calculating the frequency of these components derived from the analyzed text; and (3) providing

characters that can be formed from the components along with downloadable images based on the examined text.

Table 5. *Sample Process on the Theme 4 Generated*

Significant Statements	*Formulated Meaning*	*Clustered Meaning*	*Emergent Theme*
It was a fascinating journey.	Fascinating journey		
It's like unlocking a treasure trove of cultural history and artistic expression.	Unlocking artistic expressions		
However, it's also a significant challenge for both native and non-natives.	Having significant difficulty	Pressing Chinese characters	Difficulty on character learning
The characters are intricate, and the stroke order is critical for clear writing. I often learn Chinese calligraphy as order but with this, I am fully engaged and motivated	Experiencing intricacy		

Based on interviews, the mastery to learning Chinese characters demanded time for them as they needed to learn hanzi – the text which includes knowing the shapes, radicals, and even traditional characters. It was not just knowing Chinese writing, but it was understanding the art and aesthetics involving brush techniques, understanding the principles of balance and proportion, and artistic expression.

It was a fascinating journey. It's like unlocking a treasure trove of cultural history and artistic expression. However, it's also a significant challenge for both native and non-natives. The characters are intricate, and the stroke order is critical for clear writing. I often learn Chinese calligraphy as order but with this, I am fully engaged and motivated.

In Ogihara's study (2021), the process of learning Chinese characters can be challenging due to the ideogram, which signifies a symbol that conveys a concept without being linked to sound. The processes of writing and reading operate independently, setting them apart from alphabetic languages. Most Chinese characters possess several formal pronunciations. This contrasts with China, where the majority of Chinese characters are typically pronounced in a singular manner. Additionally, certain components of Chinese characters have distinct pronunciations. Beyond formal and unique readings, there are various interpretations that can be applied to Chinese characters. In other words, readings do not have to be directly associated with Chinese characters.

Difficulty on the vocabulary and grammar

This is one of the themes that emerged from the analysis which stood as one of the formidable challenges covering a consideration on the vocabulary and grammar. In keeping with the phenomenological approach to this study, it is important to note that whilst the theme was produced from all of the transcripts, the informants had shared similar responses emphasizing the difficulty on the vocabulary and grammar. Below showed a sample on how the generated theme was developed from the significant statements of the informants, formulated meanings, clustered theme, and emergent theme.

Table 6. *Sample Process on the Theme 5 Generated*

Significant Statements	*Formulated Meaning*	*Clustered Meaning*	*Emergent Theme*
Some of us are having less interest about the Chinese subject because of the difficulty in the language elements, vocabulary, and grammar.	Having difficulty on language elements		
I am supported by my parents when I don't know some of the Chinese words.	Supporting parents	Having difficulty on vocabulary, but supported	Difficulty on the vocabulary and grammar

As this study unveiled the challenges, this study found out that learning Chinese involves specialized terminologies which could be helpful for the learners, however difficult once learned. This also entails introducing the learners to technical and scientific vocabulary used for daily instruction, but, learners showed flexibility in the learning the language considering its unique, sensitive, and intricate processes of learning. As emphasized by Al-Sibai(2014) that learning other language requires highly complex activities and should be considered a necessary aspect when teaching. Saunders, & O'Brien (2018) supported that knowing the language is salient for learners' oral proficiency, however, it is important to note that, learning to speak a language is not only a question of acquiring a set of rules, keeping on with a bunch of idioms and or building up a wide vocabulary. Speaking proficiency goes beyond that and the learner's ability to communicate clearly and effectively should be given primary importance. As one of the informants shared

Some of us are having less interest about the Chinese subject because of the difficulty in the language elements, along with the family background, where only some families give values, encouragement and even motivation.

Since learning Chinese is a language with typological distance from Western languages, this research believed on its primary importance for school like Sun Yat Sen Elementary School as learning it contributes significantly to the second language knowledge for learners. As this study intends to consolidate the difficulties, this research brought together the efforts of the informants to be flexible and be innovative in spite the challenges.

As suggested by teachers, parental involvement plays a vital role in the language learning of the learners as understanding it is more

achieved because of identity and blood relationships, and problems be addressed through parental efforts. By knowing these things, the themes basically expose an idea of fostering an academic dialogue between learners, parents, and teachers who held different perspectives on teaching and learning. However, this research also generated theme on the attitude of the learners towards Chinese language as used in the classroom.

Attitude towards Chinese learning

It is no secret that learning a new language requires a lot of practice and immersion. This is especially true when it comes to learning Chinese. Chinese is not only a tonal language, but it also has a unique writing system with thousands of characters that require memorization. This can seem daunting at first, but with consistent practice and immersion, it can become easier over time.

Based from the analysis, results on the attitudes among the learners were positive. For them, it was easy and being immersed in the school with some learners speaking in Chinese and teachers added knowledge to them. One of the learners said, *"As a learner, I find Chinese really important because it is one of the most spoken language in the world, and I feel like it is important for travelling, interacting with other people. I also find it interesting to learn another language."*

Response showed the dedication and commitment of the learner to learn as such exposure and immersion to classroom meant significant. Results showed similar focus by Gong, Lai, & Gao (2020) that learning Chinese including (1) vocabulary learning, (2) skill development, (3) seamless learning, (4) learner attitudes and motivation, and (5) affordances and challenges would extend the understanding and development of the language assisted by parents and teachers. It is important to practice consistently, even if it is just for a few minutes a day. By practicing regularly, one can build confidence in speaking and improve the ability to communicate effectively in Chinese. With this, practice and immersion are key to mastering Chinese. With consistent effort and dedication, anyone can become proficient in this challenging but rewarding language.

Reflection

As presented in the results and discussion above, the findings included in study all attempted to address deep-seated challenges on Chinese teaching and learning. It is probably unrealistic for the researcher to arrive at definite answers to the phenomenon being examined considering the less responses among learners. However, the findings achieved some shared understanding of the relevant issues and the questions and challenges raised in it can generate more meaningful reflections and discussions for further action. This research was limited as most responses revealed less responses. Nonetheless, it is hoped that it could be deepened by building a more focused and stronger empirical data from the literatures reviewed.

In connection with Fishman's Theory of Reversing Language Shift, the conducted research supports the understanding of how languages are acquired. The minority community faces a dilemma between maintaining their cultural and linguistic identity while navigating social disadvantages or forsaking their traditions in pursuit of better living conditions. This sense of betrayal towards cultural roots among driven and capable individuals is what Fishman terms 'social dislocation.' Cultural betrayal involves rejecting the distinct customs and practices of one's culture, including the minority language. Fishman points out that many democratic societies encourage cultural betrayal through their primary social, economic, and political systems, notably via democratization and modernization processes. These developments pose considerable risks for linguistic minorities as they promote increased engagement with the dominant culture, which can become so dominant that it pervades the minority community itself. Nevertheless, Fishman contends that it is not necessary to oppose modernization and democratization in the effort to safeguard lesser-used languages. He posits that it may be possible to avoid cultural betrayal by expanding the concept of democratization to include culture as well. In such a 'cultural democracy,' the cultural and linguistic rights of minority groups would be safeguarded and promoted (Fishman 1991: 63-64). Fishman not only explains the reasons for language shift but also offers a valuable framework for preserving at-risk languages: his stages of reversing language shift. These should be viewed as a continuum, with stage 8 representing the initial level in the language maintenance continuum. 'Xish' stands for the minority language, while 'Yish' represents the dominant language. 'RLS' abbreviates the term reversing language shift.

Conclusions

From the lens of phenomenology, the findings are supported with the following conclusions:

The need to push the Chinese literacy program in the teaching and learning process in Sun Yat Sen Elementary School.

As the school engages learners in the Chinese curriculum, the research reflection requires integration of the program that observes a more consistent inclusive practice.

The results showed difficulties of learners and teachers, however, the phenomenon like challenges were just but normal areas for learning to provide opportunities in the Chinese learning.

Based on themes, the following recommendations are given:

DepEd must assess the implementation of bilingual education and provide interventions to further strengthen the program.

Teachers would recognize the needs of learners by actively engaging in this issue and creating solutions to enhance the effectiveness of Chinese instruction.

School administrators would provide training and technical support to teachers to enhance the quality of Chinese instruction, fostering trust and confidence.

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Affiliations and Corresponding Information

Diana B. Cea
Surigao Sun Yat Sen Elementary School
Department of Education – Philippines

Dr. Annabelle N. Diaz
Surigao del Norte State University – Philippines