

Enhancing Thai Learners' Listening and Speaking Skills in Chinese Language by Organizing Learning Activities

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Abstract—This paper aims at enhancing Chinese listening and speaking skills by organizing learning activities for first-year Chinese language major students at a university in Thailand. A simple random sample was conducted to obtain 30 students based on the classroom as a random unit. This study also developed a model for developing Chinese listening and speaking skills by organizing learning activities for learners. The results showed that the students' Chinese listening and speaking skills could be significantly enhanced after adopting the learning activities. The findings of the study also suggested that the proposed model can be effectively used to improve learners' Chinese language skills. The findings of the study have important implications for Chinese language teachers and learners. The proposed model can be used to design effective learning activities which can be used to support students in their language learning journey. This model can also be used as a reference for teachers to organize learning activities to improve the Chinese language skills of their students.

Index Terms—Chinese as a foreign language, listening and speaking, foreign language skills, language learning activities, Thailand

I. INTRODUCTION

Foreign language proficiency is extremely important and necessary in today's global society. As a tool for communicating, studying, seeking knowledge, career building, and understanding the culture and vision of the global community, it has become an integral part of daily life. A positive attitude is shown toward the use of foreign languages and foreign language communication, including access. Traditions, social thinking, economics, politics, and governance are characterized by a wide range of knowledge, a broad perspective, and a sense of life that is easier, wider, and more comprehensive. Learning the basics of a substantial foreign language required to be studied throughout the foundation education course. Generally, the language of instruction is English. English as a Medium of Instruction (EMI) is increasingly important in the globalized world as almost all international communication is conducted in English. By learning and using English as a medium of instruction, students can gain access to a wealth of knowledge and resources, as well as improve their communication skills. Additionally, English is the language of business, and being proficient in it can open many doors to career opportunities. Other languages may be chosen by educational institutions to manage and prepare courses. For instance, some schools may choose to offer a bilingual program in which both English and another language are used for instruction in certain courses.

Chinese language learning is, on the other hand, highly sought after due to its economic and social significance around the world. Despite the three-year COVID-19 pandemic outbreak, China's economic growth has remained steady in recent years, which has resulted in an increase in Chinese learners around the world. Therefore, it is likely that a positive outlook will be presented regarding Chinese learners' growth around the world. This will lead to further research into Chinese language learning (Xu et al., 2022). It has been known for centuries that Mandarin Chinese is a significant language in Asia. China has had one of the two greatest civilizations on the continent for centuries. The purpose of this is to preserve knowledge and various sciences in Chinese, including philosophical, historical, scientific, and geographical knowledge. Currently, the country is growing steadily in size, population, politics, government, and economy, making Mandarin one of the five official languages of the country. Using Mandarin in the United Nations has greatly increased the importance of Mandarin Chinese, which allows foreigners such as Thais to learn the language. Our ability to use Mandarin not only for general communication but also to progress in various fields at both levels has been considered to be extremely valuable. Individual and national levels of education, knowledge, science, business investment and building good relations between countries, Chinese are considered to be the key to knowledge in a new era of communication. Individuals who are proficient in Mandarin will be in high demand in the labor market, as they will be able to communicate fluently.

The Chinese Language Program prepares students for their careers with the knowledge and skills necessary to use Chinese effectively through listening and speaking. It is therefore imperative to develop the potential of Chinese language students to produce graduates who possess morality, ethics, and responsibility for themselves and society. The management of Chinese language learning in terms of listening and speaking also revealed that speaking issues existed, as consonants, vowels, and tones were not correctly pronounced. The author, as a Chinese language teacher, found that

first-year Chinese language majors had many listening and speaking problems. This may be due to students' lack of interest and motivation (Xu et al., 2022; Yu et al., 2022). Due to the difficulty of pronouncing Chinese, some students do not seem as interested in listening as they should be due to the difficulty in pronouncing Chinese. This may result from a monotonous learning environment. The problem of Chinese language skill development can be solved by using the Chinese listening and speaking assessment test, as well as pre- and post-learning tests. In order to test this hypothesis, the current study aims to achieve the following objectives:

1. To examine the basic information on developing Chinese listening and speaking skills for first-year Chinese language students at a Thai university through learning activities.
2. To develop a model for developing Chinese listening and speaking skills through the organization of learning activities for students.
3. To experiment with Chinese listening and speaking skills through learning activities for students.
4. To assess and improve the development model of Chinese listening and speaking skills.

II. RELATED WORKS

In the field of foreign language teaching and learning, a number of studies have examined Chinese listening and speaking abilities. While the current study focuses on improving the Chinese language listening and speaking skills by organizing activities for the learners, many related works have focused on determining what motivates learners to learn Chinese as a foreign language in order to improve their learning outcomes (e.g., Gong et al., 2020; Wang & Jiang, 2022; Xu et al., 2022). Several theoretical frameworks have been used by researchers to study motivation (Boo et al., 2015), including the instrumental and integrative orientations (Gardner, 1985), intrinsic and extrinsic motivations (Noels et al., 2000), and ideal and ought-to L2 selves (Papi, 2010; Papi & Teimouri, 2012, 2014). There is widespread agreement that motivated learners tend to outperform less motivated learners in SLA (de Burgh-Hirabe, 2019; Dörnyei, 2005; Papi, 2018; Sudina, 2021). Thus, it is important to understand the factors that influence motivation in second language acquisition in order to facilitate learning.

Chinese language learning motivation is an important area of research in the field of language learning and teaching, as it plays a crucial role in learners' success in acquiring the language. Research has identified two main types of motivation for Chinese language learners: instrumental and integrative. Instrumental motivation refers to the desire to learn the language for practical purposes, such as for work or travel. Integrative motivation, on the other hand, refers to the desire to learn the language to better understand and appreciate the culture and people associated with the language (Warden & Lin, 2000). Many learners of Chinese are motivated by their interest in Chinese culture, including Chinese history, literature, and art. Research has shown that learners who have a strong interest in Chinese culture are more likely to be motivated to learn the language (Gong et al., 2021).

Self-efficacy, or learners' belief in their own ability to succeed in learning the language, has been identified as an important factor in language learning motivation (Chao et al., 2019). Learners who have high self-efficacy are more likely to be motivated and engaged in the language learning process (Tian & Zhang, 2019; Wang & Li, 2019). Learners' motivation to learn Chinese can also be influenced by the support they receive from their teachers and peers. Teachers who provide supportive and engaging instruction, and peers who offer encouragement and opportunities for collaboration, can help to foster learners' motivation and engagement (Huang et al., 2019).

Overall, research suggests that Chinese language learning motivation is influenced by a range of factors, including learners' cultural interests, self-efficacy, and the support they receive from teachers and peers. Further research is needed to explore these factors in greater depth and to identify effective strategies for fostering motivation and engagement in Chinese language learning. Such strategies could include providing authentic learning materials, encouraging language use in authentic contexts, and providing feedback that is tailored to the individual needs of learners. Additionally, more research is needed to understand how motivation and engagement can be maintained over the long-term.

Furthermore, there are many studies focus on flipped language classrooms, for example, an analysis of 34 published articles was undertaken in order to conduct a systematic review of the literature regarding flipped language classrooms from the perspectives of theoretical foundations, learning activities, tools, research topics, and findings (Zou et al., 2020). It was found that a variety of research methods (e.g., tests, surveys, and interviews) were used. The results also indicated that there were various types of e-tools used in the flipped language classrooms (e.g., video-watching tools, online learning platforms, online discussion tools, and video-making tools) (Zou et al., 2020). The findings also reveal that the flipped language classroom not only improved students' academic performance and cultivated their learning motivation, but also developed their self-regulation, confidence, and higher-order thinking skills. It was also found that the flipped learning approach had an influence on the students' readiness and acceptance of technology, the flipped learning process, students' interactions, and teacher perceptions. Other research topics in the reviewed articles were the effects of external and learner factors. Chen (2022) reports on a classroom-based investigation into English as a foreign language (EFL) learners' views on lessons that integrated m-learning tools for assessment (Kahoot!) and collaboration (Padlet) during the lesson. The opinions of 289 Chinese university students regarding such lessons were collected through open-ended questions posted on Padlet. It was found that there were a number of key themes emerging from the qualitative data that are either related to teacher strategies to motivate learners or a prerequisite to learning for learners.

As a result, their perceptions of gamification were amplified when in reality only a small percentage of class activities incorporated these tools, which was a striking result. As a result, it appeared that the use of mobile learning tools in class could greatly increase learners' positive perceptions of a whole lesson if they were partially integrated into the classroom. Despite the fact that teachers were frequently encouraged to integrate technology into their lessons, they might not always be well instructed on how to do so (Chen, 2022).

Among the languages that are studied for second language acquisition, English dominates. Very few studies have been conducted on improving the speaking and listening skills of Chinese learners. One reason for the relatively limited research on Chinese language learning compared to English may be due to the fact that Chinese is still considered a less commonly taught language in many countries, particularly in the Western world. However, with the increasing global influence of China and the growing demand for Chinese language skills in international business and diplomacy, there has been a growing interest in Chinese language learning and teaching in recent years. As a result, there has been an increase in research on improving the speaking and listening skills of Chinese learners. Many of these studies have focused on developing effective teaching strategies and materials that can help learners overcome the challenges they face in acquiring these skills, such as difficulties in understanding different accents and regional variations, limited exposure to the language, and lack of opportunities for authentic communication. Nevertheless, while there may be fewer studies on Chinese language learning compared to English, there is a growing body of research on improving the speaking and listening skills of Chinese learners. As the demand for Chinese language skills continues to increase, it is likely that more research will be conducted in this area in the future.

III. RESEARCH DESIGN

In this research & development study, the author intends to improve Chinese listening and speaking skills through learning activities for first-year Chinese language learners at a university in Thailand, in accordance with the conceptual framework derived from the study, as shown in Figure 1:

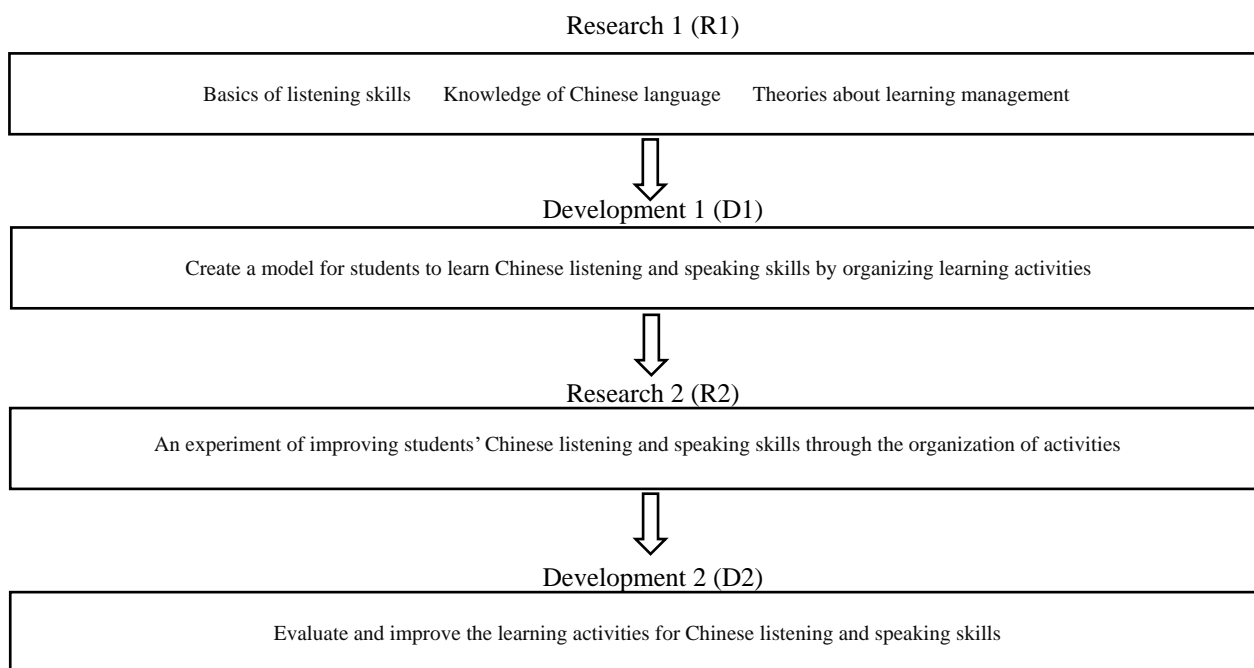


Figure 1. Research Design

A. Research 1 (R1)

This part analyzes the current context of the ability to develop listening and speaking skills through Chinese language learning activities for first-year Chinese students at a university in Thailand.

The research involved 90 students studying Chinese subjects at a university in Thailand at three levels: majors, minors, and free electives in the second semester of the academic year 2022 to 2023. Through random sampling of the classroom, 30 students studying Chinese in the second semester were chosen as participants. The participants were informed and consented to the use of the collected data for this research, and they were informed that being involved in this study would not affect their assessments or tests, and that they could withdraw from the research at any time. The collected data was kept confidential and only the author had access to it. The participants were thanked for their contribution and debriefed about the results of the research. The participants were also assured that their anonymity was guaranteed and respected, and that their data would only be used for research purposes.

Data collection tools used in the research design were consistent with those used in the research design. Developing a topic and framing a general questionnaire to guide the questionnaire for a sample of Chinese language learners and an interview form for 10 Chinese language learners is required until the data is saturated.

B. Development 1 (D1)

This is the design and development section of this study, which focuses on the development and qualitative study of listening and speaking skill development models through learning activities. The process consists of the following steps: the analysis and development of the model; the development of data collection tools; the verification and certification of the model.

In the model certification, the target group consisted of five experts selected based on specific selection criteria (purposive sampling) as follows: expert teachers of Chinese as a foreign language with at least five years of tertiary teaching experience and a Master's degree in the related field. It is important to note that not many scholars have PhDs in this area, but this ensures that the target group has knowledge and experience in the field of Chinese as a foreign language, as well as a minimum amount of experience to provide pertinent feedback. Additionally, the selection criteria ensure that a wide range of expertise is represented within the group. This will guarantee that the feedback provided is of the highest quality and that it is applicable to the research objectives. Finally, the criteria ensure that the feedback is both relevant and reliable. Experts assessed the data by using assessment forms that were created by them.

C. Research 2 (R2)

In this experiment, Chinese learning activities are organized for the participants in order to develop their listening and speaking skills.

In the trial, the target group consisted of students who studied Chinese in the second semester of the academic year 2022 to 2023 at another university in Thailand, which was a different group from those included in the sample. A modification was made to the Knowledge Quiz Tool format to measure the objectives before and after the experiment. Data was then collected and analyzed to measure the effectiveness of the experiment. The results were then compared to the control group to determine the effectiveness of the experiment. The results showed that the experiment was successful in achieving its objectives. The results were used to inform the next steps, such as further modifications to the tool or expanding the experiment to a larger population.

D. Development 2 (D2)

Through the organization of learning activities for the candidates, this part aims to evaluate the effectiveness and improve the Chinese listening and speaking skill development model.

This part utilized a Satisfaction Questionnaire to collect feedback from students, while the qualitative component involved a target group of 7 Chinese language teachers and experts. The teachers and experts actively participated in group discussions to analyze and interpret the questionnaire results. They also assessed the effectiveness of designing learning activities aimed at enhancing the listening and speaking skills of Chinese learners. The input from these experienced professionals provided valuable insights into the design and implementation of effective language teaching strategies. The teachers and experts then proposed several strategies for improving the listening and speaking skills of learners. These strategies were discussed in detail and further refined. The final set of strategies was implemented in the classroom, with positive results.

IV. FINDINGS

Based on the previous design of organizing activities to assist participants in improving their Chinese listening and speaking skills, the process can be summarized as follows:

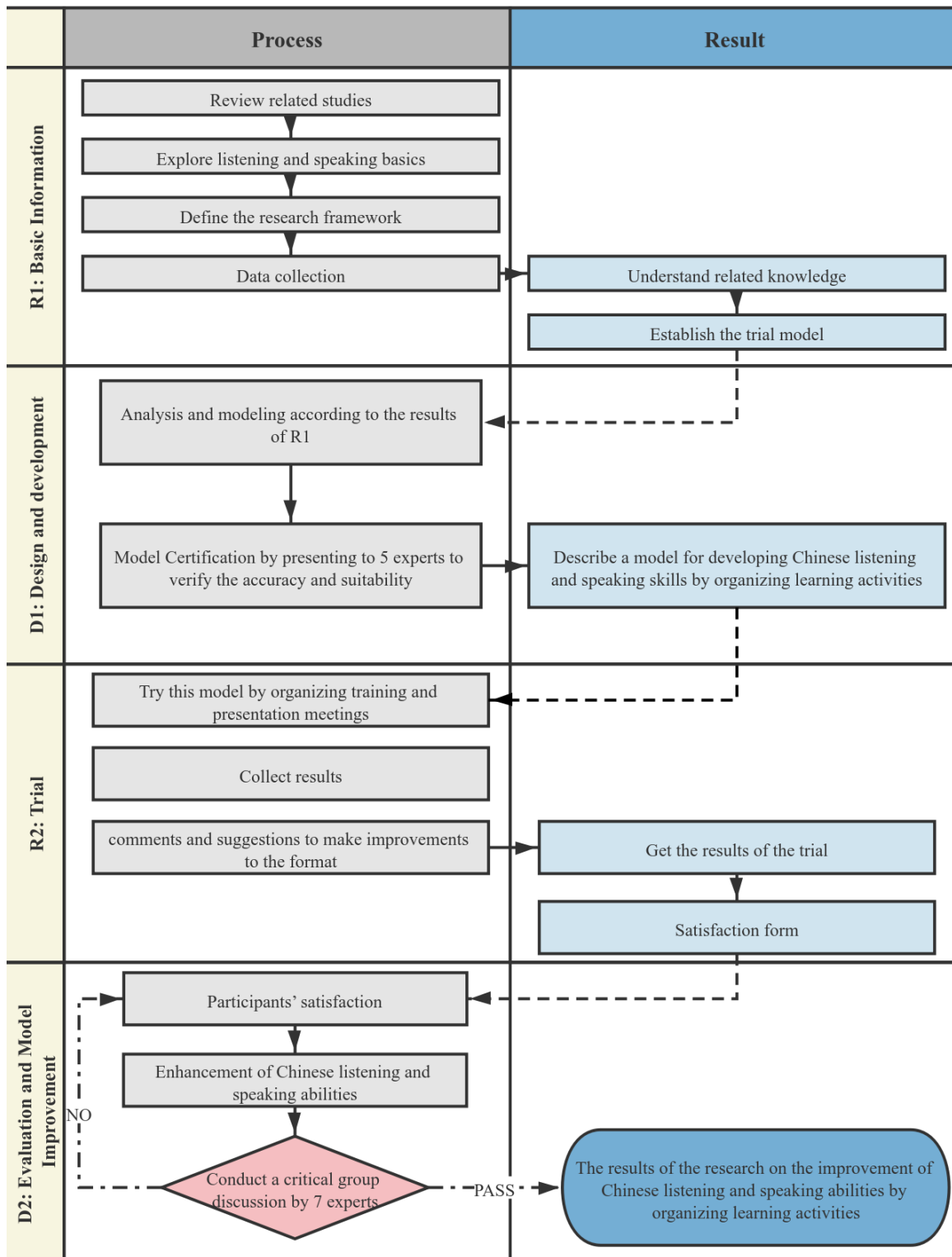


Figure 2. Framework of Organizing Activities

Using the results and processes of this study, the feasibility of enhancing Chinese listening and speaking skills among first-year students in a Thai university was investigated. After having the framework of organizing activities, the next step should be how to design valid and effective activities for improving language abilities. Activities should focus on both form and meaning. The activities should also be tailored to each individual student's level and needs and should be designed to be engaging and motivating to encourage student participation.

The findings of this study have important implications for Chinese language teaching and learning. The study showed that organizing learning activities can be an effective way to enhance the listening and speaking skills of Chinese language learners, and that this approach can be applied in a university setting. The study's proposed model for

developing Chinese listening and speaking skills through organized learning activities can be useful for language teachers and curriculum designers in designing effective and engaging instructional materials and activities for learners. The model provides a framework for integrating various language learning techniques and strategies, such as task-based learning, communicative language teaching, and the use of authentic materials, to create a comprehensive and learner-centered approach to language learning. Furthermore, the findings highlight the importance of providing learners with opportunities for authentic communication and interaction in the target language. The use of group activities and peer feedback can help to create a supportive and engaging learning environment that encourages learners to take risks and practice their language skills in a meaningful context. The framework finally demonstrates the potential of organized learning activities for enhancing Chinese language skills, and provides practical guidance for language teachers and curriculum designers seeking to develop effective and engaging language learning materials and activities.

One effective approach to designing activities to improve listening skills is to provide learners with exposure to audio or video materials appropriate for their level of proficiency (Gilakjani, 2016), and then to develop tasks that require them to understand and respond to what they have heard. For speaking skills, activities that encourage learners to participate in authentic conversations using the language they are learning can be particularly effective. These can include role-plays, debates, discussions, and other interactive tasks that require learners to use the language in real-life situations. In designing learning activities targeting both listening and speaking skills, it is imperative to create tasks that are both challenging and engaging, and that provide learners with opportunities to practice and receive feedback on their performance. Additionally, it can be beneficial to incorporate a variety of different activities and materials into the curriculum, to ensure that learners are exposed to a range of language input and have opportunities to practice using the language in different contexts and situations.

As an important component of effective language learning activities, feedback provides learners with information about their strengths and weaknesses, as well as helps them identify areas for improvement. Listening and speaking activities can be incorporated in a variety of ways by incorporating feedback:

Peer feedback: During speaking activities, such as debates or discussions, learners should be encouraged to provide feedback to each other on their performance. Through self-evaluation, peer evaluation, or group evaluation, learners can identify areas for improvement and gain insights from their peers.

Teacher feedback: It is possible for instructors to provide learners with feedback regarding their performance in speaking activities, either individually or in groups. In addition to providing corrections on grammar and pronunciation, corrections may also include suggestions for improving fluency and coherence.

Audio or video feedback: As a means of providing feedback on specific aspects of language use, such as pronunciation, intonation, and grammar, instructors can record learners' performances in speaking activities and provide feedback through audio or video recordings.

Self-reflection: Engage learners in self-reflection and identification of areas for improvement during speaking activities. Taking self-assessment activities, such as keeping a language learning journal, or setting personal language learning goals and reflecting on progress toward these goals, are effective ways to accomplish this.

Incorporating feedback into language learning activities helps learners to identify areas for improvement and develop their language skills more effectively. It is essential to provide learners with regular feedback and opportunities to practice using the language in a supportive and constructive environment.

V. CONCLUSION

The study involved a mixed-methods approach, utilizing both quantitative and qualitative data to assess the effectiveness of classroom activities for improving the Chinese listening and speaking skills of first-year learners in a university in Thailand.

The study began with a review of the literature on effective language learning strategies, which helped to identify a range of classroom activities that could be used to target listening and speaking skills. These activities were then incorporated into the curriculum for the first-year Chinese language course at the university. To evaluate the effectiveness of the activities, a Satisfaction Questionnaire was administered to the students, and a target group of seven Chinese language teachers and experts were consulted for their qualitative input. The questionnaire results indicated that the students found the activities to be engaging and beneficial for improving their listening and speaking skills, with the majority of respondents reporting that they had noticed an improvement in their language abilities. The qualitative data collected from the teachers and experts provided additional insights into the effectiveness of the activities. The experts noted that the activities were well-designed and provided a range of opportunities for learners to practice and develop their language skills. They also provided suggestions for further improvements, such as incorporating more authentic materials and increasing opportunities for peer feedback and interaction. Overall, the study provided evidence for the feasibility of organizing effective classroom activities for enhancing Chinese listening and speaking skills for first-year learners in a university setting. The findings suggest that incorporating a range of engaging and interactive activities into the curriculum can be an effective strategy for improving language learning outcomes.

This study could provide implications for both Chinese language teaching and learning.

Organized learning activities can be an effective way to enhance Chinese listening and speaking skills: The study demonstrated that organizing learning activities can significantly improve the Chinese listening and speaking skills of learners. This suggests that language teachers and curriculum designers can use this approach to design effective and engaging instructional materials and activities for learners.

Task-based and communicative language teaching approaches can be effective: The study's proposed model for developing Chinese listening and speaking skills through organized learning activities includes task-based and communicative language teaching approaches. These approaches can be useful in creating a supportive and engaging learning environment that encourages learners to practice their language skills in a meaningful context.

Authentic materials and activities are important: The study emphasizes the importance of using authentic materials and activities in language learning. This can help learners to experience the language in real-life situations, and develop their ability to understand and use the language in authentic contexts.

Peer feedback and group activities can be beneficial: The study's findings suggest that peer feedback and group activities can be beneficial for language learners. These activities can provide learners with opportunities for authentic communication and interaction in the target language, and help to create a supportive and engaging learning environment.

The study provided valuable insights into the effectiveness of classroom activities for enhancing Chinese listening and speaking skills for first-year learners in a university setting. However, there are still several areas that could be explored in further research. Firstly, the study focused specifically on first-year learners in a university setting. Further research could investigate the effectiveness of similar activities for learners at different proficiency levels, or for learners in other language learning contexts such as secondary schools or language centers. Secondly, the study utilized a mixed-methods approach, incorporating both quantitative and qualitative data. Further research could explore the effectiveness of classroom activities for enhancing Chinese listening and speaking skills using a range of different research methods, such as experimental designs or case studies. Thirdly, the study focused primarily on the design and implementation of the classroom activities. Further research could investigate the impact of different factors on the effectiveness of the activities, such as the role of cultural factors or the influence of learner motivation and engagement. Finally, the study provided valuable insights into effective classroom activities for enhancing Chinese listening and speaking skills, but did not investigate the effectiveness of other language skills such as reading and writing. Further research could explore the effectiveness of similar activities for improving these language skills, or investigate the effectiveness of different types of activities for targeting specific language skills. The study provided a strong foundation for further research into effective language learning strategies, and there are several areas that could be explored in future studies to build on the findings of this research.

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