

ACADEMIC AND CONTEXTUAL DIMENSIONS OF PERCEIVED LANGUAGE PROFICIENCY: A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF ENGLISH AND CHINESE AMONG SECONDARY SCHOOL STUDENTS IN PHUKET

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Abstract

This study examined how academic and contextual dimensions influence perceived English and Chinese language proficiency among secondary school students in public schools in Phuket, guided by Communicative Language Teaching (CLT). From an accessible population of 2,693 students across five schools, Yamane's formula required a minimum sample of 348 participants; however, 533 completed and usable responses were obtained. Data were collected through a structured questionnaire with content validity confirmed by three experts (IOC > 0.50). The data were then analyzed using exploratory factor analysis and multiple regression. Results revealed that academic dimensions—such as curriculum, assessment, and instructional exposure—consistently and significantly predicted all language skills in both English and Chinese. In contrast, contextual dimensions—including teaching style, teacher characteristics, and school support—significantly enhanced all English skills but demonstrated weaker and inconsistent effects for Chinese, particularly in speaking skills. These findings reveal a structural asymmetry: English proficiency benefits from both academic and contextual support, whereas Chinese proficiency remains largely dependent on academic structures due to limited institutional readiness. The study extends CLT by demonstrating that the effectiveness of contextual factors depends on institutional conditions and that the academic–contextual distinction varies across languages. The findings suggest practical implications for Chinese teacher development, communicative curriculum design, and language-enriched school environments in tourism-driven contexts.

Keywords: Communicative Language Teaching, English Proficiency, Chinese Proficiency, Academic Dimensions, Contextual Dimensions

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Introduction

The tourism industry remains a central pillar of Thailand's economy, particularly in the southern region, where it contributes substantially to national income. In 2025, tourism generated 961 million Baht, accounting for 33.60% of total tourism revenue (Ministry of Tourism and Sports, 2026a). This priority is particularly urgent in tourism-driven regions such as Phuket. As the most internationally significant tourism destination among Thailand's southern provinces, Phuket derives approximately 66.5% of its tourism revenue from international visitors (Ministry of Tourism and Sports, 2026a). Within this globalized service economy, language proficiency is essential for effective interaction between local service providers and international visitors. English continues to function as the dominant lingua franca across sectors such as business, technology, and tourism (Alomoush & Al-Na'imat, 2018; Baker, 2012), while Chinese has gained increasing importance due to the growing number of Chinese tourists, representing 13% of Thailand's inbound arrivals in 2025 (Ministry of Tourism and Sports, 2026b). As a result, proficiency in both languages is critical for sustaining Thailand's tourism competitiveness.

Despite this demand, language education in Thailand faces persistent challenges. English proficiency is widely recognized as crucial for academic achievement, career advancement, and professional effectiveness (Phetsangkhad, 2023; Apridayani & Teo, 2021), yet Thai students consistently demonstrate limited communicative ability, often ranking in lower proficiency categories internationally (Wathawatthana et al, 2025). These limitations are largely attributed to traditional instructional approaches that emphasize grammar, memorization, and rote learning over authentic language use (Darasawang & Reinders, 2021; Jakaria, 2024), alongside constraints such as limited speaking opportunities and pronunciation difficulties (Widiyati & Pangesti, 2022). A similar pattern is evident in Chinese language education. Although Chinese has been increasingly introduced in Thai schools due to its growing importance in tourism and trade (Rabob et al, 2016; Silarak, 2021), its implementation remains inconsistent. Structural challenges, including shortages of qualified teachers, inconsistent curricula, and reliance on rote-based practices, continue to limit learning outcomes (Photip, 2020; Xiao & Tian, 2024). These issues collectively underscore the inadequacy of traditional approaches in preparing students for real-world communication in tourism-driven contexts.

To address these limitations, Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) provides a relevant framework for addressing these limitations by emphasizing meaningful interaction, authentic language use, and the development of communicative competence (Richards, 2006; Nasimova, 2022). It incorporates task-based activities such as role plays, simulations, and information-gap tasks, while integrating the four language skills and positioning teachers as facilitators of communication (Brown, 2014; Larsen-Freeman & Anderson, 2011). However, its effectiveness depends not only on pedagogical design but also on broader instructional and environmental conditions. Public schools often operate under structural constraints—such as large class sizes and limited resources—that affect the implementation of communicative approaches (The Economist, 2017). Although recent studies confirm CLT's adaptability to resource-constrained environments (Kelasi, 2025; Hakami, 2025), its application remains uneven. Contextual factors—such as foreign teacher presence, extracurricular exposure, and institutional support—further shape students' communicative development (Watson Todd & Darasawang, 2020), necessitating analysis beyond instructional methods alone.

Despite growing interest in CLT and multilingual education, two key research gaps persist. First, existing studies tend to focus primarily on English in isolation, with limited comparative analysis of English and Chinese proficiency within the same educational context (Phetsangkhad, 2023; Rabob et al, 2016; Silarak, 2021). Second, prior research typically examines either instructional (academic) or environmental (contextual) factors separately, rather than exploring their combined and comparative effects within a unified framework (Darasawang & Reinders, 2021; Xiao & Tian, 2024). In response, this study adopts CLT as a guiding framework to examine how academic and contextual dimensions jointly influence perceived English and Chinese language proficiency among secondary school students in Phuket.

Research Objectives

1. Examine the underlying components of academic and contextual dimensions that influence perceived English and Chinese language proficiency among secondary school students in Phuket public schools.

2. Compare the predictive power of academic and contextual dimensions on students' perceived language proficiency between English and Chinese among secondary school students in Phuket public schools.

Literature reviews

Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) emerged in response to the limitations of traditional methods, particularly Grammar-Translation and Audio-Lingual approaches, which emphasize structural accuracy and rote learning over communicative use (Nasimova, 2022). It reconceptualizes language as a tool for interaction, prioritizing meaningful communication and functional language use in context (Richards, 2006). As a structured instructional stimulus, it integrates teacher roles, learner roles, communicative activities, and language support to shape learner engagement (Kholmurodovna, 2024).

The core principles of CLT can be understood through four interrelated dimensions. First, the teacher's role shifts to facilitators of interaction to design meaningful communicative tasks (Brown, 2014; Richards, 2006) and create structured opportunities for communication while remaining responsive to learner needs and proficiency levels (Larsen-Freeman & Anderson, 2011). Second, the learner's role underscores active participation in the learning process. Such a learner-centered orientation has been shown to enhance engagement, motivation, and communicative confidence, particularly in task-based settings (Darasawang & Reinders, 2021). Third, language encouragement focuses on creating low-anxiety learning environments. Research indicates that reduced anxiety and increased peer interaction facilitate communicative development, particularly among learners with limited opportunities for language use outside the classroom (Widiyati & Pangesti, 2022). Fourth, communicative activities and pedagogical techniques such as role plays, simulations, and task-based interactions provide structured opportunities for meaningful communication (Larsen-Freeman & Anderson, 2011; Richards, 2006).

Empirical studies show that CLT enhances communicative competence, learner engagement, and confidence in language use. Fauzi & Ridwan (2025) reported significant improvements among EFL learners. Dos Santos (2020) further highlights its role in promoting collaborative meaning-making. In secondary settings, CLT has been shown to improve speaking ability, communication confidence, and willingness to engage in authentic interaction (Rahmatillah, 2019). In Phuket, Wathawatthana et al (2025) demonstrated that role plays and simulations aligned with tourism contexts enhance both communicative

confidence and cross-cultural awareness. Beyond English language education, CLT has gained growing support in Chinese as a foreign language instruction. Evidence suggests that communicative tasks and interactive speaking activities can enhance learners' oral proficiency and motivation, although successful implementation remains dependent on institutional readiness and teachers' pedagogical competence (Photip, 2020; Xiao & Tian, 2024). Consequently, CLT offers a robust foundation for examining how instructional and environmental factors shape language proficiency outcomes (Aziz et al, 2020), including in educational contexts characterized by structural constraints (Kelasi, 2025; Hakami, 2025).

Within CLT, language proficiency is shaped by the interaction between academic (instructional) and contextual (environmental) dimensions (Richards, 2006; Nasimova, 2022). Academic dimensions refer to formal instructional structures such as curriculum design, assessment, and integrated-skills instruction, while contextual dimensions encompass environmental and interpersonal factors including teacher roles, classroom interaction, and institutional support (Brown, 2014; Larsen-Freeman & Anderson, 2011). CLT promotes an integrated-skills approach that develops listening, speaking, reading, and writing concurrently, reflecting authentic communication (Brown, 2014; Larsen-Freeman & Anderson, 2011). Effective curricula align with communicative purposes, incorporate authentic tasks, and support competence across linguistic and socio-cultural domains (Richards, 2006). At the same time, contextual conditions—such as low-anxiety environments, interactive pedagogy, and opportunities for meaningful communication—play a critical role in facilitating language development (Larsen-Freeman & Anderson, 2011; Richards, 2006). These factors are particularly important in multilingual and tourism-oriented contexts, where real-world exposure strengthens communicative ability.

Research Hypotheses

Based on the preceding discussion, this study proposes the following hypotheses:

H1: Academic dimensions positively influence students' perceived language proficiency—(a) English and (b) Chinese—among secondary school students in Phuket public schools.

H2: Contextual dimensions positively influence students' language proficiency—(a) English and (b) Chinese—among secondary school students in Phuket public schools.

H3: The predictive patterns of academic and contextual dimensions on students' perceived language proficiency differ between English and Chinese among secondary school students in Phuket public schools.

Conceptual Framework

As illustrated in Figure 1, this study adopts the CLT framework to examine the influence of academic and contextual dimensions on language proficiency among public-school students in Phuket. Academic dimensions represent formal instructional structures such as curriculum design and skill integration, while contextual dimensions capture environmental and interpersonal factors including teacher roles and classroom interaction (Brown, 2014; Larsen-Freeman & Anderson, 2011; Richards, 2006). Language proficiency is operationalized through four skills—listening, speaking, reading, and writing—across both English and Chinese, with both dimensions expected to exert significant and potentially differential effects.

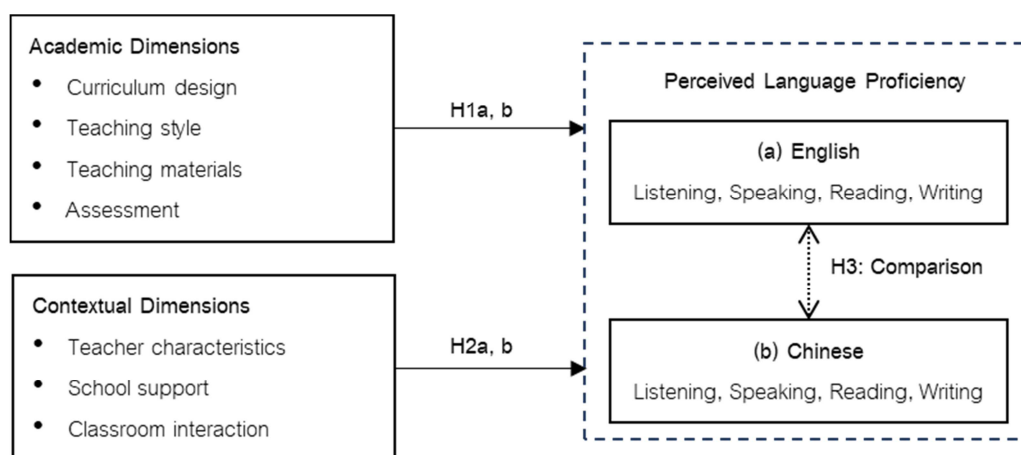


Figure 1 Conceptual Framework

Methodology

1. Population and Sampling This study employed a quantitative, cross-sectional design targeting secondary school students in public schools within Phuket Municipality. Participants were required to have at least one year of exposure to Communicative Language Teaching (CLT)-oriented instruction. In collaboration with the Phuket Municipality, five public schools were included, comprising an accessible population of 2,693 students who had studied both English and Chinese under CLT-trained foreign language teachers funded, managed, and monitored by the Phuket Municipality in partnership with the

university. This institutional arrangement ensured that all participants had received structured CLT-oriented instruction prior to participation. The required sample size was determined using Yamane's (1973) formula with a 5% margin of error, yielding a minimum of 348 respondents.

2. Research Instruments Data were collected using a structured questionnaire consisting of three sections: demographic information, learning dimensions, and language proficiency. Non-demographic items were measured on a 5-point Likert scale. Academic and contextual dimensions were assessed using seven and six items, respectively, drawn from the CLT framework as conceptualized by Brown (2014), Larsen-Freeman and Anderson (2011), and Richards (2006). Language proficiency was operationalized as perceived proficiency, measured across four skills—listening, speaking, reading, and writing—using one self-reported item per skill. This approach follows Nasimova (2022), who identifies these four skills as the core communicative outcomes of CLT, and is appropriate for large-scale survey research where comparability is prioritized. The questionnaire was developed in Thai with neutral wording to ensure clarity and comparability across language groups. Content validity was confirmed by three experts, with all items achieving Index of Item-Objective Congruence (IOC) values above 0.50.

3. Ethical Statement Ethical approval for this study was obtained from the university's Human Research Ethics Committee on 11 February 2025 (Reference No. PSU.PK 04/2025). Informed consent was obtained from all participating students and their parents or guardians prior to data collection.

4. Data Collection Questionnaires were distributed proportionally based on the number of classrooms taught by English and Chinese teachers to ensure balanced representation. As shown in Table 1, a total of 545 responses were collected. After excluding 12 incomplete responses, 533 valid cases remained, yielding a response rate of 98% and substantially exceeding the minimum required sample of 348—with near-equal distribution between English ($n = 261$) and Chinese ($n = 272$) groups.

Table 1 Distribution of Participants by School

School	English Language	Chinese Language	Total	Percentage
A	41	40	81	15.20
B	75	61	136	25.52
C	30	84	114	21.39
D	60	36	96	18.01
E	55	51	106	19.89
Total	261	272	533	100.00

5. Data Analysis Data were analyzed using SPSS Statistics through a two-stage procedure: (1) exploratory factor analysis (EFA) to validate the measurement structure and (2) multiple linear regression to test the hypotheses.

Research Findings

1. Exploratory Factor Analysis Reliability testing of the 17 items of both academic and contextual dimensions yielded a Cronbach's alpha of 0.906, indicating strong internal consistency (Saunders et al, 2019). Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) using principal component analysis with varimax rotation was conducted, with items retained based on eigenvalues > 1.0 (Pallant, 2020) and factor loadings > 0.45, consistent with prior research in this field (Saengngoen & Sincharoenkul, 2025). In the initial analysis, two items in the English group ("extra-activity at school" and "support from Thai teacher") did not meet the loading threshold, while two items in the Chinese group ("teaching style" and "pre- & post-test") exhibited cross-loadings and were removed. The second round of EFA was conducted on the retained items.

As shown in Table 2, for the English group, the Kaiser–Meyer–Olkin (KMO) value was 0.896 and Bartlett's test was significant ($\chi^2(55) = 874.888$, $p < .001$), supporting factorability (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2019). Two factors, academic and contextual dimensions, were extracted, explaining 51.961% of the variance. For the Chinese group, as seen in Table 3, the KMO value was 0.893 with a significant Bartlett's test ($\chi^2(55) = 1,145.535$, $p < .001$). Two factors were also identified, explaining 55.984% of the variance. Notably, factor loadings differed between groups, with some teacher-related and extracurricular items loading on the academic dimension in the Chinese model.

Table 2 Factor Loadings for Academic and Contextual Dimensions (English)

Factor	Loading	Eigen Value	% Variance explained	Cronbach's alpha
Factor 1 – Academic		4.592	41.741	0.807
- Textbook	0.777			
- Number of classes (per week)	0.748			
- Content	0.719			
- Assessment	0.671			
- Assessment frequency	0.540			
Factor 2 – Contextual		1.124	10.220	0.806
- Teaching materials	0.749			
- Personality and experience of teachers	0.748			
- Extra activity at university	0.618			
- Support from school	0.602			
- Teaching style	0.598			
- Pre & post-test	0.504			
Total			51.961	0.880

Table 3 Factor Loadings for Academic and Contextual Dimensions (Chinese)

Factor	Loading	Eigen Value	% Variance explained	Cronbach's alpha
Factor 1 – Academic		5.056	45.961	0.792
- Personality and experience of teachers	0.782			
- Assessment frequency	0.749			
- Assessment	0.718			
- Teaching materials	0.686			
- Number of classes (per week)	0.555			
- Extra-activity at school	0.551			
Factor 2 – Contextual		1.103	10.023	0.741
- Support from the Thai teacher	0.847			
- Support from school	0.751			
- Teaching content	0.604			
- Extra activity at university	0.571			
- Textbook	0.523			
Total			55.984	0.859

2. Hypotheses Results Model fit was assessed using the coefficient of determination (R^2). As shown in Table 4, R^2 values for English proficiency ranged from 0.176 (speaking) to 0.273 (reading), indicating moderate explanatory power. For Chinese

proficiency, R^2 values ranged from 0.276 (writing) to 0.464 (listening), indicating substantial explanatory power across all four skills (Cohen, 1988).

Table 4 R^2 Values for Academic and Contextual Dimensions on Perceived Language Proficiency.

Skill	English (R^2)	Explanatory level	Chinese (R^2)	Explanatory level
Listening	0.201	Moderate	0.464	Substantial
Speaking	0.176	Moderate	0.284	Substantial
Writing	0.233	Moderate	0.276	Substantial
Reading	0.273	Substantial	0.319	Substantial

As shown in Table 5, academic dimensions were significantly associated with all four English skills—listening ($\beta = 0.073$, $p < .001$), speaking ($\beta = 0.082$, $p < .001$), writing ($\beta = 0.092$, $p < .001$), and reading ($\beta = 0.063$, $p < .001$), supporting H1a. Contextual dimensions also significantly predicted all English skills—listening ($\beta = 0.050$, $p < .001$), speaking ($\beta = 0.045$, $p < .001$), writing ($\beta = 0.065$, $p < .001$), and reading ($\beta = 0.096$, $p < .001$), supporting H2a.

For Chinese proficiency, academic dimensions significantly influenced all four skills—listening ($\beta = 0.108$, $p < .001$), speaking ($\beta = 0.110$, $p < .001$), writing ($\beta = 0.081$, $p < .001$), and reading ($\beta = 0.115$, $p < .001$), supporting H1b. Contextual dimensions showed mixed effects, significantly predicting listening ($\beta = 0.073$, $p < .001$), writing ($\beta = 0.070$, $p < .001$), and reading ($\beta = 0.037$, $p < .05$), but did not significantly affect speaking ($\beta = 0.030$, $p = .098$), partially supporting H2b.

Table 5 Hypothesis Testing Results for Academic and Contextual Dimensions on Perceived Language Proficiency

Language	Skill	Academic Dimension			Contextual Dimension		
		β	p -value	Decision	β	p -value	Decision
English	Listening	0.073	**	H1a Supported	0.050	**	H2a Supported
	Speaking	0.082	**		0.045	**	
	Writing	0.092	**		0.065	**	
	Reading	0.063	**		0.096	**	
Chinese	Listening	0.108	**	H1b Supported	0.073	**	H2b Partially Supported
	Speaking	0.110	**		0.030	ns	
	Writing	0.081	**		0.070	**	
	Reading	0.115	**		0.037	*	

** = $p < 0.001$; * = $p < 0.05$; ns = not significant

Regarding H3, comparison of the regression results for perceived English and Chinese proficiency revealed notable differences in predictive patterns. Academic dimensions consistently and significantly predicted all four skills in both languages, with stronger effects for Chinese (β ranging from 0.081 to 0.115) than English (β ranging from 0.063 to 0.092). In contrast, contextual dimensions significantly predicted all English skills but showed weaker and less consistent effects for Chinese, including a non-significant effect on speaking ($\beta = 0.030$, $p = .098$). These findings suggest that the predictive roles of academic and contextual dimensions vary across languages, thereby supporting H3.

Discussion and Conclusion

The finding reveals that academic dimensions consistently predicted all four language skills in both English and Chinese, reinforcing CLT's emphasis on structured instructional scaffolding as a foundation for communicative competence (Richards, 2006; Nasimova, 2022). This dominance of academic factors reflects the reality of Thai public schools, where formal instructional structures—including prescribed curricula, assessed learning outcomes, and regulated contact hours—remain the primary mechanism for language development (Kelasi, 2025; Hakami, 2025). Notably, academic dimensions had stronger predictive effects for Chinese than English, suggesting that Chinese learners rely more on formal instruction due to limited informal exposure in Thai contexts.

In contrast, the contextual dimension yielded divergent results across languages. For English, contextual factors significantly influenced all skills, supporting CLT's view that communicative competence develops through interaction (Brown, 2014; Richards, 2006) and aligning with evidence on the role of interactive pedagogy in enhancing fluency and confidence (Watson Todd & Darasawang, 2020). This pattern reflects Thailand's established English-learning ecosystem, where media, tourism, and digital platforms reinforce classroom instruction through real-world exposure. For Chinese, however, contextual effects were weaker and non-significant for speaking, suggesting that limited opportunities for authentic interaction and structural constraints—such as teacher shortages and rote-based instruction—restrict communicative development (Photip, 2020; Widiyati & Pangesti, 2022). These findings highlight the relative institutional disadvantage of Chinese language education in Thailand, where CLT implementation remains uneven compared to English (Rabob et al, 2016; Silarak, 2021; Xiao & Tian, 2024; Phetsangkhad, 2023).

Moreover, the comparative analysis reveals clear differences in how academic and contextual dimensions operate across the two languages. English reflects a more established communicative ecosystem supported by broader real-world exposure, allowing contextual factors to be associated with learning outcomes (Brown, 2014; Richards, 2006; Watson Todd & Darasawang, 2020). In contrast, Chinese proficiency was more strongly governed by academic dimensions, with contextual factors playing a limited and inconsistent role, particularly in speaking skills (Photip, 2020; Xiao & Tian, 2024). This asymmetry suggests that the academic-contextual distinction varies across languages and depends on institutional support and authentic communicative opportunities.

Further evidence of this distinction is observed in the differential factor structures between the two languages. Whereas English factors aligned clearly with CLT's academic-contextual distinction, the Chinese solution exhibited inversion, with teacher-related and extracurricular elements functioning as academic anchors. This suggests that in less institutionally developed instructional contexts, learners reorganize available resources to compensate for gaps in formal curricular support. This pattern consists with adaptive learning behavior under resource-constrained conditions (Darasawang & Reinders, 2021). Additionally, higher R^2 values for Chinese indicate that school-based factors account for a greater share of learning outcomes, whereas English proficiency is influenced by both institutional and external exposure (Alomoush & Al-Na'imat, 2018; Watson Todd & Darasawang, 2020).

Theoretically, this study makes four contributions to CLT and multilingual education scholarship. First, it extends CLT by demonstrating that the effectiveness of contextual factors is depending on institutional conditions. While CLT emphasizes interaction-rich environments (Brown, 2014; Richards, 2006; Larsen-Freeman & Anderson, 2011), the findings posit institutional context as a boundary condition for CLT's applicability. Second, it introduces institutional readiness—encompassing teacher quality, curricular coherence, and authentic exposure opportunities—as a necessary precondition for contextual effectiveness, whereby academic dimensions assume a compensatory role when institutional support is limited (Photip, 2020; Xiao & Tian, 2024). Third, the comparative findings indicate that the academic-contextual distinction is context-dependent rather than fixed, with factor structure inversion in Chinese suggesting that learners adaptively reorganize available resources under institutional constraints (Darasawang & Reinders, 2021). Fourth, it contributes to multilingual

education theory by showing how institutional and sociolinguistic conditions, including real-world exposure, language status, and institutional maturity, influence instructional effectiveness in tourism-driven multilingual contexts such as Phuket (Wathawatthana et al, 2025; Silarak, 2021).

In conclusion, this study addressed both research objectives. First, this study shows that academic dimensions consistently predict perceived proficiency in both English and Chinese, whereas the effectiveness of contextual dimensions depends on institutional readiness, particularly in Chinese language education within Thai public schools. Second, the differing patterns across languages indicate that CLT's academic-contextual framework is context-dependent, with Chinese instruction requiring targeted institutional support to address structural limitations. As multilingual competence becomes increasingly important in tourism-driven economies such as Phuket, future efforts should prioritize Chinese teacher development, communicative curriculum reform, and language-rich school environments that support the effective implementation of CLT principles across both languages.

Recommendations

The findings offer recommendations for three groups of stakeholders. For teachers, structured communicative lesson design focused on authentic real-world language use is paramount. English instruction can leverage interactive activities such as role plays and simulations to capitalize on existing contextual supports, while Chinese teaching should prioritize structured speaking practice to address limited informal exposure opportunities.

For school administrators, extending language learning beyond the classroom is essential. Establishing language-enriched environments—including conversation clubs, inter-school competitions, and partnerships with local tourism businesses—can help compensate for limited contextual exposure, particularly for Chinese. Strengthening teacher quality through targeted recruitment and professional development is equally critical, especially given persistent teacher shortages in Chinese instruction.

For policymakers, addressing the systemic imbalance between English and Chinese language education is urgent. This requires investment in Chinese teacher development, curriculum standardization, and communicative assessment frameworks. Aligning language policy with multilingual workforce demands will better equip students to participate in Phuket's tourism-driven economy.

Nevertheless, several limitations should be acknowledged, which also inform directions for future research. Theoretically, while CLT provides a useful framework, it does not fully capture socio-cultural influences such as motivation and learner identity, nor structural factors specific to Chinese language education. Methodologically, the cross-sectional design limits causal inference, and single-item self-reported measures may not fully capture actual communicative ability. Future research should adopt longitudinal or experimental designs to establish causal relationships and incorporate objective proficiency assessments. Comparative studies across different school types and regions would enhance generalizability, while qualitative approaches—such as classroom observations and teacher interviews—could provide deeper insights into the limited contextual effects on Chinese speaking proficiency.

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