

Analyzing Chinese Vocabulary Errors Among Laotian Students: A Case Study at E4E Language School in Luang Prabang

老挝学生的汉语词汇偏误分析—— 以琅勃拉邦 E4E 语言学校为例

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Abstract: With China's peaceful rise, there has been a growing global enthusiasm for learning Chinese, commonly known as the "Chinese Language Fever". In recent years, many volunteers for Chinese Language education have travelled to Laos to provide instruction. However, many of them lack practical experience in teaching Chinese vocabulary to foreign learners in the local context, leading to an understanding of the specific vocabulary learning challenges and errors faced by Laotian students. This knowledge gap can hinder their ability to achieve teaching objectives effectively and efficiently. To address this gap, this research employed classroom observation and error analysis to explore the vocabulary teaching and learning challenges faced by the Laotian students. The findings of this research indicate that vocabulary instruction should prioritize the practical application of words while minimizing reliance on translation and visual aids. Additionally, this research advocates incorporating enjoyable localized elements into classroom teaching to enhance the overall learning experience. To address learning errors, this research proposes targeted teaching strategies, emphasizing the importance

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of explaining synonyms and words with similar forms, enabling students to apply their knowledge effectively. These strategies are designed to address the specific vocabulary learning challenges faced by Laotian students and to improve the overall efficacy of Chinese vocabulary instruction in Laos.

Keywords: Laos, Chinese Beginners, Chinese Vocabulary, Error Analysis

摘要：随着中国的和平崛起，全球学习汉语的热情日益高涨。近年来，许多汉语教育志愿者前往老挝开展教学工作。然而，他们中的许多人缺乏在当地环境下向外国学习者教授汉语词汇的实际经验，因而无法了解老挝学生在词汇学习方面所面临的具体挑战和偏误。这种知识差距会阻碍他们有效地实现教学目标。为弥补这一不足，本研究采用课堂观察和偏误分析的方法，探讨老挝学生在词汇教学和学习中面临的挑战。研究结果发现，词汇教学应优先考虑单词的实际应用，同时尽量减少对翻译和视觉辅助工具（PPT）的依赖。此外，本研究还提倡在课堂教学中融入愉快的本地化元素，以增强整体学习体验。针对学习中出现的偏误，本研究提出了有针对性的教学策略，强调解释同义词和形式相似的单词的重要性，使学生能够有效地运用所学知识。这些策略旨在解决老挝学生于词汇学习中所面临的特殊挑战，提高老挝汉语教学的整体效率。

关键词：老挝，汉语初学者，汉语词汇，偏误分析

1. Introduction

In recent years, as China's international influence and comprehensive strength have increased, the status of the Chinese Language on the global stage has significantly risen, establishing it as one of the most widely used languages worldwide. This growth has led to increased recognition and popularity of Chinese Language, particularly in neighbouring countries like Laos, which shares close and friendly relations with China. The deepening economic and cultural exchanges between China and Laos have fostered the expanding use of Chinese Language in Laos. Consequently, many Laotians have started learning Chinese, making it the most spoken and used foreign language for communication among the Laotian people. In response to this growing development, Laos has

established numerous Chinese educational institutions to meet the demand for Chinese Language instruction. To facilitate effective communication, Chinese Language education in Laos prioritizes vocabulary acquisition, particularly for use in everyday conversations. This research, through classroom observations, analyze the current state of vocabulary learning among Laotian students and presents targeted teaching strategies designed to improve vocabulary acquisition. It is hoped that this research will serve as a valuable reference for advancing the development of Chinese Language education in Laos.

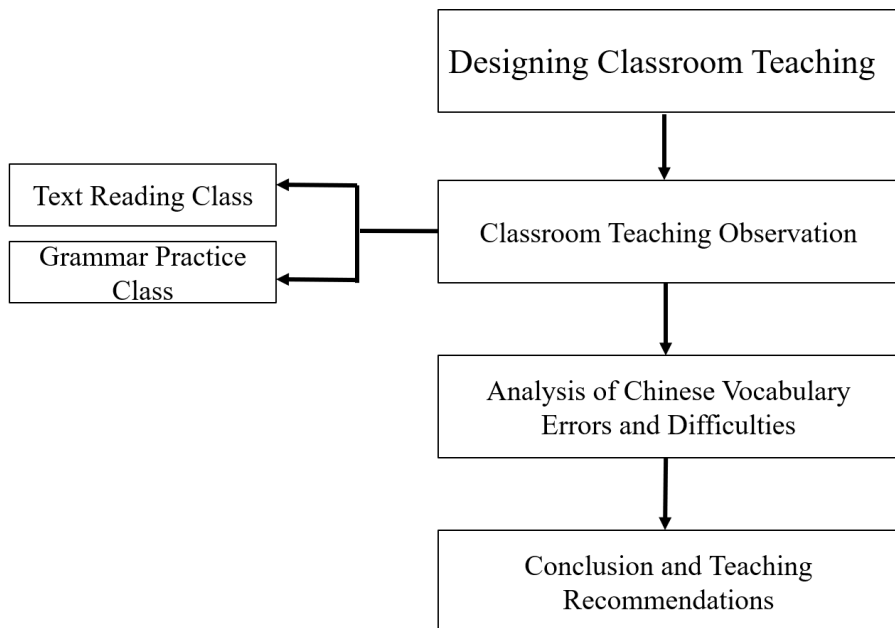
The enthusiasm for learning Chinese Language, often referred to as “Chinese Language Fever,” is rapidly growing across the globe. This trend is particularly evident in Laos, where an increasing number of people are actively studying Chinese. Despite the widespread interest in second language acquisition and numerous classroom-based studies on the challenges and strategies involved, research specifically focused on Chinese vocabulary instruction in Laos remains scarce and is still in the early stages of development. This gap poses a unique challenge for Chinese Language education volunteers, many of them lack prior teaching experience and consequently have limited understanding of the specific vocabulary learning challenges and common errors encountered by Laotian students. Such limitations may impede these volunteers from achieving their teaching objectives efficiently and effectively. Therefore, it is urgent and essential to investigate the challenges and typical errors that Laotian students face in learning Chinese vocabulary. Only by conducting a thorough analysis of these learning difficulties can we engage in targeted error analysis, which is crucial for designing effective teaching interventions. Moreover, a comprehensive understanding of learners’ common vocabulary-related errors will enable the development of targeted teaching strategies to improve vocabulary acquisition. Such research and its resulting recommendations can enhance students’ proficiency in Chinese vocabulary, thereby substantially improving the quality and effectiveness of Chinese Language education in Laos.

1.1 The Research Framework

The research framework of this research focuses on exploring the challenges and teaching strategies in Chinese vocabulary learning for Laotian beginners in Chinese from scratch. It primarily considers three aspects: designing classroom teaching, classroom teaching observation, and analysis of errors and challenges. First, through the designed classroom teaching, there will be specific classroom teaching observations during classroom practices of situational conversations and text reading. Next, the errors and challenges in learning Chinese vocabulary by Laotian students will be observed and discussed. Then, the actual situations and reasons for errors and challenges faced by Laotian students in the process of learning Chinese vocabulary will be investigated. Finally, this research will provide conclusions and recommendations. The research framework of this research is illustrated in Figure 1.1.

Figure 1.1

The research framework of this research paper.



2. Literature Review

This research examines the challenges faced by Lao beginners in learning Chinese vocabulary, as well as the teaching strategies employed to address these difficulties, using the context of Chinese Language instruction in Laos as a focal point. Accordingly, the literature review is divided into two main sections: the first section reviews existing research on Chinese vocabulary teaching in Laos, while the second section focuses on the research concerning Chinese vocabulary learning among Lao students. This division aligns with the research objectives of this research, providing a structured overview of relevant highlighting gaps that this study seeks to address.

2.1 The research on Chinese vocabulary teaching in Laos

Wang (2020) selected the theme of “occupation” as the main content for Chinese classroom learning based on the learning preferences of Thai high school seniors. The primary objective was to help students to articulate their career intentions. The research also discovered the feasibility and importance of thematic teaching, which not only allowed for the expansion and extension of vocabulary based on students’ actual needs but also enhanced communication between teachers and students. The research on the thematic teaching model could serve as a valuable reference for the design of Chinese Language teaching in Laos, providing insights into strategies for teaching and learning Chinese in Laos.

In addition to emphasizing the selection of appropriate teaching materials, Holley and Janet King (1971) proposed that teachers need to be keenly aware of how to correct students’ Chinese vocabulary usage errors, avoiding correction strategies that may embarrass or discourage students. Wang (2021) explored the error correction feedback practices of intermediate Chinese Language teachers in a non-native language environment. Intermediate-level Chinese Language teachers continue to focus on providing vocabulary-related error correction feedback to students, with immediate error correction feedback being more frequent than delayed feedback. After analyzing the students’ comprehension responses

following the teacher's error correction, it was found that the overall comprehension response rate of students was high. This indicates that intermediate-level students take the teacher's - feedback seriously. Finally, through questionnaires, the attitudes of both teachers and students towards error correction feedback were investigated. The research results were organized, summarized, and concluded, providing several recommendations for error correction feedback in the Chinese Language classroom for foreign language teachers.

As for preschool Chinese Language classrooms, Wang (2022) pointed out that the importance and feasibility of implementing thematic vocabulary teaching were emphasized to enhance the teaching level and effectiveness of Chinese Language instruction for this age group. The paper also discussed the challenges and key points of this thematic vocabulary teaching. Teachers should prioritize thematic teaching as the core of Chinese vocabulary instruction for preschoolers, integrating knowledge from various subject areas, and guiding students to build and improve their own knowledge network during the teaching process. This approach effectively assists in developing the multiple intelligences of preschoolers and helps them acquire new knowledge in meaningful learning, enriching and refining their cognitive structure.

Thematic teaching is not only applicable in preschool Chinese Language classrooms but can also be effectively applied in Chinese Language classrooms across different age groups. According to Shi (2019), using the "Mid-Autumn Festival" as the theme can guide Korean elementary school students to fully understand the traditional Chinese festival through legends, poetry, related idioms, customs, and more. Additionally, to deepen students' impressions and assist them in applying what they've learned, the teacher took the students to a local Chinese restaurant for practical exercises. Thematic teaching can effectively connect the classroom and facilitate a complete and efficient teaching process by constructing a well-designed thematic network. This approach enhances students' communication abilities (Smith, 2018).

Sun (2019) argues that culture and language are inseparable in the teaching of Chinese as a foreign language, and they mutually reinforce each other. Therefore, using “China Trip” as the teaching theme, students from Coffs Harbour High School in Australia were led to understand Chinese culture from different perspectives, aiming to enhance Australian students’ impressions of Chinese culture.

2.2 The research on Chinese vocabulary learning among Laotian students

Zhao and Mao (2010) emphasized that the elements of the Chinese Language are the core content of Chinese Language teaching and the key points that learners need to master effective communication. Therefore, Chinese educators should conduct in-depth research on the usage patterns of pronunciation, vocabulary, grammar, and Chinese characters. They should also employ corresponding teaching strategies to enable students to transform language knowledge into language skills in practice. Through the process of practice, students can effectively grasp the elements of the Chinese Language and enhance their language skills in listening, speaking, reading, and writing. This teaching method helps students acquire practical language skills in Chinese learning, laying a solid foundation for them to express themselves and communicate more freely in Chinese communication.

Chen (2020) conducted the analysis of the challenges Laotian students face in vocabulary learning. The research suggests that the difficulties and errors encountered by Laotian students mainly stem from the influence of differences between phonetic and ideographic writing systems, as well as the tedious impact of vocabulary teaching and practice methods. To address these issues, corresponding strategies and specific teaching designs are proposed. These strategies include providing more comparisons and connections to help students understand the semantics of vocabulary, using lively and interesting teaching methods to spark students’ interest in learning Chinese vocabulary, and emphasizing vocabulary practice to help students master the standard usage of vocabulary in expression. Through these strategies and teaching designs, Laotian students can better acquire Chinese vocabulary, thereby enhancing learning effectiveness and interest.

Sun (2021) used confusing word pairs as the theoretical basis. Combining this with the researcher's practical experience in Chinese teaching at Xinhua School in Laos, a predictive table of confusing word pairs is established. Referring to the vocabulary of HSK levels 1 to 4 and conducting tests on 45 intermediate Chinese learners at Xinhua School in Laos, 61 groups of confusing word pairs for intermediate Laotian students are determined based on word misuse frequency and distribution. From the perspective of learner acquisition, these 61 groups of confusing word pairs are classified into five categories: similar word forms, partially similar morphemes, similar translations in Lao, similar translations in intermediary languages, and similar meanings. The research reveals that confusing word pairs with partially similar morphemes and similar meanings pose challenges in intermediate Chinese Language teaching. Practical teaching and learning recommendations are provided for teachers and students to overcome these challenges effectively.

Cai (2011) explored the comparison of corresponding synonyms in Chinese and Lao. The usage of synonymous nouns in Chinese by Laotian students. Through a questionnaire survey, the research provides a detailed analysis of the difficulty levels in Laotian students' learning of synonyms and the errors and reasons that occur during their usage. The research also proposes specific strategies aimed at guiding and assisting Laotian students in better mastering and utilizing Chinese synonyms, thereby enhancing their language expression and communicative effectiveness. This research deepens the understanding of the semantic challenges that Laotian students face in learning Chinese Language, offering targeted assistance for teaching.

Qiao (2016) investigates and analyzes grammatical errors through examples from Thai junior and senior high school students. According to the study, errors are categorized into seven types: misuse, addition errors, omission, disordering, inappropriate collocations, semantic errors, and confusion of synonyms. The research delves into the causes of these errors to assist students in improving their

learning strategies and to provide teachers with teaching techniques and guidance. This research is significantly important for understanding the grammar difficulties and errors Thai students face in learning Chinese. By revealing the types and causes of errors, teachers can conduct more targeted teaching, guide students to avoid similar grammatical mistakes, and enhance their language expression. Additionally, learners can draw upon these analysis results to strengthen their learning strategies, better grasp Chinese grammar rules, and improve learning efficiency.

In summary, the enthusiasm for learning Chinese Language in Laos is rapidly growing, and various forms of learning classes continue to emerge, attracting an increasing number of students. The rise of the Chinese Language trend is mainly attributed to the rapid development of the Chinese economy and the continuous growth of Sino-Lao trade. With the increasing presence of Chinese companies in the Laotian market, the demand for talent who can communicate in Lao and Chinese has risen. This demand has propelled the thriving development of Chinese Language teaching in Laos. However, the current state of Chinese Language education in Laos is disorganized, lacking standardization and effective guidance, with no specialized Chinese Language research institutions to provide guidance for Chinese Language teaching in Laos. While various types of classes offer students the opportunity to learn Chinese Language, the teaching quality and standards are not consistent, resulting in varying levels of proficiency among students.

3. Research Methodologies

This research investigates the challenges faced by Laotian beginners in learning Chinese vocabulary and examines the underlying causes, aiming to propose targeted teaching strategies that facilitate effective vocabulary acquisition for foundational Chinese learners in Laos. To achieve these objectives, a literature review was conducted to provide an overview of existing research on Chinese vocabulary teaching, learning processes, and the specific context of Laotian students' vocabulary acquisition. Additionally, classroom observation and error

analysis were employed to examine real-life Chinese vocabulary classes at E4E Language School in Luang Prabang, Laos, with a focus on identifying the learning difficulties and common errors made by Laotian learners. Based on the findings, this research aims to recommend effective and targeted teaching strategies to enhance Chinese vocabulary teaching for beginner learners in Laos.

3.1 Research Design

The close and friendly relations between Laos and its neighboring country, China, have fostered frequent cultural exchanges, sparking a widespread “Chinese Language Fever” in Laos. The demand for Chinese Language proficiency has reached unprecedented levels, prompting many schools in Laos to introduce Chinese Language courses. Additionally, Chinese Language training institutions are continuously expanding to meet the growing interest in Chinese Language learning among Laotian students. Despite this enthusiasm, research focusing specifically on Chinese vocabulary instruction for Laotian learners remains limited and is still in its early developmental stages.

In recent years, a notable influx of Chinese Language education volunteers and novice teachers has arrived in Laos to support Chinese Language instruction. However, due to limited familiarity with the specific learning difficulties and common errors faced by Laotian learners, these educators may struggle to develop and implement targeted classroom strategies. Consequently, they may face challenges in effectively achieving their teaching objectives.

To address this gap, the researcher conducted classroom observations and analyzed the vocabulary learning processes of Laotian beginner learners of Chinese Language. This analysis aimed to identify common learning difficulties and errors, providing a foundation for proposing targeted teaching suggestions and strategies. The goal of this research is to contribute to the enhancement of Chinese vocabulary instruction in Laos, thereby improving the overall quality and effectiveness of Chinese Language education in the country.

Based on the research motivation, the researcher aims to achieve the following research objectives through this research:

1) To observe and analyze the vocabulary learning difficulties and common errors faced by Chinese beginners in Luang Prabang, Laos.

2) To identify effective teaching strategies for overcoming these challenges based on the results of the errors analysis.

To address the following research question through this research:

1) What is the vocabulary learning difficulties and common errors faced by Chinese beginners in Luang Prabang, Laos?

2) What effective teaching strategies can be provided to address these difficulties and errors in learning Chinese vocabulary for Chinese beginners in Luang Prabang, Laos?

By addressing these hypothesis questions, this research aims to provide valuable research findings for the field of Chinese vocabulary teaching in Laos, offering practical guidance and recommendations to enhance the outcomes and quality of Chinese vocabulary teaching and learning for Laotian students.

The research participant of this research are the students attending the elementary Chinese classes at E4E Language School in Luang Prabang, specifically the two beginner-level classes. There are a total of 50 Lao students enrolled in these classes, with one class consisting of 24 students and the other consisting of 26 students. All students are between the ages of 15 and 20 years old and their native language is Lao. The researcher will observe the performance of these Lao students in the Chinese classes, specifically during the activities of reading of texts and grammar exercises.

3.2 Literature Review Method

This research primarily collects literature related to the promotion of Chinese education and schools in Laos, as well as studies on Chinese Language teaching in the country, to analyze the language learning situation of Laotian students. Given the limited availability of research specifically focused on Laotian students in Luang Prabang, the study draws insights from previous research on students from other regions of Laos, as well as studies on Chinese Language learning challenges

observed in Laotian students studying in China. Using the Chinese class at E4E Language School in Luang Prabang as a case study, this research explores the Chinese Language learning experiences of students in Luang Prabang, Laos.

3.3 Classroom Observation Method

This research observed the performance of Laotian students in Chinese Language classrooms and documented the classroom observations through written records. Key aspects recorded include common phonetic and vocabulary errors made by students while learning course materials, as well as frequent mistakes encountered during sentence construction and Chinese character writing exercises. Observations are also conducted during conversational classroom activities to capture students' phonetic and grammatical errors. The data gathered from these classroom observations are analyzed to identify the learning difficulties and errors faced by the students. Based on these identified challenges, appropriate teaching strategies and recommendations are proposed to address the specific issues observed in the Chinese Language learning process. (Zhang, 2020)

3.4 Error Analysis Method

This research is based on the researcher's observation of Lao students' classroom learning status in the Chinese class at the E4E Language School in Luang Prabang. The classroom observations were recorded to document the Chinese vocabulary learning difficulties of Lao students. The recorded data were then systematically analyzed to identify the errors and misconceptions made by the students during their language learning process.

3.5 Observation of Errors in Text Reading Class

During the classroom observations, the researcher focused on the reading sessions of the following units which are Unit 1 "self-introduction", Unit 4 "Chatting", Unit 5 "What is this?", Unit 7 "What Can You Do?" and Unit 9 "My Life". For the reading sessions of the textbook passages, the researcher organized small group activities where students were encouraged to read the passages on their own. If they encountered unfamiliar or difficult words, they were encouraged to ask the teacher or their peers for the correct pronunciation. The

researcher supported the idea of students helping each other as it strengthened their memory of the words. Once the students became familiar with the passages, the researcher randomly selected individuals to read the text aloud. This approach provided an opportunity for each student to practice reading the passages and helped assess their reading abilities.

Regarding the pronunciation of vocabulary in sentences, especially words with neutral tones, students frequently make mistakes. In the fifth lesson (Unit 5) “What is This?” and the ninth lesson (Unit 9) “My Life”, when reading words like “房子” (fángzi - house), “鞋子” (xiézi - shoes), “裤子” (kùzi - pants), “裙子” (qúnzi - skirt), “帽子” (màozi - hat), “饺子” (jiǎozi - dumplings), “衣服” (yīfu - clothes), and “喜欢” (xǐhuan - like), students are not accustomed to pronouncing the following characters with a neutral tone. Instead, when encountering “子” (zǐ), students tend to pronounce it as the fourth tone (zì). For example, “老挝有很多房子 (zì)” (There are many houses in Laos), “这是谁的鞋子 (zì)” (Whose shoes are these), “我的裤子 (zì) 很紧” (My pants are tight), “我有一个白色的帽子 (zì)” (I have a white hat), and “我也很喜欢吃饺子 (zì)” (I also really like to eat dumplings). For “衣服” (yīfu - clothes) and “喜欢” (xǐhuan - like), students mispronounce “服” (fu) as “fú” and “欢” (huan) as “huān”. For instance, “夜市里卖的衣服 (fú) 都很好看” (The clothes sold at the night market are very nice), and “妈妈最喜欢 (huān) 买东西了” (Mom likes shopping the most).

During the reading process of the fourth, seventh, and ninth lessons, the students tend to misread words with similar shapes. For example, in the sentence “我会做面包，也会做蛋糕” (I can make bread, and I can also make cakes), students may read “也” (yě) as “他” (tā), resulting in “我会做面包，他会做蛋糕” (I can make bread, he can make cakes). Moreover, the students also make errors in reading some words in the text, such as reading “农” (nóng) as “衣” (yī), so “农历新年” (Lunar New Year) becomes “衣历新年” (Yīlì New Year) (sometimes, some students can notice the mistake after reading the first character “衣”). They may read “百” (bǎi) as “白” (bái), so “这个手机卖一百九十

万kp” (This mobile phone is sold for 1.9 million kips) becomes “这个手机卖一白九十万kp”. Also, “太” (tài) is sometimes misread as “大” (dà), resulting in “太阳出来了” (The sun is out) being read as “大阳出来了”, and “这裙子太大了” (This skirt is too big) being read as “这裙子大大了”.

In the text content, certain verbs like “笑” (xiào - laugh), “哭” (kū - cry), “痒” (yǎng - itchy), “痛” (tòng - painful) and “急” (jí - anxious) are individual new words that some of the students cannot recognize even when the teacher points to the pictures and demonstrates the actions. In such cases, the teacher needs to guide the students through the pronunciation of Chinese Pinyin to help them read these words. For example, the teacher says, ” (pointing to the picture and demonstrating the action, the student can't say the word) Students, listen to the teacher, this is ‘x’ and ‘iào’ (pointing to the student), then the student will say ‘xiào’. Furthermore, when the words “学” (xué - learn), “说” (shuō - speak), “做” (zuò - do) are separated from other nouns and written on the whiteboard, students are unable to read them. However, when these words are placed within sentences or paired with other nouns, students can guess or read the pronunciation of these words.

4. Result and Analysis

Chinese and Lao are both members of the Sino-Tibetan language family, but each possesses distinct characteristics. Chinese belongs to the logographic writing system, where Chinese characters represent both meaning and sound. On the other hand, Lao is part of the phonetic writing system, where the script represents sound rather than meaning. Due to these differences, Chinese and Lao have their own systems and rules in terms of pronunciation, grammar, and writing. As a result, there are significant differences between these two languages, leading to various learning difficulties for students studying Chinese. Influenced by their native language, students may make errors while learning Chinese vocabulary.

Therefore, based on classroom teaching practices, the researcher collected, summarized and analyzed the difficulties faced by the beginners of the Chinese class at the E4E Language School in Luang Prabang. The objective is to explore targeted and effective teaching strategies.

4.1 Analysis of Errors and Difficulties in Vocabulary Learning

Based on the current textbook used, which is “I Love Mandarin 1”, the vocabulary mainly includes nouns, verbs, adjectives, and some adverbs. The vocabulary in the book is mostly presented in the form of images, without practical English or Lao annotations. With the use of PowerPoint presentations and teaching methods in the classroom, students can easily and quickly comprehend the vocabulary.

4.1.1 Monosyllable

In the vocabulary learning section, through classroom teaching and observation of reading texts, students find it difficult to remember the pronunciation and meanings of monosyllabic words. Moreover, these monosyllabic words are often abstract to them without translation. Even when presented with pictures or demonstrated through actions, some students may still misunderstand the intended meaning. For example, for the picture representation of “痛” (pain) showing a hand being cut by a knife, or the physical demonstration of pain expression after being hit, some students might mistakenly think it represents a cutting action and say, “cut?”. When observing the physical demonstrations, some students might ask, “Is it hitting?”. Furthermore, monosyllable verbs like “笑” (laugh), “哭” (cry), “痒” (itchy), “痛” (pain), and “急” (anxious) appear in later lessons (Unit 8) of the textbook. Therefore, these words are rarely encountered in the later texts, leading students to have little exposure to these words and even fail to read them correctly.

In addition, students may have difficulty recognizing and reading the words “学” (study/learn), “说” (speak), and “做” (do/make) in the early stages. However, through their association with other learned word combinations, mostly nouns, they can gradually comprehend and recognize these single-syllable words.

For example, with phrases like “学中文” (learn Chinese) and “说中文” (speak Chinese), the word “中文” (Chinese) appears frequently throughout the entire course in listening, speaking, reading, and writing activities. Similarly, in phrases like “做衣服” (make clothes), “做面包” (make bread), and “做蛋糕” (make cake), students can infer the meaning of the verb “做” (do/make) through the following noun (object).

4.1.2 Homograph

In Chinese, besides homophones with multiple meanings, there are also characters that have similar appearances but are not related in meaning. These words or characters may look alike, but they have different meanings and pronunciations. This similarity in character shapes can lead to confusion in students' vocabulary recognition because they may not distinguish the meanings between two similar-looking words. For example, mistaking “农” (nóng) as “衣” (yī), “百” (bǎi) as “白” (bái), “太” (tài) as “大” (dà), and “去” (qù) as “走” (zǒu).

Table 4.1

Comparison of Homograph

Chinese Vocabulary	Student Pronunciation or Written Errors
农夫	“衣” 夫
一百	一 “白”
太阳	“大” 阳
去学校	“走” 学校

From the above table, the researcher found that for students who have never been exposed to Chinese characters or whose cultural background is not related to the Chinese character system, these symbols with phonetic, semantic, and visual representations are indeed not easy to remember. Some of the students develop a sense of fear towards Chinese characters early in their learning process, so they choose to mark their vocabulary or notes with pinyin (phonetic transcription). However, this approach can lead to difficulties in distinguishing similar words

when encountered again. Moreover, this is also influenced by the teaching arrangement. In a beginner-level Chinese class, the focus is usually on pronunciation, and the introduction to Chinese characters comes later.

Therefore, students may not have a solid grasp of Chinese characters by the later stages of the course, leading to difficulties in understanding and correctly using words with homograph forms. Thus, it is evident that both teachers and learners do not place enough emphasis on Chinese characters, leading to a weak foundation in character learning, which in turn affects students' vocabulary acquisition.

4.1.3 Synonyms

In the context of the classroom, the researcher found that students have confused the usage of “发” (fā) and “送” (sòng), which is both words have the meaning of “send”. According to the “The Contemporary Chinese Dictionary” (Xiàndài hànyǔ cídiǎn)¹, “发” means “to deliver” or “to send out”, while “送” is explained as “to give as a present” or “to send (someone) off”.

Table 4.2

The meanings of “发” and “送”

	Chinese Vocabulary	The meaning of the Chinese Vocabulary
Send	发	“To deliver” “To send out”
	送	“To give as a present” “To send (someone) off”

When the student said, “送” (sòng) a photo to him, meaning to give the photo as a present, but it was just an ordinary photo, even though the researcher provided some hints in response, it was not enough to remind the student of the proper usage of “发” (fā) and “送” (sòng).

¹ “The Contemporary Chinese Dictionary”, also known as “Xiandai Hanyu Cidian” is a Dictionary of Current Chinese or Contemporary Chinese Dictionary. It is an important one-volume dictionary of Standard Mandarin Chinese published by the Commercial Press, now into its 7th edition.

As for the vocabulary “好看” (hǎokàn), “漂亮” (piàoliang), and “美” (měi), the students only used “好看” (hǎokàn) without utilizing the other two words. According to the “The Contemporary Chinese Dictionary”, the explanations for “好看” (hǎokàn), “漂亮” (piàoliang), and “美” (měi) are as follows: “漂亮” (piàoliang) means beautiful, attractive, or good-looking; “好看” (hǎokàn) means good-looking, pleasing to the eye, or visually appealing; “美” (měi) means beautiful or good-looking (the opposite of “ugly”). (The English translations provided here are approximate equivalents of the meanings of the Chinese words. The actual usage and nuances of these words may vary in different contexts.)

Table 4.3

The meanings of “好看” (hǎokàn), “漂亮” (piàoliang), and “美” (měi).

	Chinese Vocabulary	The meaning of the Chinese Vocabulary
Pretty	漂亮	beautiful, attractive, or good-looking
Nice	好看	good-looking, pleasing to the eye, or visually appealing
Beautiful	美	beautiful or good-looking (the opposite of “ugly”)

From the table above, there are subtle differences between these categories of words, these words are commonly referred to as synonyms. Even native speakers may not necessarily be able to explain the differences between them clearly, let alone students learning Chinese as a second language, who find it even more challenging to grasp the concepts and usage of synonyms. Furthermore, when teachers do not provide sufficient differentiation and explanations during the instruction of these types of synonyms vocabulary, students may resort to applying the thinking patterns they have learned in studying Lao language. Moreover, since the Chinese Language translations often correspond closely to Lao language, it inevitably leads to a certain degree of confusion among students in the use of synonyms.

4.2 Analysis of Vocabulary Errors

As a tonal language, there are tonal differences between Lao language and Mandarin Chinese, which make it difficult for students to remember the pronunciation of Chinese vocabulary. They may even misunderstand the tones of certain Chinese vocabulary as Lao tones, leading to pronunciation errors in Chinese vocabulary. The influence of the native tongue on learning a second language is a common phenomenon, affecting Laotian students' learning of Chinese vocabulary. When learning Chinese vocabulary, the lack of sufficient context can affect students' accurate understanding of the meanings of words. They may rely on memorization or guess the pronunciation and usage of words based on their appearance.

Laotian students learning Chinese may first encounter the first tone because it is the most common tone in Chinese Language learning. This may lead to their later exposure to other tones, making it more likely for them to make errors in the initial stages of learning. In Lao language, tone changes can alter the meaning of a word. Meanwhile, the same applies in Chinese Language, where tone changes can also lead to changes in word meanings. The students may overly emphasize the impact of tones on word meanings while learning Chinese vocabulary, then this will be leading them to the erroneous mistakes. Furthermore, learning motivation and the learning environment can also influence the occurrence of vocabulary errors among the students in learning Chinese Language. If the learning motivation is not strong enough or the learning environment lacks opportunities for practical use of Chinese Language, the students may not pay enough attention to details, leading to difficulty in memorizing a wider range of vocabulary. Therefore, they may end up repeatedly using a few memorable words.

In summary, the classification of errors mentioned above represents common vocabulary-related mistakes that students often encounter while learning Chinese. These issues cannot be resolved in a short period of time. Some of the students believe that if they can use existing vocabulary to express themselves, it is sufficient. However, they are not aware that such expression has significant limitations.

5. Conclusion and Recommendations

This research thesis takes students from the Chinese class at E4E Language School in Luang Prabang as a case study, aiming to explore the Chinese vocabulary learning difficulties and teaching strategies for Lao beginners of Chinese Language. It includes designing classroom teaching, practical observations of classroom teaching, as well as analysis of students' learning errors and difficulties during the process of learning Chinese. Based on the exploration of the above content in "Result and Analysis", this chapter presents conclusions and teaching recommendations.

5.1 Research Conclusion

In the section of research conclusions, the researcher will address one of the previously proposed hypothesis questions, which is "What is the vocabulary learning difficulties and common errors faced by Chinese beginners in Luang Prabang, Laos?". Based on the research objectives and research findings, the researcher identified common errors and difficulties among Lao students in Luang Prabang when learning Chinese vocabulary from beginner level.

Regarding vocabulary learning, the students commonly encounter mistakes and difficulties in recognizing and using monosyllabic words, distinguishing between homograph characters, and distinguishing between synonyms. When studying monosyllabic vocabulary, the students find it difficult to remember the pronunciation and meanings of the monosyllabic words. Moreover, these monosyllabic words are generally abstract to students, even with the addition of pictures, especially when they are not translated. The students are hesitant to read these new words. Therefore, students can only guess the pronunciation of the word based on the provided context. In terms of homograph, these characters have similar shapes but unrelated meanings, appearing visually alike yet having different definitions and pronunciations. These visually similar characters also lead to confusion in students' vocabulary recognition, as they fail to differentiate the meanings between the two words. Regarding to the synonyms, it is due to the

students do not have a complete grasp of various similar words, and most of the time, they approach learning with the mindset of their native language when acquiring knowledge of Lao language. Furthermore, the close similarity in meaning between Chinese Language, Chinese characters translations and Lao words also contributes to students' confusion when using synonyms, inevitably leading to some degree of disorder in their application.

5.2 Teaching Recommendations

The researcher provides answers to the question, “What effective teaching strategies can be implemented to address the difficulties and errors in learning Chinese vocabulary for beginners in Luang Prabang, Laos?” Based on the analysis of errors in vocabulary, along with an understanding of the students' learning situations in Chinese vocabulary during the teaching process, this study proposes the relevant pedagogical suggestions and discussions.

To emphasize the explanation of synonyms and words with similar spellings is a need to the vocabulary teaching. Laotian students may encounter some difficulties when learning Chinese Language, especially when dealing with synonyms or words with similar spellings. Especially for beginner Laotian Chinese learners, when encountering vocabulary difference from their native language, they tend to rely on translation and then directly apply the same approach they use for their native language's vocabulary. Most of the basic meanings of Laotian words are similar. If two words can be used in the same context, then there is no inherent distinction between them. However, Chinese vocabulary is rich and many translated words with similar meanings may not have a close connection in terms of semantics. Additionally, besides the primary meanings, there are other connotations that determine the appropriate context for using a word. Furthermore, if the teacher, during the teaching process, introduces synonyms or words with similar spellings without providing distinct explanations and distinctions. As a result, the learning thought patterns of Laotian students' native language will continue to influence their second language acquisition. Additionally, due to the similarity in translations from Chinese to Laotian, certain levels of confusion are unavoidable.

For example, the Chinese words “不” and “没” both translate to “ບໍ່” in Laotian language.

Therefore, teachers should always be prepared to provide explanations and clarifications for this type of vocabulary. When Laotian students encounter such words in the classroom, the teacher can immediately help instead of letting students translate on their own, which may lead to numerous usage errors in vocabulary. This applies to beginners, and even more so to intermediate learners. As they continuously expand their vocabulary, they must also pay attention to the distinctions between synonymous words and characters in Chinese Language and Laotian language translations. During the explanation process, teachers should proactively assist students in distinguishing between words to minimize the interference of negative transfer from their native language.

5.2.1 Vocabulary learning should be “learn to apply”

Chinese vocabulary learning is not limited to using it in reading texts but is a fundamental requirement for language learning, ultimately enabling practical communication in real-life situations. Therefore, in addition to teaching the meanings of vocabulary, teachers should also try to encourage students to apply the words they have learned in their daily lives. The teachers can often encourage students to form sentences using the words they have learned in the classroom to express themselves. The role of the teacher is to create an environment and provide conditions for Laotian students to practice applying the vocabulary. Furthermore, during review or learning a set of new words, teachers can select several groups of words, have students read and say sentences, and finally, have students do word and sentence reordering or sentence creation. For example, when learning emotional verbs like “happy”, “sad”, “disappointed”, etc., the teacher can write “觉得” (meaning “feel”) on the side and ask students to form sentences. The teacher can then compile the sentences spoken by the students on a PowerPoint presentation for reference and correction. In addition, some vocabulary may have a low recurrence rate in the textbook or appear much later in the course. Teachers should also present these words in the classroom, use them

to create new sentences for students to read aloud, or include them in exercises to allow students to become familiar with these words through multiple exposures.

5.2.2 Enhancing the fun of vocabulary teaching

All students in the Chinese class at Luang Prabang E4E Language School are beginners with zero prior knowledge. Therefore, enhancing the fun of teaching is an important aspect to consider in classroom instruction. In vocabulary teaching, the teachers can use games such as role-playing to reinforce and assess students' learning. First, divide Laotian students into several small groups and then use a PowerPoint presentation to display relevant pictures related to the day's theme. The students will then have to revolve around that theme and use the vocabulary they have learned to form sentences, simulate a dialogue, or create a story. The displayed pictures can include a menu, some clothing, sports images, or family members, among others. When students see a picture of playing football, they can brainstorm ideas such as playing football together, buying a football, discussing hobbies, and more. Based on the students' proficiency level, it is expected that they will be able to say dialogues like, “你要不要踢足球？(Do you want to play football?) 我要踢足球。(I want to play football.) 你骑摩托车去踢足球吗？(Are you going to ride a motorcycle to play football?) 不，我没有摩托车，我骑自行车去踢足球。(No, I don't have a motorcycle, I will ride a bicycle to play football.) 你呢？(What about you?) 我骑摩托车去。(I will ride a motorcycle.)” The teacher can assist from the side and offer rewards for their efforts. This kind of activity can engage students' participation and enthusiasm, while also reinforcing the vocabulary they have learned, thereby enhancing the fun of vocabulary learning.

5.2.3 Avoid over-relying on translation and visual images.

Due to the lack of context, Laotian students tend to leave their homework review for the next class. In other words, they do not spend much time reviewing vocabulary outside of class. Some of the Laotian students tend to excessively rely on translation, so when they encounter new vocabulary, they immediately “bury themselves” and start using their phones to look up translations. This leads to

Laotian students neglecting the details and instructions provided by the teacher in class, which indirectly affects their pronunciation of vocabulary and prevents them from fully understanding the meaning and usage of the words. The vocabulary in Laotian language is not as rich as that in Chinese Language, and synonyms can be used interchangeably in Laotian language. When the meanings are the same, it also implies that the usage is generally similar. Therefore, the Laotian students tend to easily translate Chinese Language words with similar meanings into the same Laotian language word.

In the early stages of teaching, the researcher would show students vocabulary through PowerPoint presentations with accompanying images. As the course progresses and students accumulate more vocabulary, the researcher encourages them to do pre-class preparation before each lesson. The researcher allows the students to express the meanings of vocabulary through guessing the words. The students' response is not very proactive, and sometimes they avoid making eye contact with the teacher. It's only after the teacher presents the PPT and provides explanations that they show signs of understanding. The students' response is not very proactive, and sometimes they avoid making eye contact with the teacher. It is only after the teacher presents the PPT and provides explanations that they show signs of understanding. During the review session, it is the same situation. Some students need to refer to the textbook to remember the meanings of the vocabulary when the teacher presents the vocabulary cards.

Moreover, the integration of qualitative research methods such as interviews can enhance the depth of the study. Conducting interviews with the students and gaining insights into their personal experiences, motivations, and challenges in learning Chinese can provide valuable qualitative data. By combining qualitative and quantitative approaches, a more comprehensive and holistic understanding of the learning process can be achieved. The inclusion of qualitative research can also help to capture individual perspectives and unique learning trajectories, enriching the overall findings and contributing to the development of more learner-centered and culturally sensitive language teaching approaches in Laos. In the

future, it is hoped that more qualified Chinese Language educators will join this team and propose more effective teaching strategies tailored to the learning difficulties of Chinese learners in Laos. This will ultimately enhance the quality of Chinese Language education in Laos.

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