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**Exploring Teaching Strategies and Approaches for Developing  
Communicative Competence in Chinese among L2 Learners**

**A Comparative Analysis of Norway and Sweden**

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## Abstract

Communicative competence is the capacity to use language effectively and appropriately in various situations and contexts. Developing communicative competence in second languages is fundamentally important because it equips students with the ability to effectively convey and interpret messages in various contexts, which is central to intercultural understanding, collaboration, and participation in a globalized world. Therefore, this research aims to examine the following aspects: Teaching strategies employed by Chinese language teachers in Norway and Sweden, it examines the correlation between teachers' educational backgrounds and their strategies, and it investigates potential differences between the strategies and approaches in Norway and Sweden. By utilizing both qualitative and quantitative research methods, this study offers an in-depth and holistic understanding of the subject matter. Primarily, the Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) and Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) approaches were employed in the Chinese language classrooms. The study revealed a connection between the educational backgrounds of teachers and their teaching strategies. However, the teaching strategies are further influenced by various factors, including teaching experience, curriculum requirements, cultural differences, and classroom challenges. In both Norway and Sweden, oral skills were prioritized. In Norway, the focus was mainly on oral skills and grammar, while in Sweden, there was more emphasis on developing speaking, reading, and listening skills.

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## Abbreviations

**CC**

Communicative Competence

**CSL**

Chinese as a second language

**CLT**

Communicative Language Teaching

**RQ**

Research Question

**TBLT**

Task-Based Language Teaching

**Udir**

Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training

## Definitions of Terms

### **Measure word**

A measure word is a grammatical element in Chinese that is used with numerals to indicate quantity and size/shape of the object being counted (Wang & Sun, 2015).

### **Pinyin**

Pinyin is a system of Romanized spelling for the Chinese language. It uses the Latin alphabet to represent the sounds of Mandarin Chinese, the most widely spoken Chinese language (Wang & Sun, 2015).

### **Radical**

A radical in the Chinese writing system is a fundamental component of a character that is used to indicate its meaning and pronunciation (Wang & Sun, 2015).

### **Second Language**

A second language is a language that is learned in addition to one's native or first language. It can also refer to a language that a person learned earlier but is not their native language.

### **Skolverket**

The Swedish National Agency for Education is an administrative authority responsible for managing and supporting the Swedish preschool, school and adult education (Skolverket, 2023).

### **Tones in Chinese Language**

Standard Mandarin Chinese, which is the official variant of the Chinese language, features four distinct tones: the first tone (high and level), the second tone (rising), the third tone (falling-rising), and the fourth tone (falling) (Wang & Sun, 2015).

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# 1. Introduction

Following China's economic reforms in 1978, there has been a remarkable surge in worldwide interest in learning the Chinese language. The establishment of Confucius Institute classrooms in 2004, have also played a pivotal role in promoting Chinese language and culture on a global scale (Huan, 1986, p. 1; Tao & Wang, 2018). Chinese language education commenced in Sweden in 1970 and in Norway in 2009 (Sahlberg Wu, 2015, p. 12; Doetjes, 2013, p. 5). Subsequent to the implementation of Chinese language teaching, there has been a noticeable upswing in student interest. Despite significant student interest, there have been challenges faced by Chinese language teachers, such as limited time, inadequate teaching materials, and insufficient government investment. These challenges have posed substantial hindrances to the development of Chinese as a second language in both countries.

Over the past decades, a conspicuous trend has arisen, marked by a growing emphasis on employing communicative approaches in second language teaching. This transformation in pedagogical orientation gained prominence during the 1970s when the communicative approach to second language teaching took a leading role. This approach, in contrast to traditional grammar-centered methods, focuses on fostering effective communication within authentic contexts (Savignon, 2017). The communicative approach is closely intertwined with the concept of communicative competence. Dell Hymes originally introduced the concept of communicative competence as a response and critique of Chomsky's linguistic competence theory in 1972. (Celce-Murcia, 2008, p. 42; Savignon, 2017, p. 3). Subsequently, the concept was further developed by Canale & Swan, encompassing grammatical, discourse, strategic, and sociolinguistic competence. Communicative competence spans across diverse linguistic proficiencies, encompassing the skills of listening, reading, writing, and speaking. The significance of communicative competence is also underscored by the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (Vold & Hellqvist, 2020, p. 11). The framework establishes a shared basis for creating language course materials, formulating curriculum guidelines, designing assessments, and developing educational resources, which also encompasses countries such as Norway and Sweden.

## 1.1 Research Questions and Objectives

The objective of this study is to examine the teaching strategies and approaches utilized by Chinese language teachers in Norwegian and Swedish high schools to enhance students' communicative competence in the Chinese language. Learning a foreign language primarily involves the development of skills in reading, listening, speaking, and writing. Communication skills and cultural awareness can facilitate greater interaction, understanding, and respect among individuals from diverse cultural backgrounds. Additionally, grammar plays an important role.

Through a combination of observations (using both qualitative and quantitative schemes) and interviews, the study aims to address the following research questions:

**RQ1:** What teaching strategies and approaches are used to develop students' communicative competence in Chinese?

**RQ2:** Is there a correlation between teachers' educational background and strategies/approaches for improving students' communicative competence in Chinese?

**RQ3:** Are there differences in teaching strategies between Norway and Sweden in improving students' communicative competence?

## 1.2 Structure of the Thesis

This thesis starts with an introduction, providing context for the research and outlining the scope of the study. It then delves into the theoretical framework, discussing the concept of communicative competence, teaching approaches and strategies, and relevant theories.

The method section presents a mixed-methods approach, interviews, observations (qualitative and quantitative). The data collection process is described, including the process of contacting schools, interviews, observation schemes, and ensuring validity and reliability.

The data analysis section covers qualitative and quantitative analyses. Furthermore, the results of the study will be presented to the research objectives. In the discussion section, the results are interpreted, connecting them to the theoretical framework and limitations and implications of the research will be discussed. The thesis discusses recommendations for further research and ends with a conclusion.

## 1.3 Background

### 1.3.1 Chinese as a Second Language in Swedish Schools

Chinese as a second language was introduced in Swedish schools in 1970, with Skanstulls High School being the pioneer for this initiative (Sahlberg Wu, 2015, p. 12). Since then, a surge in interest has been evident, with a 75% increase in high school students successfully passing Chinese during the academic year 2008/2009 (Sahlberg Wu, 2015, p. 13). The rising demand for Chinese learning is linked to China's growing economic influence and its portrayal as a valuable trade language. Consequently, this initiative resulted in the integration of Chinese as an optional subject in 18 junior high schools within Stockholm County. By 2015, the program had garnered significant interest, with more than 1,200 students enrolled (Sahlberg & Wu, 2015, p. 14).

Chinese language teaching spans seven levels in Swedish high schools, adult education programs, as well as two levels in primary schools (Sahlberg & Wu, 2015, p. 19). The language learners receive instruction in Mandarin, also known as *putonghua* or standard Chinese. The availability and variety of Chinese language teaching materials remain limited. This paucity of available resources poses a challenge to the effective teaching and learning of the Chinese language in the Swedish educational system. Currently textbooks used are *Zhongwen Haoxue* and *Laiba* (Sahlberg & Wu, 2015).

In 2014, the Ministry of Education collaborated with Chinese language teachers to revamp curricula; Nevertheless, a persistent scarcity of teaching resources endured. Additionally, a noticeable shortage of qualified teachers became apparent. This scenario underwent a notable transformation when Lund University and Dalarna University initiated comprehensive teacher training programs for Chinese as a second language. As a result, this effort contributed to addressing the shortage of proficient teachers (Sahlberg Wu, 2015, p. 110; Dalarna University, 2023).

### 1.3.2 Chinese as a Second Language in Norwegian Schools

The initiation of Chinese as a subject in Norwegian schools commenced with the project called “Nye fremmedspråk i skolen” (New foreign languages in school). This endeavor debuted at Sverresborg school in Trondheim in 2009-10, with a core goal of facilitating the teaching of Chinese in Norwegian schools (Doetjes, 2013, p. 5). With the help of the Foreign Language Center in Norway, the project successfully concluded in 2012. However, the language instruction persisted independently even after the project's conclusion (Doetjes, 2013, p. 5).

The popularity of the Chinese language surged, attracting approximately 1,000 students in both traditional classrooms and online teaching platforms (Øksenvåg, 2018, p. 1). Despite comprising less than 2% of all foreign language subjects, it claims the fourth-largest language in Norwegian schools, after Spanish, German, and French. Certain counties have even introduced online Chinese courses (Øksenvåg, 2018, p. 4).

In a manner reminiscent of Sweden's experience, Norway has encountered its own set of challenges in terms of acquiring qualified teachers for the introduction of the Chinese language. Most of the Chinese language teachers are former students and individuals of ethnic Chinese background who possess expertise in the field. Until the Confucius Institute's closure in 2020, teachers from the institute were also employed (Øksenvåg, 2018, p. 4). Chinese language instructors have advocated for greater investment in language education and for allocating more resources to enhance awareness. In response to this demand, the University of Oslo has taken the step of launching teacher training programs designed to tackle these issues (Øksenvåg, 2018, p. 4).

## 1.4 Curricula for for CSL in Norway and Sweden

In 2001, the Council of Europe introduced a significant milestone in language education with the publication of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR). This framework has left a lasting imprint on language policies within member countries. Central to its influence is the emphasis on two crucial aspects: communicative competence and multilingualism. Moreover, the CEFR has effectively established a common standard for

assessing language proficiency across the diverse nations of Europe (Council of Europe, 2011, p.124).

The Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) has played a central role in the planning, implementation, and evaluation of second language education in both Norway and Sweden. The framework has provided a shared basis for the development of teaching materials, curricula, and instructional resources, with the aim of promoting a unified approach to language instruction and learning across national borders. The Common European Framework of Reference for Languages divides language proficiency into receptive skills (listening and reading), productive skills (speaking and writing), and interactive skills (oral and written communication) (Council of Europe, 2020).

In August of 2020, the National Norwegian Curriculum, or LK20, was implemented with the aim of revitalizing the curriculum across all subjects, including second language teaching (Udir, 2023). The new curriculum for Chinese as a second language addresses key elements in second language teaching, encompassing the following elements: 1) Communication, 2) Intercultural competence, 3) Language learning and multilingualism, and 4) Language and technology. Furthermore, the curriculum includes fundamental skills such as oral proficiency, written proficiency, reading proficiency, and digital literacy (Udir, 2023).

Commencing from July 1, 2021, the revised subject curriculum for modern languages within Swedish upper secondary schools and adult education was launched. This updated curriculum encompasses various key elements, including: 1) Proficiency in comprehending the target language in both spoken and written forms 2) Proficiency in expressing oneself and communicating effectively in the target language through both oral and written mediums 3) Skill in adjusting language usage according to varying purposes, recipients, and contexts 4) Understanding of cultural and social conditions in different contexts and areas where the language is used (Skolverket, 2023).

Beyond the core elements that were presented, the Norwegian curriculum for second languages outlines nine competency goals related to all language skills - speaking, reading, writing, listening, including grammatical understanding. Additionally it includes elements of cultural understanding and the use of digital resources. Similarly, the Swedish curriculum for

second languages encompasses a total of thirteen competency goals, which also focus on all language skills, including grammar and cultural understanding.

## 2. Theoretical Framework

In this chapter, I will present the theoretical framework on which my research is built, focusing on the evolution and key concepts in second language teaching. I will begin with a historical overview of language teaching, highlighting the shift towards a communicative approach. Next, I will delve into the central theories and concepts that inform my research focus, such as Communicative Competence, and discuss strategies and approaches in second language teaching. Additionally, I will delve into Task-Based and Communicative Language Teaching, detailing how these methodologies inform and shape my approach to addressing the problem under investigation. Finally, I will introduce the Input Hypothesis, a foundational theory in Second Language Acquisition. By presenting an overview of this relevant theoretical foundation, I intend to establish a groundwork for the ensuing discussion and analysis of the research findings.

### 2.1 Second Language Teaching: Moving Towards a Communicative Approach

The field of second language teaching has experienced notable transformations throughout its history, as scholars have endeavored to identify the most efficient approaches to facilitate language learning. In the late 18th and 19th centuries, structural grammar and translation-based methods dominated the field. However, the audio-lingual approach gained prominence in the 1950s and 1960s which focused on listening and speaking skills and placed them in higher regard than written abilities. The primary objective of this approach was to foster precise pronunciation and grammatical accuracy, while simultaneously maintaining a smooth and coherent flow of speech. The efficacy of this approach was highlighted by the significance of active listening and repetitive practice in the process of acquiring knowledge. At the core of this methodology was the utilization of dialogues as the primary medium for introducing novel language materials, predominantly conveyed through audio resources. Students were provided with encouragement to engage in active listening, imitation, and memorization of the materials (Jin & Cortazzi 2011, p.567).

During the 1970s, there was a significant transformation in the field of second language education. In contrast to conventional approaches centered on repetition, there has been a shift in focus towards prioritizing the achievement of effective communication. The significance of context and language use was underscored with the advent of communicative competence in the early 1970s. The prominent linguist Stephen Krashen significantly contributed to the transformation of second language acquisition, playing a pivotal role in this paradigm shift. The communicative language teaching approach places emphasis on genuine communication within authentic settings, where language is integrated within its contextual framework. 'Authenticity' and 'authentic' are terms frequently applied to instances of language, whether spoken or written, that exhibit a natural flow and align with the cultural and situational contexts in which they are found (Rogers & Medley, 1988). The communicative approach encompasses the utilization of authentic texts, spoken language, and exercises that mirror real-life situations (Brandl, 2021, p. 13).

## 2.2 Communicative Competence

The concept of *Communicative Competence* holds significant importance within the discourse surrounding communicative language teaching. Originating in the early 1970s, the term was introduced by sociolinguist Dell Hymes as a response to Noam Chomsky's theories on linguistic competence (Celce-Murcia, 2008, p. 42). Hymes argued that a comprehensive understanding of language acquisition and use must encompass not only linguistic competence but also interactive abilities, thus emphasizing the pivotal role of the social dimension. Hymes describe the concept as the fundamental comprehension held by a language user regarding their language, encompassing not solely grammatical principles, but also encompassing guidelines governing the appropriate timing and manner in which the language can be applied in diverse situations.

Hymes' concept of Communicative Competence extends beyond linguistic competence, which deals with knowledge of morphology, syntax, phonetics, and vocabulary. It also includes sociolinguistic competence, which pertains to the rules governing the appropriate use of language in specific social and cultural contexts. In essence, Hymes argued that it is not enough to merely describe the grammatical features of a language in isolation. Instead, these features must be considered in relation to the context in which they are used (Hymes, 1972). This perspective emphasizes the importance of understanding language use within its

broader context and acknowledges that language proficiency involves both an understanding of its formal structures and its social and cultural dimensions.

### 2.2.1 Canale and Swain's model of Communicative Competence

The model of Communicative Competence developed by Canale and Swain is a widely recognized framework that offers a comprehensive approach to understanding the various components of communicative competence. In the context of second language teaching, Canale and Swain proposed that communicative competence consists of four sub-competencies: Grammatical competence, discourse competence, sociolinguistic competence, and strategic competence. The model has become a key reference for discussions on communicative competence in the fields of applied linguistics and second language teaching (Walean, 2004, p. 13). The model comprises four key components:

- *Grammatical Competence*

Grammatical competence encompasses the understanding and application of formal language rules, including vocabulary, morphology, syntax, semantics, and phonology, in order to construct coherent and meaningful sentences.

- *Discourse Competence*

Discourse Competence pertains to the organization and structure of a conversation or text, ensuring that it possesses a smooth and logical progression in terms of its content.

- *Sociolinguistic Competence*

Sociolinguistic competence refers to the ability to use the language appropriately in different social and cultural settings.

- *Strategic Competence*

Strategic competence is about managing communication breakdowns. It involves using strategies to maintain, repair, or improve communication.

It is important to develop all these components in order to achieve communicative competence because each element plays a critical role in the complex of language skills.

Grammatical competence is the foundation for understanding and producing correct sentences, while discourse competence ensures that these sentences flow together in a coherent and logical way. At the same time, sociolinguistic competence is necessary for understanding how to use language in a culturally and socially appropriate manner, especially in varied contexts. Finally, when communication breakdowns occur, it is strategic competence that helps us navigate and resolve these situations. If one lacks any of these skills, it can affect one's ability to communicate effectively. The combination of these competencies enables us to express ourselves clearly, perceive others correctly, and engage in meaningful and appropriate interactions in a range of social and cultural contexts.

## 2.3 Strategies and Approaches in Second Language Teaching

Strategies and approaches in language teaching are used to structure and target learning towards the desired goals. In this context, a strategy refers to the specific method a teacher uses to achieve teaching and learning objectives. On the other hand, an approach represents the fundamental theories of language and its acquisition, which form the basis for language instruction (Richards, 1986, p.16).

There are numerous approaches to language teaching, with the communicative approach, task-based method, grammar-translation method, and audiolingual method being the most well-known. These approaches can be classified as either traditional or modern based on their pedagogical principles and methods. Traditional approaches encompass the grammar-translation and audio-lingual methods. The grammar-translation method hinges on translating and analyzing texts to grasp grammar rules and vocabulary. This approach prioritizes written competence and accuracy, and the teacher often assumes an authoritative role, delivering lectures and providing direct instruction. On the other hand, the audiolingual method emphasizes speaking and listening skills, with repetition as a central element. In this approach, the teacher serves as both an instructor, with students expected to mimic the teacher's language use through repetition (Liu & Shi, 2007).

Modern approaches to language teaching include the communicative approach and the task-based approach. The communicative approach emphasizes communication and the use of language in authentic, meaningful situations. In this approach, the teacher serves as a facilitator who creates contexts for communication and encourages students to express

themselves freely. The students are active participants in the learning process, and they are encouraged to use the language to communicate with others naturally. The task-based approach structures language learning around meaningful tasks or activities. This approach focuses on the practical use of language and emphasizes collaboration and interaction between students. The teacher serves as a guide and support, and students are encouraged to explore language and its use in authentic situations (Richards & Rodgers, 2006). The subsequent chapter will provide a more comprehensive understanding of these two approaches.

## 2.4 Task-Based and Communicative Language Teaching

Since the 1980s and 1990s, the Communicative and Task-Based language teaching approaches have become increasingly popular, being widely incorporated into various second language classrooms. These approaches emphasize the importance of fostering practical communication skills by involving students in real-world activities, which in turn leads to a more profound grasp of the language and natural language acquisition. Significantly, these approaches have been shown to be effective in enhancing communicative proficiency (Obenza & Mendoza, 2021). Both the Task-Based Language Teaching and Communicative language teaching approaches share a common emphasis on interactive and meaningful language learning. Their central focus is on developing practical language proficiency, closely tied to the advancement of communicative competence.

The CLT approach places a premium on using the target language for authentic communication, rather than merely acquiring knowledge about it. It emphasizes real-life communication and incorporates authentic materials (Sreehari, 2012; Kosten, 2014). In CLT, learners engage in spontaneous interactions with teachers and peers, cultivating natural communication strategies for production, comprehension, and interaction. The approach features activities such as role-playing, interviews, and discussions, all centered on the learners' interests (Dörnyei, 2011).

CLT is a learner-centered approach, encouraging students to actively participate and engage meaningfully with the language. The teacher's role is to guide and create opportunities for natural language use, facilitating conversations, asking questions, and aiding communication. In this environment, the teacher fosters a willingness to take risks, learn from mistakes, and

provide feedback (Larsen-Freeman, 2000). The emphasis on interaction in CLT is crucial, aligning with Vygotsky's sociocultural theory, which posits that learning occurs as a result of collaboration and interaction with others. Such engagement in social interaction serves as the driving force behind the learning process and subsequent advancement (Vygotsky, 1978).

Renowned linguist Nunan (1991) has elucidated the principles and foundations of Communicative Language Teaching. It includes the following elements:

- A strong emphasis on the importance of interaction for acquiring communicative skills.
- Prioritization of authentic materials in teaching.
- Opportunities for learners to focus not only on the language itself but also on their own learning process.
- Utilization of learners' own experiences in the teaching context.
- Connect language learning in the classroom with language activities outside the classroom.

Task-Based Language Teaching prioritizes the use of tasks in the target language, set within real-world contexts, as a means of enhancing student learning. A *task* is defined by Nunan (1989 as: “a piece of meaning-focused work involving learners in comprehending, producing, and/or interacting in the target language.” In TBLT, tasks are specifically designed to necessitate the use of the target language for the collection, processing, or production of information (Richards, 2002, p. 20). These tasks, often reflecting real-world scenarios (Willis, 1996, p. 2). The outcome of a task can manifest in various forms such as posters, video clips and presentations.

## 2.5 Input Hypothesis: Second Language Acquisition

Stephen Krashen's Input Hypothesis, developed in the early 1980s, is a fundamental principle in the field of second language acquisition. The term *input* pertains to language that is expressed either orally or in written form. He claimed that language learning occurs as a result of exposure to linguistic input at an optimal level of difficulty for the learner. To elaborate further, this entails exposing the learner to content that slightly surpasses their current proficiency level ( $i + 1$ ), where “ $i$ ” represents the learner's current language level and

“+1” refers to the next stage of language acquisition. The Input Hypothesis consists of five individual hypotheses, collectively aimed at explaining the process of acquiring or learning a second language (Krashen, 1985).

- 1) *The Acquisition-Learning Hypothesis* proposes that *acquisition* is an unconscious process similar to first language acquisition, while *learning* refers to a conscious process where explicit knowledge about a language can be acquired.
- 2) *The Natural Order Hypothesis* states that different components of language are learned in a specific sequence.
- 3) *The Monitor Hypothesis* suggests that formal rules in language or conscious learning have a limited significance for second language acquisition. The monitor is used, for example, to correct what has already been produced or what is about to be produced.
- 4) *The Input Hypothesis* states that language acquisition occurs through the processing of comprehensible and meaningful input. Input should be comprehensible and meaningful up to a level slightly beyond the learner's current proficiency level (i+1).
- 5) *The Affective Filter Hypothesis* suggests that the affective filter can impede or even block language acquisition. This is particularly likely to happen when the learner is unmotivated, anxious, or lacks self-confidence.

## 2.6 Previous Research on Chinese as a Second Language

The existing research landscape concerning the teaching of Chinese as a second language remains relatively underexplored, particularly in comparison to studies on other languages. In particular, the study of Chinese as a second language in Scandinavia has seen little attention. To date, there have been only a handful of studies conducted in countries such as Denmark and Sweden.

### 2.6.1 Research in Sweden

The existing studies conducted in Sweden have focused on teaching Chinese teaching material. Liu (2021) examined two Chinese language textbooks for beginners in Sweden,

*Laiba* and *Zhongwen haoxue*, with a focus on how Chinese characters are presented and learned. The study found that both books emphasized common Chinese characters and provided information on their origin, strokes, order, and radicals. However, *Laiba* used both characters and pinyin in the text and classified characters differently from *Zhongwen haoxue*. The study concluded that the selection of Chinese characters should consider their regularity and usefulness, and teaching should be adapted to the diverse backgrounds and characteristics of the students. He (2017) investigated the cultural content and visual aids in the same two textbooks as Liu (2021). The analysis showed that both books prioritized everyday life and societal orientation but differed in their presentation of cultural encounters. Neither book provided opportunities for critical or creative thinking, and both lacked culturally-relevant vocabulary and phrases. The researchers suggested that future Chinese language textbooks should be tailored to different age groups with age-appropriate content and images. Eliasson (2017) examined the same two textbooks to assess whether they met the requirements of the newly-established curriculum for Chinese language teaching in Sweden. The study found that the textbooks were not sufficient to fulfill the goals in the curriculum, especially with regard to listening and speaking skills. More tasks focusing on listening and speaking comprehension were needed to keep up with the stipulated pace in which reading and speaking skills are supposed to be learned.

## 2.6.2 TBLT and CLT in Chinese as Second Language

Previous studies suggest that TBLT can have positive effects on language learning outcomes, particularly in terms of increasing student participation, speaking opportunities, enjoyment, and reducing anxiety (Rui & Xiangyun, 2015). TBLT is found to be more effective than audio-lingual teaching approaches and can contribute to achieving communication, restructuring, and fluency goals in Mandarin learning (Wen, Ying & Azian, 2018). Integrating role-play activities into Chinese language instruction has proven to be a valuable and effective tool for students across all proficiency levels. This instructional approach offers a range of benefits, including enhanced student engagement and enjoyment, expanded opportunities for collaborative learning among peers, and the facilitation of timely and constructive feedback from teachers (Werth, 2018). Additionally, the use of TBLT in virtual environments and games such as “Second Life” can facilitate student-centered learning and provide opportunities for input, production, and feedback (Lin, Wang, Grant, Chien, & Lan, 2014). However, challenges with TBLT are also identified, including the need to balance

learners' different learning preferences, lack of emphasis on Chinese pronunciation practice, insufficient instructional time support, and the importance of contextual factors in determining its effectiveness.

Chua (2021) examined the effects of incorporating CLT Mandarin mobile learning with the chatting to Mandarin native speakers program on students' oral learning attainment, attitudes, and recommendations. Results showed that the students who participated in the program enjoyed the activity, improved their confidence and oral competence, and recommended the inclusion of more language activities. The study suggested that the success of CLT technology-integrated projects depends on considering students' learning preferences. Huang (2018) explored the impact of using authentic texts on students' learning experience in a university-level Chinese class. Results indicated that students responded positively to the use of authentic texts, finding them interesting, fun, and engaging, and some reported that reading authentic Chinese texts outside of class increased their motivation to learn. The study also underscores the significance of employing suitable pedagogical methods to enhance students' recognition of the advantages of authentic materials and their self-assurance in comprehending this type of text. In essence, the study furnishes proof of the efficacy of utilizing authentic texts in Chinese language instruction to ameliorate students' linguistic and cultural comprehension. Guo (2021) investigated the extent to which CLT has been incorporated into CSL in UK universities. Results indicated that CLT has been integrated into CSL through the use of communicative activities and an emphasis on authenticity. The study also found that teachers allow for multiple teaching methods and adopt explicit instruction while maintaining a focus on grammar, and accuracy remains a priority alongside fluency. Overall, the studies highlight the importance of considering students' learning preferences and the incorporation of various instructional strategies in Chinese language teaching.

### 2.6.3 Feedback and Correcting Errors

Several studies have explored the impact of corrective feedback on learning Chinese as a second language. Fu (2012) focused on feedback provided in a CFL reading class and found that teachers commonly used reformulation and metalinguistic explanations. The study recommended that teachers use a range of feedback techniques, particularly more explicit ones, to engage students. Li (2014) investigated the impact of different types of corrective feedback, language proficiency, and linguistic targets on Chinese language learning by

foreign students. The study found that the effectiveness of feedback varied depending on the specific linguistic target and the learners' proficiency levels. Recasts were more effective for high-proficiency learners, while metalinguistic correction was more effective for low-proficiency learners. For classifiers, recasts were effective for both proficiency levels. The studies highlight the importance of considering various factors, such as proficiency levels and feedback types, when investigating the effects of corrective feedback in language learning.

#### 2.6.4 Chinese Language Teachers Beliefs and Practices in the Classroom

The literature on Chinese language teaching highlights the challenges that Chinese language teachers face when teaching CFL in various contexts. These challenges arise from cultural and pedagogical differences between the Chinese education system and the education system in the country where Chinese is being taught. Studies have identified several challenges that Chinese language teachers face, such as designing curricula, selecting engaging topics and activities, managing student behavior, and working with parents (Yue, 2017). The challenges also encompass language barriers, culture shock, diverse views on teacher-student roles, parent communication, varied teaching styles, classroom management, special needs inclusion, and innovative teaching methods (Xu, 2012).

Despite these challenges, studies have also identified effective strategies that teachers can use to overcome them. These strategies include appropriate teacher preparation, professional development programs, and school leaders' support. Additionally, studies have found that incorporating humor and positive teacher qualities such as happiness, organization, support, and respect can positively impact students' motivation to learn Chinese (Tong & Tsung, 2020). Yang (2019) explored the beliefs of Chinese language teachers in the UK about themselves and their students. The findings emphasize the importance of professional competence and a student-centered teaching approach. Challenges related to cultural differences and adopting innovative teaching methods are acknowledged. Implications are provided for teacher professional development and teaching Chinese in cross-cultural settings. Wang & Du (2016) examined the perceptions of CFL teachers regarding their roles in Danish educational institutions. The findings reveal that teachers view themselves in multiple roles, including facilitator, cultural mediator, and relationship builder. These roles are shaped by teachers' planning and execution of teaching activities, their desired emphases and achievements in teaching, and their interactions with students and the work environment.

However, contextual factors such as limited teaching materials, insufficient professional training opportunities, and student motivation challenges impact teachers' beliefs about their roles. The study emphasizes the importance of institutional support in fostering a professional community for CFL teachers in Denmark. Moloney & Xu (2014) investigated the beliefs of CFL teachers in Australia and their ongoing pedagogical transitions. The study categorizes the teachers' beliefs into three groups: traditional Chinese education, constructivist learning, and transitioning beliefs. It is evident that all CFL teachers are engaged in a dynamic process of transition, seeking to redefine their pedagogical identities and adopt best practices. The study underscores the significance of targeted professional development programs that can effectively bridge the gap between teachers' beliefs and their classroom practices, ultimately enhancing student learning outcomes in CFL classrooms.

### 3. Methods

This chapter explores the research methodology utilized in this study, which employs a combination of qualitative and quantitative approaches. The primary methods employed to collect essential data involve classroom observations, encompassing both a qualitative approach and a quantitative approach, in addition to conducting interviews. The chapter provides valuable insights into the integration of mixed methods, the design of the research, procedures for data collection, methods of analysis, as well as considerations pertaining to validity and reliability.

#### 3.1 Research Design

##### 3.1.1 Mixed Methods: Combining Qualitative and Quantitative Approaches

Mixed methods is a research approach that combines quantitative and qualitative techniques in a single study, enhancing data comprehensiveness and depth (Sandelowski, 2000; Ivankova, 2006). It fosters a holistic understanding of phenomena, yielding robust findings (Creswell & Clark, 2011). Triangulation, using both methods to investigate a question, increases validity and reliability (Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2010).

Semi-structured interviews hold a significant role in my research, as they give prominence to teachers' experiences, opinions, and attitudes towards various topics. These interviews allow for flexible exploration of participants' perspectives and in-depth understanding (Kvale &

Brinkmann, 2009). Unlike structured interviews, semi-structured interviews foster open expression (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). They reveal unique insights and emotions, capturing contextual nuances often missed in structured approaches. Open-ended questions encourage reflection and elaboration, yielding rich qualitative data (Rubin & Rubin, 2012).

Systematic observation is a method where data is collected and analyzed in a structured manner. It involves using an observation form to gather information in controlled or uncontrolled settings. There are two conditions: naturalistic observations in real environments and controlled ones in labs (Ho et al., 2006, p. 210). Researchers use a standardized form to document variables of interest (Schutt, 2019, p.775). This helps compare data across observations, revealing patterns. Organized observations create reliable datasets, reducing bias and ensuring key details aren't missed. Systematic observation supports replication, enhancing consistency.

## 3.2 Data collection

This chapter outlines how data was collected for the study. The goal was to gather information for research questions and objectives. It covers methods, participant selection, and data collection procedures. Ethical considerations and quality control are discussed for data reliability. This clarifies how information was obtained and its analysis in upcoming chapters.

### 3.2.1 Contacting Schools and Selection Criteria

The research began by identifying high schools in Sweden and Norway that offered Chinese as a second language. Stockholm was chosen for its geographical proximity and practical reasons. In Stockholm, schools were identified through online searches, and subsequent contact was established through direct phone calls or email communication. When selecting Norwegian schools, the geographical location was of less importance, given that the observations were carried out through digital platforms. The same method was employed to identify potential schools in Norway. Permissions were obtained from school authorities, including principals and teachers. Despite efforts, some schools declined participation due to time constraints or lack of interest. Nevertheless, the study successfully recruited six schools—four from Sweden and two from Norway. These schools collectively provided valuable data for the research. The study involved observing students at beginner levels of

Chinese (1, 2, and 3), aged 16 to 18. Notably, the majority of students were of Swedish and Norwegian descent. Furthermore, it's important to highlight that the teachers were mostly of Chinese ethnicity, except for one teacher.

### 3.2.2 Research Instrument - Interviews

One-on-one interviews were conducted with teachers using digital platforms, with each interview lasting between 40 to 50 minutes. These interviews were conducted right after observing their classes. The interviews were guided by a set of twelve questions, which were administered virtually through platforms such as Zoom and Google Meet. In one instance, an interview was conducted via email due to time constraints. The primary goal of these interviews was to collect comprehensive insights, addressing aspects that couldn't be fully captured through classroom observations alone.

During the interview sessions, I employed my personal MacBook Air for conducting the interviews, while recordings were captured using my smartphone. Throughout the interview sessions, I made certain that a stable internet connection was maintained to ensure optimal audio and video quality. This approach offers a dual advantage: It enhances overall research efficiency while also empowering researchers to overcome geographical barriers (Nehls et al. 2015). Video interviews offer a unique advantage in that they facilitate real-time communication, which in turn fosters dynamic engagement between the participants (Salmons, 2012; Irani, 2019). When interviews are synchronous, they tend to elicit more spontaneous and candid responses compared to asynchronous methods (Mann and Stewart, 2000; Fielding, 2017). Notably, studies have indicated that interviewees in online settings exhibit greater openness (Deakin & Wakefield, 2013; Mabragaña et al., 2013). Furthermore, using video interviews allows us to pick up on nonverbal signals. These nonverbal cues, like body language and facial expressions, provide a deeper understanding of how participants attitudes and opinions.

Following each video observation with the teachers, I transcribed their spoken words into written form to facilitate analysis, a process often referred to as transcription (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2015, p. 204). Throughout the process, my central aim was to ensure the preservation of the original content of their responses. However, achieving a comprehensive reproduction of every statement made during the interviews is often unfeasible (Postholm &

Jacobsen, 2019, p. 252). However, the main objective is to present the findings in a precise and faithful manner, without any manipulation of the data.

### 3.2.3 Research Instrument - Observations

The qualitative observation scheme has been specifically designed to methodically gather data concerning various aspects of the Chinese language lessons. This scheme is divided into two distinct parts. The first part encompasses fundamental information such as school name, grade, level of proficiency, date, teacher's name, number of students, duration. The second part delves deeper into specifics including learning outcomes, topic/subject for the lesson, activities, teaching approaches, language skills, feedback from teacher and reflections. I captured real-time notes on my MacBook during the lessons to ensure accurate documentation. The objective was to document with the utmost detail possible to ensure that no crucial aspects were missed and to retain a clear recollection of the proceedings in each of the different classes. This approach offers a comprehensive understanding of class dynamics. It enables an exploration of teaching patterns and the identification of new trends. The use of real-time note-taking ensures precise documentation of class activities. Consequently, this method promotes a thorough investigation of strategies and approaches employed in the Chinese language classroom.

Excel served as the data collection tool for the quantitative observation scheme. This scheme covered six schools (A-F), with each school divided into eight columns representing a total of 8 observations. Each observation was then broken down into three columns: time (in minutes), number of activities, and inclusion of competences (yes/no). "Time" represents the duration allocated to each competence, whereas the "number of activities" specifies the quantity of activities per competence. For example, it might indicate the presence of 4 oral activities. Moreover, this scheme also determined the inclusion or absence of different language competences. It's important to highlight that activities were only considered if they lasted a minimum of five minutes.

Employing the Excel scheme yielded a thorough and unbiased overview of findings from eight classroom observations. These observations aimed to investigate the emphasis on various language competences. Excel offered several advantages, such as adeptly managing large datasets, minimizing errors during data collection and analysis, and expediting data

processing. Furthermore, the observation scheme bolstered consistency and comparability across observations, ultimately enhancing the study's findings in terms of reliability, validity, and objectivity.

In Sweden, physical observations took place, while Norway opted for online platforms like Google Meet and Zoom due to practical reasons such as cost and time constraints. Before observing classes, I explained the study's goals in both Sweden and Norway. Ethical guidelines were followed, including obtaining consent from students and teachers through a detailed declaration. This process will be discussed further in the “Ethical Considerations” chapter.

During observations, I acted as a non-participant observer to avoid influencing teachers and students. Non-participant observation is a research method that involves observing a group or phenomenon without direct participation (Jacobsen, 2005). This detached method allowed for objective data collection. In Sweden, I positioned myself discreetly at the back of the classroom, taking thorough notes to document activities. No audio or video recordings were used to prevent disruptions.

For virtual observations, preparations were made to ensure good quality. Network checks were done, and ensured that I had clear audio access. The teacher's computer was strategically placed upfront to capture both the teacher's voice and a wide-angle view of the classroom, providing a holistic picture of interactions. To ensure that the students' behavior remained unaffected, no audio or video recordings were carried out during the observation. This choice was deliberate, aimed at avoiding any alteration in their natural conduct due to the presence of recording devices (Sedwick, 2015).

### 3.3 Ensuring Validity and Reliability in Interviews and Observations

Validity refers to the accuracy with which the outcomes of a study allow for exact and well-grounded deductions concerning the specific objectives outlined for the investigation. This encompasses distinct categories like construct validity, internal validity, and external validity (Yin, 2017, p.6). Construct validity concerns measuring precisely what is intended, internal validity ensures that outcomes can be perceived as accurate, while external validity

deals with extending findings to broader populations and scenarios. On the other hand, reliability is used to indicate the constancy in measurements (Kirk & Miller, 1986, p.19).

Employing both qualitative and quantitative methodologies in research holds the potential to enhance the reliability and validity of research outcomes (Biber, 2010, p. 465). By utilizing these approaches, researchers can leverage the objective and generalizable knowledge provided by quantitative methods, while also uncovering detailed and deep insights that qualitative methods can provide (Biber, 2010, p. 456). This alignment of methods facilitates the capture of intricacies and perspectives that may remain elusive when relying solely on a singular approach. As a result, research conclusions can achieve a heightened level of precision and accuracy.

In this research, semi-structured interviews were employed as one of the primary data collection methods. However, it should be recognized that using this approach presents certain difficulties in maintaining a consistently high level of reliability. It's essential to recognize that during interviews, there are dynamic conversations taking place, where both the interviewer and the participants mutually shape the direction of the discussion. The interactive nature of these exchanges makes it difficult to ensure that another researcher could precisely replicate the same results.

The interview questions were meticulously crafted to ensure neutrality. I avoided using leading questions to prevent influencing participants' responses, thereby enhancing the study's reliability. During the interviews, I aimed to create an atmosphere of trust and openness. I wanted participants to feel comfortable sharing their honest perspectives without the pressure to align with any preconceived expectations. The advantage of these recordings is that they could be replayed multiple times, allowing for a thorough review and correction of any transcription errors. This method greatly ensured the accuracy of the transcripts. Transcription was conducted shortly after each interview to ensure the recollection was fresh.

Throughout the interview process, in a bid to ensure comprehensive validation, I consistently utilized follow-up questions. These were strategically employed to clear up any ambiguities or uncertainties that arose. By doing so, I aimed to verify that my interpretation of the participants' statements was accurate. Additionally, these follow-up questions were designed to encourage participants to provide more in-depth and varied descriptions, allowing for a

richer and more nuanced understanding of their perspectives. I placed a strong emphasis on accuracy during the transcription of the interview. I had previously tested the audio to ensure its clarity, which made the transcription process more straightforward. While interpretations can differ among researchers, I ensured that the transcription closely represents the original conversation. These interviews provided me with valuable insights, helping me compare the teacher's statements with my own observations.

To enhance the reliability of my observations, I strategically minimized my influence on the teacher and students. Although it is challenging to avoid influencing the class, I've made a sincere effort to minimize it. As more observations were conducted, it became evident that the behavior of both students and teachers remained consistent and unaffected. By observing each class 8 times, I was able to continuously study the same group over an extended period. To ensure the accuracy of my data, I meticulously documented my notes, keeping them objective. I separated any personal reactions, and concentrated on clear, unbiased descriptions of the lesson.

The quantitative observation scheme is valued for its capacity to improve both reliability and validity. This is largely due to its systematic and objective nature. Using numerical data, the findings can be thoroughly analyzed using statistical tools. The approach inherently reduces subjectivity, yielding results that are not only dependable but also comparable. Another strength of the quantitative approach lies in its replicability, leading to consistent evaluations. Yet, when applied to assessing time allocation within language competencies, it's not without its challenges. Factors like classroom disruptions and the diverse speeds at which students operate can introduce discrepancies in results. For example, the duration one class spends on a reading assignment might considerably exceed that of another, underlying these inherent variations. The combination of interviews and observations (qualitative and quantitative) strengthened the validity of my study.

### 3.4 Ethical Considerations

This research adheres to the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) implemented on May 25, 2018, the GDPR, strengthens the privacy rights of EU citizens, aiming to provide them control over their personal data (Wolford, 2023).

Prior to the research, I introduced myself to the participants, clearly outlined the study's objectives, explained what participation in the study entailed, and distributed the declaration of consent. The declaration of consent provided participants with a clear understanding of the study's purpose and methodology while emphasizing the safeguarding of their privacy rights. When it came to teacher interviews, additional precautions were taken. Teachers were informed about audio recordings, which were used exclusively for transcription, and assured that this data would be deleted after the study to maintain strict confidentiality.

While the GDPR mandates parental consent for children under 13, this requirement was not relevant for my study since the participants were aged 16-18. To ensure anonymity, schools and teachers were assigned identifiers from letters A to F. No audio or video was recorded during sessions, and identifiable information was carefully excluded. Participants could also opt out of the study at any time. All students agreed to participate in the study and signed the consent form. These measures underline my dedication to participant privacy and upholding ethical standards.

### 3.5 Analysing Data

The process of analysis involves breaking down a complex entity into smaller components in order to obtain a comprehensive understanding, facilitating the later identification of the entirety and interrelationships in the research (Robson & McCartan, 2016). I will employ a combination of thematic and descriptive statistical analyses to obtain a comprehensive and nuanced understanding of the research topic investigated.

Thematic analysis will be used for the interviews. Thematic analysis revolves around the identification of distinct patterns within a given dataset. This approach entails a methodical examination of the data aimed at revealing patterns (Braun & Clarke, 2006). It is a flexible method that can be used to gain a rich and detailed understanding of the data. In the context of the interviews, thematic analysis will involve the transcription of the interviews.

In this study, descriptive analysis will play a pivotal role in fostering a comprehensive grasp of the distribution of language competences within the context of Chinese language teaching. The central objective revolves around delving into the extent to which each language competence receives emphasis throughout the instructional process. As a subsequent step, the

gleaned outcomes will undergo cross-school and cross-country comparisons to unveil broader trends.

In presenting my findings, I will employ a mix of pie and bar charts to provide clear visualization (Loeb, 2017, p.33). The calculations and chart creation were carried out in an Excel document. These charts will distinctly illustrate several categories: The time distribution across competences, the frequency of competences, and whether or not the competences were included in the lesson. Such a presentation enhances the interpretability of the insights I gather.

## 4. Results

This chapter presents the results from an in-depth exploration of teaching strategies used to enhance students' communicative competence in Chinese across various high schools. Classroom observations and interviews were carried out with Chinese language teachers from six different schools – four in Sweden and two in Norway. Furthermore I seek to explore the potential impact of teachers' educational backgrounds on their teaching strategies and approaches. Finally I aim to identify any differences in teaching strategies between the two countries under investigation. The results are presented in two main sections: One section concerning the observations made, while the other focuses on insights from the interviews.

### 4.1 Oral Activities

#### 4.1.1 Spontaneous Dialogue and Questions

Systematic observations from six high schools revealed spontaneous dialogue and questioning as pivotal activities in Chinese language classrooms. These interactions, both teacher-student and peer-to-peer, encapsulate natural, informal conversations that often revolve around daily topics like hobbies or weekend plans, aligning with the lesson's core subject. Such exchanges, mirroring real-life language situations, necessitate students' understanding and active engagement in unscripted spoken communication. By exposing students to these authentic scenarios, they practice genuine language use, vital for real-world interactions (Christie, 2016).

At School E, a common practice was to randomly select a student and initiate a spontaneous dialogue by asking assorted questions about their daily activities. This pedagogical strategy sought to promote direct engagement and cultivate unplanned dialogues between the teacher and student, thus enriching the classroom's interactive atmosphere. Some sample questions posed by the teacher included:

今天几号? *Jīntiān shì jǐ hào?* ‘What is today's date?’

你会开车吗? *Nǐ huì kāichē ma?* ‘Can you drive a car?’

你喜欢滑雪吗? *Nǐ xǐhuān huáxuě ma?* ‘Do you like to ski?’

这个周末你有什么计划? *Zhège zhōumò nǐ yǒu shénme jìhuà?* ‘What are you doing this weekend?’

These topics often diverged from the lesson's main content, focusing instead on students' daily routines. Similar patterns of impromptu dialogue and questioning were noted in other institutions, including Schools A, C, and F.

During the lessons observed, teachers frequently reformulated students' answers. Through this method, they addressed fundamental grammatical errors and set an authentic standard for pronunciation. While tonal mistakes were typically overlooked, corrections were made for words where tone was crucial to meaning. A deeper exploration of these feedback techniques can be found in the chapter on feedback and grammar.

#### 4.1.2 Dialogue in Groups

In classroom observations, group and partner dialogues emerged as prevalent activity. The aim of these activities was to replicate authentic scenarios, constructing conversations around specific vocabulary and structures, thereby underscoring the practical application of the language. Such collaborative exercises not only enhance. By engaging in these activities, students not only improve their Chinese proficiency but also boost their self-esteem (Mynard & Navarro, 2010, p.98). Such practices serve to strengthen both their collaborative abilities and their oral communication skills (Vasalampi et al., 2021, p.2). Schools A and F particularly highlighted dialogues related to everyday topics from the textbooks.

At School A, students regularly practiced dialogues using vocabulary from the textbook,

focusing on specific topics. Teacher A closely monitored and provided feedback for errors. School F had similar practices, with dialogues often based on everyday themes from the textbooks. Both schools facilitated dialogues that were unscripted, allowing for spontaneous interactions. However, students were guided to utilize vocabulary from their textbooks to support their conversations, emphasizing the development of authentic communication skills within real-life contexts.

#### 4.1.3 Role-play

Role-play in language teaching involves taking on distinct roles and engaging in simulated situations while utilizing the target language. It enhances the development of communicative competence by encouraging active participation, facilitating practical language use, and promoting authentic communication. Furthermore, incorporating role-play activities in the classroom cultivates a comfortable and enjoyable learning environment, allowing students to engage more freely with the target language (Altun, 2014, p. 29; Ampatuan, 2016, p.19).

Role-play was observed as an activity in Schools C and E. In School E, the students were assigned the task of conducting a search on an online hotel booking platform, such as booking.com or hotels.com, with the objective of finding a suitable hotel. Subsequently, they were instructed to prepare a brief presentation of the hotel and its various facilities. Furthermore, the students were directed to engage in a role-play activity, assuming the roles of either a customer or a hotel employee/receptionist from a travel agency. The aim of the role-play was to simulate a telephone conversation involving the reservation of a hotel room. In preparation for the role-play at School E, the students were asked to use digital aids, such as PowerPoint, and also create a script to be used during the role-play. The groups were given the option to choose among the following four scenarios:

- Two university students on a tight budget plan to go hiking in the Norwegian mountains.
- A businessman/woman attending a conference in Copenhagen.
- Best friends who received money for their birthdays. They plan to travel together for a week during the winter break.
- A family with two young children wants to visit Disneyland Paris.

In contrast, at School C, a different approach was taken for their role-play activity centered

on the theme of grocery shopping. Instead of incorporating digital aids, the teacher handed each student a box filled with miniature groceries and conducted a spontaneous role-play without the use of a script. These toys were arranged on the table in front of the students. Subsequently, every student engaged in separate one-on-one conversations with the teacher, during which the teacher posed the subsequent questions:

你要买什么? *Nǐ yào mǎi shénme?* ‘What would you like to purchase?’

The students were expected to respond in Chinese, utilizing the toy food items on display.

For instance, a student may respond by saying: 我要买三块比萨饼 *Wǒ yào mǎi sān kuài bǐsàbǐng* ‘I would like to purchase three pizza slices’.

At School C, a spontaneous approach to role-playing was embraced. This method encouraged students to cultivate their improvisational skills. Conversely, School E integrated digital tools and prewritten scripts into their role-playing activities. As a result, students at School E relied more extensively on the provided scripts, diminishing the emphasis on improvisation in their performances.

#### 4.1.4 Oral Presentations

At School D, students were tasked with preparing oral presentations centered around Chinese cuisine, utilizing PowerPoint. These presentations encompassed aspects such as ingredients, preparation methods, and the distinct regions in China where each dish originates. Some students used prepared scripts, while others chose to improvise. All presentations were delivered in Chinese. Furthermore, students were given the chance to translate difficult vocabulary, specifically from their presentations, which went beyond what they were familiar with. The presentations were improved with helpful feedback from teachers and classmates. The students also faced follow-up questions in Chinese from the teacher. In a different class, another group of students took on a similar task, where they did a presentation about a Chinese province. They discussed its size, population, significant rivers, and other details.

#### 4.1.5 Visual Aids and Digital Learning Resources

The utilization of visual aids and digital learning resources was observed in certain schools as an approach to foster speaking skills and facilitate self-expression in the Chinese language.

Describing images enhances confidence and vocabulary growth (Nurhizrah et al., 2019, p. 266). Visual aids kindle creativity and attention, fostering active participation (Karya et al., p. 110, 2022). This activity was observed at both School F and School C.

At School F, this activity featured images meant to represent various activities, prompting students to respond in Chinese to questions related to these depictions. Students were asked questions, such as “这个是什么?” *zhè ge shì shén me?* translates to ‘What is this?’ The students were assigned the task of describing the activity shown in the images, which could include actions like climbing or painting. This approach motivated students to converse in Chinese and actively participate in oral exercises. Similarly, at School C, they utilized images of both Chinese and Western cuisine, employing Quizlet as a digital tool. Students were instructed to identify the items in the picture by stating their Chinese name on the food. These images showcased classic Chinese dishes such as dumplings and tofu. At School E, it was noted that the teacher utilized a PowerPoint presentation featuring a calendar with a green arrow indicating a particular date. Students were individually asked to pronounce the date in Chinese. For example: 今天是几月几号? *Zuotian shì jǐ yuè jǐ hào?* ‘What was yesterday’s date?’ The teacher often repeated the students’ answers to ensure correct pronunciation. The primary emphasis of the oral exercises at school B was on texts or movies that students had read or watched. These activities were complemented by teacher-led discussions and related questions.

## 4.2 Listening Activities

### 4.2.1 Target Language Input

At all schools A-F, the target language was observed both at the start and end of lessons. This encompassed expressions such as: 早上好 *zǎo shàng hǎo* ‘Good morning’, 再见 *zài jiàn* ‘Goodbye’, 我们上课 *wǒmen shàngkè* ‘The lesson is starting now’, 我们下课 *wǒmen xià kè* ‘The lesson is finished’, 下个星期见 *xià ge xīngqī jiàn* ‘See you next week’. Furthermore, the teachers utilized the target language to offer feedback on students’ engagement during the lessons: 很好 *hěn hǎo* ‘Very Good’ 对 *duì* ‘Correct’, 不错 *bù cuò* ‘Not Bad’, and 很棒 *hěn bàng* ‘Excellent’.

The observations unveiled that the teacher provided instructions to the students and delivered comments on their pronunciation and understanding of the subjects. This involved phrases

such as: 你明白了吗? *nǐ míngbai le ma?* ‘Do you understand?’, 再说一遍 *zài shuō yí biàn* ‘Please repeat it once’, 你们累不累? *nǐmen lèi bù lèi?* ‘Are you tired?’, 请打开课本 *Qǐng dǎkāi kèběn* ‘Please open the textbook’, 我们一起唱歌 *Wǒmen yìqǐ chànggē* ‘Let’s sing a song’, 中文怎么说 *zhōng wén zěn me shuō* ‘How do you say in Chinese?’, 这是什么? *zhè shì shén me* ‘What is this?’

#### 4.2.2 Listening to Dialogues

During the classroom observation at School C, the teacher read aloud a dialogue from the textbook. This dialogue was centered on the theme of shopping for groceries and provided details about which items to purchase, along with their corresponding prices. By using this approach, the teacher guided a listening exercise that closely aligned with practical, real-life scenarios. Afterward, the students were presented with questions related to the dialogue, serving as a way to assess their comprehension of the material.

At School F, the teacher employed PowerPoint presentations to introduce sentences and dialogues related to a recently introduced lesson topic. The teacher introduced these dialogues and repeated them a total of 3-5 times. The dialogues presented in this lesson revolved around the theme of seasons. A similar activity was also carried out at School D, where Teacher D orally presented dialogues for the students to actively listen to.

#### 4.2.3 Listening Activities in Pairs

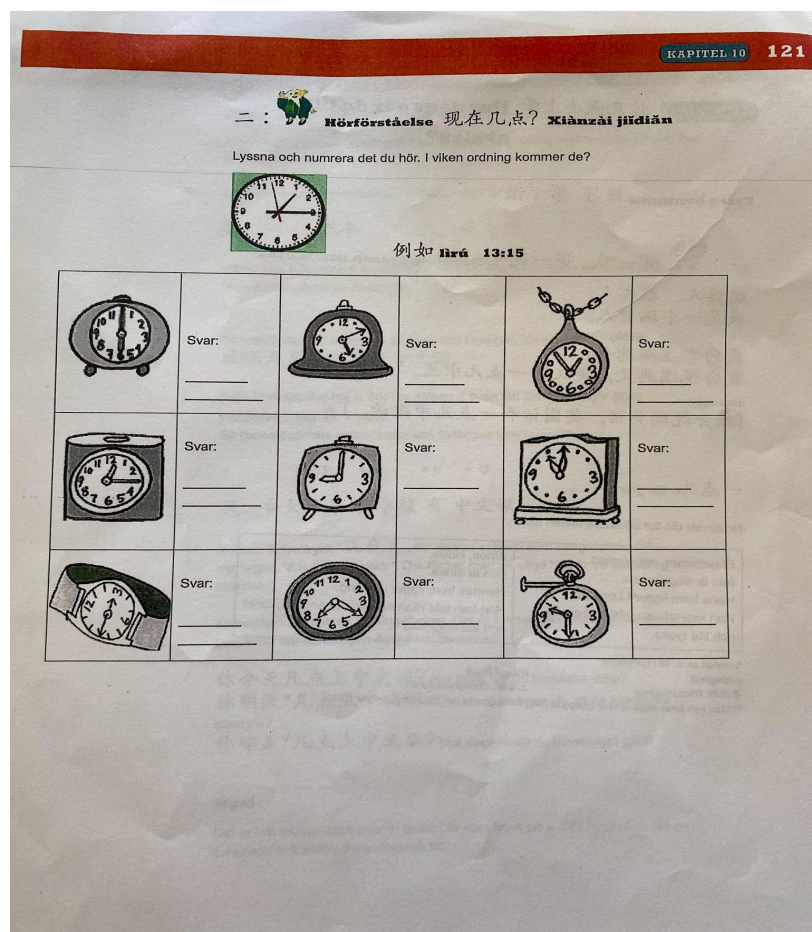
In a lesson at School A, a task was implemented that involved pairs of students interacting by sharing their phone numbers in Chinese. One student vocalized their phone number aloud, while the other student was responsible for noting down what they heard. This exercise aimed to offer students an opportunity for interactive listening practice, aligning with real-life communication scenarios. By engaging in the practice of listening to their partner's phone numbers and writing them down, students could effectively hone their listening skills.

#### 4.2.4 Listen and Write the Correct Answer

During a classroom activity at School E, students were actively involved in a listening exercise that utilized audio files featuring dialogues between two individuals. After each dialogue, students received a worksheet with questions pertaining to the dialogue's content, presented in Chinese characters. They were then tasked with selecting the image that most

accurately corresponded to the dialogue being played, for example: 我们要去哪儿? *Wǒmen yào qù nǎr?* ‘Where are we going?’ The options given to the students consisted of visual depictions representing a movie theater, an airport, and a park.

Similarly at school B, one of the listening activities revolved around an audio file that presented various clock times in Chinese. After listening to the audio file, students were provided with a worksheet containing clock images. Their objective was to arrange the clock images in the correct order (1-8) on their worksheets. This exercise aimed to strengthen students' proficiency in recognizing clock times in Chinese.



*Illustration 1: The students were instructed to listen to an audio file that provided various clock times, and their task was to write down the times in a sequential numerical order.*

#### 4.2.5 Chinese Songs

In some of the lessons at Schools C, D, and E, students actively took part listening to Chinese songs through YouTube. These songs were accompanied by both pinyin and Chinese characters, offering valuable opportunities for practicing reading comprehension. The song selection included a diverse range of pop songs, incorporating both current hits and Chinese classics. Integrating Chinese songs into the language teaching holds profound cultural significance. This activity not only practices their listening comprehension, but also enriches their understanding of Chinese culture, as they absorb the themes, melodies, and messages conveyed by the songs.

### 4.3 Written Activities

#### 4.3.1 Repetitive Writing of Chinese Characters

Regarding written exercises, the activities mainly centered on repeatedly writing Chinese characters in worksheets. Additionally, other activities included completing missing characters or strokes within the textbook and practicing writing pinyin with the appropriate tones.

At Schools A, B and D, the primary activities observed were repetitive character writing, completing strokes, and filling in missing characters. At schools C, E, and F, handwriting was given less emphasis, with Pinyin being frequently used instead. By practicing Chinese character writing, students enhance both their memory of and familiarity with the characters. This practice enhances one's ability to recall and replicate the characters (Hsiung et al., 2017).



*Illustration 2: The image depicts a character worksheet with various Chinese characters arranged vertically. Students are instructed to write each individual character horizontally eight times.*

### 4.3.2 Fill in the Missing Character

In an observation at School D, students were given the task of completing Chinese sentences on the board by filling in the missing characters. This exercise tested their knowledge of Chinese characters and their proper stroke order. The students filled in the blanks with the correct characters to form complete sentences. For instance, one question posed was “In which region is this city located”: 北京在\_\_\_ *Beijing zài* ‘Beijing is located in’ 上海在\_\_\_ *Shanghai zài* ‘Shanghai is located in’, 西安在\_\_\_ *Xi'an zài* ‘Xi'an is located in’. The possible answers could be “northern China,” “eastern China,” and “northwest China”.

### 4.3.3 Computer-Based Writing

There was a noticeable shift towards emphasizing the use of computers to type Chinese characters. School E, in particular, prominently favored this computer-based approach over traditional handwritten character practice. A program called “Padlet” was employed to aid a group task centered on shopping. The task involved a dialogue or chat with the teacher about clothes shopping. The teacher asked the students questions, and they had to respond by typing Chinese characters on the computer. An example is as follows: 你想买什么? *Nǐ xiǎng mǎi*

*shénme?* ‘What would you like to buy?’ 你喜欢穿什么颜色的衣服? *Nǐ xǐhuān chuān shénme yánsè de yīfú?* ‘What colors do you like to wear?’ Students typed in pinyin, which then offered them the corresponding Chinese characters to choose from, simplifying the writing task. This computer-centric method was most notable at School E. However, relying solely on computer-based writing may diminish character retention and reading skills due to lack of handwriting practice (Lyu et al., 2021).

## 4.4 Reading Activities

### 4.4.1 Flashcards

Digital platforms such as Quizlet and Kahoot were frequently employed in the teaching across schools A-F to enhance vocabulary learning. Physical flashcards were also integrated into the learning process. These resources offered students an engaging way to reinforce their understanding of new vocabulary, often presented in both pinyin and characters. At School D, emphasis was placed on understanding radicals. Learning radicals in Chinese offers insights into character structure and meaning, facilitating recognition.

At School B, physical flashcards aided in word-building exercises. Students received flashcards displaying individual Chinese characters, such as: 你 *nǐ* ‘You’, 好 *hǎo* ‘Good’, 中 *zhōng* ‘Middle’ and 国 *guó* ‘Country’. Furthermore, students were guided to combine the flashcards to form complete and meaningful words in Chinese, for example: 中 *zhōng* ‘Middle’ and 国 *guó* ‘Country’ into 中国, which means “China”. This exercise was designed to deepen students' understanding of Chinese characters.

### 4.4.2 Dialogues in Textbooks

The textbooks were actively used when the students were reading dialogues or short texts. The use of dialogues in textbooks allowed students to practice reading comprehension and become familiar with common language patterns, structures and vocabulary. However, it is widely acknowledged that not all textbooks exhibit a sufficient level of authenticity, which is crucial for the development of communicative competence (Gonzales, 2012, p. 78). The dialogues were often in both characters and pinyin, and were observed at schools A, D and C. They were delivered either as whole-class readings or through pair work.

The first approach involved the teacher reading the text sentence by sentence, while students repeated the text, as part of a so-called “read after me” activity. The second approach had specific students designated to read the dialogue to the entire class or involved reading in smaller groups. At School D, the practice of employing “read after me” exercises was prevalent not only for presenting dialogues but also for introducing new topics during Chinese language lessons.

#### 4.5 Cultural Elements and Authentic Teaching Material

The use of authentic teaching materials is vital for fostering students' communicative competence and for deepening their understanding of the associated culture (Beresova, 2015, p. 195). This can be achieved through the incorporation of materials like texts, videos, and audio recordings. In many schools, it has been observed that teachers primarily employ digital tools to convey lessons on Chinese culture, using them in diverse and innovative ways.

The implementation of YouTube videos was a prominent method observed at School E regarding teaching about different aspects of Chinese culture. Teacher E presented a YouTube video that delves into the customs of Chinese birthday celebrations, while also introducing students to the concept of the Chinese zodiac YouTube, enriching the students' comprehension of these cultural facets. After watching the YouTube videos, Teacher E led a classroom discussion comparing Chinese and Norwegian birthday traditions. This activity prompted students to explore and reflect upon the contrasts between these two cultures, fostering interactive engagement.

While observing School D, it was evident that cultural integration played a significant role in their language teaching approach. Students were seen participating in a Taiji session, facilitated through the use of YouTube. The teacher also took part in this activity.

At School C, as previously mentioned, the integration of authentic Chinese songs through YouTube proved to be a valuable resource. The projected song lyrics allowed students to sing along with the guidance of the teacher. Meanwhile, at School B, the utilization of CCTV-produced TV series served as a means to provide students with language input and cultural insights. These selected videos portrayed everyday conversations, offering students exposure to authentic language use and colloquial expressions.

## 4.6 Errors and Grammar Corrections

During the observations, it became evident that teachers actively offered feedback on pronunciation during oral activities and presentations, encompassing phonological, lexical, grammatical, and pragmatic aspects. This comprehensive correction approach is essential for promoting effective communication and minimizing misunderstandings. Notably, immediate corrections were prevalent, with metalinguistic feedback, recasts and reformulation being the most frequently employed form of correction.

In a class lesson at School D, students were given the task of reading aloud newly introduced vocabulary, which included terms like: 国际机场 *Guójì jīchǎng* ‘International airport’. It was observed that some students struggled with correctly pronouncing the “jǐ” [tɛi], often pronouncing it as a soft “j” [ji]. To ensure accurate pronunciation, the teacher led them through multiple repetitions of the word. Interestingly, similar phonetic errors were also identified in other schools, such as letters z and q in Chinese. For instance: 学 *xué* ‘study’, where “x” is pronounced as [ɕ] (a sh-like sound). Teacher D also emphasized the importance of writing characters accurately, particularly focusing on the correct stroke order. This emphasis was especially noticeable during individual exercises, where each student was given the task of writing a character on the board.

In a lesson at School E, a student was asked to describe the teacher's hair color in Chinese. The response was pronounced as “haise”, but the teacher offered a correction to the proper pronunciation: 黑色 *Hēisè* ‘black’. Such corrections highlight the teacher's attention to detail, emphasizing the importance of accuracy in language learning. Furthermore, teachers at School E were observed giving feedback on students' grammar during oral presentations. One notable correction involved a student using the word 他们 *tāmen* ‘they’ being corrected to 你们 *nǐmen* ‘you’, indicating an error in pronoun usage.

At School A, both the teacher and students were observed practicing the numbers one to ten orally. The number four, pronounced as 四 *sì* in Chinese, can be confused with the word for 死 *sǐ* ‘death’. Students were instructed to pronounce 四 *sì* ‘four’, several times to achieve correct pronunciation.

Norwegian and Swedish learners of Chinese frequently encounter challenges in adhering to the syntactic structures of the Chinese language. This is often attributed to a direct transference of their native linguistic patterns into Mandarin, resulting in syntactic discrepancies, for instance: 我吃晚餐在餐馆今天 *Wǒ chī wǎncān zài cānguǎn jīntiān* ‘I am having dinner at the restaurant today’ is grammatically incorrect in Chinese. The correct structure should be 我今天在餐馆吃晚餐 *Wǒ jīntiān zài cānguǎn chī wǎncān*. In Chinese, the word order typically follows the Subject-Time-Place-Verb pattern. In this case, the subject is “I” (我), the time is “today” (今天), the place is “at the restaurant” (在餐馆), and the verb is “eat dinner” (吃晚餐). To address this, School F introduced a pedagogical strategy wherein students utilized flashcards to construct sentences in the appropriate Mandarin order.

## 4.7 Interviews

### 4.7.1 Balancing the Four Language Skills

Teacher A uses a tiered method to teach Chinese, tailoring the instruction to the students' level of proficiency. For students who are just starting to learn the language, the teaching focus is primarily on developing listening and speaking skills. This approach ensures that students first establish a solid foundation in the basic elements of the language, enabling them to communicate in everyday situations. However, by the time students advance to level 2, the teacher shifts the focus significantly towards reading and writing. Teacher A points out the distinct complexities associated with learning Chinese, from the task of memorizing an extensive set of characters to grasping its tonal variations. According to Teacher A, these elements make Chinese a particularly time-consuming language to master. The teacher further states:

*“If we had more time, I would certainly focus more on developing all four language skills. The Chinese curriculum requires proficiency in all four skills, and I strive to help students master as much as possible.”*

Teacher C and E, much like Teacher A, emphasizes the crucial role of oral and listening exercises in the early stages of learning. Teacher C believes that for practical daily interactions, mastery in oral communication is essential. Meanwhile, as students advance, Teacher E accentuates the increasing significance of reading and writing skills in language education. Both Teacher B and Teacher E concur that the approach often hinges on the

students' proficiency level. Diving deeper, Teacher B points out notable differences in the expectations set for students regarding various language skills, explaining:

*“Written language skills tend to be of a lower level in comparison to oral and listening skills. If you have a closer look at the curriculum, it reveals a substantial contrast in the levels of oral and written language and the corresponding expectations placed on students, particularly when compared to other modern languages. As a teacher, I prioritize the integration of all language skills in my lessons”.*

In teaching Chinese, Teacher F strives for a balance across all language skills, tailoring the approach based on the topic introduced. Employing interactive activities, including group work and role-playing, the teacher prioritizes providing students with resources and guidance over dominating the teaching process. Additionally, Teacher F has noticed a drop in student motivation, suggesting that the pandemic has played a role in this change.

Overall, the results show that teachers highlight varied approaches to teaching Chinese based on the students' proficiency level. While oral skills are emphasized in the early stages, written abilities become more crucial at advanced levels. Chinese is described as time-consuming to learn, especially due to its complex writing system.

#### 4.7.2 Strategies for Developing Students' Communicative Competence - Speaking and Listening

Teacher A and C emphasize an engaging and supportive classroom environment that motivates students to practice their speaking and listening skills. These teachers balance the use of the target language with the students' needs, making sure students are comfortable yet challenged to use the language confidently. In particular, Teacher C emphasizes the incorporation of Chinese in group activities, providing students with more authentic language practice that mirrors real-life situations. This approach helps students interact with the language more naturally and meaningfully. Regarding listening skills, they both place emphasis on Chinese movies and songs.

Both Teacher A and C believe in the use of group work in teaching, noting its positive outcomes and advantages. In Teacher A's approach, dialogues, group activities, and games

are integral components that serve to engage and motivate students actively. By fostering group interactions, Teacher A creates an environment that encourages direct student involvement in the learning process. Games focused on recognizing Chinese characters and constructing words and sentences contribute to an engaging and interactive atmosphere, aiding in the development of language proficiency while ensuring an enjoyable learning experience. Similarly, Teacher C observes that interactive approaches, such as group work, bolster students' confidence in tackling class tasks. Teacher C further elaborates:

*“In my experience, I have noticed that students tend to hesitate to take risks and make mistakes when working on their own. However, when they work in groups, they are more likely to collaborate and leverage their individual strengths to accomplish tasks.”*

Teacher F stresses the importance of cultivating strong oral skills and accurate pronunciation in the early stages of learning Chinese. To help students improve their pronunciation, Teacher F offers targeted feedback during oral presentations and dialogues, focusing on specific areas that need more practice. For example, the teacher has observed that some Norwegian students encounter challenges in accurately producing the fourth tone and articulating words containing the letter “j”, and thus encourages them to pay special attention to these areas. However, Teacher F also advises against getting overly fixated on achieving perfect pronunciation, warning that this could lead to student demotivation. Teacher F comments:

*“The aim is for students to use the language in a way that is understandable, without the expectation of having perfect pronunciation.”*

Teacher A also places a high priority on addressing pronunciation errors, particularly those associated with tone, due to their potential to cause misunderstandings. Teacher A provides immediate feedback and corrections for such errors during oral exercises.

Teacher E highlights the significance of weekly spontaneous conversations to enhance listening and speaking skills. These weekly interactions enable students to practice their language abilities. Individualized support is given to students who face difficulties with mastering tones in Chinese, ensuring that their specific needs are addressed. Teacher further explains:

*“The Chinese language's special feature is its tones. Students need to practice differentiating and pronouncing the four tones accurately to communicate effectively.”*

Additionally, Teacher E clarifies that self-assessment is conducted at the conclusion of each topic. This process involves an informal language assessment that students are required to undertake. Much like Teachers C and A, Teacher E also prioritizes interactive activities in language teaching. However, it's important to note that Teacher E emphasizes the significance of traditional approaches, emphasizing that they cannot be entirely eradicated from the language teaching. For listening exercises, the teacher utilizes audio files. On the other hand, C employs videos as a means to enhance students' listening skills. By using this method, students actively listen to the video. Subsequently, they participate in a reflective activity that entails reproducing the video's content.

In contrast to the other teachers, Teacher D emphasizes that she places less emphasis on listening exercises and interactive activities like group work, particularly for beginners, as she deems these approaches less effective. To enhance and provide feedback on students' pronunciation, they engage in self-recording exercises where students are required to pronounce words or sentences following lessons.

Teacher E noted that some former students had participated in a 6-month exchange program in China, and upon their return, there was a marked improvement in their language skills. Teacher E further explains:

*“I believe that if we send students to China for three to six months, their language skills will improve significantly.”*

Teacher E further explains the scarcity of language environments presents a significant challenge for students striving to become proficient in an Asian language. Teacher E further contends that it would be unrealistic to expect or require these students to achieve fluency in everyday conversations.

### 4.7.3 Strategies for Developing Students' Communicative Competence - Writing and Reading

In order to enhance students' recognition of Chinese characters, Teacher A employs physical flashcards as a teaching tool. During this activity, students write the phonetic transcription (pinyin) under the corresponding Chinese characters on the flashcards. This specific exercise is aimed at reinforcing the students' ability to recognize and understand Chinese characters. Furthermore, Teacher A places emphasis on reading dialogues from the textbooks, either within small groups or to the entire class. For additional writing practice, Teacher A supplies worksheets focused on Chinese character writing, enabling independent practice and improved writing proficiency. Similar to Teacher A, Teacher B also recognizes the significance of reading from books, but particularly highlights the value of supplemental reading materials, such as Chinese books as an effective means for students to explore varied content and enrich their vocabulary.

Both Teachers C and E focus on engaging their students in Chinese language learning by incorporating modern teaching methods and digital tools. They use Quizlet and Kahoot to help students remember Chinese vocabulary and characters. Repetition and varied exercises, such as flashcards and tests, are integral to their teaching approaches, ensuring a thorough understanding and recall of Chinese words and characters. Both teachers emphasize the importance of handwriting practice for memorizing Chinese characters. Teacher C encourages students to practice writing characters early on to enhance recognition and comprehension. Teacher C also underscores the importance of learning to type Chinese characters on a keyboard. Teacher C points:

*“In today's modern society, it is also important that students are able to use a computer to type Chinese characters(...). I have many students who are enrolled in the economics program. If any of these students were to collaborate with a company in China in the future, they would need to be able to send emails in Chinese.”*

Much like Teacher C, Teacher F believes that, for beginners, the accessibility of keyboards eliminates the need for handwriting practice. Instead, Teacher F focuses on the crucial skill of character recognition. This focus on character recognition is shared by both Teachers E and F, who agree that students' primary difficulty lies in their ability to read and recognize Chinese

characters. Teacher E attributes this difficulty to inconsistent practice. Teacher E further explains that many Norwegian students, faced with the challenge of reading Chinese characters, rely heavily on Pinyin and frequently resort to it for assistance in understanding written texts.

Like many other teachers, Teacher D uses character worksheets in her writing exercises. However, she places a higher emphasis on 'read-after-me' exercises, deeming them more effective and advantageous for Chinese language beginners.

#### 4.7.4 Strategies for Developing Students' Communicative Competence - Grammar

Teacher A and Teacher D both concentrate on analyzing the syntactic structure of sentences, and they engage in a comparative linguistic analysis of the syntactic features present in both the English and Chinese languages. Teacher D explains:

*“When studying Chinese grammar, we translate sentences and construct our own sentences using specific words. I place great emphasis on the importance of understanding the underlying logic of word order in Chinese sentences.(....) Through comparing the structural differences between Chinese and English sentences, and through the process of translating between the two languages, a better understanding of the nuances of Chinese grammar can be achieved”.*

Teacher A points out that Chinese grammar is relatively straightforward and doesn't require as much effort to grasp compared to other languages like Swedish or English. To help students understand Chinese sentence structure, Teacher A draws parallels between simple Chinese sentences and similar ones in Swedish or English. Additionally, Teacher A uses creative and enjoyable activities that revolve around Chinese characters. Through these activities, Teacher A showcases how the process of combining two or more Chinese characters can result in the formation of entirely new and distinct meanings. For instance, verbs in Chinese can be transformed into objects by skillfully combining multiple characters.

In contrast to Teacher A's method, Teacher B employs a traditional teaching approach for teaching Chinese grammar. Teacher B's approach involves explaining grammar rules,

followed by exercises. Students practice and repeat these rules for better understanding. Sometimes, they create sentences using specific grammar rules and share them with peers for collaborative learning. Teacher C, similar to Teachers A and D, observes that students commit syntax errors. Moreover, Teacher C underscores that the usage of measure words is regarded as a challenge in the realm of learning Chinese grammar.

Teacher F places strong emphasis on the gradual introduction of grammar concepts, preferring to avoid overwhelming students with an abundance of theoretical information. The teacher's primary focus centers around active participation in spoken communication, rather than delving into the complexities of grammatical rules. Teacher F also employs a strategy similar to the other teachers, involving a comparison between Norwegian and Chinese sentences.

Teacher E also highlights the value of regularly practicing sentence structures to help students remember them better. Like Teacher A, Teacher E shares the view that grammar is not overly complicated at the basic level. Furthermore, Teacher E remains dedicated to offering constructive feedback to students in written assignments. Teacher E further explains:

*“After every planned test, the students receive feedback on the test. Various colors are used to mark errors or ways to improve the text, such as orange for grammar and sentence structure, pink for irrelevant content, blue for vocabulary etc.”*

#### 4.7.5 Strategies for Developing Students’ Communicative Competence - Cultural Understanding

Teacher C employs a variety of methods to introduce students to Chinese culture. Videos are a preferred pedagogical tool as they provide an engaging and immersive way to learn about China's language and customs. To teach Chinese characters, students are encouraged to practice writing with brushes. Activities like paper-cutting and crafting envelopes with Chinese phrases are also incorporated into the lessons. Students create posters to explore and understand the customs and significance of different traditions, such as Chinese New Year. Additionally, students give presentations on specific topics, comparing aspects of Sweden and China, which further enhances their understanding of both cultures. Subsequently, there will be group discussions focusing on cultural disparities.

Teacher A also believes that movies can be a valuable resource in language teaching, as it provides students with an authentic and engaging insight into various aspects of Chinese life and society. Moreover, Teacher A uses the book called “Tecknens Rike” written by Cecilia Lindqvist, which revolves around the history of Chinese characters. Additionally, the teachers' external network provides valuable insights into Chinese culture. This includes guest talks by experienced business leaders and visiting authentic Chinese restaurants. Teacher A underscores the significance of comprehending Chinese culture as an integral aspect of language acquisition:

*“It is not sufficient to merely acquire some Chinese expressions; a comprehensive understanding of the culture is also imperative.”*

Like Teacher C, Teacher B also adopts a more interactive approach. Students are encouraged to give presentations on various Chinese traditions and cultural aspects. After these presentations, Teacher B facilitates discussions where students can share their insights, ask questions, and discuss the cultural differences they have observed.

Teacher E utilizes YouTube for access to documentaries about China and other videos related to China’s culture. Furthermore, Teacher E introduces students to authentic movies such as 孔子 *Kǒngzǐ* Confucius and Chinese classical songs. Additionally, the teacher integrates Chinese newspaper articles for more advanced Chinese language students. Likewise, Teachers D and F utilizes digital resources, such as Youtube.

## 4.8 Educational Background

In order to achieve a more comprehensive understanding of the teaching strategies employed by teachers, it is essential to consider their educational background. The information obtained through interviews sheds light on their training and qualifications. The table below presents an overview of this information.

<b>Teacher</b>	<b>Country</b>	<b>Educational Qualifications From</b>	<b>Teaching Experience</b>	<b>Native Speaker</b>
<b>A</b>	<b>Sweden</b>	China, Sweden	17 y	Yes
<b>B</b>	<b>Sweden</b>	China, Sweden	< 1y	No
<b>C</b>	<b>Sweden</b>	China, Canada, Sweden	8 y	Yes
<b>D</b>	<b>Sweden</b>	China, Sweden	14 y	Yes
<b>E</b>	<b>Norway</b>	China, Norway	17 y	Yes
<b>F</b>	<b>Norway</b>	China, United States, Sweden	10 y	Yes

#### 4.8.1 Educational Background and Teaching Strategies

Teacher D, with an educational background in IT, stated in the interview that she encourages logical thinking in her students as a key part of her teaching strategy. Specifically, she aims to provide logical explanations of how Chinese characters are constructed. Her approach involves helping students understand the inherent logic behind the Chinese language, and the structural composition of characters. By doing so, she seeks to equip students with the ability to understand the patterns and connections within the language, enabling them to grasp the Chinese language more deeply and intuitively.

Both Teacher E and Teacher F believe that their teaching strategies are heavily influenced by the teaching experience and curriculum requirements. Teacher F contends that teaching strategies should be adapted to meet the requirements of the curriculum and that it is important to focus on the practical application of the language as well as interactive teaching methods. Meanwhile, Teacher E highlights the value of teaching experience and the importance of exchanging insights with colleagues as a way to inform and influence teaching strategies. Teacher E also stresses the importance of adhering to both laws and the curriculum

Teacher B's approach to teaching Chinese has been shaped by the intensive studies of the language in China, where the teaching covered a wide range of aspects of the Chinese language and lasted significantly longer than typical Chinese language lessons in Sweden.

However, the approach has been adapted to fit the Swedish context, where intensive teaching is not feasible due to time constraints. Teacher B has also drawn significant insights from online courses at Dalarna University in Sweden, which have notably formed the teaching strategies, as the teacher shared in the interview. In mixed-level classes that include students at levels 1, 2, and 4, Teacher B confronts the distinct challenge of accommodating diverse skill levels. As a result, Teacher B is often compelled to resort to a more traditional teaching approach. Typically, this involves grouping students according to their proficiency levels and assigning tasks tailored to their individual needs, such as studying flashcards or reading books. Additionally, the teacher points out that it can be challenging to fulfill the requirements of the curriculum while simultaneously addressing the diverse interests and needs of the students. Teacher B further states:

*“Although it is possible to find activities that are enjoyable for all students, the challenge arises when these approaches do not align with the intended learning outcomes from the curriculum.”*

#### 4.8.2 Other Factors Shaping Teaching Strategies

Teachers A and C have noted distinct differences in pedagogical cultures between China and Sweden, particularly regarding the roles and expectations of both teachers and students in the classroom. In China, students typically have clear objectives and exhibit a strong work ethic, seeing the teacher as a central authority figure guiding their teaching lesson. Conversely, in Sweden, students have diverse needs requiring a more personalized teaching approach.

A shared challenge that Teachers A and C have identified among their Swedish students is maintaining motivation and concentration. To address these issues and the broader cultural differences, both teachers emphasize the importance of fostering student engagement by using interactive teaching strategies, enriched with playful and engaging tasks, which can help in boosting motivation and sustaining concentration.

Teacher C, however, encounters further difficulties arising from time constraints and curriculum requirements. With only a few hours allocated for language teaching each week, it becomes challenging to cover the various aspects of the curriculum.

Moreover, Teacher F has observed that specific students are facing challenges in acquiring Chinese characters. The teacher recognizes the needs of the least proficient students and the

necessity for customized approaches to aid their learning. To address this concern effectively, Teacher F organizes supplementary activities that are specifically designed to cater to the requirements of these students requiring extra support.

Additionally, Teacher B, C, and E, also highlight the insufficiency of the textbooks in providing a realistic portrayal of spoken Chinese in real-world contexts. These teachers further explain that they are compelled to invest their time in sourcing additional resources from the internet. This underscores the need for supplementary materials to bridge the gap between textbook learning and practical language usage.

#### 4.9 Summary of Results - Interviews and Observations

This section provides a comprehensive review of the diverse teaching strategies used by six teachers in schools located in Norway and Sweden. While some strategies differ, certain shared tendencies can be identified within their teaching practices. Additionally, this section will outline any potential links between the teachers' educational backgrounds and their selected teaching strategies. It will also highlight that other factors also play a significant role in shaping their teaching strategies.

In Norway, Teachers E and F adopted a combination of communicative and task-based approaches. Teacher E, in particular, made significant use of technology in the lessons. Digital tools like Quizlet, Kahoot, PowerPoint and Padlet were extensively integrated into the teaching. The lessons were designed to facilitate group work and various collaborative written tasks, with most assignments being carried out on computers used by the students. Besides the heavy reliance on technology, Teacher E also prioritized fostering spontaneous dialogues and the incorporation of scripted role-playing activities into the lesson. On the other hand, Teacher F emphasized collaborative activities, including group assignments and dialogues within pairs and small groups, with a primary focus on promoting teamwork and effective communication among students.

In Sweden, the teaching approaches of Teachers A, B, C, and D were quite varied, encompassing task-based, communicative, and traditional approaches. Teacher A primarily adopted a communicative approach, emphasizing collaborative and interactive tasks, such as group work and dialogue in pairs. The teacher also employed physical flashcards. Moreover,

the teacher encouraged students to practice reading dialogues from textbooks. In contrast, Teacher B utilized a mix of traditional and communicative approaches. While the teacher placed an emphasis on teacher-led lectures and grammar exercises, interactive activities such as group work were also integrated into the lessons.

Teacher C's strategies encompass a mix of communicative, task-based, and technology-driven approaches. Digital platforms such as Kahoot and Quizlet were integrated into the lessons, adding engaging and interactive elements to the lesson. Teacher C also introduced spontaneous role-playing activities to encourage active participation and creative expression among the students. Incorporating Chinese music and songs into the lessons, Teacher C further enriched the cultural context, deepening students' understanding of the language within its cultural setting. Additionally, Teacher C used dialogues from the textbook in the lessons and organized group work and discussions.

In contrast, Teacher D in Sweden adhered to a more traditional teaching approach, centering on the writing and comprehension of Chinese characters, including their structural composition and associated radicals, rather than prioritizing interactivity and collaboration. This teacher-centered approach largely involved the use of structured PowerPoint presentations by the teacher, translation tasks, “read after me” exercises. Moreover, Teacher D consistently dedicated time to teaching about Chinese history and philosophy, enhancing the depth of Chinese culture.

The teachers' teaching strategies are shaped by a complex interplay of factors. Among these, are their educational background and teaching experience. Furthermore, teachers must also consider the requirements of the curriculum and adapt to various cultural and contextual challenges in the classroom. In addition to these factors, teachers need to consider the individual needs of their students and tailor their teaching accordingly. They also have to deal with time constraints in teaching and ensure that students are engaged in the learning process. While teachers' educational background is an important part of their teaching approach, there are many other factors that contribute to shaping their strategies. These factors all play a role in how teachers approach teaching and how they engage their students in learning.

## 4.10 Quantitative Analysis

To gain further insights and address the research questions, quantitative data has been collected during the observations. The aim is to provide a more accurate depiction of the observed phenomena and shed light on facts that cannot be explained through qualitative means. The quantitative data collection follows a customized form inspired by the COLT scheme, tailored to the study's objectives to obtain and present relevant findings.

To answer the research questions, data was collected on the extent to which different competencies were addressed during the observations. The following two measures were utilized to gain insights into the design of the instruction.

### 4.10.1 Amount of Classes with Competence Included

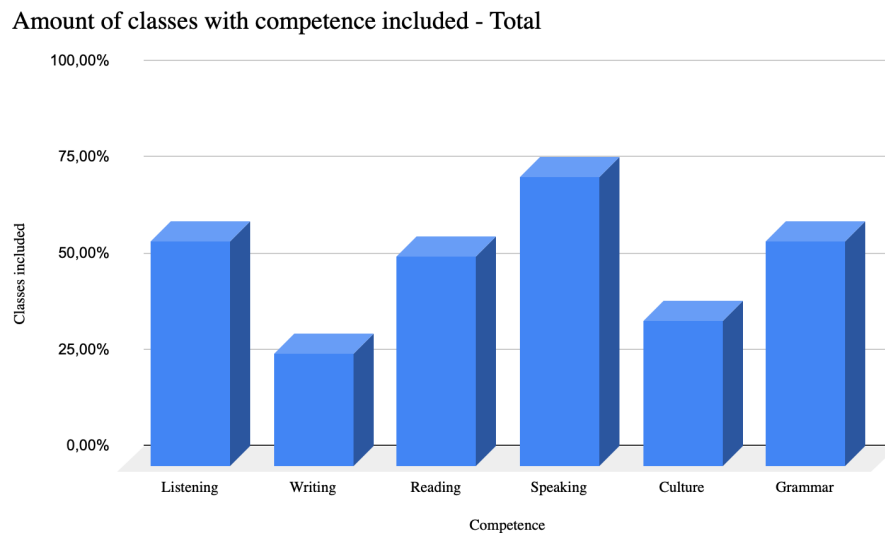
The measurement provides insight into the proportion of the total number of observations in which a given competence was included. To calculate this, the inclusion or exclusion of each competence per class was noted during all observations. The number of lessons in which a specific competence was included was then divided by the total number of lessons to obtain the percentage of observations in which the competence was covered. As a result, the range for each competence spans from 0% to 100%.

### 4.10.2 Average Time Spent per Competence

The calculation involved measuring the amount of time dedicated to each competence during the observed lessons. The total time allocated to each competence was obtained by summing up the corresponding durations across all observations. This cumulative time was then divided by the overall duration of the observations to derive the average time allocation for each competence. This analysis provides insights into the relative emphasis given to different competencies across all observed lessons. Therefore, 100% of the observed minutes were included in the study and subsequently distributed across the various competencies.

### 4.10.3 Results from all Observations

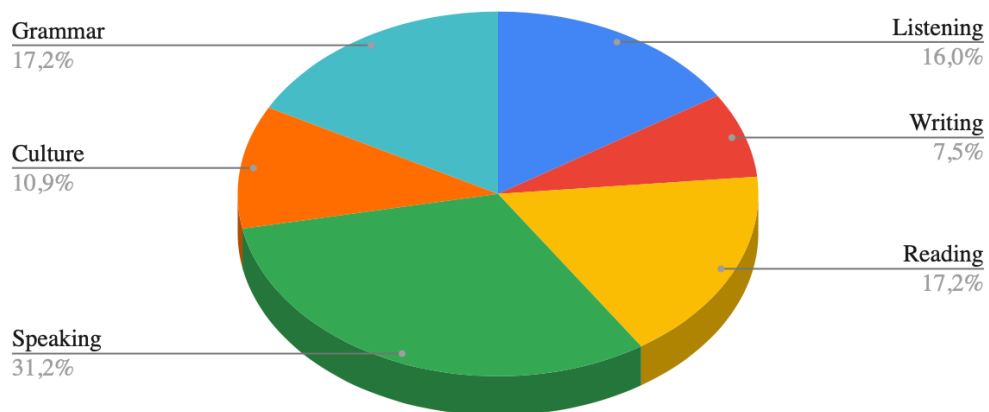
Below, the results for all observations are presented. The diagrams are primarily useful in providing relevant insights to answer RQ1.



*Figure 1: Amount of classes with competence included - Total*

When looking at Figure 1, it becomes evident that speaking exercises were included in 75,0 % of all observations, making it the most frequently included competence. Following this, we can observe listening (58,3 %), grammar (58,3%) and reading (54,2 %) falling within a similar range. Culture (37,5 %) and especially writing (29,2 %) were observed to be the least frequently included competencies.

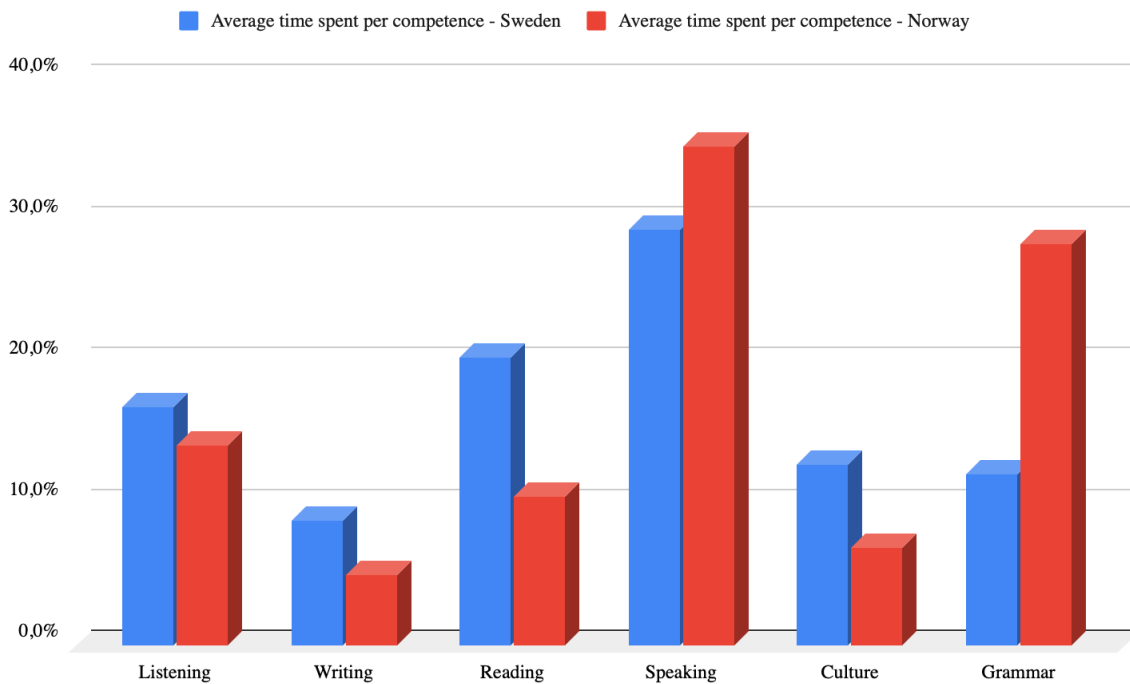
### Average time spent per competence - Total



*Figure 2: Average Time Spent per Competence - Total*

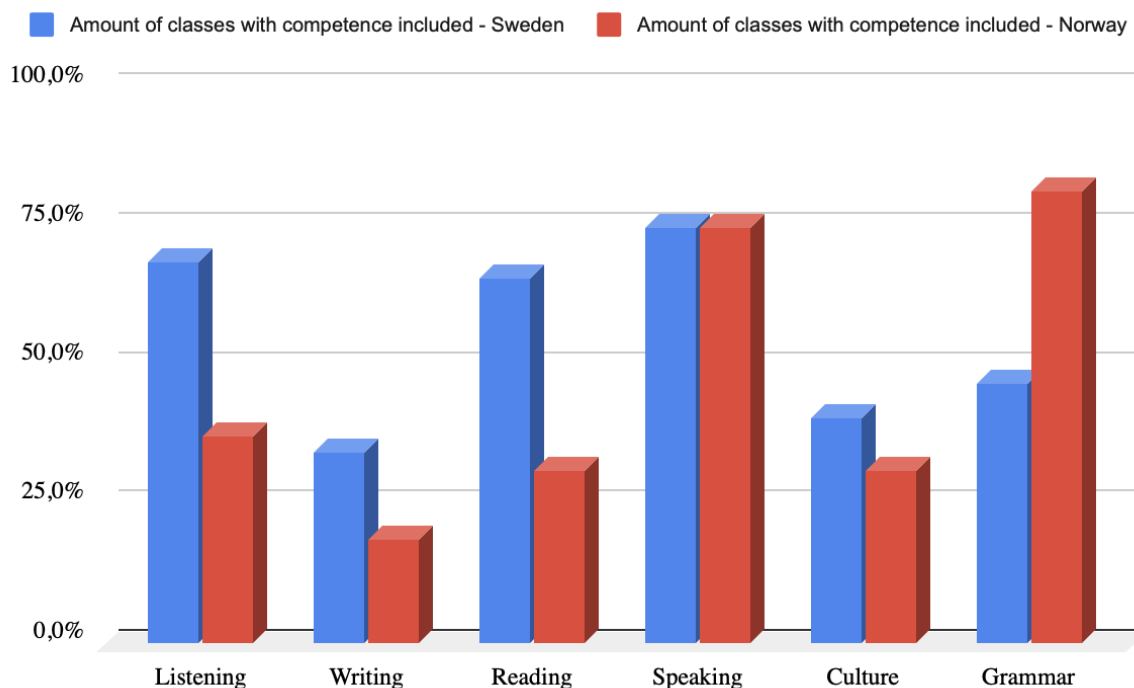
Figure 2 illustrates the distribution of time allocated to each competence, and we can observe that the distribution largely follows a similar pattern as in Figure 1. It was noted that less time was allocated to listening activities (16.0%) compared to reading (17.2%), despite listening being included in more observations than the latter. The distribution of time allocated to the different competencies is relatively evenly spread, except for speaking (31,2 %) and writing (7,5%), which are clearly given the most and least time, respectively.

#### 4.10.4 Sweden vs. Norway



*Figure 3: Comparison between Sweden & Norway, average time spent per competence*

Figures 3 and 4 help us understand the similarities and differences between Swedish and Norwegian schools, hence it will provide useful insights in order to answer RQ3. When looking at Figure 3, it can be noted that the Swedish schools best reflect the results presented in Figure 1. This can be attributed to more observations being conducted in Swedish schools than in Norwegian schools, which may have skewed the weighting of the results. An interesting observation from the Norwegian schools is that grammar (28,3 %) is the competence for which second most time is allocated, whereas only 12,0 % of the total lesson time is allocated to this competence in the Swedish schools. The distribution of time allocated to each competence is more evenly spread in Swedish schools, even though speaking and reading exercises constitute approximately 50 % of the total lesson time across all observations. Whereas the distribution in Norwegian schools is more skewed, with less emphasis given to listening, writing, reading, and culture in favor of speaking and grammar. Activities related to speaking and grammar together constitute 61.3% of the total lesson time.



*Figure 4: Comparison between Sweden & Norway, amount of classes with subject included*

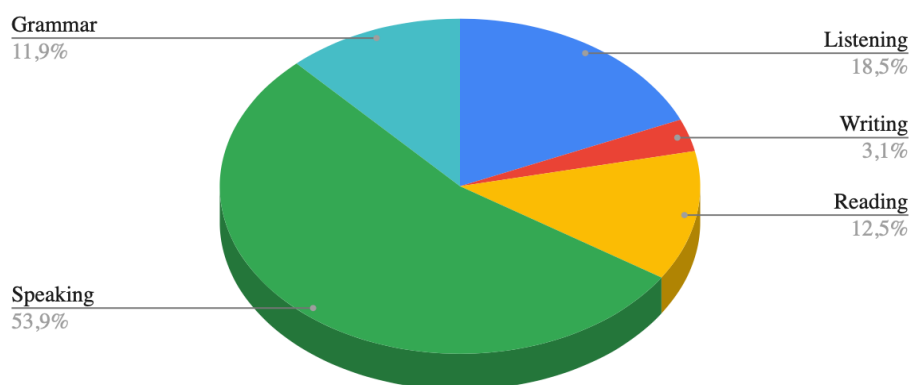
In Figure 4, we can once again see a distribution in the Swedish schools that is similar to the distribution presented in Figure 1. For the Swedish schools it can be found that listening, which is the second most frequently included competence, which is included in 68,8 % of all classes, has been allocated less time per activity. As it only makes up 16.8% of the total lesson time, as shown in figure 3.

In the Norwegian schools grammar (81,3%) and speaking (75,0 %) are included in the most amount of classes. Whereas the other competencies are more evenly included. Culture, which as shown above is included in approximately one-third of the observations in Norwegian schools, receives only 6.9% of the total lesson time.

#### 4.10.5 Other findings

Presented below is a selected subset of the observed schools, whose outcomes offer significant insights and contribute to the elucidation of the configuration of the diagrams presented earlier.

Average time spent per competence- School A



*Figure 5: Average time spent per competence - School A*

Figure 5 illustrates the time allocation for the different competences in School A. It is evident that 53.9% of the total lesson time is allocated to speaking. Notably, culture was not included in any of the observed lessons and is therefore not reflected in the presented diagram. Furthermore, the distribution between listening, grammar, and reading is relatively evenly distributed, while writing only constitutes 3.1% of the total lesson time.

### Average time spent per competence - School C

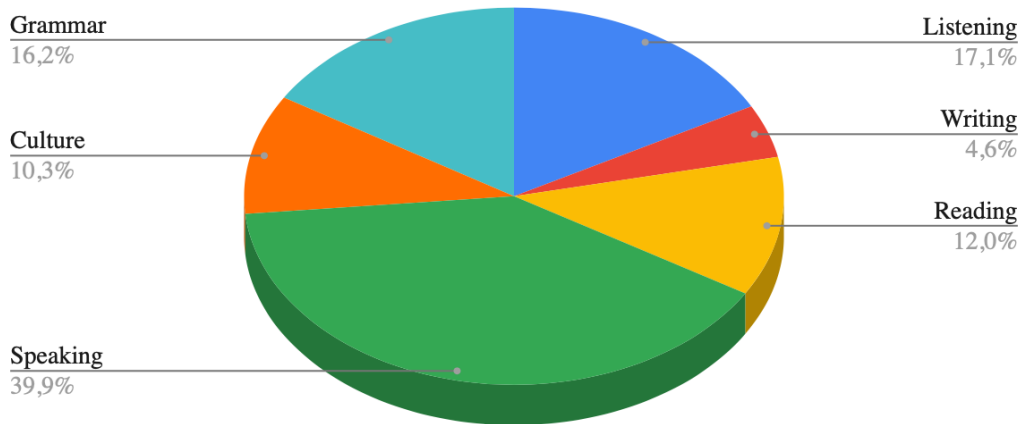


Figure 6: Average time spent per competence - School C

An overview of time allocation for School C is presented in Figure 6. School C has the distribution that is most similar to the total distribution in Figure 1. Speaking is the competence that is given the most time in lessons, while the other competencies are distributed in a relatively similar way to the total for all schools in.

### Average time spent per competence - School D

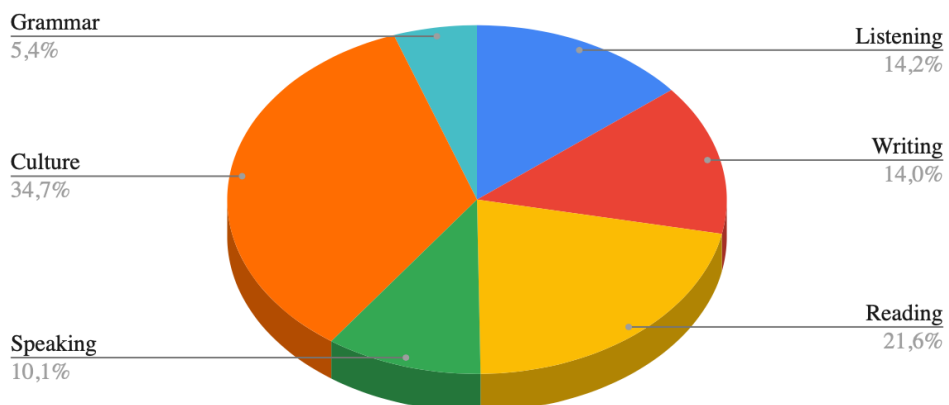


Figure 7: Average time spent per competence - School D

School D is the school whose time allocation differs the most from the total in Figure 1, as shown in Figure 7. Culture is given the most space with 34.7% of the total lesson time. It can also be noted that writing, which has received relatively little time in the other diagrams, is the third most common competence with 13.3%. Notably, speaking, which has been given the most lesson time in all other schools, has received the second least amount of lesson time at School D.

## 5. Discussion

This chapter presents a thorough discussion of the study's results concerning teaching strategies in the Chinese language classroom. In the sections that follow, I will delve into the significance of the results in the context of the research questions I set out to address. These results will be compared with existing research, and I will offer insights into the broader implications and contributions of this study. In addition, I will discuss the theoretical frameworks underpinning the study, and potential directions for future research. Finally, I would like to present a conclusion of the results from this study.

### 5.1 Teaching Strategies in the Chinese Language Classroom

#### 5.1.1 Summary of findings

This study investigates the strategies and approaches that Chinese language teachers use to enhance students' communicative competence among the learners. The competencies assessed were speaking, writing, listening, reading, cultural and grammatical understanding.

The findings revealed three dominant approaches among the observed teachers: communicative, task-based, and traditional approaches. Specifically, teachers A, C, E, and F employed communicative and task-based approaches, while teachers B and D leaned towards a more traditional approach. These observations align with previous research, which has consistently found task-based and communicative approaches to be effective in enhancing communicative competence.

Teachers employed a variety of strategies to develop language skills including cultural and grammatical understanding. For oral communication, the most prominent strategies employed were role-playing, group work, dialogues, spontaneous conversations, and student

presentations. Written skills were enhanced through computer-based activities and repetitive writing practices. Listening skills were enhanced with audio files, movies, video clips, and songs. Reading skills were improved by employing dialogs and texts from textbooks, as well as songs with subtitles and flashcards. Cultural understanding was integrated through video clips, presentations, and music. Grammatical knowledge was strengthened through oral feedback, group tasks, and visual presentations of grammatical concepts provided by the teachers.

## 5.2 Connecting Research Results to Existing Theories

In the realm of second language acquisition, Krashen's Input Hypothesis has long been considered a foundational theory, particularly relevant to the discussion of communicative competence (Haukås, 2007, p.7). This discussion will explore the findings of my study, considering them within the context of Krashen's Input Hypothesis.

Central to Krashen's Input Hypothesis is the notion that comprehensible input is a key factor in language learning. Comprehensible input means that the learner needs to be exposed to language that is slightly above their current level of proficiency, but still understandable. Evidence supporting this theory was observed in several Chinese language classes, where teachers incorporated authentic materials into their lessons. For instance, Teacher B incorporated videos from China's state-run television network, CCTV. This video clip was sourced from a Chinese series in which the actors employed everyday, casual language. Teacher C also provided students with Chinese songs, allowing them to practice listening skills and gain insights into Chinese culture. It's noteworthy that the resources utilized were just a bit beyond the students' current Chinese proficiency levels.

However, concerns were raised regarding the authenticity of the textbooks used in these classrooms. Teachers C and E expressed concerns about the textbooks, noting that they often lack authenticity and don't accurately reflect everyday language used by native speakers. Rogers and Medley (1988) assert that the terms 'authenticity' and 'authentic' are frequently used to describe instances of language, whether spoken or written, that exhibit a natural flow and align with the cultural and situational contexts in which they occur. As a result of relying on inauthentic materials, students may develop an inaccurate or limited understanding of the Chinese language and culture. This lack of authenticity in teaching materials can have a

direct impact on students' communicative competence, which involves not only linguistic knowledge but also the ability to use the language effectively and appropriately in various contexts.

Another key concept in Krashen's theories is the Acquisition-Learning Hypothesis. One of Teacher E's teaching strategies notably align with the tenets of this hypothesis. This theory distinguishes between 'acquisition,' an unconscious, natural process of language assimilation, and 'learning,' a conscious, deliberate process of studying language. During Teacher E's lessons, it was frequently observed that spontaneous dialogues with students were a common activity, particularly fostering the 'acquisition' process. By promoting natural conversations and interactions in Chinese, these activities encourage unconscious language acquisition. This process is particularly effective in a natural interaction with a native speaker, as it allows students to immerse themselves in authentic language use. In line with the Acquisition-Learning Hypothesis, the focus is on communication rather than correctness. This approach assists students in engaging with the language in meaningful contexts, contrasting with explicit grammar instruction, which falls under the 'learning' process of the hypothesis and represents the conscious learning process.

Moreover, Teacher E mentioned in the interview that some of the previous students had spent six months on an exchange program in China, and upon their return, they showed significant improvement in their language proficiency. It can be somewhat challenging to achieve language acquisition in a classroom setting when much of the learning occurs consciously. By sending students on exchange programs to China, they will have the opportunity to engage in conversations with native speakers which can greatly enhance their language acquisition.

Another key hypothesis of Krashen's is the Affective Filter Hypothesis, which suggests that learners' emotional states can significantly impact their language acquisition. It is crucial for educators to create a positive learning environment where students feel safe, motivated, and confident. To do this, teachers should prioritize building strong relationships with their students and encouraging active participation. However, it's worth noting that some teachers, namely A, C, and F, have reported challenges in fostering student motivation. This lack of motivation can raise the affective filter, potentially hindering the process of language acquisition.

Finally, the use of the target language by teachers was a consistent feature throughout the lessons. Significantly, the majority of these teachers are native speakers, adding substantial value to their linguistic input. The frequent inclusion of everyday Chinese phrases offers students invaluable exposure to authentic language. However, several teachers mentioned that conducting classes entirely in Chinese would not be feasible, as it would be too advanced for the students. Yet, they agreed that incorporating small, everyday phrases is beneficial.

### 5.2.1 CLT & TBLT

Both Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) and Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) play pivotal roles in fostering communicative competence among language learners (Obenza & Mendoza, 2021). CLT emphasizes creating authentic and meaningful communication situations where students engage in practical language use. Through collaborative activities, role-plays, and authentic conversations, learners acquire the ability to express themselves naturally and effectively. TBLT takes it a step further by integrating language instruction with task-based scenarios. Through challenging tasks and projects that involve problem-solving or real-world assignments in the target language, students are compelled to use a range of language skills simultaneously, including listening, speaking, reading, and writing. This approach enables learners to develop not only grammatical and lexical knowledge but also the adaptability to various communication contexts.

One of the key principles of CLT is its strong emphasis on interaction as a crucial element in acquiring communicative skills. This focus on interaction was evident across all the observed schools, labeled A-F. For practicing oral skills dialogues and role play was observed, enabling students to practice speaking and listening in a more natural context. In grammar exercises, for instance, students were divided into groups or pairs to solve grammar tasks. This collaborative approach allowed them to work together in solving tasks, fostering both communication and understanding of grammar concepts. Additionally, the schools incorporated pair work into listening exercises. In these exercises, one student would speak, while the other was tasked with writing down what they heard. In these instances, students worked in pairs, adding an interactive element to the process of developing listening skills.

It is noteworthy that interaction extends beyond mere face-to-face communication to encompass the use of technology as well. This was particularly evident at School E, where technology was incorporated into written tasks. Specifically, teachers and students engaged in

chats that centered around everyday life conversations, thus incorporating a more interactive and authentic dimension to their language practice.

While technology offers advantages in language learning, an overreliance on computer-based writing can hinder the retention of Chinese characters, as highlighted by Lyu (2021). Handwriting Chinese characters is crucial for cultivating visual recognition skills. One of the distinctive challenges faced when learning Chinese is the complex nature of its characters, each representing a unique combination of strokes and components. Handwriting these characters is more than just a mechanical exercise; it fosters a deeper understanding of the characters' structure and helps learners develop visual recognition skills. The tactile experience of forming characters on paper engages different cognitive processes than typing on a keyboard or touchscreen. This tactile engagement strengthens the connection between the visual, motor, and memory centers of the brain, facilitating better retention. An overreliance on computer-based writing might inadvertently diminish the cognitive benefits of handwriting Chinese characters. While technology can expedite typing and input, it might lack the same level of cognitive engagement as physically writing characters. Additionally, technology-driven approaches often rely on predictive text or auto-correction features, which could hinder learners' opportunities to practice character formation independently and accurately.

Another fundamental tenet of CLT emphasizes the significance of connecting learning to language that is employed in authentic, real-life situations. In this regard, role-playing has proved to be a particularly effective strategy for simulating real-life situations in the classroom. For instance, Teachers C and E incorporated role-playing extensively into their teaching, allowing students to practice oral skills in scenarios they might encounter in the real world. At School C, spontaneous role-playing centered around a grocery shopping scenario.

TBLT was also observed in the Chinese language classroom, as demonstrated at School D. An illustrative example is when students participate in delivering presentations about Chinese cuisine, conducted entirely in the target language. As they delve into aspects such as dish preparation and the cultural significance of each dish, students not only practice their language proficiency but also gain a deeper understanding of different aspects of Chinese culture.

The role of feedback in Chinese language lessons should be highlighted. The primary feedback that was observed was metalinguistic feedback and reformulation. This strategy aligns with previous research showing the potential benefits for language learning. A study conducted by Li (2014) found metalinguistic correction to be particularly advantageous for low-proficiency learners, underscoring the importance of tailored feedback approaches for enhancing language acquisition among diverse learners. Metalinguistic feedback was observed immediately after the students had made a grammatical error during oral activities in the class. Such direct feedback offers learners the advantage of immediate clarification on their errors, enabling them to rectify mistakes promptly and efficiently. This approach fosters accuracy improvement by providing clear guidance on the correct language forms, aiding learners in gradually refining their linguistic precision.

On the other hand, there can be some drawbacks to the excessive use of metalinguistic feedback. The emphasis on correctness can often impede the natural flow of communication, as learners become preoccupied with avoiding errors instead of expressing themselves freely. This can diminish the spontaneity in conversations and make students less comfortable with attempting to use the language. This concern was also underscored by some teachers in the interviews, who noted that it could lead to students feeling uncomfortable about using the target language. Furthermore, excessive metalinguistic feedback can also be demotivating for learners. Being consistently corrected can lead to frustration and a lack of confidence in using the language. This type of feedback can also shift the focus from meaningful communication to a unilateral concern for the formal aspects of the language.

Both CLT and TBLT highlight the significance of learning language in a meaningful context, with an emphasis on achieving practical goals through language use. This helps overcome barriers that might hinder the development of communicative competence, such as an excessive focus on grammar rules and isolated vocabulary. By participating in authentic, task-based situations, learners get the opportunity to experiment, make mistakes, and self-correct, which is crucial for building confidence and mastering practical language use. Overall, both CLT and TBLT lay the foundation for a deeper understanding of language as a tool for communication and encourage the development of communicative competence in a holistic and authentic manner. On the other hand, implementing both TBLT and CLT in the language teaching is perceived as an overemphasis on fluency at the expense of accuracy. While both approaches prioritize the ability to communicate effectively, this focus can

inadvertently lead to a neglect of correct language usage. In these approaches, students are encouraged to interact, express themselves, and perform tasks using the target language, even if their language use is not entirely accurate. While this can boost students' confidence and help them become more fluent speakers, there is a risk of reinforcing incorrect language patterns, as students might not receive timely or adequate correction. It is essential for teachers to strike a balance between encouraging communication and ensuring that students are aware of and can use correct language forms. In a well-balanced language program, fluency and accuracy should complement each other, enabling students to communicate effectively while using the language correctly.

## 5.2 Linking Educational Background to Teaching Strategies and Other Influences

In the study, it was observed that all the teachers, except for the teacher at School B, had experience teaching Chinese at either Norwegian or Swedish high schools, with their experience ranging from 8 to 17 years. Teachers C and F stood out due to their diverse educational backgrounds, holding qualifications from three countries, while Teachers A, B, D, and E had qualifications from two countries: China and either Norway or Sweden.

It was observed that there was a correlation between the diversity of the teachers' educational backgrounds and the variety of their teaching activities. Specifically, Teachers C and F, who held qualifications from three countries, displayed not only the most varied teaching activities in their classes but also exhibited remarkable creativity and interactivity in their teaching approaches. This observation suggests that a broader educational background may contribute to a more diverse range of teaching strategies and approaches. While the teachers did not explicitly attribute this in their interviews, the observed correlation potentially indicates that diverse educational experiences can enhance the learning experience for students by offering them a wider array of teaching activities.

The teachers' experience also played a role in their approach to teaching. Notably, an observation made during the study indicated that those teachers with longer teaching experience in schools were more likely to diverge from relying solely on textbooks. Instead, these more experienced teachers were observed to incorporate more engaging and varied teaching materials and activities. This shift may stem from teachers feeling more secure in

their roles with longer teaching experience, thus allowing them to embrace a wider range of strategies in their pedagogical approach. In contrast, the teachers with less experience were more reliant on using the textbook in their teaching. This underscores the vital point that teachers' background and experience significantly impact their teaching strategies, ultimately shaping the overall classroom environment and learning experience for students.

Teachers also discussed the role of curriculum requirements in shaping their teaching strategies. They recognized that taking these requirements into account, limited their flexibility in the classroom. Furthermore, teachers mentioned the significant challenges posed by time constraints in achieving the requirements outlined in the curriculum. Given the limited hours available for instruction each week, they frequently struggled to cover the required content while still offering engaging and varied activities for their students. The combined effects of time pressure and the need to meet curriculum requirements heavily influenced their teaching strategies and the choices they made within the classroom. The tension between these competing priorities shaped their pedagogical decisions, affecting their ability to deliver diverse and engaging lessons.

Another factor that influenced teaching strategies was the contrasting views on the roles of teachers and students in classroom settings in China and Sweden. Teachers A and C noted a distinct contrast in how both teachers and students are perceived and interact within the learning environment. They observed that in Sweden, there is a greater emphasis on catering to students' interests, exemplifying a distinctively student-centered approach to teaching in Scandinavia. In this context, the teacher's role is seen more as a facilitator or guide, rather than a strict authority figure. This shift towards a more student-centered approach is a notable departure from the more traditional teacher-centered methods they experienced in China.

While most teachers in the study shared largely similar teaching strategies and approaches, with only minor variations, Teacher D stood out as a distinct exception in this research. Teacher D's background, which combines both IT and pedagogical education, might have influenced the teaching approach. It was noted that the teacher placed substantial emphasis on writing skills, an aspect that is under-prioritized in the curriculum. Moreover, this teacher significantly enriched the lessons by incorporating cultural elements, offering students a more comprehensive learning experience. However, the teacher adopted a more teacher-centered approach, characterized by students predominantly engaging in passive listening. This

approach would likely stem from Teacher D's extensive background in IT education, which may have influenced their perspective on language instruction. The teacher also confirmed that this background had a considerable impact on the teaching approach.

Lastly, the teachers discussed various classroom-specific factors that influenced their teaching strategies. They pinpointed student motivation and concentration levels as key factors. The teachers emphasized that these elements required a tailored approach to teaching. Furthermore, they noted that adapting to these classroom-specific needs was often quite time-consuming for teachers. This occasionally resulted in not all of the day's objectives being met, which in turn could negatively impact the learning process.

### 5.3 Differences between Norway and Sweden

In examining Chinese language teaching in both Norway and Sweden, a noticeable pattern was observed. Teachers in both countries placed a strong emphasis on oral skills. This observation was corroborated by interviews with teachers, who unanimously stressed the importance of oral activities in language teaching, with many considering it the most crucial competence. This focus on oral communication was also evident in the curricula for foreign languages in both countries, where, particularly in the early stages of language instruction, oral communication skills are prioritized. This was also reflected in the quantitative results. It is important to note, however, that the distribution of time and activities across various competencies observed during the study period may not be representative of the entire school year. Observations over a more extended period might yield different results.

Figures 1 and 2 reveal that both countries give limited attention to written skills in their language teaching. This result aligns with my findings and could be attributed to the fact that written skills are not prioritized in the curricula of both Norway and Sweden. However, figures 3 and 4 show a marked difference in the emphasis placed on grammar between Norway and Sweden. In the Swedish curriculum grammar is given more attention, being mentioned twice, whereas it is mentioned only once in the Norwegian curriculum.

Furthermore, figures 3 and 4 highlight that while Norway places a substantial emphasis on oral skills and grammar, Sweden prioritizes speaking, reading, and listening. These differing approaches could result in students with varying language proficiencies. Mastering a foreign

language involves proficiency in all language skills: speaking, writing, listening, and reading. Additionally, all language skills are integral components of communicative competence. The observed differences also suggest that, despite time constraints, teachers in both countries prioritize their instruction differently.

The variations in teaching strategies and approaches between Norway and Sweden do not show a distinct demarcation or significant disparities. It appears that certain teachers share similarities across the two countries rather than being representative of their respective countries. This indicates that factors such as a teacher's educational background, experience, personal preferences, and classroom challenges like student motivation play a more substantial role in shaping teaching strategies than the prescribed curriculum of the country. While many teachers shared the same approaches to language teaching, they often implemented different strategies and activities. For instance, two teachers might both emphasize communicative language teaching, but choose to execute this approach through different activities. In one school, a teacher might use role-play to foster oral skills. Meanwhile, in another school, a different teacher might opt for pair dialogues as the preferred method to enhance oral skills. This example underscores that while schools may adopt a similar teaching approach, they may implement it through distinct methods.

Lastly, it was noted that Norwegian teachers commonly used PowerPoint presentations in every lesson to introduce new content for the lesson. This presentation outlined the day's objectives, introduced new vocabulary, provided dialogues for oral practice, and different group tasks. The Norwegian teachers demonstrated a more structured approach to presenting new content and often relied on technology, such as PowerPoint, to facilitate this.

In contrast, some Swedish teachers did not use PowerPoint presentations at all to introduce new content. Instead, technology was incorporated as a supplementary teaching resource. For instance, they utilized digital flashcards and Kahoot.

## 5.4 Limitations and Implications

This study offers valuable insights into the field of Chinese as a second language in Scandinavia, though it comes with several limitations that could impact the research outcomes. One notable limitation is the restricted number of schools observed. The study's

findings are derived from a narrow selection of schools, which could hinder the generalization of the results to other educational institutions or contexts. Future research should consider including a wider and more diverse sample of schools to enhance external validity.

Furthermore, longer observation periods would allow researchers to yield a deeper insight into the research questions, enabling the identification of trends and patterns. Since the observations were conducted over a specific two-month period, the findings may not necessarily be representative of teaching practices throughout an entire school year. For example, it is possible that some teachers may have focused only on certain language skills during this period.

Additionally, the use of an e-mail interview with Teacher D may have limitations regarding the depth of the responses. The lack of real-time interaction and opportunities for follow-up questions could have influenced the richness of the collected data.

## 5.5 Further Research

Further research into communicative competence within the realm of Chinese language teaching could encompass a variety of focus areas. One potential avenue for exploration might be the comparative impact of native and non-native Chinese speakers on students' development of communicative competence. Future studies might also consider evaluating students' proficiency in Chinese communication through testing and evaluate the efficacy of different teaching strategies.

Authenticity in teaching materials is a crucial aspect that emerged from the interviews with teachers, who expressed concerns about the current resources available for Chinese language teaching. Investigating the authenticity of teaching materials used in Chinese language classes can provide insights into their potential to effectively develop students' communicative competence.

The issue of authenticity in the current teaching materials was a recurrent theme in the interviews with teachers, many of whom voiced concerns regarding the textbook not being authentic enough. An in-depth examination of the authenticity of these materials, used in Chinese language classes, could provide valuable insights into their potential to effectively

cultivate communicative competence among students. This is an area that warrants further exploration in future studies.

The growing incorporation of digital tools into classroom settings offers a promising area for future research. Investigating the impact of technology and digital tools on Chinese language instruction could provide valuable insights into their potential benefits and effectiveness in enhancing the learning experience. Emerging technologies used in language classrooms, such as mobile chat with native speakers, as explored by Chua 2021, and the utilization of virtual reality (VR), could be investigated for their potential influence on the development of communicative competence among language learners.

## 6. Conclusion

This study has explored the teaching strategies and approaches employed by Chinese language teachers in both Norway and Sweden. Teachers in both countries mainly employ communicative and task-based approaches, which are fundamental for developing communicative competence. For instance, one teacher may employ roleplay, while the other may utilize dialogues in pairs, as strategies to enhance oral proficiency.

A correlation was observed between education background and teaching strategies. Teachers with educational backgrounds from different countries employed more varied, interactive and creative teaching strategies. Other factors that also influenced teaching strategies include teaching experience, curriculum requirements, cultural factors as well as classroom challenges.

Oral skills received the most emphasis in both Norway and Sweden. Furthermore, in Norway, the emphasis was primarily placed on oral skills and grammar, whereas in Sweden, the focus leaned towards developing skills in speaking, reading, and listening.

Overall, both CLT and TBLT contribute to the development of communicative competence by emphasizing authentic language use in meaningful contexts. These approaches assist language learners in developing the ability to comprehend, express themselves, and interact effectively in real communication situations.

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# Appendix

## Qualitative Observation Scheme

School:	School level:	Subject:	
Date:	Teacher: Students:	Duration:	Level of proficiency:

The teaching lesson	Observation
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Learning outcomes</li> <li>• Subject for the lesson</li> </ul>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Competences</b> Speaking Listening Writing Reading Cultural understanding Grammar</li> <li>• <b>Feedback/Corrections</b></li> </ul>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Teaching Activities</b> -What kind of teaching activities are used ? -What strategies/approaches are emphasized?</li> <li>• <b>Teaching Materials</b> -What kind of teaching materials are included ?</li> </ul>	

<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <b>Reflections</b></li></ul>	
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## Interview Questions

1. *Where did you receive your teacher education from, and how long have you been teaching Chinese in Swedish/Norwegian high school?*

2. *How has your educational background influenced the teaching strategies you use to teach Chinese?*

3. *How do you balance the use of traditional teaching methods with more modern and interactive methods to develop students' language skills in Chinese?*

**Traditional teaching methods** usually refer to lectures, lessons, repetition, and memorization. This can include the use of textbooks, grammar tables, board teaching, and standardized tests.

**Interactive teaching methods**, on the other hand, involve more participation and collaboration from students. This can include group work, discussions, role-playing, games, and other interactive activities that use technology or other tools to increase students' engagement and participation.

4. *What types of teaching materials do you use in your teaching? (Textbooks, powerpoint etc). Do you find the materials sufficient? If not, do you use other teaching materials (such as You-tube, chinese websites, creating your own activities)?*

5. *How do you balance teaching between the different language skills in Chinese, such as listening, speaking, reading, and writing, and which of these skills do you consider particularly important for developing students' language skills?*

6. *What teaching strategies do you use to develop students' skills in listening, speaking, reading, and writing in Chinese?*

7. *How do you help students develop knowledge of language structures and grammar rules in Chinese?*

8. *What types of authentic materials do you use in your teaching to increase students' cultural awareness and understanding of the Chinese language? **Authentic materials** can be Chinese newspapers, TV programs, music/songs, movies, podcasts, and conversations between native speakers).*

9. *How much do you use the target language in the classroom when commenting or asking your students questions? And could you provide examples? ( "你们有问题吗? " "早上好," and "对了"?)*

10. *How do you assess, give feedback, and correct your students' Chinese pronunciation, grammar, and vocabulary usage? Specifically, which of these areas do you prioritize and place particular emphasis on?*

11. *Can you describe the challenges you face in developing students' language skills in Chinese, and how do you work to overcome these challenges?*

12. *Are there any other relevant aspects or topics you would like to include in the interview regarding developing students' language skills in Chinese, beyond what has already been discussed?*

## **Declaration of consent (teacher)**

My name is Anna-Elisabeth Untiedt, and I am currently in the final semester of the Master's program in Language and Linguistics, with a specialization in Chinese, at Lund University. During the upcoming spring semester, I will be working on my master's thesis. The focus of my research will revolve around exploring the pedagogical approaches and strategies used in teaching Chinese as a second language in Norwegian and Swedish high schools. Through this study, I hope to contribute valuable insights to the field of language education and enhance our understanding of effective language teaching methods in educational settings.

As part of my research, I will conduct a non-participant classroom observation focusing on beginner-level Chinese language teaching. To ensure efficient data collection, I will use my computer to systematically take notes during the observation. It is important to note that no audio or visual recordings will be made during the lesson. This approach will allow me to capture essential information while respecting the privacy and confidentiality of the participants. My plan is to participate in approx. eight observations for the purpose of gathering sufficient data to carry out a comprehensive analysis. The personal information of all participants will be kept anonymous, and no identifiable personal data will be disclosed. I would sincerely appreciate it if you could allow me to conduct research in your classroom. Please note that participation in this research is voluntary, and individuals have the right to withdraw their consent at any point without being obligated to provide an explanation. There will be no repercussions for any student who chooses not to participate in the study.

Additionally, I plan to conduct interviews with the Chinese language teachers, with each interview lasting for a maximum duration of 40-50 minutes. The objective of these interviews is to gain a deeper understanding and insight into the teachers' beliefs and attitudes when it comes to teaching strategies developing student communicative competence in Chinese. Please note that all personal data will be kept anonymous in the interviews, and recordings will solely be used for transcription purposes. All audio recordings will be deleted immediately after the end of my project. Participants are welcome to withdraw their participation in the interview at any point, and may also request that any shared or recorded data be retracted. I wish to emphasize that your participation in this research is crucial to the completion of my master's thesis, and I would be grateful for your involvement.

I have received information about studies and am willing to participate in the project:

Date: \_\_\_\_\_ Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

If you have any questions about my study, please contact:

Mail: untietanna@gmail.com

Mobile: +47 41751907

### **Declaration of consent (students)**

My name is Anna-Elisabeth Untiedt, and I am currently in the final semester of the Master's program in Language and Linguistics, with a specialization in Chinese, at Lund University. During the upcoming spring semester, I will be working on my master's thesis. The focus of my research will revolve around exploring the pedagogical approaches and strategies used in teaching Chinese as a second language in Norwegian and Swedish high schools. Through this study, I hope to contribute valuable insights to the field of language education and enhance our understanding of effective language teaching methods in educational settings.

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I have received information about studies and am willing to participate in the project:

Date: \_\_\_\_\_ Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

If you have any questions about my study, please contact:

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