Teaching Business Chinese Translation to Thai Undergraduates: Problems, Difficulties and Implications

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Abstract—This research aims to (1) identify common problems and potential difficulties Thai undergraduates faced when they practicing their translation skills from Thai to Chinese, (2) examine Thai students' perceptions on their knowledge and skill; and (3) investigate Thai students' feedback on Thai-Chinese translation teaching materials and teaching methods. Based on the literature review, a 20-item survey was designed. The questionnaire's Cronbach's Alpha reliability is .868 (>.70). At the first semester of academic year 2014, the survey was distributed to the fourth-year students who are studying Thai-Chinese translation at Business Chinese (BC) Department and Chinese for Economy & Trade (CET) Department of Assumption University. The results indicated that most Thai translation students have weak Chinese foundation. Thai students often make grammatical errors, write wrong Chinese characters, and use inappropriate vocabularies and incorrect punctuations. Thai students find it difficult to translate Chinese idiom, business terminology, proper name, and Chinese measure word. The study's findings offer useful information that is applicable for improving business Chinese translation teaching and learning.

Index Terms—Business Chinese translation, problems, difficulties, implications.

I. INTRODUCTION

As the bilateral economic and business relationships between China and Thailand become closer, China has become Thailand's second biggest overall trading partner. Since more and more Chinese companies join Thai market, and Thai companies invest in China's market, the need for high quality business Chinese translators is greater than ever. A good business translator can help remove the barrier and make business communication smoothly. In line with the growing interest in business Chinese translation, Assumption University has been offering Thai-Chinese translation courses in Business Chinese (BC) Department and Chinese for Economy & Trade (CET) Department. What are the common problems and potential difficulties Thai students encountered in business Thai-Chinese translation class? What teaching strategies can be considered to overcome these translation problems and difficulties? How do Thai students assess their knowledge and skills? What are their responses towards business Chinese translation teaching materials and teaching methods? In order to answer the above research questions, the researcher designed a questionnaire to obtain the direct feedback from the course participants and analyzed the result.

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II. LITERATURE REVIEW

In 2013, it was found out that the students' common translation problems are much time, longer translation, word for word, difficult terms, grammar errors, inappropriate vocabulary [1]. In 2012, two researchers classified the error types into four categorizations: (1) syntactic errors: grammar, syntax, punctuation, and usage; (2) semantic errors: addition or omission; terminology, word choice; too freely translated; too literal, word-for-word translation; false cognate, ambiguity; accents and other diacritical marks; upper case and lower case; word form; spelling; (3) pragmatic errors: misunderstanding of the original text, mistranslation into target language, register, style; and (4) translation-specific errors: incomplete passage and inconsistency [2]. In 2013, two researchers have categorized major challenges of Arabic-English translation into four main patterns: lexical knowledge insufficiency; inadequate knowledge and practice of grammar; little cultural backgrounds; and inappropriate teaching atmosphere and methodology [3].

In 2010, one researcher designed a test to explore the difficulties and problems that English students faced at Al Quds Open University in the Gaza Region [4]. It was found that the difficulties and problems facing students in the translation process from English to Arabic including: idiom; proper name of people, organizations, and places; slang difficult to understand; source language vs. target language recipients, source language medium; cultural translation problems; linguistic translation problems; and grammatical difficulties.

In 2008, one researcher distributed a survey to second and third year undergraduates of business and legal translation course at the Jagiellonian University, Krakow, Poland [5]. She determined the particular translation difficulties are: understanding unfamiliar concepts, using specialist terminology in context, interference from students' mother tongue, learning specialist terminology, translating legal texts, translating cultural elements, organizing material, and searching for information. She introduced a series of translation activities, such as: discussing different versions of translated texts in class, peer correction, translating with a partner, translation and retranslation, creating glossaries and databases, reading parallel texts, etc.

In 2009, one researcher observed translation classes held in Ferdowsi University of Mashhad, Imam Reza University and Sheikh Bahaeei University of Isfahan [6]. Iranian universities have English translation teaching problems as follows: Iranian translation students have weak bilingual foundation, teachers use wrong translation teaching methods and their instruction is inefficiency. The researcher suggested making translation an effective learning process: translation

instructors can use parallel texts, student group preparation for collaborative learning, keep a translation dossier, annotated translation, correct an inaccurate translation, use different reference sources.

In 2012, two researchers investigated the effect of using students' native language (Arabic language) on teaching English as a foreign language grammar achievement at Eskan Al Jubaiha secondary school in Jordan [7]. The study consisted of 80 students enrolled in ninth grade. They suggested using the students' native language in the classroom helping students to raise their awareness and knowledge about the similarities and differences between the two languages, and help them to discover different methods to practice and to express themselves in the target language.

In 2013, one researcher suggested activate and develop students' translation competence should be the ultimate goal of all translation training programs [8]. In 2010, one teacher used varied translation activities teaching Bulgarian undergraduate students: vocabulary building activities; interpretation and analysis of authentic texts; sight translation; translation correction; group work; translation and backtranslation; translation and peer correction [9]. In 2012, one Chinese teacher proposed a new interactive teaching mode of after-class translation based on QQ [10]. In 2011, one researcher suggested online forum is an important learning strategy for students to improve their language skills [11]. In 2013, two Chinese teachers advocated the application of computer-aided translation technology in translation teaching [12]. In 2012, one researcher suggested five grammar-translation methods: (1) learning grammar rules, (2) translating back and forth between the target language and the speaker's native language, (3) memorizing lists of words, (4) utilizing exercises and tests in constrained ways, and (5) explicit error correction [13]. There are a lot of researches relevant to English translation teaching and learning. However, very little research has been done on teaching business Chinese translation to Thai undergraduates.

III. SIGNIFICANCE OF THE RESEARCH

This study not only investigates the common problems and potential difficulties Thai undergraduates faced when they practicing their translation skills from Thai to Chinese; but also investigate Thai students' responses towards business Chinese translation teaching materials and teaching methods. This study will be beneficial to the students, teachers and researchers who are interested in business Thai-Chinese translation. This study will help business Chinese teachers to have a deeper understanding of learning obstacles Thai students encountered during their translation process. By understanding business Chinese translation students' needs, instructors can design the relevant translation teaching and learning activity to improve students' translation proficiency. Moreover, this study will also serve as a future reference and guidance for researchers to investigate the relevant topic.

IV. LIMITATIONS OF THE RESEARCH

The subjects of the study were only 62 Thai undergraduates

from Business Chinese (BC) Department and Chinese for Economy & Trade (CET) Department of Assumption University. The small size of the sample limits the generalizability of this study. Due to the constrained time, the questionnaire only included 20 items. Those items may not cover all the Chinese translation problems and difficulties Thai students encountered during their translation process.

V. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

In order to address the research questions, a questionnaire was conducted among 62 Thai undergraduates who are learning Thai-Chinese translation at Business Chinese (BC) Department and Chinese for Economy & Trade (CET) Department of Assumption University. The survey contains altogether 20 items, including four major categories: (1) common translation problems, (2) potential translation difficulties, (3) students' perceptions on their knowledge and skill, and (4) students' response on translation teaching materials and teaching methods. After collecting the data, The Means and Standard Deviations were computed to identify the common translation problems & potential difficulties, students' perceptions on their knowledge & skill, and students' response on translation teaching materials & teaching methods. Also, Independent Samples T-Test was employed to determine the difference of common problems and potential difficulties faced by Thai undergraduates classified by gender and Chinese major.

VI. RESEARCH SUBJECTS

The participants are 62 fourth-year students who are studying Thai-Chinese translation at Business Chinese (BC) Department and Chinese for Economy & Trade (CET) Department of Assumption University. Classified by gender, the participants are 16 male students (25.8%) and 46 female students (74.2%). Classified by Chinese major, the respondents are 48 students (77.4%) from BC Department and 14 students (22.6%) from CET Department.

VII. DISCUSSION AND SUGGESTION

Research Question One "*What are the common problems and potential difficulties Thai undergraduates faced when they practicing their translation skills from Thai to Chinese?*"

TABLE I: CHINESE TRANSLATION PROBLEMS

	Never	Rarely	Some times	Often	Very Often	Mean	Std.
P1	3.2%	6.5%	30.6%	41.9%	17.7%	3.65	.960
P2	1.6%	14.5%	41.9%	25.8%	16.1%	3.40	.983
P3	3.2%	3.2%	35.5%	46.8%	11.3%	3.60	.858
P4	1.6%	21.0%	41.9%	27.4%	8.1%	3.19	.920
P5	3.2%	12.9%	50.0%	30.6%	3.2%	3.18	.820
P6	6.5%	16.1%	46.8%	24.2%	6.5%	3.08	.963

P1=Grammar Error
P2=Wrong Character
P3=Inappropriate vocabulary
P4=Incorrect Punctuation
P5=Missing Information
P6=Mother Language Interference

Table I shows frequency, means and standard deviation of common Chinese translation problems perceived by Thai undergraduates. The findings indicate that grammar (3.65) is the biggest problem encountered by Thai students in translation from Thai language into Chinese language. Other Chinese translation problems include: inappropriate Chinese vocabulary (3.60), wrong Chinese character (3.40), incorrect Chinese punctuation (3.19), missing information (3.18), and mother language interference (3.08)

TABLE II: CHINESE TRANSLATION DIFFICULTIES

	Never	Rarely	Some times	Often	Very Often	Mean	Std.
D1	1.6%	4.8%	35.5%	46.8%	11.3%	3.61	.817
D2	1.6%	4.8%	33.9%	50.0%	9.7%	3.61	.797
D3	3.2%	6.5%	40.3%	35.5%	14.5%	3.52	.936
D4	1.6%	4.8%	21.0%	48.4%	24.2%	3.89	.889
D5	1.6%	11.3%	45.2%	35.5%	6.5%	3.34	.829
D6	1.6%	6.5%	43.5%	38.7%	9.7%	3.48	.825

D1=Business Terminology
D2=Business Article
D3=Proper Name
D4=Chinese Idiom
D5=Chinese Measure Word
D6=Exact and Suitable Word

Table II shows frequency, means and standard deviation of potential Chinese translation difficulties perceived by Thai undergraduates. The findings indicate that Chinese idiom (3.89) is a big challenge encountered by Thai students in translation from Thai language into Chinese language. Other Chinese translation difficulties include: business terminology translation (3.61), business article translation (3.61), proper name translation (3.52), use exact and suitable word (3.48), and Chinese measure word translation (3.34).

Research Question Two "*What are Thai translation students' perceptions on their knowledge and skill, teaching material and method?*"

TABLE III: THAI STUDENTS' SELF-ASSESSMENT

	Poor	Fair	Good	Excellent	Mean	Std.
1	8.1%	67.7%	19.4%	4.8%	2.21	.656
2	3.2%	51.6%	38.7%	6.5%	2.48	.671
3	3.2%	4.8%	24.2%	67.7%	3.56	.738
4	6.5%	53.2%	37.1%	3.2%	2.37	.659
5	8.1%	54.8%	32.3%	4.8%	2.34	.700
6	3.2%	62.9%	32.3%	1.6%	2.32	.566

1=Business Vocabulary
2=Business Knowledge
3=Thai Language
4=Chinese Language
5=Chinese Writing Skill
6=Chinese Translation Skill

Table III shows frequency, means and standard deviation of Thai translation students' self-evaluation results. The findings indicate Thai students perceived their mother language (Thai) as good as excellent (3.56). However, their target language (Chinese) is just fair (2.37). Moreover, Thai students are weak at business vocabulary (2.21), Chinese translation skill (2.32), and Chinese writing skill (2.34) which should be improved.

TABLE IV: FREQUENCY OF TEACHING MATERIAL AND METHOD

	VD	D	Neutral	S	VS	Mean	Std.
M1	3.2%	6.5%	43.5%	29.0%	17.7%	3.52	.971
M2	1.6%	6.5%	30.6%	40.3%	21.0%	3.72	.933

VD=Very Dissatisfied
D=Dissatisfied
S=Satisfied
VS=Very Satisfied
M1=Teaching Material
M2=Teaching Method

Table IV shows frequency, means and standard deviation of Thai translation students' perceptions on teaching material and teaching method. The findings indicated Thai students are satisfied with translation teaching material (3.52) and teaching method (3.72).

Research Question Three "*Is there significant difference between male and female's perceptions on common translation problems, potential translation difficulties and overall self-assessment?*"
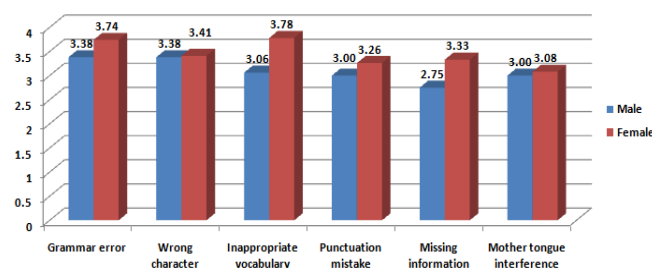

Fig. 1. Translation problems classified by gender.

According to the statistics (Fig. 1), common translation problems male students encountered belong to grammar error (3.38), wrong Chinese character (3.38), inappropriate vocabulary (3.06), incorrect punctuation (3.00), native language interference (3.00), and information omission (2.75). Most problems female students encountered belong to inappropriate vocabulary (3.78), grammar error (3.74), wrong Chinese character (3.41), information omission (3.33), incorrect punctuation (3.26), and native language interference (3.08).
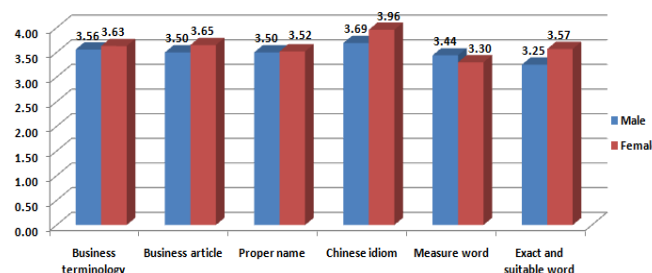

Fig. 2. Translation difficulties classified by gender.

According to the statistics (Fig. 2), frequent difficulties male students encountered belong to Chinese idiom (3.69), business terminology (3.56), business article (3.50), proper name (3.50), measure word (3.44), and word choice (3.25). Frequent difficulties female students encountered belong to Chinese idiom (3.96), business article (3.65), business terminology (3.63), word choice (3.57), proper name (3.52), and measure word (3.30).
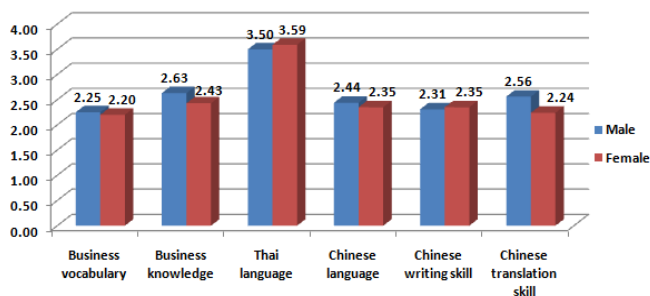
Fig. 3. Students' self-assessment classified by gender.

Fig. 6. Students' self-assessment classified by major.

According to the statistics (Fig. 3), male students are weak at business vocabulary (2.25), Chinese writing skill (2.31), and Chinese language (2.44). Female students are weak at business vocabulary (2.20), Chinese translation skill (2.24), Chinese language (2.35) and Chinese writing skill (2.35).

Research Question Four "*Is there significant difference between BC and CET student's perceptions on common translation problems, potential translation difficulties and overall self-assessment?*"
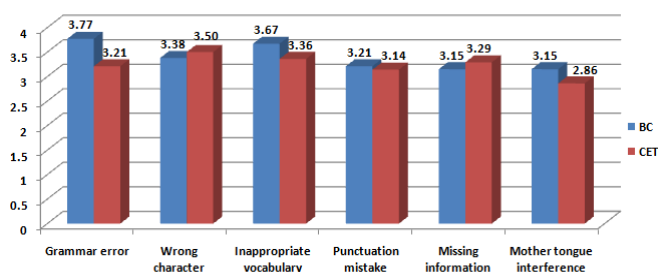

Fig. 4. Translation problems classified by major.

According to the statistics (Fig. 4), common translation problems BC students encountered belong to grammar error (3.77), inappropriate vocabulary (3.67), wrong Chinese character (3.38), incorrect punctuation (3.21), information omission (3.14) and native language interference (3.15). Common translation problems CET students encountered belong to wrong Chinese character (3.50), inappropriate vocabulary (3.36), information omission (3.29), grammar error (3.21), and native language interference (2.86).
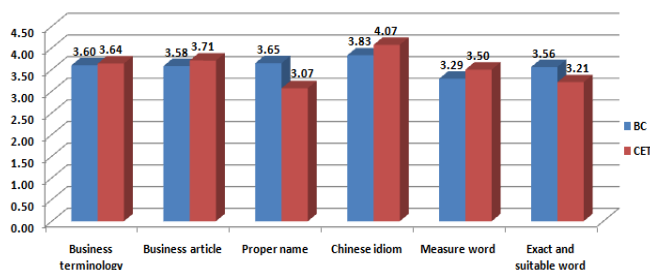

Fig. 5. Translation difficulties classified by major.

According to the statistics (Fig. 5), frequent difficulties BC students encountered belong to Chinese idiom (3.83), proper name (3.65), business terminology (3.60), business article (3.58), word choice (3.56), and measure word (3.29). Frequent difficulties CET students encountered belong to Chinese idiom (4.07), business article (3.71), business terminology (3.64), measure word (3.50), word choice (3.21), and proper name (3.07).
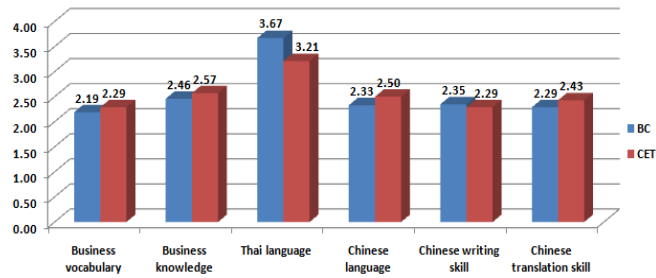
According to the statistics (Fig. 6), BC students are weak at business vocabulary (2.19), Chinese translation skill (2.29), and Chinese language (2.33). CET students are weak at business vocabulary (2.29), Chinese writing skill (2.29), and Chinese translation skill (2.43).

Research Question Five "*Is there significant difference between students' perceptions on Thai-Chinese translation teaching material and teaching method classified by gender and major?*"

TABLE V: FREQUENCY OF TEACHING MATERIAL AND TEACHING METHOD CLASSIFIED BY GENDER

	Mean	Std.	F	Sig.	T	Df	Sig. (2-tailed)
MM1	3.69	1.138	.744	.392	.818	60	.417
FM1	3.46	.912			.734	22.075	.471
MM2	3.75	1.125	.506	.480	.142	59	.888
FM2	3.71	.869			.126	21.704	.901

MM1=Male Students' Perception on Teaching Material
FM1=Female Students' Perception on Teaching Material
MM2=Male Students' Perception on Teaching Method
FM2=Female Students' Perception on Teaching Method

Table V shows the difference between male and female students' perceptions on translation teaching material and teaching method by using Independent Samples T-test. The significant value was more than 0.05 suggesting no significant difference between male and female students' perceptions.

TABLE VI: FREQUENCY OF TEACHING MATERIAL AND TEACHING METHOD CLASSIFIED BY MAJOR

	Mean	Std.	F	Sig.	T	Df	Sig. (2-tailed)
BM1	3.48	.945	.989	.324	-.552	60	.583
CM1	3.64	1.082			-.512	19.169	.614
BM2	3.68	.911	.025	.875	-.617	59	.539
CM2	3.86	1.027			-.578	19.510	.570

BM1=BC Students' Perception on Teaching Material
CM1=CET Students' Perception on Teaching Material
BM2=BC Students' Perception on Teaching Method
CM2=CET Students' Perception on Teaching Method

Table VI shows the difference between BC and CET students' perceptions on translation teaching material and teaching method by using Independent Samples T-test. The significant value was more than 0.05 suggesting no significant difference between BC and CET students' perceptions.

VIII. CONCLUSION

Based on the study, for senior Thai students who have been learning Chinese for 4 years, common translation problems include grammar error (3.65), inappropriate Chinese vocabulary (3.60), wrong Chinese character (3.40), incorrect

Chinese punctuation (3.19), information omission (3.18), and native language interference (3.08). Frequent translation difficulties include Chinese idiom translation (3.89), business terminology translation (3.61), business article translation (3.61), proper name translation (3.52), word choice (3.48), and Chinese measure word translation (3.34). Thai students are weak at business vocabulary (2.21), Chinese translation skill (2.32), and Chinese writing skill (2.34) which should be improved.

Thai students often encounter word choice problems because Chinese language includes a lot of ambivalent words which have several related or different meanings. Some Chinese words have the same pronunciation but different meanings, e.g. 公历 solar calendar, 公立 public, and 功利 utility; 势力 power, 势利 selfish, 事例 example, and 视力 eyesight. Some Chinese vocabularies are ambiguous in their meaning relying on the context to understand the intended meaning.

Thai students sometimes write wrong Chinese characters, including substitution of one character for another, substitution of one component for another, absence of a required stroke, an extra stroke, stroke placement is incorrect, width relation of certain strokes are incorrect, an opening where there should be none, etc. Because a lot of Chinese characters just differ in a key stroke, e.g. 大太，土士，天夫，未末，万方，厂广，可司，因困，休体，外处，洒酒，睛晴，人入八，日目曰，己已巳，于干千. There are so many homophones in mandarin.

Thai undergraduates sometimes make punctuation mistakes because there are only three punctuations frequently used in Thai language: question mark, ellipse, and quotation mark. However, in Chinese language, there are plenty of punctuations, such as: 逗号(comma), 句号(full stops), 冒号(colon), 顿号(enumeration comma), 问号 (question mark), 分号 (semicolon), 引号 (quotation mark), 感叹号 (exclamation mark)，省略号(ellipsis), 连字号(hyphen), 破折号(dash), 书名号(title mark).

Mother language sometimes negatively influences students' translation from first language to second language. The bigger the differences between Thai and Chinese, the more negative effects of interference are likely to be, especially when students have an imperfect command of the target language. It is a big challenge to reduce native language interference in second language translation.

Thai students often make grammar errors due to the difference between Thai grammar and Chinese grammar. In order to solve grammar problem, teacher should encourage students practice translating back and forth between native language and target language. Also, teacher should identify some typical grammar rules and design some error correction exercise for Thai students.

In order to translate accurately and precisely, students should have the competency in Chinese writing skill and familiarity with the pertinent terminology. Apparently, students are weak in Chinese language, Chinese writing skill, business vocabulary, and business knowledge. Therefore, students needed to be trained in the area related to business vocabularies, business knowledge, Chinese language proficiency, and Chinese writing skills.

In addition to mainstream textbooks, Chinese translation instructors could also use open educational resources – website to regularly update new knowledge. For developing students' translation competence, Chinese translation teachers should encourage students to use "Line Group" – online forums practicing spontaneous translation skills, sharing translation experiences and give constructive feedback.

APPENDIX

Business Thai-Chinese Translation Questionnaire

Gender: ☐Male   ☐Female
Major: ☐Business Chinese
☐Chinese Economy & Trade

My common Chinese translation problems are: (1=never, 2=rarely, 3=sometimes, 4=often, 5=very often)					
Grammar errors	1	2	3	4	5
Write wrong Chinese character	1	2	3	4	5
Use inappropriate vocabulary	1	2	3	4	5
Punctuation mistakes	1	2	3	4	5
Missing information	1	2	3	4	5
Mother language influences	1	2	3	4	5
I find it difficult to translate:					
Business terminology	1	2	3	4	5
Business article	1	2	3	4	5
Proper name	1	2	3	4	5
Chinese idiom	1	2	3	4	5
Chinese measure word	1	2	3	4	5
Exact and suitable word	1	2	3	4	5
Overall: (1=poor, 2=fair, 3=good, 4=excellent)					
My business vocabularies are:	1	2	3	4	
My business knowledge is:	1	2	3	4	
My Thai language is:	1	2	3	4	
My Chinese language is:	1	2	3	4	
My Chinese writing skill is:	1	2	3	4	
My Chinese translation skills is	1	2	3	4	

I am ☐very dissatisfied ☐dissatisfied ☐ neutral ☐satisfied ☐ very satisfied with business Thai-Chinese translation teaching materials.

My suggestions on teaching materials are:

_____
_____

I am ☐very dissatisfied ☐dissatisfied ☐ neutral ☐satisfied ☐very satisfied with business Thai-Chinese translation teaching methods.

My suggestions on teaching methods are:

_____
_____

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