

Introduction

- Attention to the role of teacher agency has grown dramatically in studies on language teacher professional development over the last decade. However, teacher agency has remained under-examined especially in the field of Teaching Chinese to speakers of other languages (TCSOL).
- This paper is based on a large scale project which aims to find out a group of university language teachers' manifestations of their teacher agency. As researching proceeded, the author found that teachers from the department of TCSOL need to address various challenges against the influence of institutional system and school policies.
- A growing number of new doctoral graduates are recruited as academics to train potential student teachers because of their outstanding research profiles in the current publish or perish higher education climate; however, lack of formal Chinese teaching experience makes these inexperienced Chinese language teacher educators frequently fail to grasp educational realities, posing difficulties in linking theory and practice. When confronted with up or out personnel system, Chinese language teacher educators have the pressure of improving their research performance.
- Given the issues above, this paper addresses how teachers exercise their agency for their professional development.

Key concepts

Social-cultural theory

- emerged from the work of Vygotsky (1978)
- explores the relationships between external and internal processes
- Social factors influence development
- Development can differ between cultures

Teacher agency

- agency is often perceived as action upon given contexts such as school culture and policy mandates; dynamic and involves the interaction between individual and context
- agency as a socioculturally mediated capacity in sociocultural theory (Tao and Gao, 2021)

Research Design

Research questions

- 1) How do TCSOL teacher educators exert their teacher agency to improve their professional development?
- 2) What are possible factors influencing teacher educator's agency?

Research context

This study was conducted in an applied-research university with discipline characteristics which is located in a coastal city in one of the most affluent regions in China. The institution started the "up or out" personnel system reform in 2015. The international Chinese education centre was established in 2018, belonging to College of Foreign languages. Teachers in the centre also take on some college English teaching work.

Participants

Pseudonym	Gender	Position	Educational background	Course taught
Amy	female	lecturer	PhD in applied linguistics (Chinese)	College English; CFL
Betty	female	lecturer	PhD in applied linguistics (Chinese)	College English; CFL
Cathy	female	lecturer	PhD in applied linguistics (English)	College English; CFL

Data collection

- The life history interview was adopted to collect data because it allows participants to provide respective accounts of their experiences, help the researchers capture their voices, and enhance our understanding of their professional experiences (Gao, 2008; Johnson & Golombek, 2002). Each interview lasted 40-50 minutes and was audio-recorded.
- Data also included three years' Wechat chat history with participants and informal face-to-face conversation notes at different places.

Data analysis

- Phase 1: Within-case analysis → global understanding of each participant
- Phase 2: Cross-case analysis → coding and thematic analysis (Miles and Huberman, 1994)

Key findings

Teaching challenge

"I have a student who has ten years of teaching experience in Thailand. He knows more than me. I think he can be my teacher."

"I have no choice but have to teach *Educational technology*. What is technology? Is it like PowerPoint?"

"I do not have overseas learning or working experience but I really like to teach Chinese since I used to teach a group of international students when I was a PhD student."

Research challenge

"I am the only one who has not got a national or provincial research grant in our centre. I feel left behind."

"My colleagues offer my suggestions on my manuscript rejection. It helps."

"Teaching has taken my majority of time. I have to take advantage of my weekends and holidays to complete my research work. I have to work harder because I have not got a long-term contract yet."

Reponses

"I feel a sense of fulfillment when my master student won the best teaching award in a provincial competition. I feel my teaching gains."

"I am considering about leaving this university but I will not leave the academia. I know I still have a lot to learn about teaching about researching."

"I cannot say that I am not afraid of getting kicked out but what I can do is to never let my learning ends. Keep reading and writing."

Conclusion

- Chinese language teacher educator's teacher agency are affected by their own experience and institutional culture. Although they are confronted with the pressure of "up or out", they take a positive attitude rather than a "laid down" attitude to balance their teaching and researching so that they can adapt to their career development

References

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