The construction of a professional learning community (PLC) for English teachers' development under the Rural Revitalisation Strategy

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Project overview

This project forms part of a suite of projects funded by the British Council that aim to explore the options for the professional development of English language teachers in rural and under-developed areas of Yunnan province. The project represents a cooperative collaboration between UK-based researchers at the University of Warwick and the Yunnan Education Centre for International Exchanges in partnership with Kunming University of Science of Technology. The research focused on the development of a professional learning community (PLC) in two middle schools in rural areas in Yunnan. The research involved developing an understanding of the teachers' needs for professional development and integrating these into an initial program to create a technology-mediated PLC across the two schools. The aim of the program was for the UK-based team and the Yunnan-based team to work collaboratively to establish a PLC in the schools and then to pass the PLC over to the Yunnan-based team for future development.

The project aimed to establish a principled, replicable model for a professional learning community, supported by a higher education institution, that would promote the sustainable development of local English education, focusing specifically on secondary school level. The basic format and aims of the project were developed by the team at the Yunnan Education Centre for International Exchanges (YECIE) and Kunming University of Science and Technology (KUST) as a starting point to secure UK partners, through the British Council. The project scope developed by YECIE and KUST aimed:

- to investigate in-service foreign language education in Yunnan;
- to provide policymakers with a greater insight into the professional development needs of in-service rural teachers of English;
- to work towards a model for professional development of in-service rural teachers of English in rural areas through professional learning communities supported by higher education institutions.
- To investigate to possibilities for cross-university participation and guidance in in-service teacher education and support.

This initial design of the project was further developed by the University of Warwick team and refined in collaboration with the KUST partners. The final version of the project consisted of a literature review to understand the existing situation around using PLCs in in-service education in China, a needs analysis targeting teachers in the two schools identified for the study, and the design of a series of four workshops to be delivered online as a first stage in implementing a PLC.

Professional learning communities: A review of the literature

Introduction

Professional Learning Communities have emerged in the last 30 years as an important part of how teachers can respond to the growing complexity of teaching in the face of theoretical and policy developments in the field. While the idea of the PLC is not a recent coinage, the term has not been precisely defined and many different types of groupings of teachers working together have been called PLCs. In spite of the diversity of PLCs, there is a broad consensus in the field that a PLC is "a group of people sharing and critically interrogating their practice in an ongoing, reflective, collaborative, inclusive, learning-oriented, growth-promoting way" (Stoll et al., 2006, p. 223). This definition reflects the understanding of PLC that informs the present project. It entails that a PLC involves a collaborative attempt by teachers to improve the quality of teaching and learning in their own local context by collectively investigating and reflecting on their own practice. It is a teacher-led approach to

professional learning that identifies needs and seeks to find contextualised ways of responding to them (Admiraal et al., 2021). This section will examine how PLCs and PLC-like groups have merged in China and some of the issues that confront PLCs as professional learning spaces in the Chinese context.

Traditional models for PLCs in China

The practice of employing collaborative methods for teachers' professional development is not new in China (Wong, 2010) and teacher collaboration and professional learning activities are regular occurrences in the school-based context in China. Although the term professional learning community (PLC) is not widely used, analogous groups have had a long existence (Paine & Ma, 1993; Qian & Walker, 2021). The reason for this widespread use of PLCs is related to the ways that professional development has been structured in Chinese education policy. Unlike self-initiated and bottom-up PLCs in other parts of the world, China has adopted a top-down approach to creating PLCs that structures them into the educational system at the national, provincial, city, district, and school levels, to facilitate teachers' professional activities. At the school level, these PLCs take the form of Teaching Research Groups (TRGs 教研组), Lesson Preparation Groups (LPGs 备课组), and Grade Groups (GGs 年级组) (Wang, 2015; Zhang & Pang, 2016). TRGs are made up of teachers in the same subject (Paine & Ma, 1993), LPGs of teachers of the same subject and teaching at the same grade level, and GG of teachers in the same grade teaching different subjects. These groups provide different structures in which teachers can work collaboratively.

TRGs are the groups that are the most commonly used for teachers' professional learning in China in the international educational field (Gao et al., 2011; Paine & Ma, 1993; Qian & Walker, 2021; Wang, 2015; Zhang & Pang, 2016). It is a common practice for schools in China to allocate a regular two-hour block of time for TRG meetings (Paine & Ma, 1993). In TRGs, teachers may prepare lessons collectively, share their teaching experiences, and gain mutual support in developing their professional practice (Gao et al., 2011). Additionally, TRGs may enable the sharing of resources and organised discussions of articles and lectures related to teaching (Sargent & Hannum, 2009). A widely used activity in TRGs is the 'open lesson' (公开课), where teachers' lessons are open for observation by their peers and the teacher receives feedback and comments during post-lesson conferences (Wong, 2010).

TRGs emerged in China in the 1950s following on the implementation of collaborative ways of working in the Soviet Union (Wang, 2015). Over the course of time, the ways of working in TRGs has evolved and there has been a shift of emphasis from an original teaching-focused emphasis to a more recent research-focused emphasis and increased integration with other professional development initiatives, together with an increased emphasis on administration. Although the development TRGs in China has a different origin from those in other places, they are intended have a number of characteristics that fit closely with the PLC concept. Wong (2010) outlines the following five key features of TRGs that show parallels with PLCs:

- shared goals, a strong commitment to shared practice, and a common desire to work toward good practice;
- openness to new ideas and innovative practices;
- a more reflective and student-centred professional development;
- collegiality among members to solve encountered problems;
- active participation of community members.

The advantages of these school-based PLCs are multifaceted. Research has shown that these PLCs contribute to teacher professional learning and collective inquiry (Wang, 2015). PLCs can also be a catalyst for teachers' ongoing professional development and engagement with research (Gao et al., 2011). PLCs have also played a significant role in supporting the dissemination of new norms and practices related to iterations of educational reform in China (Sargent & Hannum, 2009). However, the TRG model of PLCs has also been criticised, with two main issues being identified. The first is the top-down integration of TRGs into organisational structures rather than having them emerge from teacher spontaneous collaboration, with the result that collegial work may be superficial and less effective because it is a contrived collegiality instead of genuine collegiality (Wang, 2015). The second criticism relates to the effect of hierarchy in the educational context in China, which leads to unequal collaboration in TRGs with some teachers having more control than others. One consequence of this may be reproducing the practices of more dominant teachers leading to conformity in teaching practice, and preventing new teachers from introducing or leading innovation, and maintaining the status quo of traditional teaching (Paine & Ma, 1993; Paine, 1990). These issues are reinforced by Chinese cultural values such as 'respecting authority and conflict prevention', which may lead to 'unfavorable interpersonal relations and superficial collaborative cultures' (Zhang & Pang, 2016, p. 20).

In addition to the impact of policy on the working of PLCs in China, aspects of school culture can play an important role in how PLCs function locally (Carpenter, 2015; Sargent & Hannum, 2009). At the level of school culture, the most significant factor appears to be the leadership of the school principal (Qiao et al., 2018). Qian and Walker (2021), after investigating the role of school principals in over 100 primary schools across six regions in China, conclude that they play a key role in 'creating aligned structures and processes and to nurture a culture of trust and collaboration' (p. 593). In addition, how teachers' efforts are recognised within the institution also play a role in influencing individual teachers' engagement and investment in PLC activities.

It is thus clear that PLC-like activities are not new to the Chinese context, but it should be noted that existing models present problems in terms of their functioning and effectiveness. Studies of such PLCs report that the use of the PLCs for school improvement involves 'a time-consuming task to build or rebuild a school culture' (Wong, 2010, p. 139).

Developing new models of PLCs in China

In addition to the traditional school-based PLCs discussed above, there have been a number of attempts to create new forms of PLCs in China. This section will introduce some typical innovative PLCs in China, such as web-based urban-rural PLCs, PLCs with outsiders' expertise, and mixed cross-level PLCs.

Web-based urban-rural PLCs

One issue associated with China's basic education is the great regional disparity among different schools in terms of educational resources and pedagogical practices (Hu, 2003). The significant differences in resources and teaching development between rural and urban schools have been a concern for China's efforts to achieve educational equality across the country. Compared to their counterparts in the city, rural English teachers, as the backbone for rural educational reform and development, generally have fewer opportunities for professional development due to various

contextual constraints, which have an adverse impact on the enhancement of education in rural schools (Chen & Pang, 2018).

Web-based collaborative urban-rural PLCs have been proposed as a solution to the current inequalities by capitalizing on the affordances of the rapid development of internet technology (Zhang et al., 2017). Through online PLCs, teachers can not only enrich their professional knowledge and experience but are also able transcend the school and space boundaries and the constraints of their local context (Ching & Hursh, 2014). As with other models of PLCs, online PLCs have been initiated and facilitated by relevant educational authorities, with the aim of enhancing the professional development of rural teachers (Chen & Pang, 2018). The online model largely views the function of such PLCs as the transfer of practical knowledge from more-advantaged urban teachers to less-advantaged rural teachers (Xu, 2018).

PLCs with outsider's expertise

To address the issue of PLCs as they are implemented in China, working to reinforce practice and establish conformity, it has been proposed that PLCs include input from outside the local school context. This outside input is largely understood as bringing in experts, whether from elsewhere in China or internationally, to introduce new ideas and practices into local contexts. This practice is a relatively new development in the function of PLCs in China. While there is evidence that bringing new expertise into schools can be important for developing successful school-based PLCs (Qiao et al., 2018; Wong, 2010), it may also have negative consequences as a transmission model in which external expertise driving innovation may limit the school community members' ability to identify their own specific contextual needs and lead to failure of the PLCs as mutually supportive local learning contexts. It is important for the successful functioning of PLCs that external expertise is used to address locally identified needs, rather than determining the focus of the work of the PLC (Richmond & Manokore, 2011).

Cross-level PLCs

In cross-level PLCs, teachers are not only at different stages of their professional life and based at different educational levels. Such PLCs usually are typically made up of teachers from higher education institutions and from schools of basic education stages (Qiao et al., 2018). The particular aim of this model is to bring normal universities and schools into closer relationships to support in-service teacher education and teachers' professional development, and also to provide enhanced support for pre-service teachers (Xu & Yan, 2020). An example of such a collaboration, which covers both these purposes, is reported by Yuan, Guo and Yang (2020), who studied a PLC that consists of eight members with different backgrounds: two pre-service teachers preparing for teaching at primary and middle school (no teaching experience), four slightly experienced teachers teaching at primary, middle school and university (3 to 14 years of teaching experience), and two experienced expert teachers from middle school and university (28 and 31 years of teaching experience). In the PLC, teachers worked together to research language teaching practice, and research seems to be a key feature of such collaborations. Yuan et al. found that the PLC offers benefits to all members by assisting pre-service teachers to apply knowledge in practice, supporting slightly experienced teachers to develop their awareness of researching their own classroom to improve their effectiveness as teachers, and supporting experienced expert teachers to complete their research agenda. Yuan et al. concluded that the PLC brings sustainable opportunities for in-depth professional learning, mutual development for its members in addressing professional issues together and fosters a sense of belonging. However, they

report a somewhat unequal model of learning in which university members are seen as researchers of the others' practice while others are positioned more as recipients of their expertise. Zhao (2018) reports that teachers working in both higher institutions and schools acknowledge that it is a demanding and challenging task to establish an effective PLC. The different agendas of the participants pose a challenge for the successful functioning of groups as each group may lack interest in the others' research goals and objectives and there may be communication problems resulting from the widely different contexts in which the teachers are working. Another key challenge for research-focused PLCs lies in the shortage of schoolteachers who have a genuine interest in doing teacher research. It appears that although research is implied as a central element of groups such as TRGs, for many teachers it is not seen as a priority, or even as relevant to their work.

Concluding comments

While a form of PLC has long been a feature of Chinese teachers' professional development, the models that exist may not realise the intended goals of collaborative, teacher-led professional learning. In particular, the top-down mandating of PLC-like activities creates a context in which collaboration and reflection on practice is superficial and meetings are seen more as fulfilling an administrative requirement than as being important for professional development (Zhang & Pang, 2016). Moreover, while some widespread cultural practices and values relating to collective action may support the idea of PLCs as collaborative learning environments, other cultural practices and values may pose problems, especially the prevalence of transmission models of learning in professional development activities, with the hierarchies present in groups shaping what is achieved and achievable (Yin & Zheng, 2018; Zheng et al., 2016). As a result, an important starting point for future development of PLCs requires a process of cultural change that gives value to PLCs as learning opportunities rather than as administrative requirements (Wang, 2015).

Needs analysis

Methodology

Teacher questionnaire

Participants

The participants for the needs analysis questionnaire were teachers of English from two middle schools in Yunnan, one located in an urban area and one in a rural area. This group of schools is the focus of the professional development activities designed by the project. A total of 26 teachers responded to the survey, and this represents the complete group of English teachers in the schools. Of these teachers the majority was female (25) with only one male teacher. All teachers held a Bachelor's degree and this was the highest qualification held by any of the teachers. The teachers reported a range of self-assessed proficiency in English (see Table 1), with most teachers reporting an intermediate level of English or higher, although with only one teacher reporting advanced levels of English.

Basic	Low intermediate	Intermediate	High intermediate	Advanced
1	3	15	6	1

Table 1: English proficiency

The teachers were generally quite experienced with most teachers having taught for five years or more (see Table 2). Most of the teachers had only ever taught at middle school, although three teachers reported having also taught at junior high schools.

<5 years	5-10years	11-15 years	16-20 years	>20 years	Total
5	10	8	1	1	26

Table 2: Teaching experience

All of the teachers had obtained teaching titles, although mainly in the lower levels of the system (see Table 3).

Title	Senior teacher	First-level teacher	Second-level teacher
Number of teachers	4	10	12

Table 3: Teaching title

The teachers were all teaching English in two middle schools in Yunnan: one school was based in Western Yunnan (school A) and the other in a rural area of South-western Yunnan (School B). All of the teachers teach in very large classrooms, with none having classes with an average size of under 30 students.

<30	31-40	41-50	51-60
0	2	15	9

Table 4: Average class size

Data collection

The needs analysis employed an online bilingual questionnaire and focus groups. The questionnaire was published in bilingual form on wjx.cn. The questionnaire included two types of questions 1) questions with Likert scale answers to prompts and 2) questions with open answers. All question prompts were developed in English and the questionnaire items were discussed collaboratively by the Warwick and KUST teams before being translated into Chinese. All questions and instructions were translated into Chinese, and the translations were checked first by a bilingual member of the Warwick team and then by members of the KUST team. Once the translations were agreed, the questions were published in both languages on the survey platform. The questionnaire was based on a questionnaire developed by the UK team in an earlier project and designed to identify the professional development needs of teachers in China (Centre for Applied Linguistics, 2019). It was revised with reference to the European Profiling Grid (EAQUALS, 2013) and the Technological Pedagogical Content Knowledge (TPACK) framework (American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education, 2008) in order to develop a more comprehensive set of questions.

The questionnaire collected information in relation to four main topics. The first section focused on demographic information, information about their teaching context, general issues relating to teaching methodology, and open questions about the sorts of difficulties teachers faced in teaching English in their context. The second part collected information about the teachers' perceptions of their role using open questions and their experiences of participating in professional learning using a combination of open questions, yes/no questions, a four-point Likert scale about the frequency with which they

delivered particular types of professional development activities (never-rarely-sometimes-often), and a series of questions about their confidence in leading types of professional development activities, measured using a 3-point Likert scale (not confident-confident-very confident). The remainder of the questionnaire focused an aspects of teaching practice. It elicited information about the frequency of particular teaching practices using a five-point Likert scale (never-rarely-sometimes-often-very-often. These teaching practices related to teaching writing, reading, speaking, listening, viewing, and language knowledge, and teachers' use of various types of resources. These questions contained an 'other' category to allow teachers to list additional activities they used, but few answers were given to this prompt. The questionnaire also investigated teachers' knowledge and abilities by asking teachers to respond to a series of statements about classroom management, assessment, technology use, and creating and using resources. This information was collected using a four-point Likert scale (strongly disagree-disagree-agree-strongly agree).

Teacher focus groups

Data collection and participants

The teacher questionnaires were supplemented by a focus group drawn from the two schools to develop greater nuance and to understand key dimensions of teachers' needs in more depth. It was decided to conduct the focus group online, mainly for reasons of practicality. Travel was difficult at the time because of Covid-19-related travel restrictions but online groups also allowed for participants from the two schools to be brought together in the same focus group, and for participants to communicate who would not normally have been able to travel to a central location because of difficulties of travel from remote areas.

The focus group was conducted in Chinese by members of the KUST team. The focus group was made up of six teachers drawn from the two schools. The focus group lasted for just over 2 hours. It was recorded using the recording tool in the app and recordings were transcribed and translated into English for analysis. The details of the focus group participants can be seen in Table 5.

Focus group	Participant	Gender	Years of teaching experience	School	Location
FG1	Teacher A	Female	11	School A	Western Yunnan
	Teacher B	Female	11	School A	Western Yunnan
	Teacher C	Female	3	School A	Western Yunnan
	Teacher D	Female	14	School B	South-western Yunnan
	Teacher E	Female	13	School B	South-western Yunnan
	Teacher F	Female	16	School B	South-western Yunnan

Table 5: Focus group participants

Findings: Teacher questionnaire

General difficulties in teaching English

The respondents were asked to identify the main problems they faced in teaching English in their context by completing an open question asking them to identify three main issues. The issues faced by teachers showed some consistency across the range of responses, with the following being the most commonly cited difficulties in rank order of frequency:

The most common problem (34 mentions) cited was students' lack of an adequate foundation in English: this was usually expressed as a general comment on low levels of English language attainment by students and observations that students' language levels were not adequate for them to engage with the curriculum at their current level. For example, one Teacher said:

> 大部分学生英语基础薄弱，难以衔接新教材内容 (Most students have a weak foundation in English and find it difficult to connect to the content of the new textbook) Teacher 5

> 学生基础太弱，大多数学生，初中单词，语法溥弱。又要补初中知识，又要上高中知识，确实吃力 (Students' foundation is too weak, most of them, middle school vocabulary, limited mastery of grammar. It's really hard for them to relearn junior high school knowledge and, at the same time, take in senior high school knowledge) Teacher 10.

This indicates that many teachers are dealing with a mismatch between the curriculum and their students' language levels. For some teachers, the problem was in specific areas of the students' knowledge such as vocabulary or grammar, but teachers who identified such problems usually identified both as two different problems, indicating a general overall view of students' lacking the required knowledge for their level.

Students' lack of motivation or interest in learning English was indicated as a widespread problem for teachers (13 mentions). In one case, the teacher specified this as a problem with male students, associating it with a lack of ability to learn English:

> 男生学英语困难，不愿学 (Boys have difficulty learning English and don't want to learn) Teacher 15

Teachers' workload was raised by a number of teachers (9 mentions), usually without giving more details, but teachers sometimes stated the workload pressure came from things that were not directly related to teaching, without specifying further: 教学外的事情多 (Too many things irrelevant to teaching), Teacher 9.

Lack of professional knowledge was identified by teachers as a problem for their current teaching (nine mentions). Sometimes this was expressed as a general lack of knowledge but often teachers identified particular issues where their knowledge was lacking, although one teacher mentioned a general lack of English knowledge and another a lack of knowledge of teaching approaches. A related issue was the problem of providing differentiated learning to classes where the level varied among students (three mentions). As a contributing factor in relation to professional knowledge, teachers mentioned a lack of access to professional development (four mentions).

System factors were also identified as contributing to difficulties in teaching. Some teachers expressed constraints imposed by the current education system as problems for their teaching (8 mentions). These included the exam-oriented education, the organisation of the school, and a general lack of control over their teaching.

Most teachers, therefore, saw the main problem they faced in their teaching as the students, who were constructed as lacking the necessary levels of English ability to learn the curriculum and as having poor attitudes to English learning, including a lack of motivation. This understanding of the teaching

problem places the issue outside the context of the teachers and their teaching and locates the issue outside the dimension of their own agency as teachers. Factors within the control of the teacher, such as professional knowledge, were seen as more marginal in contributing to general problems in teaching.

Teaching practice

The questionnaire asked teachers to comment on general issues in teaching methodology before responding on specific areas of teaching practice. This section of the questionnaire included questions related to five topics: issues relating to the language focus of teaching, issues relating to culture in language teaching, issues relating to how teachers understand and adapt to their students, issues relating to organising classroom activities, and issues relating to the impact of their teaching context on their practice. See Appendix 1.

In responding to the language focused prompts, both groups of teachers generally indicated that they had the ability to implement all the aspects of practice surveyed. At least 21 of the 26 teachers indicated that they were able to address fluency and accuracy in their teaching, encourage authentic student interactions, teach grammar communicatively and integrate the macro-skills of listening, speaking, reading, and writing. The results here concerning integration, however, do not reflect those elsewhere in the questionnaire, indicating that integrated tasks were not used frequently.

Teachers said that they felt able to integrate cultural content into their teaching, with 23 of the teachers agreeing or strongly agreeing that they were able to do this. They were slightly less confident in their ability to integrate intercultural skills into their teaching with 20 of the teachers agreeing or strongly agreeing.

Teachers also expressed a high level of agreement with the prompts relating to working with students, with 24 teachers agreeing or strongly agreeing that they create opportunities for and engage students in independent learning. The teachers were also confident they were able to address issues relating to students' learning styles, with 22 teachers saying they were able to identify students' learning styles and 20 teachers agreeing or strongly agreeing that they could adapt their teaching to students' learning styles.

In their responses to the items about organising classroom activities, teachers indicated that they had the ability and knowledge to organise most of the activities described, with over 21 teachers agreeing with the statements. Teachers were able to engage students in free and controlled practice and to move between these types of practice, and they could set up and incorporate small group work in their teaching and use games as part of their overall teaching approach. Teachers expressed less ability to implement roleplay and drama, with 22 teachers saying they had the opportunity to use these techniques, although only 19 teachers expressing confidence in using roleplay and drama to promote students' learning, indicating a possible gap in their professional development. The other potentially problematic aspect for these teachers was in teaching without the textbook, with only 19 teachers expressing enough confidence in their teaching to depart from their textbooks. This indicates that some teachers may be quite dependent on textbooks for organising their teaching.

Writing

The results for writing showed that teachers' practice focused on only a part of the range of activities presented in the questionnaire (see Appendix 2). The most commonly used writing tasks were

workbook/worksheet exercises and letter writing (used often or very often by 24 teachers), exam paper questions (used often or very often by 23 teachers), grammar and other structure-based exercises (used often or very often by 22 teachers), textbook exercises (used often or very often by 21 teachers) and short-text activities such as messages, notes, emails, etc.) (used often or very often by 19 teachers). None of these tasks were never used by teachers except for one teacher who did not use textbook activities for teaching writing. The remaining tasks in the questionnaire were much less used, with fewer than half of teachers saying they were used often of very often, and large proportions of teachers reporting that they never or rarely used them. Of these, the least used tasks were stories, poems and writing games, which were used often or very often by only seven teachers and never or rarely by 13 teachers (stories and poems) and 15 teachers (writing games). Essay writing was used often or very often by ten teachers and rarely by six, and integrated writing tasks were used often or very often by 12 teachers and rarely or never by ten teachers. The results therefore show that the teaching of writing is for many of the teachers based on a limited set of regularly used practices, often with a form-focused rather than communicative orientation.

Reading

All teachers reported using reading comprehension tasks often or very often (Appendix 3). Reading aloud and pre-reading tasks were also a common element of teachers' practice with 23 and 22 teachers reporting using these often or very often. Graded reading was used often or very often by 19 teachers. The remaining task types were much less used. Integrated reading tasks, reading authentic materials and group reading were used often or very often by only half of the teachers, with five teachers saying they used authentic materials and integrated readings rarely or never, and six teachers reporting similarly in relation to group reading. Reading games were used even less, with only ten teachers using them often or very often and eight teachers using them rarely or never. As with teaching writing, teaching reading seems to be based on a small number of widely used practices.

Speaking

The most widely used speaking tasks were whole class drilling and repetition and homework/self-study tasks, which were the only tasks used often or very often by 20 or more teachers (20 and 22 respectively). Group assignments (19 teachers), pronunciation practice (16 teachers) and individual practice (16 teachers) were the next most widely used. All other tasks were used by fewer than half of the teachers. Presentations and discussion tasks were the least widely used (seven teachers in each case reporting using them often or very often and 10 teachers and one teacher using them rarely or never respectively). Online assignments were not widely used (ten teachers often or very often, eight teachers rarely or never), nor were controlled speaking activities, speaking games, individual target setting (all reported as being used often or very often by 11 teachers), stress and intonation practice (12 teachers) and self-evaluation (13 teachers). Again, the pattern of practice is that a restricted range of task types is widely used, especially tasks with a form focus, while other tasks are more marginalised.

Listening

In teaching listening, the main approach used is dictation, which is reported as being used often or very often by 24 teachers. The only other task used frequently by these teachers was note taking, which was reported by 17 teachers. All the remaining tasks were used often or very often by fewer than half the teachers. Integrated listening activities were used by 12 teachers and were used rarely or never by eight teachers. Pre-listening activities were used frequently by ten teachers and sometimes by another ten, while listening games were used by ten teachers frequently and rarely or never by 13. Again, the pattern

of using a small range of activities regularly is found for listening, but with a very restricted set of activities being used.

Viewing

The relatively new curriculum area of viewing appeared to be particularly under-developed in the practice of these teachers with only the use of video and animation being reported as being used often or very often by the teachers (16 teachers in each case). These represent more established teaching resources that have often been used for supporting other forms of language learning. Tables were used frequently by 11 teachers and rarely or never by nine, charts were used frequently by six teachers and rarely or never by 14, and diagrams/figures were used frequently by only five teachers and rarely or never by 13.

Language knowledge

A large majority of teachers said that focusing on grammar, vocabulary and pronunciation was something that they did often or very often (see Appendix 7): grammar and vocabulary (25 teachers) and pronunciation (24 teachers), with remaining teachers stating that they focused on them sometimes. These results suggest that teachers had a very strongly code-focused view of language learning, which is consistent with the form-focused orientation to teaching identified above.

Resources

The teachers used a range of resources in their teaching of English (see Appendix 8). The most widely used resources were textbooks (25 teachers using these often or very often), reference books such as dictionaries, (24 teachers using them often of very often) and workbooks (23 teachers using these often or very often). Teaching guides for textbooks were also widely used (22 teachers using these often or very often). Teachers reported frequent use of handouts that they produced themselves (22 teachers using these often or very often). They also made extensive use of whiteboards, used by 24 teachers often or very often. This would indicate that both schools adopted a highly textbook-focused approach to teaching with high usage of traditional forms of teaching resources. In addition, the teachers also used a range of technologies in their teaching. Twenty-three teachers reported using smartboards often or very often. The teachers also used videos and audio recordings often (17 teachers reporting this is each case) but these were reported as being used very often by only four and three teachers respectively. However, teachers used audio and video resources they produced themselves much less often, with only eight teachers reporting using self-made audio and seven teachers reporting self-made video often and no teachers reporting using these very often. Only a small number of teachers reported never using such resources, so the lack of use would seem to indicate a lack of time for developing such resources or a lack of confidence in doing so rather than a lack of technological resources for producing them. Internet resources were used often or very often by 21 teachers, and social media and mobile phones were also used frequently (19 teachers reporting using each often or very often). Use of other technologies is more limited; eleven teachers reported using laptops and other mobile devices often or very often, with 10 teachers reporting using them seldom or never. This is an issue of access to the technology because children are not allowed to bring cell phones to these two boarding schools. However, in China children are less likely to own a laptop and more likely to use a mobile phone to access the internet (Duan et al., 2021).

Knowledge/abilities

Classroom management

The teachers expressed high levels of knowledge about all of the topics relating to classroom management (see Appendix 9), with most responses receiving agreement or strong agreement from at least 23 of the 26 teachers. The lowest score was in relation to the prompt 'the assigned textbook limits my ability to promote authentic classroom communication', which received agreement or strong agreement from 19 teachers. This is significant given the high level of textbook use that was reported elsewhere and indicates that there may be tensions between the use of textbooks and what teachers might prefer to do in their classes for a significant number of these teachers.

Assessment

The teachers expressed high levels of knowledge for all items in the assessment part of the questionnaire (see Appendix 1), with most prompts receiving agreement or strong agreement from 19 or more of the teachers. The lowest scoring responses concerned using portfolio, which received agreement or strong agreement from 17 teachers, and understanding how to use formative assessment, which received agree or strong agreement from only 18 teachers.

Technology

Almost all teachers expressed agreement or strong agreement with all the prompt statements concerning technology use in their teaching (see Appendix 11), with all receiving agreement or strong agreement from 21 or more teachers. This indicates that most teachers do not perceive problems in using technology.

Resources

The responses to questions about knowledge and abilities relating to resources produced the results that showed that many teachers faced problems in this area. The prompt which achieved the greatest agreement was 'I have the understanding and skills needed to develop my own materials', which received agreement or strong agreement from 23 of the 26 teachers. However, fewer teachers (17) said that they had the time to develop their own resources, indicating that they may not always be able to put their knowledge into use. The lowest response was to the prompt concerning adapting textbook tasks to maximise communication, with only 14 teachers agreeing or strongly agreeing. Given that the teachers reported relying on textbooks as a main resource for teaching, their lack of confidence in adapting these is an important problem for their practice.

Reflective Practice and Professional Development

The overall approach to professional development reported by the teachers was collegial in form (see Appendix 13), with almost all teachers agreeing or strongly agreeing with prompts regarding collegial professional development. Observation of teaching practice was a very common part of teachers' professional development with almost all teachers saying that they had opportunities to observe other teachers and to be observed by colleagues (24 teachers agreeing or strongly agreeing). They also reported knowing how to work with colleagues to develop themselves professionally (24 teachers agreeing or strongly agreeing) and being willing and able to incorporate feedback from peers in their own teaching (25 teachers agreeing or strongly agreeing). However, they expressed less experience of working in teacher-led professional learning communities where the members of the community controlled the focus of the work (16 teachers agreeing or strongly agreeing).

There was evidence that teachers felt able to engage in aspects of reflective practice. Most of the teachers felt able to reflect on their teaching and to analyse it (24 teachers agreeing or strongly agreeing in each case). A large proportion also felt they could engage in research about their own teaching (21 teachers agreeing or strongly agreeing.

Teachers expressed less confidence in other forms of professional development. Ten teachers disagreed or strongly disagreed with the prompt about knowing about useful journals and about professional development opportunities outside their schools. However, more teachers expressed agreement or strong agreement with the prompt about being able to research, reading and other forms of classroom inquiry (21) and a similar number felt that competitions were useful for their professional development (20). Most teachers (19) agreed or strongly agreed that their schools supported them in attending professional conferences but only a minority of teachers (12) felt they were able to present at such conferences.

Findings: Teachers focus group

Student proficiency levels

One significant problem mentioned by the teachers is the low level of language ability of the students they teach, which was not adequate in relation to the level required by the textbooks and curriculum in use in the high school. They attributed this to the fact that students were mainly from poorer rural areas.

> 然后，我们学校的话，是也是属于县城内部。虽然说，但虽然说是县城内部，但是我们学校之前在没有就是这个脱贫攻坚之前，也是属于一个国家级贫困县。现倒是不属于，但至少是一个属于一个贫困县。学生主要是，也是农村学校，农村这边的学生比较多，县城基本上也就是全校加起来 400 个左右,那这这个啊, 呃，我们的话就是现在我们的这个学生，因为因为呃刚才也说了可能就 2500 多个学生，差不多两千左右的是呃来自于农村，所以说我们的这个学生的基础水平，各方面也是非常低的，然后就英语而言，学生基础情况, 因为(Researcher))老师也在我们这边，他也也非常清楚我们这边学生的一个基础到底是个什么样子的。可以说是, 有一部分学生，初中基础已经很不错了，但是很少很少，连三分之一都不到，但其他同学可以用零基础这样来说。Then, our school also belongs to the inner part of the county. Although, although it is said to be in the inner county, our school used to be a state-level poverty county before the poverty alleviation movement. It is not anymore but it is still at least a poor county. The students are mainly-, It is also a rural school, there are more students from rural areas, whereas there are basically in total 400 students in the whole school who come from the county, so this this, ah, uh, as to us, now our students- because as I just said we have more than 2500 students, almost two thousand or so are from rural areas, so that our students' basic level is very low in all aspects, and then in terms of English, in terms of students' foundation, because ((Researcher)) is also with us, he also knows very well what kind of a foundation our students have. It can be said that there are some students who have a very good foundation in junior high school, but they are very few, not even a third, but the rest of the students can be said to have zero foundation. (FG: Teacher A)

The teachers realise that they need to supplement students' learning if they are to address their weak levels of attainment but feel that the current context does not allow them to do this in a suitable way.

> 嗯，好的呃，那么我首先讲一下学生方面的，我觉得学生方面，因为受基础的影响嘛，然后所以他可能对学习英语的兴趣啊等等的也不太浓厚, 所以来到我们高中之后，然后呢，我们就面对一个困境。我们既要给学生做一个初高中的衔接，然后要兼顾我们高中的一个课

> 时，就是我们教教材、内容之类的，一个一个安排。所以从整一个教学的这一个时间上，然后各方面我觉得还是存在着一个困境的。Uhm ok so I will first of all talk about the student aspect, because of their foundation, and so they are not very interested in learning English, so when they come to our high school, then we face a dilemma. We have to help students bridge between junior and senior high school, and then we have to take into account our senior high school class time, like our teach- teaching materials, content and so on, arrange those things one by one So I think there is still a dilemma in terms of the whole teaching time and all aspects. (FG: Teacher B)

This teacher feels it is necessary to devote some time to helping the students make up what they should have learnt in junior high school so that they can learn the high school curriculum. However, there is not enough time available to do this and also teach the high school curriculum to these students.

In responding to the mixed levels of students, the schools use a streaming process via which students of similar levels are grouped together.

> 嗯，因为我们学生基础不一样，我们每个班级教的学生不一样，我们不是说因为要区别对待学生，可能只是说，帮把他们就是水平差不多的学生把它分到一块，更好上一点，比如说我们有实验班，也就是我们的重点班，然后有我们的特色班，平行班。这样子的话，对于教学方面就不至于说，一个 130 的学生跟零基础的学生放到一个班教学。不是我们有困难，而是是那个零基础的学生。如果我讲给这个 130 的同学听的时候，他听懂，然后我又去讲给基础比较薄弱的同学听的时候，那么 130 的这个他就他就可能没事情干，所以为了处理这个问题，所以一直坚持这样一个样子 Well, because we have different student levels, we teach different students in each class. We're doing that not because we want to treat students differently, it just means that we group students at a similar level into the same group. it's a little better. For example, we have experimental classes, which are our advanced classes, and then we have our special classes and parallel classes. In this way, the teaching issue is not so bad as if 130 students are put in with zero-foundation students. It's not us but the students with zero foundation who would have trouble. If I teach the 130 students, they'll understand it, and then if I then orient to the weaker students, the 130 students will have nothing to do. So, to deal with this problem, we have insisted on this way of working. (FG: Teacher A)

The use of streams is seen as a way of delivering teaching in a way that responds to the levels of all of the students. However, in the discussion it was not clear how the teachers work with the lower levels groups to overcome the mismatch between their levels of ability and the demands of the curriculum.

> 啊, 啊，我们也是一样的，每周二的 16 点啊，16 点到 17 点半啊, 就是四点到五点半, 是采集体备课的时间。那么这一段时间呢，每一个备课组，比如说高一高二高三是分组的。就是统一一个年级的老师在一起备课。那么我们是采用集体备课，但是分层教学的方式。我们也是一样的，有三个层次的班级。一层次，二层次和平行班。然后，一层次的话，根据我们集体备课的内容，那么教师去上课的时候，该增加的内容自己要加进去。一般来说，就是针对二层次的班级来备课，你要加的一层次，再加一些。那么在平行班，就减一些内容。嗯，所以这个只是一个集体的备课，结束之后，那个重点班的和平行班的老师还要经过一些深层次的修改。Ah. We're the same, every Tuesday. 16:00 uh, 16:00 to 17:30 uh, from 4:00 to 5:30, we do collective lesson planning. So, during this time, each lesson preparation group, like year 1, 2 and 3 are grouped respectively. The teachers who teach students of the same year are grouped to prepare lessons together. So, we do collective lesson preparation, but with a tiered teaching approach. We are the same, with three levels of classes – Level 1, Level 2 and parallel classes. Then, for Level 1, using what we have prepared collectively, when teachers go to class, they need to add whatever they need to add. Generally speaking, to prepare lessons for the second level

> class, you need to take the first level, and then add some more. Then in the parallel classes they take out some content. Well, so this is a group lesson preparation, and after that, the teacher of the advanced class and the parallel class has to go through some revision. (FG: Teacher F)

Similar planning approaches were reported in each school. The approach to differentiating the curriculum in the schools is therefore to start with a common curriculum and to add more content for the more advanced students and remove content for the less advanced students. It is not clear, however, that this planning model leads to a coherent curriculum for the less advanced students as the scope and sequencing decisions are not made on the basis of their needs but on the basis of the progress of the median level students.

Students' proficiency levels are seen as consequential for engagement and motivation, with lower-level students being perceived as especially lacking in motivation and engagement.

> 学习兴趣。就是他的基础薄弱，决定他学习兴趣的浓厚与否，是一个因素，我认为层次越低的话，学生学习态度决定了他那个成绩。他的态度不端正的话，他为什么二三十分可以考出来。其实英语这个科目。你要学好的话，非常简单，不是吗？记记背背，马上就跳出了二三十分了。但是他就是不愿意记，他连初一七年级上册的单词他都不愿意记，这不是基础或者说是智商问题的，直接是个态度问题。这些学生，首先态度不端正。嗯，我认为这个东西很关键，特别对于层次越低。它基本这个东西在遏制着它。Interest in learning. I think it is their weak foundation that determines the strength of their interest in learning, which is a factor, and I think that the lower the level, then the students' attitude to learning determines their grade. If their attitude is not correct, they can score 20 or 30 points on the test. In fact, English is a subject that is very simple to learn well if you want to, isn't it? If you memorise and recite, you will immediately jump out of 20 to 30 marks. But they just don't want to memorize, they don't even want to memorize the words in the first book of the first year and seventh grade, this is not a basic or intellectual problem, it is directly a problem of attitude. These students, first of all, don't have the right attitude. Well, I think this is something that is critical, especially for the lower level. It's basically this thing that's limiting it. (FG: Teacher E)

Here the teacher argues that lower-level students have a motivation problem that prevents them from doing the work necessary for good grades. The teacher also presents a view of what is involved in doing well in English – memorisation and recitation, which are seen as the things that students must do for themselves to succeed. This means that lower-level students seen as less motivated and engaged, and so do not fulfil their expected responsibility for using good learning practices. The teachers therefore do not see themselves as having a main responsibility for assisting such learners.

Opportunities for professional learning

The teachers expressed dissatisfaction with the professional development opportunities available to them, both in terms of the amount of professional development they could access and the quality of development opportunities available to them.

> 呃，无从下手的。因为你想出去外面多学习，但是，又没有这样的机会，或者说是你学到的和需要你学到的是那么多，但你学到的才这么点。Uh. There's no way to get started. Because you want to go out and learn more, but there aren't any opportunities. Or you learn so much but there's so much you need to learn, and you learn so little. You only learn so much. (FG: Teacher E)

This teacher recognises a need to learn but lacks the opportunities to do so. Moreover, she feels that her learning is too limited, and she is not developing her professional abilities well.

The teachers report that the professional learning opportunities that are available are often repetitive, with the same people delivering the training with the same focus.

呃，我自己觉得啊，因为是我们线上也有过类似的培训，线下就是去了那一次。呃，我觉得，好多都是重复的。他们可能请的人是同一拨人。呃，请的同一拨人。所以线上的也用这一份讲义，然后亲自来讲呢，也是用这一份讲义，所以，所以我觉得。效率不是很高。Uhm, I think so myself, because it was similar training that we had online and the offline one that we went to. Uhm, I think that a lot of it was repetitive. They seem to have hired the same people, uh, the same set of people were invited. So the online one uses the same handouts, and then in person, it's the same handouts, so, so I think. It's not very efficient. (FG: Teacher F)

This teacher not only expresses concerns about the focus of professional development but also the quality of the teaching, which in this case involves speaking to a handout. The teaching approach adopted appears to be very teacher-centred and this evaluation was repeated elsewhere in the focus group discussion. The view that the focus is repetitive was also expressed by Teacher C.

嗯，这个其实培训的时候。嗯，就是你,你听了任何的一场培训，可能就是有些绝大部分内容,就是刚刚那个 B 学校老师说的，就是有点重复。但是就是稍微上，细节上会有一点小不同。然后呢，当时你听完之后你觉得也有感触，你也想去实验。但是我觉得这个实验，还是要针对我们的学生的情况。比如说像之前, 之前我也是听到，高考，高考的那个一轮复习，关于一个词汇的复习，那个老师就是他整理了很多，他的教学方法，和他已经做过的那些，比如说他的，呃，教学的使用的那种备课本，还有就教学的小卡片之类的啊，在我看来，我觉得挺好的，但是如果说要直接生搬硬套的话，然后这种是不太科学的。那我要做的就是，我可能要就是要思考一下这个班的学生给适合，如果适合了的话，那我就可以去使用。但是一般你加的东西，可能只有 30%能适合你的。我们需要再进行二次整合的。Well, when you are actually at the training, well, you listen to the training and it's possible that the vast majority of the content, as that teacher from School B said, is a bit repetitive. But the details will be a little different. Then, after you have listened you feel resonant with that, and you want to experiment. But I think this experiment should be adapted to our students. For example, I got to know that in the first round of reviewing for Gaokao, there was a teacher who had compiled a lot of his teaching methods and what he had already done, such as his, uh, teaching preparation book, and little cards on teaching and so on. In my opinion, I think it’s quite good, but if you want to copy what he says directly and then this is not very scientific. Then what I have to do is to think about the students of my class and if it’s suitable, if it is suitable, then I can go and use it. But generally, in terms of the things you add, maybe only 30% of it will fit you. We need to do some adaptation based on that. (FG: Teacher C)

This teacher complains about the repetition but also feels that having heard something new she wants to experiment with it, but this experimentation involves a lot of modification of what she has learned. She therefore faces a difficulty of localising her learning in order to build effective teaching practice for her students.

R: 好的，好老师，我们还呃，我还想问一下大家就是刚才你们提到那个培训的时候就是好像两边的中学都有很多的这个线上培训就是线上培训，你们是是是怎么样的，是相当于是那边有老师在讲 ppt，然后你们就戴着耳机听，然后看回放嘛，它有没有什么互动之类的。OK, teachers, I also want to ask you about what you mentioned training is like. There are a lot of online training in both middle schools. What is it like? Is it like there is a teacher talking through some slides, and then you are wearing headphones to listen, and then you watch the playback. Is there any interaction?

TD: 嗯，基本没什么互动，没有互动。Well, there's basically no interaction, no interaction.

TC: 嗯。Mm.

TA: 没有吧，没有。None right, none.

R: 就是纯纯看就是对方讲是吧？It’s just looking at the other person speaking, right?

TA: 嗯。Mm

TL: 嗯。Mm

The teachers thus report that they are exposed to models of teacher professional development that have a focus on transmission of information, which is often repetitive, and with little active engagement of the teachers themselves in the learning. Such teaching approaches were perceived by the teachers as not being effective or beneficial for their development.

The teachers also reported that in addition to the professional learning offered outside the school, the urban school provided some opportunities for professional learning within the school, although this was not the case for the rural school.

R: 所以就是教师培训这一块儿，其实是看各个学校自己怎么组织是吗？比如说 A 学校这边的，好像就要多一些。是因为，是不是 A 学校更重视这一块，组织的更多，还是，就是跟当地的教育部门有关系呢？So it's the teacher training part, in fact, it depends on how each school organises itself, right? For example, School A seems to have more. Is it because School A attaches more importance to this area, organises more, or is it related to the local education department?

TC: 嗯，这个我觉得是。应该是大的方面，就是应该大的方面，应该就是都差不多，比如说 B 学校和两种就是比如说线上培训的这些都差不多，但是就是小一点的方面。那比如说 A 学校，也会自己组织着，组织着其他类型的培训，所以我我觉得好像也跟学校的安排有关吧。Well I think it is. in general, in terms of the general things, it is all similar. For School B, the two types of online training are similar, but in terms of smaller things. For example, School A would also organise by itself, organises other types of training. So I think it has something to do with the school's arrangements.

It appears that there is a cultural difference between the schools in terms of professional development, with the rural school accessing online training possibilities but the urban school supplementing these with other opportunities. In School A, teachers reported that a mentoring approach was in place in which teachers were paired together.

> 嗯，我们学校不是有那种结对嘛，就是师傅带徒弟呀，什么的，这种如果在一起的时候有解决不了的问题的话，我们私下是会有去听课。通过嗯师傅去听徒弟的课啊，徒弟去听师傅的课呀，在听课的过程当中把这些存在的问题啊，包括教学步骤啊，教学的这个深广度啊，这些教学内容的深广度啊, 这些, 嗯，都会有做一些适当的调整。包括嗯备课的时候。Well, in our school, we have the kind of pairing, that is, the master leads the apprentice, and so on. If there are problems that cannot be solved when we are together, we will go to observe the lessons unofficially. The master observes the apprentice's class, and the apprentice observes the master's class. In the process of observing the lessons, the problems, such as teaching procedures, the depth and breadth of the teaching, the depth and breadth of the teaching content, will be adjusted, including when we do lesson preparation. (FG: Teacher D)

This mentoring relationship allows less experienced teachers to work with and observe more experienced teachers, to discuss issues related to teaching and to learn from the practices of others. The model appears to be unidirectional, with the more experienced teacher assisting the less experienced teacher in a master-apprentice model, rather than being collaborative learning for the whole of the teaching staff.

Some teacher reported that they sought opportunities for themselves to develop their teaching by accessing online resources and networks, usually as passive recipients of the work of others.

R: 嗯，那您会采取什么样的方式进行自学呢？Well, what approaches do you take to do self-study?

TD: 啊，就是嗯，手机上自己掏啊。然后看看啊，还有电脑上有些像学科网里面啊，那些嗯, 有人家怎么做，有些时候看到人家做的课件，我们就会在想, 他们是怎么做到要这样子把它全部都这样子融进去的，然后我们自己自己操作的时候，感觉弄不了，弄不到那么那么流畅。然后速度啊，什么的啊，都是都是受限的。感觉要自己认真重新去啊弄个课件出来确实很花时间，真的很花时间。本来课时很多，自习很多，如果每节每天我们都要去做这些事情，感觉好像是一整天都在学校里面。就在办公室里面, 出了教室，就在办公室里面。Ah, it's just well, you find it for yourself on your phone. You look at that and on the computer like on xkw.com there are people showing what to do and sometimes look at the slides made by others. And we think about how they did the slides that include everything, and then when we do it ourselves, I don't think I can do it that smoothly. And like can't do it very fast. I feel that I have to recognize that I am starting from scratch, so it takes a lot of time to make slides, it really takes time. There's already a lot of class time and lots of time for monitoring self-study sessions and if we have to do these things every day, it feels like we are in school all day. Just inside the office, when you're out of the classroom, just inside the office.

While teachers were aware of resources they could use, as this teacher shows, the process of self-study is difficult and time-consuming, and even if it is helpful, it makes professional development burdensome.

The teachers were also aware of opportunities for professional development offered outside Yunnan, including in-country programs in the UK.

> 呃，说到这个培训啊，我们呃那个一四年的时候它有一个呃。有什么滇滇西地区还是滇什么地区,呃，农村？农村--英语教师出国留行项目，他是那个呃国家留学基金委组织的一个一个培训项目，他是先到北京培训一个月，然后再到英国培训三个多月。这样这样有一个项目。Uh, speaking of this training, we uh in 2014 it was in the Western Yunnan region or some other Yunnan region, uh, rural area an English Teachers Study Abroad Program, it was a training program organised by the Chinese National Scholarship Council, it was training in Beijing for a month, and then in the UK for more than three months. So there was such a project. (FG: Teacher F).

The teachers reported that one outcome of these external opportunities was the development of networks with other participants in the program. These networks had the possibility of providing informal opportunities for professional learning.

R 嗯，那我还有一个问题想问一下，就是 B 学校的李老师和杨青老师就你们两位都有比较丰富的，就是这样的参加长期培训的经历。杨老师去了上海，然后李老师去了英国。那当时肯定有很多老师和你们一起去参加的这个培训训，你们有没有说就是和当时一起培训的老师还保留了一个联系方式，然后大家以后还经常持续的进行呃教学方面交流呢？就是通过培训认识的老师，或者是专家甚至是，有没有跟他们继续保持交流的，这样的一个情况？Well, then I have one more question to ask, which is that Teacher F and Teacher E from School B both of you have more extensive experience of attending long-term training. Teacher E went to Shanghai and Teacher F went to UK. There must be lots of teachers going to this training with you. Did you keep their contact number of the teachers you met in the training, so that you could continue to communicate with them about teaching and learning? Did you keep in touch with any of the teachers or experts you met through the training, and did you continue to communicate with them?

TL: 啊专家都是没有，但是我们一起去英国的那些同学都还有联系的，嗯。啊，会有一些，但是不多。呃，都是私底下的一些活动，比如说呃 S 学校的那个 Teacher X，他现在是 S 学校的副校长，啊，我们两个私底下会进行一些呃研究探讨啊，但是都是私人的，没

> 有进行过呃你说公对公的什么呀，都是私底下一些交流。Ah not the experts, but those students whom I went to the UK with are still in contact, mm. Ah, there has been some, but not many Uh, it's all private activities, for example, that (Teacher X[1]) at (School S), he is now the vice headmaster of (School S), ah, we have some private research and discussion, but it's all private, there's no public-to-public communication whatsoever, it's all private communication.

Teacher F indicates that leveraging such networks to support professional learning depends on individuals building on these relationships and that such networks do not create functioning professional learning communities among the participants. In fact, networking opportunities outside schools seem to be very limited for all of the participants in the focus group and there is a sense that they tend to have worked largely in isolation from other teachers.

Discussion

A common feature of teachers' practice that seems to be reflected in the teaching of all aspects of English is that the majority of teachers drew on a limited repertoire of teaching approaches to activity types. While there was evidence of a much wider range of teaching practices across the teachers at the two schools, many of the practices included in the survey were used either rarely or only by a limited number of teachers. The majority of teachers, therefore, seem to have a limited repertoire of teaching practices, which were mostly form focused. This may mean that teachers had few alternative ways of teaching available to them to deal with the problems they faced in teaching, and few opportunities to vary their practice when their usual teaching approach was ineffective.

This restricted repertoire would appear to present particular problems in dealing with the main challenge that most teachers faced, namely the diversity of language levels in their classes. The teachers particularly expressed great difficulty in meeting the challenge of teaching lower-level students whose level of language development was not adequate to engage with the set curriculum. The main approach to different levels was a streaming approach in which less able and more able students were separated out, and then taught using a collectively developed, single curriculum for all learners, with the more able students receiving additional work and the less able students covering less material. This solution focuses more on the management of classes than on the teaching and learning needs of the different cohorts. It would appear to be a solution that entrenches the disparities between groups and does little to address the learning needs of lower-level students.

The teachers reported low availability of professional development opportunities in their schools, although with differences between School A and the School B. Both groups of teachers expressed problems with the availability, quality and focus of professional development from outside the school. In the rural school, possibilities for school-based professional development led by the teachers themselves also seemed to be lacking, meaning that such teachers had very few opportunities to develop their practice unless they took individual action to try to do so. The urban school, however, reported that there were instances of collaborative professional development in the school and involving mentoring and observation of lessons. Such in-school professional development can be highly effective but if it does not draw in ideas from outside the school the result of such professional development may do more to confirm existing practice rather than introduce innovation (Murray et al., 2021). Given the limited repertoire of many teachers in the schools, a model of professional

[1] Teacher at another school (=School S).

development that drew only on existing practice may risk entrenching the most common practices found in the schools rather than challenge teachers to innovate in their teaching.

One significant problem reported by a number of teachers was their own limitations as speakers of English. Given the frequency with which this problem was reported, it is notable that professional development opportunities for teachers do not seem to include opportunities to develop their English language abilities. The teachers did show awareness of opportunities to study in the UK, but it appeared that such opportunities were limited, and few teachers were able to participate in them. The lack of professional development opportunities in English and focusing on English language development would appear to be a particular issue in these schools and is one that within-school models of professional learning would probably be unable to address.

Professional learning community workshops

A series of four workshops was organised with a view to promoting a shared understanding among participants of that a community of practice is and some of the ways in which is can most effectively serve as means of teacher professional development. The four workshops delivered were as follows:

Workshop 1: Professional Learning Communities
Workshop 2: Professional Learning Communities: Time Management
Workshop 3: Professional Learning Communities: Motivation and Proficiency
Workshop 4: Professional Learning Communities: Making Training Effective

An outline of each workshop is given below.

All the workshops were of two hours duration and were delivered on the Zoom platform and recorded for the purpose of subsequent analysis. The breakout room facility in Zoom was seen as important as collaborative group work was a key element of every workshop in order to move away from a transmissive model of development to a more egalitarian, consultative one; this again reflected what we were trying to promote as the modus operandi within PLCs – but while not altogether excluding and dismissing the value of talks, presentations, demonstrations etc. Another key element was the inclusion of pre-workshop tasks that encouraged the participants to give thought to ideas and concepts that would arise in the upcoming workshops. For this purpose, apps such as Padlet were used.

The design and delivery of all the workshops were the product of a process of consultation between the Warwick University Team and Kunming University of Science and Technology.

The workshops were delivered using the Zoom live meeting tool. The two groups of teacher participants were based at two separate institutions. Each group opted to access the training in their respective settings, namely in one classroom in each of the two schools, and they participated via a single central screen (as opposed to using their own devices). On viewing the recorded workshops, it was striking how the physical setting in which teachers participated, the way they positioned themselves in the classroom, and their general lack of interaction both within and outside of breakout groups, all indicated the disposition towards a transmissive mode of professional development, and this is certainly reflected in the findings reported below.

Workshop 1: What is a Professional Learning Community?

Delivered by: Steve Mann and Maricarmen Gamero Mujica, supported by Meifang Zhou (Warwick); Wang Ying & Yuman Liu (KUST)

Workshop structure

1. General introduction of the team (all team members), aims and nature of the workshops and housekeeping rules
2. Professional Learning Community (PLC) as a concept and related key terms, what makes a PLC successful; the concept of Continuous Professional Development (CPD), key dimensions and good practices of CPD; reports and views on the literature of CPD.
3. Introduction of PLC situation in China and thoughts on it and an online PLC: the project to develop the virtual Teaching and Researching Section on the English Curriculum founded and led by Beijing Foreign Studies University
4. Harnessing technology to ensure that the PLC is (and remains) collaborative, effective and impactful

Pre-workshop task for Workshop 2

As preparation for the second workshop, participants were asked to complete a pre-workshop task involving lesson planning.

Pre-workshop task

Look at the following task, designed to teach your students how to use 'going to' and 'will' to talk about the future.

> ***You are going to plan a party with a friend. Choose what you need, and who will bring each item.***

Plan a 30-minute lesson to teach these future forms. Please post your lesson plan (with timings) to the Workshop 2 Padlet.

You can plan as you would normally plan or according to the PPP model.

If you choose to use the PPP (presentation-practice-production) structure, here are some links to help you:

https://seetefl.com/ppp-tefl-teaching-methodology/
https://www.teachingenglish.org.uk/professional-development/teachers/planning-lessons-and-courses/articles/planning-grammar-lesson

Workshop 2: Dealing with diverse demands on teachers' time

Delivered by: Neil Murray and Penny Mosavian, supported by Meifang Zhou (Warwick); Zeng Jing and Zhao Xue (KUST)

Workshop structure

Introduction: The workshops are to help model PLCs instead of prescribing what you should do.

1. How can teachers innovate in the classroom given the time pressures they face? (40 minutes)
2. Dealing with the tension between: the need to develop students' communication skills/fluency and the pressure to complete textbook units in the allotted time (exacerbated by insufficient

time to monitor students' in-class performance; low student motivation; mixed proficiency levels). A reconfiguration of pedagogical approach as a solution– Flipped Learning. Discussion of the differences between the 'Traditional' model and 'Flipped learning model' considering an unflipped PPP approach (presentation-practice-production).

3. Group work: Modelling flipped learning
   - Worked example: wildlife protection
   - Discussion: rethink of the lesson plans developed in the pre-workshop task and discussion of how teachers could modify these according to the Flipped learning approach.
   - Discussion of the advantages of flipped learning and challenges of flipped learning
4. Misconceptions about flipped learning.
5. Application of the principles of flipped learning to the building of PLCs -- Flipped CPD.

Pre-workshop task for Workshop 3

As preparation for the second workshop, participants were asked to complete a pre-workshop task involving reading and article and sharing responses.

Pre-workshop task

Please read the article and share your thoughts here on the Padlet.

Chen, L. (2021). The reasons and motivation strategies for the inadequate English learning motivation of high school students. *Frontiers in Humanities and Social Sciences*, 1(4), 81-83.
Think about any or all of these questions:

- To what extent do you agree with the author's reasons for students' lack of motivation in the English classroom?
- Can you think of any other reasons why students might be demotivated? Please share them.
- Which of the motivational strategies have you tried and how successful were they?

Workshop 3: Students Proficiency and Motivation

Delivered by: Kathryn Sidaway (Warwick), supported by Meifang Zhou (Warwick); Ma Qian and Yuman Liu (KUST)

Workshop structure

Introduction to the focus in this workshop: low levels of students' motivation to learn English; mixed levels of English proficiency.

Motivation

- What is motivation and how it is associated with teaching efficiency
- Different types of motivation: amotivation (zero motivation, extrinsic and intrinsic motivation, ideal and ought-to self
- Sustaining students' motivation, including a case study from south-west China that reveals the majority of students have no clear goal for learning English; high-achieving and average students had a mix of extrinsic and intrinsic motivation. The suggestions for supporting motivation by creating an encouraging and flexible environment and ensuring that students experience success.

Workshop 4: Making training effective

Delivered by: Jason Anderson and Meifang Zhuo (Warwick); Zeng Jing(KUST)

Workshop Structure:

1. Approaches to training: Teachers from both schools share their views on pros and cons of training and useful training. Teachers produce a summary of their training and the current Yunnan project appraisal using SWOT (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, threats) and participants analyse the feedback data from teachers at the two schools. Teachers choose characteristics for good useful training (using the interactive annotate function through Zoom).
2. A summary of 教研组 (Teaching and Research Group) activities and functions in the 2 schools with teachers' comments on each other's 教研组 (Teaching and Research Group).
3. The usefulness sharing experience
4. What is 'training' (teacher education includes teacher training – top down – and teacher development – bottom up). Sharing experience is a form of teacher development.
5. Characteristics of successful training, as reported in teacher education literature
   - is offered near to teachers' school as possible
   - has relevant contextualisation, i.e., examples, anecdotes, demos
   - requires all members to take responsibility
   - provides opportunities for teachers to discuss and compare understandings of content
   - supports appropriation of content
   - provides light pressure to continue involving required work to do after training
   - is linked to other CPD activities
6. Two models to make training more effective:
   - from 'training' to 教研组 (Teaching and Research Groups) – teachers attend 'top-down' training- teachers 'cascade' to peers in school; year groups of teachers (research and) discuss training in Teaching and Research Groups; planning lessons collaboratively, including (some) elements of training; teachers try out the lesson in class; teachers report to the Teaching and Research Group and reflect on successes and challenges.
   - from 示范课 to 公开课（take what is given by an expert into one's own teaching） Senior teachers work together with other teachers to plan changes together to fit the needs of their students; teachers implement the changes; teachers evaluate and reflect on the changes.
7. Discussion: Reflecting on the models presented and the model adopted in the schools' Teaching and Research Group.
8. Planning for future PLC activities: (15 minutes)

Understanding the notion of a professional learning community

It quickly became evident that the idea of professional development within the context of a professional learning community – that is a PLC as a vehicle for professional development – was not well understood by teachers, and to some extent this coloured their perception of the workshops in terms of their purpose and value. The expectations of participating teachers were that the series of two-hour workshops was designed to provide them with teaching techniques, easy fixes, that would address some of the commonly felt issues identified in the Project 2 questionnaire. Furthermore, they expected expert teachers and renowned scholars to lead the workshops and adopt a transmissive delivery mode rather than – or in addition to – alternative modes of discussion, reflection, reporting (on action research and other initiatives, for example). These expectations were likely influenced by pre-existing notions of professional development, traditional "expert teacher" practices, and traditional modes of learning (Cordingley et al., 2015). It was, therefore, made clear early on that the purpose of the

workshops was to provide participating teachers with insights into how PLCs could function in ways that expanded on these more traditional modes, and that their function was to exemplify this both by drawing on two problematic areas of practice highlighted by teachers in the project's needs analysis exercise conducted previously via a questionnaire, and by considering the affordances and constraints around the delivery of professional development. In other words, the workshops would effectively be exploring questions such as "How might a professional learning community go about unpacking and responding to the commonly felt issue of generally low levels of students' English language proficiency and motivation?". While the first workshop focused on defining a Professional Learning Community and on explaining the purpose of the workshop series, it was nonetheless necessary to reiterate that purpose multiple times.

Feedback on the workshops

In order to elicit feedback from workshop participants, two questionnaires were designed, both comprising open questions, one questionnaire for the teacher participants and one for the workshop organisers, i.e., those individuals who decided the focus of the workshops and who led them. 18 teacher participants completed the questionnaire, and 10 presenters. In order to ensure that respondents fully understood the questions, those featured in the teacher participant questionnaire were written in English and Chinese. Informal feedback was also elicited in a meeting between the two partner institutions that took place following completion of all four workshops, as well as via a written feedback summary provided by KUST of their own perceptions of the workshops and separate from the questionnaire.

Findings from the workshops, presented below, are organised according to each of the questions featured in the questionnaires and are the product of a coding of the data. The workshop videos were watched and, where useful, invoked to support or contradict comments expressed in the questionnaires. Part A deals with the teacher participant questionnaire, and Part B with the organizer/presenter questionnaire.

Part A: Teacher participant questionnaire

In general, teachers found that the types of workshop activities they found most engaging and likely to influence their future practice, whether as 'regular' teachers, expert teachers, teacher-trainers, or mentors, were activities that had a practical orientation to them. This practical orientation was seen not only in their response to the workshop activities that formed part of the project but also in the way in which they envisioned professional development activities more generally. That vision – or wish list – encompassed such things as the observation of demonstration classes, either videoed or live, and in some cases the observation of the same lesson taught by different teachers. Comments reflecting this bias towards the practical included the following:

> Listen to classes in person instead of speeches or theory explanation
>
> … practical teaching more, less theoretical speeches
>
> professional development activities focused on a detailed analysis of textbooks
>
> Classroom examples from other countries or schools
>
> Some observation and studying of various kinds of lessons

This relegation of theory in favour of practice – something also evident in feedback elicited during the workshops – is somewhat concerning and reflects the expectations, referred to above, with which teachers came to the workshops. These expectations persisted despite efforts to change their understanding of the purpose of the workshops as models for how PLCs can function and thereby serve as ways to reflect on issues of policy and practice more generally, and so promote teachers' professional development and sense of belonging to and taking advantage of a community with shared interests and of shared and varied experiences. In the final workshop, teachers made it clear that they were disinclined to engage in professional development because of time pressure and unless it was exam oriented. Their general disinclination to engage with theory reflects a problem reported in the literature with particular respect to the Chinese context (G. Zhao, 2018), namely the often unprincipled implementation in practice of ideas that appear interesting and current; that is the lack of pedagogical reasoning governing when and how teachers apply those ideas and adapt them as necessary according their teaching objectives .

Although one question specifically asked participants what they felt the balance needed to be between theory and practice in the professional development workshops, it was clearly misunderstood by the majority of respondents, most probably due to its meaning being lost in translation. What *could* be ascertained from the responses was that, despite the general subservience of theory to practice that was a salient theme throughout the questionnaire, the few valid responses to this particular question suggested a recognition, nonetheless, of a need for theory and an appropriate balance – however judged – between theory and practice and the difficulty of establishing the nature of that balance.

The minority of teachers who saw professional development within the context of a PLC as an opportunity to develop a deeper understanding of their practice and the factors impacting on it expressed this in various ways, including the following:

> The study of new theories and concepts and how they can be applied in teachers' everyday practice
>
> we are deeply inspired, eye-opened, and cause deep reflection.
>
> a good opportunity for cooperation and the exchange of ideas face-to-face [although whether this meant face-to-face in an online environment is unclear].
>
> Professional teacher sharing session. Acquired a lot of teaching experience and lessons from it.
>
> Renowned and expert teachers delivering professional development sessions
>
> Research-oriented professional development sessions, including training on how to become a teacher researcher [this presumably being a reference to action research (reference was made by one participant to how to conduct research, and another to practical front-line research, and more practical in-depth research on front-line teaching)].
>
> Workshops provide an opportunity for in-depth discussion provided there is a limited focus of one or two questions that are decided in advance on each occasion.

Especially notable, particularly given the general preference for practically oriented events and activities, was the small minority of respondents who expressed a desire for PLCs that adopt approaches to professional development that link theory and practice in order to improve teaching (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1999). There was a desire for professional development activities to be very

targeted and have clear objectives – immediate, short-term and long-term – in order to be impactful. There was also a wish expressed for expert teachers to share particular cases with colleagues within their PLCs and to engage in an actual classroom case analysis.

Some respondents highlighted the importance to them of a sense of participation and an environment where all members of the workshop can actively participate. Another very salient theme that emerged was a desire for consideration within PLCs of ways of alleviating professional burnout as a result of too many responsibilities and too little time to fulfil them.

The pre-workshop tasks that teacher participants were asked to complete were widely regarded as making a positive contribution to the workshops and were seen by the great majority of respondents as a valuable element of future professional development activities within the community. Evidence of this was seen, for example, in the large number of contributions to Padlet, prior to the workshops. The pre-workshop tasks were seen as important in making clear in advance the objectives of the workshops and enabling participants to better understand new concepts and to engage better and in greater depth with the content on the workshops, and in this respect were seen by some as embodying the notion of flipped learning, as presented on Workshop 2. They were also seen as facilitating communication more generally during the workshops by helping ensure that participants had a shared understanding of their objectives and of the language associated with the foci of the workshops. Some participants regarded them as helpful by encouraging them to reflect on their own teaching practice in relation to the new concepts being introduced, not only prior to but during the workshops, and in so doing helping them develop their pedagogy. One participant also highlighted the fact that the tasks helped them prepare and ask targeted questions. It was noted that the workshops served an important function by being the first step to creating a collaborative culture.

While it should be noted that a number of participants felt that the workshops worked very well and needed no improvement[2], those aspects of the workshops which respondents highlighted as less useful tended to reflect the aforementioned widespread preoccupation with the practical rather than the theoretical, and again served to emphasise a lack of appreciation of the importance of theory in guiding pedagogical decision-making and ensuring that it is appropriately informed. Thus, just as those elements of the workshops that elicited the most positive responses reflected the desire for what teachers *see* as practical, conversely, those deemed less practical elicited a quite proportionate number of negative responses. This tendency could be seen in comments such as "Sometimes, the contents are not suitable for my teaching and the level of my students", "The pertinence of the activity content can be closer to the real problems of the participants" and "Short of practical hands-on training", behind which appears to be the idea that not only are *immediate* practicalities the main concern of the teachers, but also that the purpose of the workshops was on particular techniques rather than the general principles guiding the modus operandi of PLCs.

Workshops were sometimes seen as too abstract, specialised, theoretical, and difficult to understand in only a two-hour workshop. There was also a sense that the workshops were directed at teachers in general, rather than focused on students and the educational environment in different regions. Again,

[2] Given the nature of participants' responses generally, one wonders according to what basis/criteria the workshops were judged as very good and not in need of improvement.

this somewhat misses the main point of the workshops as a vehicle for understanding the notion of a PLC as means of discussing, understanding, and solving local issues faced in different regions.

One of most frequent comments had to do not with the content of the workshops themselves but rather the scheduling of them and the fact that they took place during teachers' rest time on Friday afternoons. Given the frequently cited fact of teachers being overworked and subject to multiple responsibilities and tight timeframes, this is perhaps unsurprising and understandable; however, it may also be emblematic of a general sense the presenters had of a lack of real interest and engagement, partly due to teachers' perceptions of what is and is not relevant/useful, and again harking back to the theory-practice issue. Regardless, however, those within PLCs tasked with arranging and scheduling workshops and other activities need to be cognizant of such attitudes and arrange events at times that are likely to maximise participation. They may also need to take account of the fact that some of the participants also felt that 2 hours was too long given that the workshop took up their free time.

One respondent's comment that cultural differences led to incomprehension in some respects is ambiguous. It could refer to a belief that presenters did not fully appreciate the context in which teachers are operating (despite all presentations being collaborations between the Warwick and KUST teams), or it could mean that the Warwick presenters were difficult to understand or did not understand what the teachers were attempting to convey.

When asked about the respective benefits and disbenefits of online and face-to-face workshops, a number of teachers felt that face-to-face workshops were more engaging and promoted a greater level of collegiality. This preference for face-to-face workshops is consistent with other recent literature following from the move to online workshops during the Covid-19 pandemic (El-Serafy et al., 2023; Van et al., 2022). Many of the teachers believed face-to-face was more convenient and efficient and cited a number of reasons for this. For example, they saw face-to-face workshops as allowing for more effective communication and realism, and greater depth of discussion and analysis of issues. In this regard, one participant commented that by allowing for more effective communication, face-to-face workshops offer a better grasp of the learning situations of participants. Another reason underlying this perception of convenience and efficiency was that face-to-face workshops allow for greater immediacy and timeliness of input and feedback on comments and ideas (one participant's statement, for example, that they are more intuitive, appears to be referring to this notion). It was also noted that face-to-face professional development workshops are not subject to network requirements and stability issues in the way their online equivalents are, and this again enables smooth and uninterrupted communication. However, in other respects face-to-face workshops were also seen as inefficient in that they were costly to organise and to attend as they required a venue that may attract a fee and meant that some or all attendees would need to travel. Furthermore, they were seen as placing more demands on their time, particularly in periods where their workload is especially demanding (participants spoke of professional development workshops being a burden when the work intensity is high). When asked which mode they would prefer for professional workshops (online, face-to-face, or a combination of the two), 60% expressed a preference for a combination, 11% for face-to-face, and 28% for online. This suggests that online workshops are likely to be an attractive proposition for a majority of teachers, and thus viable. However, they would require careful management if the issues of convenience and efficiency are to be addressed.

Teacher participants' views were also solicited in relation to the idea of cross-school professional learning communities as a model for delivering professional development activities. While in their written responses they generally felt positively about this, at the end of the final workshop most expressed the view that they did not favour this model of professional development, in part because they felt that being time poor meant that it was difficult to keep professionally connected and thus to sustain a PLC. We also got a sense that the idea provoked a sense of competitiveness and/or vulnerability. Some teachers felt that cross-school PLCs were a good idea only so long as teachers cooperated closely and shared ideas and resources freely and in a spirit of openness. One respondent felt that cross-school professional learning communities are only of value if they result in better student grades, while another suggested that good participation is essential. However, it was acknowledged that, in theory at least, the model was conducive to communication and therefore to learning within the wider professional community, allowing participants from different schools to discuss and reflect on common current issues and learn from each other and the different approaches they take to addressing them. While schools that embody exemplary practices were seen as potentially serving as models/points of reference, one teacher expressed the view that cooperation between schools for the purpose of professional development was only valuable if the participating schools shared similar contexts/circumstances. One respondent was concerned that cross-school collaboration would be time-consuming and thus result in added pressure on frontline teachers.

In response to the question of who they most like to deliver professional development sessions, the majority of teachers expressed a preference for expert teachers (44%), followed by teacher trainers (28%), colleagues/peers (16%), external speakers (6%), and no preference (6%).

All respondents felt a website would be a useful element in developing a community pf practice and promoting their professional development and there was range of things they wanted to see featured on any such website. Most prominent was a repository of high quality teaching resources that included the following:

- Test papers and exercises
- Videos of model classes
- Model lesson plans
- Videoed lectures (as opposed to demonstration/model classes)
- Information on new theories and a facility to upload and download relevant professional articles
- Guidance on professional development, and including guidance on conducting research (action research was not specifically referred to)
- An interactive facility through which to pose questions, share experiences and discuss and consult on issues and new concepts
- Ideas for motivating and engaging students – an issue that arisen throughout the project.

A website was seen as an important means of sharing ideas and practices between schools across China, although one respondent specified that its content needed to respond to the particular needs of the local context. Another highlighted the need for resources featured on the website to be updated periodically.

Respondents had different views on their desired frequency of professional development events, with 32% wanting them to take place once a year, 26% once a month, 17% once a semester, 10% once

every three years, 10% favouring flexibility depending on teachers' workloads and the time available to them, and 5% expressing no particular preference. It was unclear whether desired frequency would vary according to the mode of delivery of professional development events.

Responses to the question of how teachers preferred to be notified of professional development activities showed a clear majority in favour of notifications being sent via WeChat (55%), with 37% in favour of notification via a PLC website, and 8% indicating no preference.

Part B: Organiser/presenter questionnaire

Presenters identified a number of positive aspects to the workshops. It was felt that the sessions were well prepared and well structured, something which helped ensure a coherent learning experience. Good collaboration, pace and time management, and the effective division of labour between presenters were seen as contributing factors that helped ensure the generally smooth-running of the workshops. Materials were judged to be clear and well-organised, and slides, handouts and supplementary materials easy to understand, engaging and visually appealing. Other factors cited as contributing the generally effective delivery of the workshops included the use of pre-workshop tasks that served to familiarise the participating teachers with concepts and ideas discussed in the workshops and allow them an opportunity to reflect on them. Apps such as Padlet, with which teachers were already familiar, likely encouraged engagement and helped ensure that these pre-workshop tasks worked well. The in-workshop tasks were seen were seen by some as helping to keep participants engaged and actively learning, although, as we note below, this was not necessarily reflected in high levels of contribution: even in breakout rooms there was sometimes little or no interaction taking place and a tendency for the same few individuals to dominate. One important point to emerge from the questionnaire was the fact that the workshops helped raise awareness of the fact that professional development can involve more than having a speaker transmit knowledge and experience to the audience. Furthermore, the scope of the kinds of professional development activities PLCs employ extends beyond merely looking for solutions to practical (pedagogical) problems and addressing teachers' everyday needs, to include the introduction of new theory and the development and understanding of existing theory, the development of teachers' research capacity, particularly action research and their confidence in conducting it, and career development. With regard to research capacity in particular, one presenter noted that the workshops helped to highlight the significance of the link between 'teachers as teachers' and 'teachers as researchers' and raised awareness of how PLCs can form the basis of professional development activity and provide a forum for the sharing of research.

Respondents cited the positive, motivating atmosphere in which the workshops were conducted and the positive spirit in which feedback was offered in response to participants' oral and posted questions. It was felt that a dynamic atmosphere was created due to approachable and knowledgeable facilitators who encouraged the teachers to participate and ask questions. This was apparently appreciated by the attending teachers, although it is of note that active participation was, in fact, less than stellar – an issue we address below – even where teachers were working on tasks in breakout rooms and despite the fact, highlighted by one respondent, that the concise nature of the presentations helped encourage teacher contributions. The objectives of the sessions (collectively and individually) were made clear and some of the presenters felt that the topics were relevant in that they touched on real issues experienced by teachers, promoted teacher reflection and, via discussion, helped them discover new ways to improve themselves. That the sessions touched on real issues was unsurprising as these

emerged from the needs analysis exercise and were chosen in order help model how PLCs might work to shed light on these and other such issues.

Other aspects of the workshops that the presenters felt teacher participants appeared to respond well to and find engaging were the pre-workshop tasks which, among other benefits referred to earlier, offered teachers a way to show presenters their know-how and experiences; the comment function available on Zoom; opportunities to reflect on and relate their experiences (the limited level of participation not withstanding); the facility to discuss ideas on WeChat; hearing their peers' ideas and responses to questions; relating the focus of workshops to teachers' particular learning contexts; and being asked to share their opinions, which they perceived as confidence-building.

A number of key themes emerged in relation to aspects of the workshops that presenters felt were problematic in some way. As alluded to above, it was widely reported by respondents that teachers often appeared reluctant to participate and speak up due to insecurities about their language proficiency and their difficulty, often, in comprehending theory and associated terminology. This was exacerbated by sometimes poor and unreliable internet connections and other technical problems. On observing the videos, it was notable that most teachers were reluctant to feed back orally during the workshop sessions when asked for views and were more inclined to use WeChat or the Zoom chat function. It was suggested by two respondents that theory could be presented in Chinese and needed to be presented more gently; also, that discussions could be in Chinese. In relation to IT-related (technical) problems, it was felt that a physical setting where, apart from WeChat, there is only one channel of communication (a single shared computer) for a group of teachers located together in a classroom in their school does not work well and encourage/allow participation. It was seen by one respondent as making participants feel like students rather than interactive peers and defeats the flexibility that online events promise to offer. Having two such environments (i.e. two groups of students, one per school) simultaneously was even more challenging. Smaller groups with more than one computer/link per school would have helped and promoted participation and interaction between schools, which some presenters noted was almost non-existent. As noted earlier, this lack of inter-school interaction may, in part, have been a result of competitiveness and/or insecurities and in this context the comment by one presenter who viewed doing tasks with the group of people they are familiar with as something the participating teachers responded well to, may be significant. Some respondents commented that an online delivery format is inherently less engaging than face-to-face and makes it easier for participants to remain unengaged and more difficult for presenters to control the dynamics of sessions.

Online delivery or workshops was seen as less motivating than more participative face-to-face workshops, but it was felt, nonetheless, that participation improved when sessions became less presenter-centered as this allowed for more collaboration and interaction and may have been less face-threatening, particularly as teachers were working with peers from their own school groups. While such in-workshop participation was variable and generally not very good, there was a quite good level of engagement with pre-workshop tasks, although one respondent highlighted the need for these to be sufficiently well scaffolded. In addition, one presenter highlighted the fact that an online delivery format makes it easier to remain unengaged and more difficult for the presenter to control the dynamics of the session. Also, it was noted that when teachers listened to the ideas and opinions of their peers they became more animated – something which further supports the argument for a less presenter-centred dynamic. Although such a dynamic was a priority in the design of the workshops, there was nonetheless some variation on how presenter-centred they were, and it was suggested that getting

participants heavily involved from the outset would generate *greater* engagement and interest. It is notable that some presenters felt that levels of participation were quite good; however, perceptions in this regard, are likely a product of knowledge of the audience and associated expectations and it seems likely, therefore, that the feedback from Chinese presenters was more positive in this regard than that of their non-Chinese counterparts.

The issue of time arose in the presenter responses, reflecting concerns expressed by the teacher participants. Time and teachers' workloads, along with delivery mode(s) are clearly crucial issues governing the scale and effectiveness of professional development activities organised within PLCs. Presenters picked up on teachers' difficulty concentrating and themselves highlighted the fact that teachers complained of the workshops and pre-workshop tasks taking up too much time, and more time than expected. One respondent stated that … some of the participants were not doing it [participating] voluntarily but in some way forced to do so. This may, to some extent, also explain the lack of participation during the workshops.

While one respondent commented that the flipped and blended learning experience could be improved, this was no attempt made to expand on this.

When asked to make recommendations regarding a professional learning community and the nature of professional development activities in light of their experience of the workshops and/or what they know of the context in which the targeted teacher population works, the presenters/organisers made a number of points. Firstly, and not for the first time, teachers' busy schedules were seen an obstacle to growing a PLC and organizing and attending professional development events. One respondent stressed that it is important for teachers not only to attend professional development sessions but also have time to try things out, reflect and report back to members of the PLC and suggested that f lipped learning model might be suitable. Regardless of the mode of delivery of these events, expectations need to be realistic and careful thought given to their scheduling, frequency, duration and type. It was seen as important to strike a balance between providing enough professional development opportunities to support teacher growth, while also not overwhelming teachers with too many extra responsibilities. Only two presenters addressed the question of the frequency of professional development events, showing a preference for once a month. Professional development activities were seen by some as more effective in small groups, although across the respondents' numbers varied from 4-5, 10 and 20-30, depending on the nature of any given event (one respondent cited 100s if the event consisted of simply listening to a lecture). It was noted that smaller events or the creation of smaller groups within larger events allowed for greater levels of interaction and collaboration between participants and more focused and personalised learning. It was also suggested that professional development activities be project-based; for example, conducting action research with colleagues and reporting on it. It was felt by the vast majority of respondents that a combination of face-to-face and online professional development events and of formal and informal events (however defined) would be preferred, always with a facilitator – something that would have implications for the frequency of events (see Recommendations, below).

It was suggested that events need to address and find solutions to real problems teachers face if they are to attract participation and enthuse. One respondent commented that events also need to cohere in the sense of there being a logical relationship between them and the order of their appearance in any professional development schedule. These suggestions are significant in that, despite coming from

some of the presenters/organisers of the workshops, they again reflect a view of PLCs and the events they organise and host merely as vehicles through which to solve everyday pedagogical problems faced by teachers in those communities, when in reality their purpose is much broader and their value more diverse.

Despite concerns over time commitment and the variation expressed by participants regarding frequency of professional development events, there was some recognition of the fact that establishing common interests is important to developing a collaborative culture and that, consequently, teachers needed to meet regularly and look for opportunities for collaboration and the sharing of ideas, with ongoing communication in order to maintain momentum and focus. In connection with this, it was noted that online professional development events are good for connecting teachers in different schools, while face-to-face are more suited to building communities within schools. Occasionally, larger cross-school events could be held face-to-face in larger venues to share experiences and learn from each other.

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It was suggested that information of professional development events be circulated via accessible platforms in order to ensure it reaches all interested parties. A PLC website, discussed previously, would be an ideal shopfront for this. Another suggestion was that cutting-edge topics, such as ChatGPT, be the focus of certain professional development events.

Presenters recommended that the effectiveness of a PLC can be evaluated via personal reflection, levels of participation, participant feedback (e.g. via questionnaires etc.), and the tracking participants' professional development.

Recommendations

Based on the above narrative and evidence from the recordings of the four workshops, we offer the following recommendations, organised according to 12 key themes that emerged from the data.

1. Clarifying the purpose and operation of PLCs to all stakeholders

There was a lack of clarity over the nature and purpose of a PLC, and in particular how it serves as more than merely a forum for presenters to offer solutions to pedagogical problems commonly experienced by teachers.

Recommendations:

- Provide training and resources to all stakeholders to help them better understand what a PLC is, its purpose and value, and the various ways in which it can function so as to best serve the interests and developmental needs of its membership (Lamb 1995). This could include offering workshops, webinars, and online resources.
- Ensure that the PLC has a defined structure, with officers and a defined leadership – possibly expert teachers – who have a deeper understanding of the concept and who can lead on its establishment and development. These individuals can serve as mentors, coaches, and trainers, providing guidance and support as required.
- Establish effective channels of communication to ensure that members remain engaged and are kept fully informed of activities within the PLC. Such channels will likely include email, newsletters, social media, and a PLC website (see below).

2. Achieving a balance between theory and practice

There is clear evidence that teachers do not always understand theory or appreciate its relevance to their practice and the fact that the latter needs to be informed by the former even if a degree of adaptation needs to occur. An improved understanding of this relationship will not only help ensure that teachers are better practitioners but also help them to accept as relevant and worthwhile professional development events run under the auspices of a PLC and which for many represent an intrusion on their limited time.

Recommendations:

- Ensure that the content/topic focus of professional development activities not only reflects current trends and thinking but also directly relates to the needs of the teacher – a relationship that may need to be demonstrated.
- Ensure that the delivery of professional development events considers and elicits participants' reflections on the ways in which ideas may be governed by the constraints and affordances of the context of their application.
- Incorporate practical tasks and experiences that allow teachers to apply theoretical concepts to their real-world teaching situations. This could be done through group projects, peer mentoring and collaborative problem-solving activities that promote reflection and help teachers to understand the diversity of teaching across a range of settings and consider issues around adaptation.
- Encourage teachers to become more reflective in their practice and embrace the theoretical concepts they are learning (Richards & Farrell, 2005). This can be done through the PLC meetings, group discussions and peer dialogue, whether face-to-face or virtually.

3. Modulating the frequency of professional development events

A strong theme to emerge from the data was a sense of teachers being time poor, something which appeared to demotivate and discourage many of them from participating in professional development. Many felt reluctant to engage in professional development very often, if at all. Responses ranged from monthly to every 3 years, and even in the video clips there was some evidence of a number of teachers looking somewhat tired and disengaged, likely due in part to the workshops being scheduled at the end of their working day.

Recommendations:

- Depending on the availability and resources of the school or district, begin by offering professional development events on a quarterly or biannual basis, with additional optional/occasional opportunities throughout the year. Also, larger, costlier, and more formal face-to-face events could be less frequent and interspersed with smaller, less costly, less formal but more frequent online events (Borg, 2015).
- Offer flexible scheduling that takes into account teachers' other professional and personal commitments. Surveying teachers will help schedule events at times that would be most convenient whilst also getting teachers invested in the process.
- Creating a Calendar of Events for the semester or year would also help teachers to plan and make time for their Professional Development sessions.
- Using a variety of formats – careful planning would allow for professional development events to be made available in several formats and give teachers flexibility in the way that best suits schedules and learning styles.

- Providing incentives, where possible, may help to encourage participation. This could include professional development credits, or simply a certificate for attending a certain number of professional development events.

4. The focus of professional development events

Teachers' responses highlighted the importance placed by many on addressing and resolving their everyday practical problems, learning about new theory, and developing understanding of existing theory, career development, and building research capacity, in particular action research.

Recommendations:

- Conduct localised needs assessments to identify the practical problems and needs of teachers in their specific teaching contexts. This will inform the focus of the training events. Our data offers a good steer in this respect.
- Offer training on the nature of action research, research methodology, and the reporting of research for the purposes of presentation and publication (Writing for publication).
- Create opportunities to discuss career paths, opportunities and trajectories, and strategies such as networking and creating and nurturing collaborative activities. Collaboration within and across schools, for example on an action research project, could form the basis for a publication. Such collaboration not only promises to motivate and help teachers overcome workload/time obstacles but also to improve their promotion prospects.
- Use the PLC as a forum for discussing ways of managing the issue of work-life balance, which emerged from the data as a key concern of teachers.

5. Size of professional development events

Respondents indicated that the size of any professional development event will be determined largely by the purpose of the event, but also by the mode of delivery (face-to-face or online – see point 6).

Recommendations:

- If the purpose of an event is primarily transmissive – for example, to provide an overview of a new theory or teaching strategy or resource, a larger group may be particularly appropriate – although this would certainly not preclude smaller group interactions. D
- Even in in large events with a 'key' speaker, there need ideally to be opportunities for discussion and small-group interactions and consideration of implications for teachers' own circumstances, aspirations etc. This will help motivate, encourage future participation and create a sense of community and a shared culture with shared challenges and goals.

6. Modes – online and/or face-to-face

Unsurprisingly, most participants showed a preference for a combination of face-to-face and online professional development events. Teachers' responses showed recognition of the benefits and drawbacks of both modes of delivery, while presenters felt quite strongly that, in both cases, it is important to consider teachers' workloads and availability. Questions also arise as to how best to maximise engagement regardless of mode, given teachers' proficiency levels and insecurities around their understanding of theory.

Recommendations:

- Consider using a blended approach that incorporates both online and face-to-face models of delivery. This provides greatest flexibility and allows teachers to choose the format that works best for them in their local contexts and according to their schedules.

- If it is decided that events are relatively frequent, consider running the same event twice at difference times and/or in different modes to suit different schedules and therefore maximise the 'reach' of professional development initiatives
- Ensure that content is relevant and accessible by using infographics/visual aids etc, taking into account teachers' proficiency levels and insecurities around their understanding of theory.
- Do not prohibit the use of the spoken Chinese and consider providing materials in the L1 as well as in English, and support workshops (where possible).
- Offer training in the use of any online tools, including workshops on using the relevant online platform, or short tutorials on specific tools in order to help teachers to feel more confident. Also, provide technical support during events.

7. Promoting relationships and building a collaborative culture in and between schools

As discussed above, the idea of cross-school collaboration was generally received with a sense of caution, possibly due to a sense of competitiveness and/or a lack of confidence. It may also have been a result of the concern teachers universally felt about the time commitment involved. Despite reservations, participants recognised the value of building a collaborative culture but emphasised that this should be done in the spirit of openness and sharing. Given the geographic challenges of schools located remotely, technology is a key tool to facilitate communication and collaboration between teachers in these schools.

Recommendations:

- Where possible (and feasible) initiatives and/or partnerships that include joint research projects, shared lesson planning, or cross school teaching.
- Opportunities for teachers to observe each other's classes (may already be happening), sharing teaching materials and undertaking peer to peer feedback.
- Have schools jointly organize professional development events, perhaps by ensuring that PLC organising committees have cross-school membership. Also ensure that other PLC offices have such cross-school membership.
- Use video conferencing, online forums, and shared document platforms (Padlet), as well as social media tools (WeChat) to support cross school projects, joint events, the sharing of resources and the fostering a culture of collaboration.
- Whether online or in person, incorporate group work activities – and particularly teachers working in mixed groups with peers from other schools in the PLC – to encourage teachers to ice break, build teams and network with each other. This will, in turn, help encourage teachers to connect and collaborate after events.
- Celebrate within and across the PLC the successes of individual teachers and schools, share success stories and achievements, and hold celebrations such as award ceremonies to recognize hard work and commitment.

8. Communication platforms for online or blended events.

A number of factors need to be considered in deciding on choice of platform(s).

Recommendations:

- The platform needs to be accessible to all teachers, regardless of their location, device, or technical proficiency.
- Platforms need to enable interaction and collaboration between teachers (e.g. video conferencing, chat rooms, shared document platforms).

- Platforms need to be secure and protect the privacy of participants, especially when dealing with sensitive information.
- Platforms need to be cost-effective and fit within the budget of the PLC.
- Platforms need to come with technical support or easily be troubleshooted by technical experts either within the school, or the professional development community, to ensure smooth and successful delivery of online events.

9. Workshop preparatory work

In order to make events most productive, both teacher participants and presenters highlighted the value of pre-workshop tasks and other preparatory activities in helping participants prepare for the training sessions.

Recommendations:

- Provide pre-event materials where appropriate, such as readings, slides, videos, and discussion prompts to help teachers prepare for their professional development event. This will ensure that all participants are on the same page and both ready and more willing to engage with the content and with their fellow professionals.
- Use interactive apps such as Padlet, Mentimeter, or Kahoot (or equivalents that are easily accessible and available in China) to engage teachers before and during the event. These apps can be used to create polls, quizzes, and interactive discussion boards that help to stimulate engagement and participation.
- Assign pre-event tasks that are manageable, given concerns expressed by teacher participants, and to some extent presenters, over workloads.
- Encourage collaboration prior to PLC events by creating online discussion forums or group chat rooms (see website point, below). This can help to build a sense of community among teachers and facilitate the sharing of ideas and resources; the latter was particularly highlighted by respondents.

10. Feedback on PLCs

According to the workshop presenters, participant feedback on professional development events is vital to the success and continuity of the PLC – a view we wholeheartedly endorse. Feedback ensures that the PLC remains responsive to the needs of the teachers and in doing so reinforces its relevance and value. Monitoring and evaluation of the progress of the PLC helps ensure that its goals are being met and expected outcomes achieved, and by doing so helps identify and respond to areas in need of improvement.

Recommendations:

- After each professional development event, feedback from participants should be sought on the content, delivery, relevance, and effectiveness of the event. This will clearly identify areas for improvement and ensure that future events are better tailored to the needs of the teachers. Feedback can be obtained at the end of face-to-face events either in person prior to their departure or subsequently online.
- Conduct surveys at set points in the teaching year to gather feedback on overall levels of satisfaction with the PLC and professional development events, along with recommendations for improvements, future activities, professional development themes etc. Feedback should also solicit feedback on the emerging collaborative culture and on whether, how and to what extent professional development participants have integrated new learning into their practice. will help

to ensure that the PLC remains responsive to the needs of the teachers and can address issues as they arise.
- Consider sharing feedback with teachers on their participation in the PLC and their engagement with the professional development events. This can help to encourage ongoing participation and foster a culture of continuous learning and improvement.

11. What should a PLC website look like and what functions should it fulfil?

Participants all agreed that a dedicated website would be a useful vehicle for the development, effectiveness and sustainability of a PLC, serving in part as a 'shopfront' but also potentially fulfilling multiple functions.

Recommendations:

- The website should include information about the purpose, goals, objectives, and modus operandi of the PLC, as well as information – including contact information – about its members and officers, and how to join or become a member of the PLC.
- There should be included a calendar or schedule of professional development events, including information about the topic, location, and time of each event, along with an event sign up page
- The website should be easy to navigate so that users can easily find the information they are looking for.
- There should be access to resources relevant to the nature and purpose and objectives of the PLC, to upcoming professional development events, and, more broadly, to teachers' own teaching contexts and circumstances. These resources could include articles, videos, and other materials that support professional learning and development, and which should extend beyond classroom teaching resources.
- The website should include tools that foster communication and collaboration between schools and individual teachers, and including discussion forums, chat rooms, and shared document platforms.
- News and updates relating to the PLC should feature, including announcements about new professional development events, changes to the schedule, and updates on the progress of the PLC.
- The website should provide a facility through which members of the PLC can provide feedback on its general functioning, events attended etc, along with recommendations (see feedback, above).

11. How to foster leadership of PLCs

Leadership of PLCs can be promoted by ensuring, from the outset, a clear leadership structure that is accessible to all those involved, either in delivery or participation. Its leaders should be proactive in fostering a culture of collaboration both within the PLC and particularly across schools by:

Recommendations:

- Training should be made available, if only initially and for expert teachers who are engaged and enthusiastic about the idea of a PLC, around leadership, the qualities of leaders and how to grow organisations.
- Holders of any offices within the PLC should be replaced periodically in order to give others leadership experience and help them feel invested in the PLC initiative. It may be that such individuals, prior to assuming any such role, would need to have completed the above-mentioned leadership training.
- Leaders should consistently encourage collaboration and shared leadership within the PLCby identifying opportunities for members to work together on projects/initiatives. Empowering

members of the PLC at all levels will help to build a sense of community and shared ownership of research and practice.

- Leaders should also recognize and celebrate leadership: highlighting achievements, recognizing, and sharing successes builds a culture of leadership. Encouraging members to propose and organize their own events or initiatives, and providing timely support and resources can only serve to build a culture of creativity and continuous improvement.

Appendices

Appendix 1: General questions about methodology

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
Language				
I feel able to give sufficient attention to fluency in class, compared to accuracy	0	3	21	2
I know how to develop language fluency as well as accuracy in the classroom	0	4	17	5
I am familiar with techniques that encourage authentic student interactions	0	3	18	5
I feel I have the knowledge and skills to develop students' real-life communication skills even if this is not included in my textbook	0	5	14	7
I am able to integrate different language skills (Listening/Speaking/Reading/Writing/Viewing) in my teaching	0	5	16	5
I am able to teach grammar communicatively	0	3	18	5
Culture				
I am able to integrate cultural content into my language teaching	0	3	18	5
I understand how to develop intercultural skills as part of language learning	0	6	17	3
Learner				
I feel able to engage my students in independent learning	0	2	19	5
I know how to create opportunities for my students to learn independently	1	0	18	7
I am able to identify the learning styles of all of my students	0	6	14	6
I am able to adapt my teaching according to students' different learning styles	0	4	15	7
Classroom organisation				
I have the opportunity to engage students in free practice rather than controlled practice	0	0	20	6
I am familiar with techniques for moving from controlled student practice to free practice in lessons	0	5	18	3
I feel able to incorporate small group work into classroom activities	0	2	16	8
I have the skills needed to set up and facilitate effective small group work	0	0	17	9
I have the opportunity to use role play and drama in the classroom	0	4	16	6
I feel confident using role play and drama to promote my students' learning	0	7	15	4
I have the opportunity to use games as a learning tool	0	2	19	5
I know how to use games effectively as a learning tool	0	4	16	6
I feel confident enough in my teaching to depart from textbook teacher manuals	0	7	15	4
Context				
I am able to cover the curriculum in the time available	0	5	16	5
The way in which students are assessed limits what I feel able to do in my teaching	0	3	17	6
I am able to be creative in my teaching while at the same time meeting the traditions and expectations of my school/peers	0	2	20	4

Appendix 2: Writing

	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Very often
Textbook exercises	1	1	3	16	5
Workbook/worksheet exercises	0	0	2	15	9
Short-text activities (messages, notes, emails, etc.)	0	3	4	14	5
Grammar and other structure-based exercises	0	0	4	16	6
Essay writing	0	6	10	7	3
Letter writing	0	0	2	18	6
Stories or poems	3	10	6	4	3
Writing games	7	8	4	5	2
Exam paper questions	1	1	1	10	13
Integrated writing activities	3	7	4	8	4

Appendix 3: Reading

	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Very often
Pre-reading activities	1	2	1	15	7
Graded reading	1	1	5	14	5
Reading aloud	1	0	2	16	7
Reading games	2	6	8	7	3
Group reading	1	5	7	11	2
Reading comprehension	0	0	0	13	13
Integrated reading activities	2	3	8	10	3
Reading authentic materials	2	3	8	7	6

Appendix 4: Speaking

	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Very often
Whole-class drilling and repetition	1	1	4	13	7
Individual practice	1	2	7	11	5
Pronunciation practice	1	3	7	13	3
Stress and intonation practice	1	7	6	8	4
Controlled speaking activities	4	5	6	9	2
Speaking games	1	10	4	8	3
Free discussion, seminars discussion and debates	3	7	7	7	2
Presentations	5	6	8	5	2
Homework/self-study tasks	0	1	3	13	9
Group assignments	0	4	3	14	5
Online assignments	3	5	8	8	2
Individual target setting	3	6	6	7	4
Self-evaluation	2	5	6	11	2

Appendix 5: Listening

	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Very often
Pre-listening activities	1	5	10	7	3
Listening and note-taking	1	2	6	13	4
Listening games	4	9	3	8	2
Dictation	0	0	2	9	15
Integrated listening activities	1	7	6	7	5

Appendix 6: Viewing

	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Very often
Tables	1	8	7	9	3
Charts	2	12	6	5	1
Diagrams/Figures	2	11	9	4	1
Video	0(	1	10	14	4
Animations	1	2	8	14	3

Appendix 7: Language knowledge

	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Very often
Grammar	0	0	2	19	8
Vocabulary	0	0	2	13	13
Pronunciation	0	1	4	19	6

Appendix 8: Resources (use)

	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Very often
Video	0	1	4	17	4
Audio	0	2	4	17	3
Self-made audio recordings	3	8	7	8	0
Self-made video recordings	4	8	6	7	0
Overhead projector	0	2	3	15	6
White/blackboard	0	0	2	13	11
Interactive whiteboard/smartboard	1	2	1	15	7
Laptops	3	7	5	7	4
Mobile phones	0	3	4	12	7
Other mobile devices	2	8	5	9	2
Internet resources	0	1	4	13	8
Social media	0	2	5	14	5
Textbooks	0	0	1	8	17
Teacher guides	0	0	4	11	11
Workbooks	0	1	2	13	10
Self-produced handouts	0	2	2	14	8
Reference books (dictionaries etc)	0	0	2	15	9
Language games	1	4	8	11	2
Flashcards	3	6	6	9	2

Appendix 9: Classroom management

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
I have the skills needed to promote authentic communication in the classroom	0	5	15	6
The assigned textbook limits my ability to promote authentic classroom communication	0	7	16	3
I feel able to use Chinese in the classroom in order to promote learning	0	1	19	6
I feel confident knowing when to use Chinese and when not to。	0	3	18	5
I know how to control the pace and timing of classroom activities	0	1	18	7
I understand how to signal transitions between the stages of a lesson	0	2	20	4
I am able to make effective use of available resources and equipment	0	2	18	6
I know how to give effective instructions to students	0	3	15	8
I am able to adjust my language to the language level of my students	0	2	15	9
I am able to monitor learner engagement in order to maintain learner motivation	1	2	17	6
I am able to identify learning opportunities and adjust my learning plan accordingly	1	1	19	5
I know how to explain learning objectives in a way that promotes student motivation and engagement	0	0	19	7
I am able to plan lessons in collaboration with other teachers	0	1	17	8
I believe that planning lessons in collaboration with my colleagues is important	1	1	18	6

Appendix 10: Assessment

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
I understand how to use formative assessment	1	7	16	2
I am able to identify students learning needs at the beginning of a course	0	4	18	4
I am able to design end-of-course assessments that enable me to monitor my students' learning	0	6	17	3
I know how to employ work portfolios in order to measure students' learning	0	9	15	2
I know how to use peer assessment	0	7	16	3
I know how to use formative and summative assessment effectively	2	5	17	2
I am familiar with different modes of assessment	0	4	19	3
I feel able to assess students' real-life communicative ability。	1	6	15	4
I am able to design my own assessment tasks	0	7	17	2
I know how to use assessment as a way of improving my course planning and teaching	0	4	17	5
I know how to direct learners to assess their own work and progress	1	4	15	6
I am able to use assessment as a way of motivating my students	0	1	21	4
I know how to design assessment tasks that measure the achievement of course objectives	0	4	19	5

Appendix 11: Technology

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
I am aware of technological resources that can support my teaching of English.	0	3	17	6
I have suitable access to technology for teaching English in my school.	0	5	14	7
I am able to choose technologies that enhance my teaching approaches.	0	5	16	5
I am able to choose technologies that enhance my students' learning.	0	4	16	6
My teacher education program helped me to think more deeply about how technology could influence the teaching approaches I use in my classroom.	1	4	13	8
I am able to think critically about how to use technology in my classroom	1	3	16	6
I can adapt the use of the technologies to different teaching activities.	0	2	18	6
I feel confident using technology to support my teaching	0	2	18	6

Appendix 12: Resources (knowledge/ability)

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
I am able to make time to create my own materials	1	8	12	5
I have the understanding and skills needed to develop my own materials	0	3	16	7
I am able to create materials that promote opportunities for student interaction	1	5	14	6
I am able to adapt textbook materials in a way that maximises authentic communication	2	9	11	4
I am able to create materials that emphasise fluency as well as accuracy	2	7	14	5

Appendix 13: Reflexive practice and professional development

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
I have opportunities to observe and be observed by colleagues	1	1	19	5
I know how to reflect on my own and others' teaching practice	0	2	19	5
I am able to analyse my own teaching	1	1	20	4
I know which journals can best facilitate the development of my theoretical and practical knowledge of English language teaching	2	8	14	2
I know how to work with colleagues in ways that develop me professionally	0	1	19	6
I know what opportunities exist for professional development outside of my institution and how take advantage of them	3	7	14	2
I am able and willing to incorporate colleagues' feedback on my teaching	0	1	18	7
I am able to engage in research, reading and other forms of classroom inquiry	0	5	16	5
I am able to present at professional conferences	3	11	8	4
My school supports me to attend professional conferences	2	5	18	1
Participation in teaching competitions is helpful for my professional development	1	5	18	2
I have experience of participating in a professional learning community in which the members control the focus of the work	1	8	13	4

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