On July 8, 2023, the 'Online Teacher Research Mentoring for Professional Learning: Experiences of Chinese English Teachers' webinar was held by the British Council to promote the progress and findings of Chinese English language teachers' localised exploratory action research. This contextualised research approach was supported by the online mentoring of a renowned group of international and Chinese teacher researchers, including Dr Harry Kuchah Kuchah and Dr Zhang Ronggan (Vincent), who also moderated the session. The event was held in English.

Project background

The webinar, and the action research on which it is based, is intended to be a contextual exploration that contributes to the 2022 – 2023 National Online Development of English teachers (NODE) programme pilot findings (The NODE pilot was a collaboration between CEAIE (China Education Association for International Exchange) and the British Council, with activities managed by the UK consultancy, ELT-Consultants. Over approximately 6 months the programme supported over 200 Junior High English teachers and 8 lead teachers to develop their awareness and capacity within 4 identified themes (Teaching speaking, Teaching reading, 21st century skills; motivating students). The pilot, which concluded in March 2023, sought to identify best practices and models for localised, flexible, digital CPD that can support English teachers in China at scale.

Based on the NODE pilot, a number of key areas for adaptation and delivery of future CPD content models for busy classroom teachers were identified and resources were created. Some resources made available through the pilot can be found here (https://cn.live.solas.britishcouncil.digital/en/teach/sharing-learning). Key recommendations from the pilot, based on feedback and analysis, offer a clearer direction for digital delivery models that allow teachers to become leaders of their own learning, and offer greater opportunities for them to learn at their own pace with structured support.

For the action research element, from March-June 2023 the project research team set up a classroom research mini-project to support the professional development of teachers in a way that was led by the teachers to solve problems and address issues in their own classroom. Through exploratory action research procedures, these teachers engaged with their students and colleagues in identifying and investigating aspects of their practice to find solutions to their own classroom puzzles. Based on this, the 'Online Teacher Research Mentoring for Professional Learning: Experiences of Chinese English Teachers' webinar offers valuable case studies and examples of the application of action research procedures that can be integrated into both individual classrooms and future digital (and non-digital) CPD models such as those identified by NODE. This research undertaken by the UK research team offers an autonomous option that can be readily integrated into CPD models already explored and identified.

Ultimately, the webinar provided a fantastic opportunity for participating teachers to share their research processes, findings and reflections on their journey with the wider ELT community. This can inspire participants and audience members to further consider context appropriate ways of investigating their own practices and fostering their own professional development.