



The Journal of Language Teaching and Learning™

2016

Volume 6/Issue 1

Article 1

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Recommended Citations:

APA

Liu, I. C., & Sayer, P. (2016). Reconciling Pedagogical Beliefs and Teaching Practices: Chinese Teachers and the Pressures of a U.S. High School Foreign Language Context. *The Journal of Language Teaching and Learning*, 6(1), 1-19.

MLA

Liu, I-Chun, and Peter Sayer. "Reconciling Pedagogical Beliefs and Teaching Practices: Chinese Teachers and the Pressures of a U.S. High School Foreign Language Context." *The Journal of Language Teaching and Learning* 6.1 (2016): 1-19.

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The Journal of Language Teaching and Learning, 2016(1), pp. 1-19

Reconciling Pedagogical Beliefs and Teaching Practices: Chinese Teachers and the Pressures of a U.S. High School Foreign Language Context

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ARTICLE INFO

Article History:

Received 19 March 2015

Revisions completed 08 July 2015

Published 1 January 2016

Key Words:

Chinese Foreign language programs

Self-efficacy

Teacher beliefs

U.S. high school foreign language

ABSTRACT

The number of Chinese foreign language (CFL) programs is increasingly rapidly in U.S. high schools. Working in newer programs places special pressures on CFL teachers, who often did not themselves study in U.S. schools, may have different expectations and experiences about teaching and learning, and often have had less professional preparation in foreign language education. The authors use the concepts of *teacher efficacy* and *self-efficacy* (Bandura, 1997) within a multiple case study approach to explore the beliefs and practices of two CFL teachers working in large high schools in Texas. They identify four main factors that influenced the teachers' efficacy: (1) school contexts, (2) educational policy, (3) foreign language program types, and (4) professional development opportunities. Aspects of these four areas were both beneficial and adversely impacted the teachers' beliefs about how effectively they could manage their students' learning, including students' socioeconomic levels, advanced placement (AP) exams, constructions of student "achievement," and the effects of in-service training.

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This study explores the factors associated with the pedagogical beliefs of Chinese language teachers who worked in high schools in southern Texas in the U.S. Using a classroom-based case study design, we examined the relationship between the pedagogies of Chinese foreign language (CFL) teachers, their beliefs about the effectiveness their teaching, and how they felt compelled to reconcile tensions between their beliefs and practices due to a variety of ecological factors. Working with two focal teachers and four non-focal teachers at eight different high schools in southern Texas, we aim to provide a descriptive account of CFL teachers' views on their classroom practices and how those views are influenced by the

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teacher's own background and the educational settings where they work. The general question that guided this study is: *What is the relationship between teachers' efficacy and their pedagogies?*

"Pedagogical beliefs" in this study refer to the perceptions regarding what content a teacher considers appropriate for a CFL class, what approaches CFL teachers believe can facilitate students' comprehension, as well as what pedagogical designs can contribute to students' success in acquiring Chinese. This type of belief has been termed *self-efficacy* (Bandura, 1977). As Cantrell and Callaway (2008) assert, "Teacher efficacy refers to a teacher's belief that she or he can positively influence a student's learning despite perceived barriers" (p. 1740). It involves both *teaching efficacy* and *personal teaching efficacy* (Ashton & Webb, 1986). In addition, the concept of teacher efficacy has been connected to the effectiveness of classroom practices and student attainment (Ashton & Webb, 1986; Bandura, 1997; Gibson & Dembo, 1984). However, there have been no studies of foreign language teachers using the teacher efficacy framework. Therefore, by examining pedagogical beliefs, we explore how CFL teachers deliver instruction and scaffold concepts for students with diverse language backgrounds.

Hence, this study examines both the influences on and the impacts of teacher beliefs. These influences are framed from both macro and micro perspectives. First, from a macro point of view, the study considered that the everyday learning and teaching that goes on in U.S. high schools are strongly influenced by teachers' pedagogical beliefs. In a CFL classroom, these beliefs are intertwined with policies such as state foreign language teaching guidelines, standardized tests like the Advanced Placement (AP) or International Baccalaureate (IB) Chinese exam, and the pressures of continual budget cuts in educational, and in particular in high school foreign language programs.

CFL programs in public high schools in southern Texas only began since 2006, and guidelines of state and local educational policy served to orient the pedagogical direction for teachers from different countries who had recently begun teaching CFL (Chi, 2009). Most of the CFL programs provide Advanced Placement (AP³) Chinese courses for students who were interested in taking the AP test, and teachers who work for the schools offering AP courses have additional work in learning how to best prepare students for AP requirements. Moreover, in Texas where this study took place, financial support for education has been shrinking each year since the economic crisis began in 2007, making foreign language programs vulnerable to cutbacks.

Second, from a micro perspective, we look at the factors affecting CFL teachers' pedagogies by examining their personal beliefs and prior learning and social experiences. Following Bandura's theory of self-efficacy beliefs and social cognitive theory (Bandura, 1986), the study regarded personal experiences and knowledge as chief factors affecting individual beliefs, which consequently influence motivations, attitudes, and expectations towards the target performance. The efficacy of a given classroom practice is constituted by multiple continuous skills and subskills to cope with various challenges, stresses, and uncertain situations in the real-time decision-making. For teachers who are confident in their ability to engage students and deliver effective instruction, they tend to view outcomes positively: "Teachers with a high sense of efficacy not only believe that their students are capable of mastering curricula objectives, but also that they are capable of motivating and instructing students successfully" (Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 2001, p. 784). However, for many CFL teachers, there were a confluence of macro and micro factors that tended to undermine their sense of self-efficacy. Our case studies reveal that teachers' self-efficacy beliefs and experiences appeared to be important factors influencing their teaching. Especially when teachers mostly worked alone and without too much background training in teaching, this study shows how their personal experiences became pivotal to their overall self-efficacy beliefs.

³ AP classes in the U.S. are advanced high school classes which allow students to earn university credits. In the case of foreign languages, the classes are tied to an AP language proficiency exam.

2. Self-efficacy in Teaching

Studies have identified teacher efficacy as a primary variable guiding teachers' behaviors (Ashton & Webb, 1986; Bandura, 1997; Hanif, 2010) as well as an important tool for construing variances in teaching effectiveness (Ashton & Webb, 1986; Gibson & Dembo, 1984; Henson, Kogan, & Vacha-Haase, 2001). It is evident that teacher efficacy is strongly correlated to teachers' determination, enthusiasm, dedication, classroom behaviors, and even their students' achievement and motivation (Allinder, 1994; Hepperlen, Clay, Henly, & Barke, 2002; Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 2001). By adopting Bandura's concept of self-efficacy, Ashton and Webb (1982) and Gibson and Dembo (1984) introduced the importance of teacher efficacy in education; their findings did not merely corroborate Bandura's theory of self-efficacy in terms of social cognitive development, but also inspired many further studies investigating factors affecting teacher efficacy and the relationships between teacher efficacy and educational quality.

The concept of self-efficacy as originated in Bandura's social cognitive theory (1977, 1986) is the beliefs people hold about how competent they are to perform some task and their strength to overcome setbacks on the way to their goals. Bandura (1977) defines self-efficacy as "beliefs in one's capabilities to organize and execute the course of action required to produce given attainments" (p. 3), and ecological factors served as one crucial factors associated individuals' perceived efficacy beliefs and outcome expectancies. The environment affects the degree of teacher efficacy, including how teachers react, experience, and behave (Bandura, 1997). The influence of the environment includes actual and potential variables which help teachers structure their beliefs through "a process of enculturation and social construction" (Pajares, 1992, p. 316). Teachers can benefit from the resources that the environment offers and effectively function and engage in activities; they adapt, fix, and restructure their professional belief systems and broad their knowledge and techniques due to inconsistent incidents continually challenging their original beliefs and conceptions when engaging in classroom teaching (Kagan, 1992); with the support from the administration or colleagues, they feel more confident executing particular tasks or courses (Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 2001). Nevertheless, they may feel alone or stressed when there is sparse support from the school as well as pressure them to make difficult trade-offs in terms of planning time that they may feel ill-equipped to manage.

The potential of the theory of self-efficacy to explain the dynamics of the relationship between teachers' beliefs, practices, and environmental factors has sparked research into how sense of teachers' own efficacy – what they think about how well they are able to direct student learning – is related to their performance. :

- evaluating and filtering what teachers experience and interpret in their own ways owing to their prior knowledge and experiences (Pajares, 1992);
- employing different strategies or responding to situations differently as their practical classroom knowledge (Borg, 2006);
- constructing core instruction standards after processing dissonant circumstances and acquiring the connection between beliefs and realities (Kagan, 1992);
- feeling aware of a tension in their practices due to the stimulation of inconsistencies between beliefs and actual work (Phipps & Borg, 2009);
- revealing different expectancy beliefs because of skills of class management and reciprocal relationship with students (Dunn & Rakes, 2011; Emmer & Stough, 2001);
- four major categories of experiences associating with individual cognitive process and the development of self-efficacy: actual teaching experiences, and student achievement (mastery experiences); observations, imitation, and modeling (vicarious experiences); coursework, social interaction, verbal appraisals, and feedback (social persuasions); anxiety, burnout, fear, job satisfaction, or excitement (physiological and emotional states) (Johnson, 2010; Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 2001)

According to the studies, four prominent areas have been identified as primary factors associated with teacher efficacy: the school context, professional development, student achievement, and physical and emotional states. We used these areas as the analytic starting point for examining the CFL teachers' efficacy.

3. Qualitative Case Study Design

Since high school CFL programs in the U.S. are still relatively young and there is a paucity of research in the area, we used an exploratory case study design. We examined multiple sources of data, which allowed us to triangulate around the extent to which the teachers were influenced by or aligned with their educational environment in terms of lesson design and teaching attitudes as well as their reliance on personal background and experiences.

The study was long term. We worked with the two focal teachers, Maria Lee and Lan-Chen Tsai, over two years, which allowed us to do robust within-case and cross-case analysis (Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña, 2014). In order to enhance the cross-case comparison and better understand how the focal teachers were representative or not of CFL teachers in south Texas, we also worked with four other non-focal teachers involved in eight different schools within four school districts in two cities. In order to capture "social meanings and ordinary activities" (Silverman, 2006, p. 67) and comprehend how the teachers performed in their professional world, fieldwork occurred in natural settings and encompassed a broad range of observation, including classroom practice, interactions with students and colleagues during breaks and after school, and several social events, as well as formal and informal interviews, and collection of teaching materials.

The data collection generated hundreds of fieldnote entries, 353 hours of observations, more than 20 hours of formal, semi-structured interviews, and countless hours of unrecorded informal interviews and conversations, as well as photos, files, and related documents. As Yin (2012) notes, "case study research is not limited to single source of data, as in the use of questionnaires for carrying out a survey. In fact, good case studies benefit from having multiple sources of evidence" (p.10). Thus, the variety of sources in this study encompass:

1. Direct observations (e.g., classroom behaviors, actions and emotional states in a physical environment, and real-world events)
2. Participant observations (e.g., being identified as a researcher or language educator but also filling a real-life role in the scene being studied)
3. Interviews (e.g., formal and informal conversations with key participants, volunteer students, and related persons in the scene)
4. Archival records (e.g., student records, assignment or project performance, and the results of AP Chinese Exams)
5. Physical artifacts (e.g., teaching materials, photos of classroom settings and decorations, information on their professional websites, information and handouts from workshops and training sessions (teacher attended and collected), syllabi, and curricula)
6. Documents (e.g., newspaper articles, e-mails, training information, school online newsletters/announcements, relevant educational policies and standards)

Our analysis proceeded inductively. We generated emergent themes by comparing and contrasting the teachers' responses or performances in similar circumstances. In order to group these codes into broader themes, we revisited the theoretical framework while looking for relationships within the codes and ways to categorize them logically. In addition, based on the chronological sequence of events and how they were associated, we further explored the connections and hierarchical relationships among each category. Based on the categories explored, we created several themes to cover the broader context and capture the patterns and relations amongst categories.

4. Biographical Portraits of the Focal CFL Teachers

The two focal teachers, Maria Lee and Lan-Chen Tsai (pseudonyms), had quite different backgrounds and experiences before they began teaching high school CFL (see TABLE 1). Without prior Chinese teaching training in the beginning, they gradually developed their teaching models through the accumulation of years of teaching and personal experience. In the following narrative, we privilege the teachers' own voices and perspectives, revealing self-efficacy and pedagogical beliefs through their practices, their own accounts, behaviors, reflections, encounters with existing conditions, and self-recognition within the social institutions of education.

Table 1.

Focal CFL teachers' backgrounds

Focal Teachers	Age	Origin	Yrs in US	L1	Main language spoken	College Education	Major	Years CFL teaching	Class schedule	Program types
Maria Lee	Early 40s	China	>10	Chinese (Mandarin)	English	China	TESOL	4	A/B Block	Confucius Classroom AP & IB
Lan-Chen Tsai	50s	Taiwan	>25	Chinese (Mandarin/Taiwanese)	Chinese	US	Computer	5	Daily	Regular & AP

4.1. Lee Laoshi

We met Lee Laoshi⁴ in the fall of 2010. She was in her late 30s, with abundant curly hair and metal frame glasses. Since marrying her American husband, she has used her English name. Most people did not know her Chinese name and even thought Lee was her first name, while her students always called her "Lee Laoshi" or "Ms. Lee." She identified herself as from "China" or "Hong Kong." She was born and educated in a city in southern China and spoke Mandarin Chinese and a Nanjing dialect as her native languages, but she was proud of her career history in Hong Kong, where she met her husband and the working environment and average salary were exactly what she desired. She dreamed of working in Hong Kong again, but whenever she was asked when she planned to return, she always said⁵: "How could it be possible? My kid is still young, and my husband would never allow me to work in Hong Kong."

Prior to teaching Chinese, Lee Laoshi used to teach ESL and Special Education classes, and additionally she has a teaching certificate in math. Her principal believed Lee Laoshi was the best CFL teacher in the city because of her extensive experience in Special Ed and ESL classes, and had also taught Chinese in middle school. Lee Laoshi thought her previous teaching experience helped her be more adaptable to differences in class composition and to collect a variety of teaching strategies and activities which she used to get her students to practice the same concept in various ways. She expected her students to treat Chinese learning as a life-long interest that they would continue to pursue even after obtaining essential credits for foreign language learning or graduating high school.

In class, Lee Laoshi aimed to keep things fun. She applied key concepts through constant practice, which was the focus of her instruction, especially for the first two levels. Through her experience, she had

⁴ *Laoshi* means "teacher," and is the way the focal participants were addressed by students.

⁵ All participants' quote translated from Chinese except where noted.

also developed her approach to teaching L2 Chinese literacy. For writing, although she would introduce stroke orders of characters, she preferred students to practice character recognition by typing rather than actual writing. Radicals and Pinyin⁶ played major roles in the preliminary phase of Chinese learning. She taught simplified characters, which she believed to be in keeping with the trend of globalization. As she claimed,

Lee: Now simplified characters are being taught everywhere. This has become a trend of in the contemporary era. I really cannot understand why some Taiwanese teachers are still teaching traditional characters.

The main language used in the class was English, not the target language. Even in a Level 3 class, Lee Laoshi still spoke over 60% of English. In her opinion, using English was a good approach for checking students' comprehension of texts. Initially, she did not encourage students to read texts in Chinese, though she later changed her approach after taking a language acquisition class in an online master's program in foreign language teaching.

Lee Laoshi was proud of her strong classroom management especially in her first few years when most of her students were from good socioeconomic backgrounds and had strong desire to learn Chinese. However, one semester during our fieldwork she had several new students with attitude problems. They often refused to participate in class and rested their heads on the desks until the class ended. Suddenly Lee Laoshi found that she could not maintain her usual style of class management. These Level 1 students were unengaged in learning the language even though they attended the class regularly. This contributed to Lee Laoshi thinking switching to teaching math instead of Chinese, even though she had begun an online master's program. Although her goal was to teach Chinese at the college level, she frequently talked about how her husband encouraged her to become a math teacher instead.

The problem, she reasoned, was that Chinese is not a core course in high school. Students always had a number of excuses to avoid the class or for incomplete assignments and quizzes. At the college level, Lee Laoshi believed that adult learners would be more willing to dedicate themselves to the study of a target language they had freely chosen with an informed understanding of their decision. Therefore, she started doing some online research to find out how many community colleges provided Chinese language programs in the city. Teaching became another chance for her to practice what she learned in the graduate program. Without caring too much about students' incomplete work or upsetting behaviors, Lee Laoshi switched her focus to making connections between the theories she was learning through graduate study and her current practice as well as deliberating about what she needed to do next.

4.2. Tsai Laoshi

Now in her 50s, Tsai Laoshi emigrated with her elder sister from Taiwan right after she graduated from high school. She completed her college education in the US, majoring in computer science. Today, all of her family lives in the US. Her husband, who she met at a computer company she used to work for, is also from Taiwan. In addition to English, she speaks both Chinese and Taiwanese, which are the languages she felt most comfortable speaking and the main languages used in her family even though she has had been in the US for more than 20 years. Prior to becoming a high school teacher, Tsai Laoshi worked for an international computer company for several years. In order to encourage her own children to learn Chinese, she started to teach Chinese in a heritage school on the weekends. After a few years, she

⁶ Radicals are the roots of Chinese ideographs. Pinyin is phonetic representation of Chinese using Roman characters. PRC uses simplified characters, whereas in Taiwan they still use traditional characters, and Hong Kong uses both, meaning that teachers' choice of traditional versus simplified systems is not just pedagogical but a cultural and even political decision.

taught Chinese as a part-time job in a private high school. Then she found out that the state government had started to recruit Chinese teachers, so she took the certification test and became the first certified Chinese teacher in a public high school in the city.

Tsai Laoshi was very approachable for the students. Students could almost always find her during or after school in her room, and sometimes students even entered the classroom when other classes were still in session. She usually stayed in her classroom working or tutoring students until after 7:00pm. For Tsai Laoshi, the main focus of her job was how to deliver an effective lesson. She spent long hours searching for and collecting different materials and teaching methods. In her estimation, no student was good or bad; instead, teachers needed to make every effort to increase students' motivation and progress. As she stated,

Tsai: I feel so pleased when I see my students are willing to learn. Even if a student is unable to make the same progress as other students, I am still glad to help him or her learn.

Tsai Laoshi was always open to trying different techniques, activities, and materials to support her teaching while also collecting a variety cultural crafts and learning some folk traditional technics to increase students' exposure to the target culture. Even when she got home, she would often stay up late to search for information to bring into class. In addition, in the first two years of her Chinese teaching experience, she attended numerous national and overseas professional development conferences. In recent years, she preferred to attend workshops that catered to her specific purposes. Tsai Laoshi was aware that what she really needed was the information for applying technology to her instruction, various approaches for teaching culture, and different activity models that could connect with the concepts in the main content of the textbook. Up to this point, she had collected a number of online activities and exercises that helped students practice Chinese in their personal time or during winter and summer breaks.

Due to the growing number of students, and despite her years of experience, teaching has become more challenging for Tsai Laoshi. The six classes she was teaching included four different levels, with over 20 students in most of her classes, with different demands and learning styles. In addition, Tsai Laoshi insisted on teaching both simplified and traditional characters in each class. Though the use of simplified characters has been a major trend in Chinese study in the US, Tsai Laoshi liked to encourage students to learn traditional characters, which, for her, represented her Taiwanese identity and the roots of Chinese culture. Some of her students were inspired and did choose to learn traditional characters in her class, which really pleased her:

Tsai: I always encourage every student in each of the classes to learn traditional characters, and I teach both types of characters for each word every time. I feel this is a type of cultural inheritance. I feel so delighted even if there is only one student in a class who wants to learn traditional characters.

Therefore, she always needed to design two different versions of quizzes and materials for the students with different learning preferences. She needed to make sure an appropriate number of copies were available for simplified learners and traditional learners for each class, though this sometimes became a confusing addition to her heavy workload.

Class management had always been a serious concern for Tsai Laoshi since she began teaching in high school. She knew how to design and integrate different activities with her instruction, but once the students started to get excited, she had very little idea about how to calm them down. What she usually did was to raise her voice to increase students' attention while the situation got out of her control. Although Tsai Laoshi often felt tired when she stayed up late to design her lessons or seek new information, she was pleased when she achieved something or discovered new techniques. Nevertheless,

she felt so hopelessly exhausted when she was unable to control the students' behaviors. She felt irritated when students did not listen to her, and upset and disappointed when students missed her announcements due to class disorder.

The power balance with her students often challenged Tsai Laoshi's authority in her professional area and in the classroom, but she remained motivated and dedicated because she took exceptional joy when her students were able to accomplish something. For instance, some of her former students came back and told her that the college they attended was amazed by the proficiency they had achieved. Even though the textbook Tsai Laoshi used was designed for college students, she tried her best to teach students a complete volume at each level by skipping unrelated information and adding material related to their high school experience. One semester, Tsai Laoshi enrolled in an online master's program, and by chance became Lee Laoshi's classmate. She took the class because she felt a certain level of peer pressure as most of her colleagues held master's degrees or were working towards a doctorate. Tsai Laoshi's personal goal was focused purely on how to deliver a great language lesson and increase students' language acquisition. Her own kids had already grown and left home, and her husband had a stable job. Therefore, teaching had become the center of her life, and continual achievement in her teaching and with students had become a major personal expectation.

5. Teacher Efficacy in the Chinese Language Classroom

It should be evident that both focal teachers were highly invested in their teaching, but that their teaching environments contributed to a certain ambivalence of their perceptions, emotional states, and teaching strategies. The analysis revealed four major ecological factors associated with teachers' pedagogical beliefs and practice, including (1) school contexts, (2) educational policy, (3) foreign language program types, and (4) professional development opportunities. We will discuss how each in turn, center on the teachers' classroom practices. The data and analysis illustrate how the teachers' responses to the pressures exerted by each of these factors varied, but were consistent with their attempts to align their pedagogical practices and beliefs in a way they felt would make them most effective.

5.1. School Contexts and CFL Teachers' Pedagogical Beliefs

Where schools were located, attributes of the schools, and the demographic features of the student bodies were associated with the teachers' pedagogical approach, and reflected in their expectations for and attitudes towards their students. The characteristics of the surrounding neighborhoods weighed especially on the school's academic priorities and the types of CFL program they offered, which in turn directly influenced teachers' decisions about curriculum design and teaching strategies. This was particularly true for AP programs. One study noted that "the larger the school, the more likely it was to offer AP language classes" (Rhodes & Pufahl, 2010, p. 39), and that public high schools with greater numbers of high SES (socioeconomic status) students were more likely to offer AP classes than schools with more students of lower SES.

Moreover, apart from school policy arising from educational context, students' language and socio-cultural backgrounds have also been identified as a factor affecting how teachers structured their pedagogies and interacted with their students (Luk & Lin, 2007). Teachers' decisions about content and concepts to provide students were thus influenced by how they saw their students' family and language backgrounds. For instance, the teaching content and progress for heritage and non-heritage students were disparate as they had different language learning backgrounds and exposures. As a result, the school contexts emerged in our analysis as having the greatest direct impact on teachers' sense of efficacy and pedagogical beliefs, and can be seen as the overarching ecological factor that encompasses the others.

The focal teachers' schools were two large public high schools in the urban area of the city with records of great academic achievement, and were ranked amongst the top 25 in the state. The majority of the students in the two schools aimed to continue their academic pursuits in college after their high school education. The teachers reported that most of the students who enrolled in the CFL were English native speakers and from white-collar families with steady professional backgrounds, including teachers, doctors, or held managerial positions in certain international companies.

Confronting mostly students with English as their native language, Lee Laoshi centered her pedagogy on helping increase students' motivation in learning Chinese by highlighting the importance of the language in today's world, simplifying the learning process, tapping their native language learning experience, and having ample opportunities to practice the target language. On the first day of the class, for instance, Lee Laoshi would choose one or two clips in English from talk shows or political comedies about relations between China and the U.S. which illustrated the potential benefits of knowing Chinese. The video clips she showed us during the interview included one in which the host scoffed at the debt imbalance between China and the U.S., and another in which a number of Chinese language learners in the U.S. presented their writings and paintings to welcome China's president, Hu Jintao, to America. She was convinced of the impact of the videos and believed they showed the importance of China-U.S. relations (original in English):

Lee: You know, Hu-Jin-Tao, the Chinese president, came to United States to visit? [...] You know, Chinese know everything about us now. They loan a lot of money. They pretty much can buy us now. I don't wanna be... offending Americans, the students in the classroom. I don't want them to feel frightened [...] Also, I think this is related to Chinese language learners. China is such a big country, and Chinese is our target language that we are learning, right?

After, she underscored the point of the videos by enumerating jobs that required Chinese language ability, such as international business, journalism, and working as an intelligence agent.

Lee Laoshi was aware that for most of her monolingual students, this was their first foreign language learning experience, and first real encounter with a non-Western language and script. She used extensive visual aids and referred to students' knowledge of L1 to present Chinese characters and syntactic principles. For certain rules that do not exist in English, Lee Laoshi would invent techniques and mnemonics so students could relate to their personal experience. For instance, when she taught different Chinese tones, she drew on varied emotional states to utter the tones along with hand gestures, such as "falling tone, like a mad tone," with a hand falling sign. When she talked about the term "好好吃" (hǎo hǎo chī; *delicious*), she would follow by stating "Good-good-eat," reminding students of each character's meaning.

Lee Laoshi realized that many students were daunted by the complexity of Chinese and that overwhelming and frustrating them early on would decrease their motivation, so she was selective about what language aspects to practice with students. For example, students were not encouraged to learn how to write characters but instead to recognize them. Nor did students need to have accurate tone expression, but rather simply had to know how to pronounce the sound. She considered that keeping students interested in the language was more important than forcing them to correctly articulate each sound detail:

Lee: Because they are just high school students and they are not going to be linguists, it is not necessary to pronounce quite accurately. It would be fine if they just know how to use and apply them.

As in the case of Lee Laoshi, most of Tsai Laoshi's students were monolingual English speakers, about 80% of whom were White. Tsai Laoshi insisted on an approach that integrated the four basic language skills:

Tsai: I give them listening, speaking, reading, and writing practice. I print out a great number of exercises for them, and then they [students] have to go online and listen to the exercises. I have made questions and answers for every article in every chapter in the textbook. [...] They [the students], after all, are American kids. They have some difficulties speaking and listening, but they may not have problems with reading and word reorganization because I teach them a lot of characters. [...] Sometimes I teach them culture, and also incorporate some activities.

She also tried to finish a complete volume of the textbook each year, even though the book was designed for college-aged students and she often supplemented it with culturally-related activities. Tsai Laoshi believed her insistence on trying to cover so much material was vindicated when students came back and showed their gratitude for having been pushed so much. She recalled:

Tsai: Lots of my students continue to learn Chinese when entering to college. Some of them even come back to say “Thanks” to me because I insisted on completing the four volumes of the textbooks in four years, which equipped them with better capacity for Chinese than other peers in college, and even surprised their instructors there.

Unlike Lee Laoshi, Tsai Laoshi did not show her students how learning Chinese gave advantages for future career paths, and instead preferred motivate students by keeping activities lively and engaging. The school was located in an affluent area of the city, and her students’ fathers included the owner of a computer company and the director of a global technology firm. So, she seemed to think that the adolescents were informed enough that the relevance of Chinese in modern society was self-evident. Her focus was on her students’ achievement, both in terms of good grades and learning Chinese, and that served for her to prioritize her expectations for her classes.

On some days, Tsai Laoshi taught six different classes. Although she looked energetic and had a great level of interaction with students in class, she was completely burnt out after an entire day of instruction. Working on her computer, teaching or grading papers, Tsai Laoshi seldom left the classroom except to go to the restroom or buy lunch at the school cafeteria. During the week, she often slept only three or four hours a night. One morning we arrived to observe her, Tsai Laoshi was reviewing and preparing lessons for the day when her husband called to make sure she was all right and could handle the whole day at work. After the phone call, Tsai Laoshi explained:

Tsai: It’s happened to me quite often recently that I couldn’t fall asleep after staying up too late. It’s been several days that I haven’t really slept, and that’s why my husband called to express concern about whether I still could hang in here.

The teaching contexts of Lee and Tsai contrasted with two of the non-focal teachers, Liang Laoshi and Wu Laoshi, who taught in a district consistent where students are predominantly Latino and work-class, and which offered the largest number of foreign languages in the area, including Spanish, Latin, German, French, Japanese, ASL, and Chinese. These CFL programs had been established in 2007, and the teachers explained that most of the students and parents still did not recognize what Chinese language was, and some were even confused about the difference between Chinese and Japanese cultures and writing systems. In addition, the number of students that enrolled in the CFL program was still far fewer than in German, French, Japanese, and Sign Language. Therefore, the two teachers had to travel between two schools to complete their basic class load. Although their teaching styles were completely different, Wu Laoshi used a great number of video clips to assist him to cope with different levels of students and Liang Laoshi basically followed the content of the textbook and provided additional information occasionally, they believed the important work for them was to create a fun class as well as recruit and

retain a sufficient number of students to keep the CFL programs viable. Nevertheless, it was hard to maintain the quality of their instructions due to constant travel and mixing-level classes.

Another non-focal CFL teacher, Miller Laoshi, taught in the area with the largest Chinese population in the city. Her classes generally consisted of a majority of Chinese heritage students. There were only a few students without Chinese learning backgrounds in the Level 1 and Level 2 classes. This school also provided AP and IB programs for different subject areas. Miller Laoshi graduated from this high school, so she believed the students to be of a quality comparable to private school students in her experience. She confided in us that she felt that the purpose of Chinese heritage students enrolled in AP/IB Chinese programs was to target to their dream universities, as they could obtain easy “A” grades from a language they were familiar with. Therefore, she spent most of time creating a variety of worksheets for her Level 1 and 2 classes who did not have much Chinese learning background. She perceived that integration of different language skills was important to language instruction, but being a new instructor and the only CFL teacher in the school she still needed some time to figure out how to put this concept into practice as well as how to develop an approach that addressed the different needs of heritage and non-heritage students.

From the above analysis about how the two focal teachers confronted the various characteristics of their students and school contexts, teacher efficacy was revealed at two levels: (1) applying good strategies for motivating students and target language acquisition in the classroom, and (2) ability to manage a variety of classes and maintain students’ interest. To achieve positive teacher efficacy at the first level, teachers had to spend considerable time preparing their instruction to confront a range of classes and students; while to achieve efficacy in the latter, teachers had to take on greater responsibility for program success and maintain students’ learning interest.

5.2. Program Types and Pedagogical Beliefs

Another contextual factor under school settings associated with teacher efficacy was the type of program in which these CFL teachers worked and the goals teachers were expected to achieve in such settings. The programs involved in this study mainly included regular and AP/IB classes. However, different schools held different expectations and aims for the development of their CFL programs. Additionally, two schools were affiliated with the Confucius Classroom Network; however, such affiliation did not directly influence teachers’ pedagogies and interaction with students, but had more to do with financial support, as will be further discussed in the next section.

The most significant impact of program type on teacher efficacy was related to AP/IB classes. All the teachers in the study, even the teachers not teaching AP/IB classes, agreed that AP/IB was an important factor when designing their instruction. Some teachers even reacted strongly when responding to the interview question, “*How would your teaching be different if there were no AP/IB Chinese exam?*” One surprising finding was that teachers asserted that the instruction for regular classes was more interesting than AP/IB classes. Whereas they reported that the AP/IB instruction primarily centered on incessant exercises in specific areas and simulating practice of the variety of tests, regular classes could provide more fun and practical activities. To prepare AP/IB classes, the teachers had to collect additional materials specifically tailored to the exams, and special AP syllabi for the College Board’s approval (the IB program did not require approval). Although the teachers agreed that the students in AP/IB classes were more disciplined and invested in their learning, their attitudes towards AP/IB clearly fluctuated according to their experiences, and the added pressures in lesson planning and the unpredictable outcomes of students’ test results.

So, different types of courses influenced how teachers designed their pedagogies and the ways in which they interacted with students. Having taught Chinese both in middle school and high school for several years, Lee Laoshi had accumulated experience in teaching regular CFL classes, developed her own

style for motivating student learning, and established a great reputation in the area, both within the CFL community and within her district. She felt quite confident about her own instruction and capability of communicating with her students. However, when confronted with planning to teach an AP Chinese course for the first time, she seemed suddenly unsure of herself, and in terms of her self-efficacy beliefs, starting openly doubting if the non-heritage Chinese learners could really pass the test. She worried that, since academic achievement was one of the major concerns of the school and district, low pass rates for the AP test would reflect badly on her as a teacher.

Having attended AP and IB trainings for two consecutive years since teaching her first Pre-AP/IB class, Lee Laoshi had a general understanding about how the two exams proceeded, the major components they encompassed, and the chief content they expected students to acquire. Nevertheless, without prior actual experience teaching classes and seeing student outcomes on the AP exam, she was often second-guessing herself about whether her teaching approach and strategies were going to work. We noted that when she began teaching AP classes, her pedagogy shifted; she focused on practicing a variety of vocabulary by recognizing words and meanings, and devoted considerable time to test preparation. In her interactions with students, she ceased complimenting her AP students and instead sought reasons to fail them on the exam. She was very cognizant of the district office's attention to student performance, and the high achievement of Asian students on the AP Chinese exam in past few years. Lee Laoshi started to worry about the poor results her non-heritage students might attain, and deliberated over likely explanations she could offer the district office if the students did not perform well. So, one unexpected finding is that despite the prestige of AP/IB, the increased pressure actually lowered teachers' self-efficacy.

Facing a similar situation, Tsai Laoshi had to provide both regular and AP Chinese courses in her school as well. In a school with a great academic reputation and high index of college readiness, Tsai Laoshi indicated that gaining a high GPA was most students' goal to help their application to their dream colleges. Therefore, her teaching quality and students' performance were important for establishing the credibility of the program. Tsai Laoshi created certain routines for all class levels to guide students in acquiring Chinese language skills and to become accustomed to a different linguistic system. Additionally, she had to reflect on how to improve her instruction with appropriate practice and activities to make her class fun and help students maintain their interest in the target language. For AP classes, Tsai Laoshi would focus more on practice than activities, as students cared more about the test than having fun. Unlike Lee Laoshi's situation, Tsai Laoshi had had one year of AP teaching experience. In her first year of AP preparation, she had similar concerns regarding whether the complexity of the test was suited to learners with alphabetic language backgrounds who did not have sufficient exposure to the target language, and was always confused about whether the AP Chinese exam was designed only for Chinese heritage learners who had opportunities to practice with family members. Nonetheless, after one year of experience and positive information brought back by her former students, she felt more certain about how to prepare students to confront the AP Chinese exam and started to collect more related materials to increase students' chances for practice with target learning areas.

In order to give students clear information regarding application of vocabulary, phrases, and sentence structures, both focal teachers often employed a grammar-translation approach (Brown, 2007). They believed it was an effective method for teaching a large group of students which allowed them to cover information about language structure, ensure every student acquired the target knowledge, control learning progress toward the goal of each course, and incorporate AP test content for students to practice. The teachers usually modeled the designated patterns through handouts, transparencies, or PowerPoint slides, and then asked students to translate the given sentences by using the specific words, phrases, or sentence structures orally or in writing.

Besides grammar, Tsai Laoshi felt that vocabulary and speaking played important roles in students' language acquisition. The more words students learned, the better their reading achievement. The students in the Pre-AP and AP Levels especially required a great amount of vocabulary to facilitate their comprehension of each exam text. In addition, Tsai Laoshi always set aside class time for students to practice their reading and speaking. According to the feedback from her former students who had taken the AP Chinese exam, the speaking section scared them the most, since in-class exercises were their only opportunity to practice. In order to prepare students for confronting the future exam, Tsai Laoshi believed she had to provide students more chances to read and speak.

Moreover, all of the teachers claimed that culture should be integrated with the content in the textbook. Even Lee Laoshi, who found it difficult to complete the textbook in the allotted time, would supplement her lessons with cultural information when she felt it could facilitate students' understanding about the meanings behind the words, phrases, and book content. For instance, she frequently explained the evolution of stories behind characters and used actual examples to illuminate the texts from the book. She would not, however, spend additional time conducting other culturally related activities, except for one field trip every year. When students in one Level 2 class felt envious about the cultural activities being conducted by the next-door Spanish class, Lee Laoshi told the class (in English), "You are here to learn, not to play around. Don't expect me to play any silly games with you in class. I will give you the best that you have to know, and prepare you to confront AP or IB exam in the future." Her statement seemed to reflect the washback of standardized tests on teacher efficacy. Test results had become the over-riding goal for students and teachers, and actual cultural practices were largely ignored (hand-writing, too, was another casualty, since it was deemed less important than knowing how to type characters).

However, the other teachers claimed that particular cultural practice could maintain or increase students' interest in the target language, even when those activities did not directly connect with the current content they were learning. They incorporated different cultural events with the regular class when Chinese festivals came around. Except for the two new teachers, the teachers held field trips and cultural activities each semester. Tsai Laoshi also shared techniques for folk games and handicrafts with her students. She regularly played movies touching on particular cultural issues in class every semester to expand students' perceptions about different aspects of Chinese culture, such as the educational system, parents' perspectives, traditional marriage customs, and so on. Tsai Laoshi explained why she held a variety of cultural activities for her students:

Tsai: Because Americans have different training styles from ours. Their training is to show their kids to see everything directly, and then they can be educated and learned directly. For example, they take their kids to Yellowstone Park to be educated directly Do you know what I meant? To let them directly see, learn and be educated.

Clearly, although teachers saw the value of cultural elements in their classes, they were unsure whether lessons that examined Chinese cultural practices actually contributed to better comprehension of the target culture, or simply squandered time that could have been used furthering the primary goal of preparing for the major measure of achievement, the standardized test. Since the teachers saw the AP Chinese exam as a measure predominantly of students' linguistic knowledge rather than cultural knowledge, the washback effect (how an assessment impacts teaching) was to question the value of spending class time learning about culture. This was unfortunate, since the teachers did feel that infusing cultural content into their lessons made students more interested and engaged with the course. The teachers' dilemma also reflects a polemic with L2 assessment about if and how to incorporate cultural elements into tests. Especially given that, according to ACTFL's Five Cs guidelines, "culture" is one of the core standards in foreign language teaching (ACTFL, 1996), the dilemma also causes us to reflect on how

we can reorient teachers', students', and administrators' notion of "achievement" in foreign language education to encompass a broader spectrum of benefits of L2 study besides just linguistic knowledge.

5.3. The Impact of Funding and Enrollments on Efficacy

In addition to being affected by various factors within the school environment, the CFL teachers' practices and self-efficacy beliefs were also influenced by institutional factors, in particular financial support for the CFL program and teachers' class load. Adequate financial support for the CFL programs was a major contextual factor that the teachers repeatedly brought up in terms of choice of professional advancement, provision of learning materials, and additional pressure of enrollment promotion. Owing to declining education budgets, teachers were able to recoup less and less of their expenses for updating materials and attending professional meetings.

In contrast, the two programs (Lee's and Wu's) affiliated with Confucius Classroom Network received additional financial support from China, which allowed the teachers to purchase additional equipment, books, and supplementary materials. It also financed extra opportunities for professional development, which made the teachers confident and emotionally satisfied, especially compared with other CFL teachers. Miller Laoshi, who had worked with Lee, had seen how Lee Laoshi was able to use the funds to add more materials to the classroom, and the positive reaction of Lee's school and district office. The teachers who were able to secure more financial support from outside sources, such as the Confucius Classroom Network, were seen as more "successful" by their administrators, which likely contributed to their sense of self-efficacy.

The widespread addition of the option of Chinese as a foreign language in U.S. high schools not only reflects its growing status as a global language, but also shows that increasing numbers of students are interested in learning it. However, in this study, different schools had different growth rates of CFL enrollment, not all of which satisfied their administrative departments. As the basic class load for a full-time foreign language teacher in public high school was six classes, the prerequisite for a CFL teacher to work at a single school was to have enough students enrolling in the CFL program to fill the basic class load, or be able to teach other subjects. Otherwise, they had to travel between schools to sustain their status as full-time teachers. Additionally, educational cuts had caused a great impact on school support for teachers' professional advancement and students' learning quality. The number of students enrolled in CFL programs was crucial to deciding the value of the programs. For the two focal teachers, classes filled with 20 to 25 students was typical. Sufficient enrollments not only indicated the number of classes that the school was able to fill for the teachers, but also weighed on the district's decision to keep the programs. Several non-focal teachers in the study had to split their teaching loads between schools, and continuously worried about the viability of their programs due to declining enrollments; unfortunately, working at a campus part-time also made it more difficult for them to recruit and build up the CFL program, which compounded the problem.

5.4. Professional Development and Pedagogical Beliefs

Educational budgets and time constraints concerned the teachers a lot, particularly because they directly impacted their opportunities to attend professional development (PD) activities. The two focal teachers preferred to attend workshops that could directly benefit their instruction, rather than national conferences which they felt were not focused on their interests. During the study, they both enrolled in an on-line master's program. Lee Laoshi reported that her main PD interests, besides attending AP or IB workshops, were to acquire more skills in using technology in her class and more specific teaching techniques, whereas Tsai Laoshi also wanted to learn to better use technology, as well as approaches for incorporating cultural elements in her classes.

Although both focal teachers were experienced, they were both open to making changes in their teaching practice based on new information from PD activities. For instance, for several years prior to the study Lee Laoshi was in the practice of ignoring the process of reading textbook content aloud in class, believing it would take too much class time. However, after a class in her online master's program emphasized the importance of reading practice to second language acquisition, she started to ask students to read texts from the book in class. In addition, she was proud of her collection of online activities she had compiled from various workshops which she selected for students as follow-up activities on specific grammar or thematic topics.

Previously, Tsai Laoshi had taught students the entire Pinyin pronunciation system (based on the Roman alphabet) prior to teaching other skills. However, after attending a workshop which modelled L2 teaching strategies, she modified her approach by letting students listen to basic conversations and encouraging them to speak from the beginning in order to get a feel for what the language sounds like. She showed students the Pinyin combination for each word when reading, but she would not ask them to specifically memorize the sound of each symbol until after they had had two to three weeks of speaking practice. She found that students could easily articulate the sound of the Pinyin alphabet after consistent speaking exercise. Additionally, students felt more comfortable speaking Chinese when she encouraged them to speak in class, out of class, and whenever they met her on campus.

Without specific foreign language pedagogical training prior to beginning their CFL careers, the teachers taught primarily based on experience, which may explain why they were somewhat insecure when faced with new challenges, such as teaching a new AP class:

Tsai: I have taught Level 1 and Level 2 for quite a few years, so I have accumulated plenty of teaching materials and experience. Usually I just need to spend some time reviewing the materials, and then I will have a clear idea about how I will proceed later. Nevertheless, I have only taught Pre-AP and AP for two years. I may have a general understanding about what the AP Chinese exam looks like, but I feel that I still need to reconsider what style of instruction will be better for my students. So, actually it took me a lot of time to think about how to deliver the lesson and prepare appropriate materials for them.

The attitudes of the non-focal teachers towards professional training varied, and were largely influenced by personal cost – two teachers only attended workshops that the schools paid for – and their workload. Deng Laoshi, for example, had paid the registration for a regional foreign language teaching conference that she was looking forward to, but in the end had missed it because of her heavy workload. Over the summer, however, she had been able to participate in a two-week course which combined teaching, using technology to design activities and materials, and a classroom research project. Our field notes capture the teacher's reaction and the potential positive effect of professional development on self-efficacy:

Deng Laoshi was waiting outside of Building 700, jumping and waving her hand when she saw me walking through the hallway. She looked extremely happy, much happier than usual. I couldn't believe the teacher who always looked graceful and steady suddenly looked like a happy kid who found an amazing gift on the Christmas morning. She grabbed my hand and started to tell me how many things she acquired during the workshop that she wanted to share with me. She walked so fast. She was eager to show me the result of her summer project and how much she enjoyed the training. She said she never knew that there were so many online resources that she could apply in her instruction. She kept smiling and telling me how many new techniques she had learned during that ten-day workshop. She rattled off a lot of terms related to techniques and websites that I had never heard of, but I didn't stop her; I just let her continue sharing her joy about how many online

activities and assignment she had designed. She used to fear using the computer to create teaching materials, and now she had a bunch of ideas to share with me.

While we would have expected PD to positively affect in-service teachers' self-efficacy, it was clear that it had an even greater impact than we had anticipated. The impact was greatest when the PD activity addressed the teachers' specific concerns. However, the other factors we have discussed previously, in particular the pressures of workload and the resulting lack of time, and the limited financial resources, limited the ability of teachers to access PD opportunities. In fact, most of the teachers in the study sought out and paid for workshop and conferences on their own, further attesting to the perceived value of professional development.

6. Conclusion

The accounts of these Chinese teachers reveal the complexity of foreign language teachers' self-efficacy. The case studies of Lee Laoshi and Tsai Laoshi demonstrate that the belief in one's ability to do a good job, to be able to get your students' to learn a language, and to be interested in their learning, is influenced by a myriad of factors. Amongst the main elements of CFL teachers' efficacy beliefs that our analysis identified were aspects of the school context and student population, constructs such as student "achievement" and pressures of AP/IB tests, financial support and workload, and access to professional development opportunities. Furthermore, teachers' personal experiences took on an important role in their perceptions about what language skills and types of cultural practice should be covered in their instruction. As other researchers have documented, language teachers highly rely on prior experience and individual endeavor rather than working with other professionals due to time constraints (Byrd, Hlas, Watzke, & Valencia, 2011). Without any existing models for them to refer to, their own learning experiences became *a priori* evidence to determine their own teaching approaches (Pajares, 1992). The confidence level of executing specific tasks is varied because individual backgrounds and knowledge interplay with their perceptions of self-efficacy and self-worth.

In addition, factors resulting from the macro environment inevitably affected the teachers' decisions about their teaching approaches and instructional strategies. As the data demonstrated, the wider school and social contexts play a central role in influencing teachers' reactions, experiences, and behaviors (Bandura, 1997). In this study, we saw how the teachers' adoption of grammar-translation type methods, their struggle to incorporate cultural components into the curriculum, and the tensions around preparing AP classes for non-heritage learners all were framed by "external" concerns about funding, enrollments, and pressures for student achievement and test scores. It would seem that these external information is alien to teachers' knowledge systems and has influenced their beliefs greatly when making decisions or doing teaching practices (Phipps & Borg, 2009). We attribute part of the teachers' insecurity, reflecting an undermining of their belief of their own self-efficacy, to the fact that they worked long hours, often in isolation with relatively little interaction with other foreign language educators. Professional development activities seemed to be one opportunity for them to interact with their peers and become rejuvenated about their work.

Maintaining students' interest and dealing with their reactions towards different teaching strategies became another variable for teachers in determining their teaching approaches. Students' motivation served as one main factor mediating teachers' performance and beliefs (Rahimi & Nabilou, 2011). The development of teacher efficacy is intertwined with student achievement (Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 2001). Students' reactions and learning motivations guided teachers to evaluate their practice within efficacy parameters and decide how to adjust their instruction to raise students' interest, such as simplifying their learning routine and incorporating more visuals to facilitate understanding.

The focal teachers in this study are presented as thoughtful professionals who, like most high school foreign language teachers, worry about how to do a good job. The study illustrates how, even for highly invested and competent CFL teachers like Lee Laoshi and Tsai Laoshi, a teacher's self-efficacy does not only on the ability to deliver an effective lesson. Rather, an ecological approach to examining the effectiveness of classroom teachers needs to account all the contextual factors that come into play.

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