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Instructional English as a Second Language Practices for Oral Proficiency Development in Chinese English as a Second Language Classrooms

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Walden University

College of Education

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Wallace C. Norwood

has been found to be complete and satisfactory in all respects,
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February 2023

Abstract

Instructional English as a Second Language Practices for Oral Proficiency Development

in Chinese English as a Second Language Classrooms

by

Wallace C. Norwood

MSW, Washington University, 1998

BSW, University of Mississippi, 1996

Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Education

Walden University

February 2023

Abstract

Foreign language instructors inconsistently implement instructional practices to support Chinese high school students' learning of oral English as a second language (ESL). The purpose of this basic qualitative study was to explore the perceptions of foreign language teachers working in the Hangzhou region of China, regarding their use of instructional strategies to support Chinese high school students' learning of oral English language. Sato and McNamara's general-purpose second-language oral competency theory, which suggests that instructional practices can be evaluated in terms of formal and interaction components, served as the basis for the conceptual framework to examine foreign teachers' perspectives regarding instructional practices related to lesson plans, classroom management, and extrinsic pressures created by tests and assessments. Research questions were designed to obtain foreign language teachers' perceptions concerning implementation of instructional practices. Data were obtained from interviews with eight purposively sampled foreign ESL instructors teaching at a public school and learning center. Inductive, deductive, and NVivo coding were used to analyze data. Themes included preparation methods for ESL instruction, classroom management strategies for courses and individual learners, and ways institutional-related educators prepare students for external demands for success. Instructors perceive that their classroom management methods are strong; however, practices to improve student engagement and anticipation of classroom challenges could enhance outcomes. This study could affect positive social change through creation of best practices to improve ESL education in public schools and learning centers in China as well as promote proactive foreign ESL teacher strategies for classroom management.

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Dedication

I dedicate my dissertation work to my past and current colleagues and lifelong friends. A special feeling of gratitude to my dearly departed parents, Wallace and Mary Norwood Sr., whose words of encouragement and push for high aspiration still ring in my ears. My trusted confidante Angela, son Cameron, and daughters Dorian and Empress have always been a constant presence.

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Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

The growing interest in English as a second language (ESL) education in China is due in part to changing demographic realities of the larger global economy (Liu et al., 2017). This has put pressure on the school systems to improve the quality of ESL programs. The ESL learning market is a growing segment in China among the new generation of parents who provide their children with foreign language learning opportunities (Liu et al., 2017). Hu (2017) reported that 20 of Beijing's top high school students were tutored in English outside of school. Additionally, without additional English tutoring, many secondary school students in China may not achieve a satisfactory level of English-speaking skills, which is vital for their future academic success (F. Hu, 2017). Differences in receiving instruction from native English speakers as compared to Chinese teachers may influence students' oral English proficiency. For many Chinese students, a lack of oral English proficiency has emerged as the key challenge for adaptation to Western learning environments (S. Wang, 2019). Because most English lessons are taught by Chinese teachers in their native tongue (Liu et al., 2017; Ming & Wang, 2017), schools are committed to increasing the number of native English-speaking educators, resulting in an increase of foreign teachers in China (Liu et al., 2017; S. Wang, 2019).

In this study, I examined foreign ESL teaching practices in Hangzhou region Chinese schools, instruction methods and materials, and teacher education. The study is significant as the findings could lead to positive social change in local settings. Students could benefit from increased confidence in their language abilities to participate in

international business, attend Western universities, and communicate with those from other countries. Foreign ESL teachers could also benefit from this study as they may better understand their instructional approaches to learning oral English. Lastly, the local high school and private learning center where this study took place could also benefit, due to improvements in ESL teacher training, pedagogies, and curricula that could be more advantageous to ESL students, which ultimately may help Chinese students interested in postsecondary education abroad.

In this chapter, I will present a background for this research, the problem addressed, and the purpose of the study. I also list the main research question (RQ) and subresearch questions (sub-RQs) and outline the conceptual framework that guided this study. Next, I discuss the nature of the research, provide definitions of terms, list assumptions, and outline the scope and delimitations. Finally, I note any limitations and the study's significance,

Background

The goal of foreign language instruction is to help the learner master the selected language and achieve successful communication in the shortest time possible (S. Wang, 2019). To reach that goal, foreign language teachers and applied linguists try to find the most efficient and effective ways of teaching a foreign language. Various instructional strategies are used in Chinese ESL classrooms, including vocabulary development, grammatical instruction, content-based instruction, task-based exercises, and storytelling. However, there is limited data on how these are applied; the focus has been on documenting the instructional strategies, not on exploring how these are practiced in real-

world considerations, such as lesson plans, classroom management, and extrinsic pressures created by tests and assessments (S. Wang, 2019).

A gap in practice exists regarding foreign ESL teachers in China inconsistently implementing instructional practices to advance oral English language proficiency. There is an increasingly high stakes testing system that has supported ESL communication skills but has not placed emphasis on oral speaking comprehension during the secondary education process. According to the local director of a leading learning center (personal communication, August 2021), over the past 2 decades, the English College Entrance Examine (Gao Kao) has only focused on discrete grammar points, vocabulary tests, Chinese to English translations, and 120-150-word compositions. According to this onsite learning center improvement plan regarding linguistic processes and outcomes, professional development was scheduled to be incorporated into foreign teachers' schedules. These improvement plans are based on after-class feedback, upgrade tests, and combined oral and written exams.

The Chinese government's efforts to restructure its economy and sustain its economic foundation and future growth have supported teachers' skills and development. Because of additional private resources, learning centers can develop programs that support in-service training for teachers and, in turn, boost student test performance. The rapid rise of the organization, New Oriental Education and Technology Group, which uses an after-school model that fosters teaching various types of English speaking and literacy skills to K-12 students, represents a specific case in point. The model that the New Oriental organization employs provides services across 1,472 learning centers

located throughout China. The organization appeals to a diverse range of students and families, offering innovative types of English language instruction at lower prices than typical tutoring programs in the country (Seeking Alpha, 2021).

This study could be advantageous for both foreign ESL teachers and Chinese students to widen perspectives and gain insight regarding influences that affect students' English-speaking ability. Bilingualism has increasingly gained recognition, and the findings of this study argue for the development of a pedagogical framework and professional development to support foreign teachers with ESL Chinese classroom instruction. Based on my communication with the public high school district representative (August 21), rather than assuming foreign teachers are intuitively capable of delivering multimodal classroom instruction, it would better serve an organization to conduct ongoing professional development for the purpose of teacher modeling. These models would specifically address the limitations notable among public high schools, even following the Ministry of Education of the People's Republic of China's (2018) establishment of the national English curriculum standard for regular high schools, which created a model to address discrepancies in English educational plan quality among regular and key public schools. Introducing bilingual models would help students adversely impacted by these gaps gradually achieve and incrementally improve their English knowledge and speaking competency.

Namaziandos et al. (2019) stated teachers should carefully identify and define the specific strategies and student ESL skills that need to be developed. Next, instructors must attain the insight and skills necessary to teach oral English. Although foreign ESL

instructors are encouraged to teach autonomous learning, many still use traditional methods. According to Lee (2017), teachers find it difficult to change how they teach and instead, continue to offer instruction in traditional ways. As such, many ESL educators only have a limited understanding of how to use a learner-centered approach when teaching speaking skills.

Historically, in China, speaking and listening have not been given the same degree of importance in second language acquisition as writing and reading. Many high school Chinese students have less than adequate English-speaking skills and are passive in their response to listening. However, researchers have shown that oral skills increasingly impact how a student learns listening, reading, and writing skills (Nugroho et al., 2020). Current research has specifically explored aspects of Chinese students' English language learning regarding instructional classroom curriculum approaches and theoretical teaching perspectives (B. Wang et al., 2017) and teacher roles and standardized performance assessments (He & Chen, 2017; Ming & Wang, 2017). However, the literature does not fully explore or detail how ESL teachers in China implement instructional practices. Therefore, it is not yet understood how instructional methods for improving the oral English language proficiency of Chinese ESL students are implemented in Chinese English as a foreign language (EFL) classrooms.

The purpose of this study was to explore the perceptions of foreign language teachers in China, specifically regarding their implementation of instructional strategies to support Chinese high school students' learning of oral English language. The qualitative methodology helped address the problem and the gap in the literature

regarding the practice of how foreign ESL teachers in China approach instruction to facilitate students' English oral proficiency acquisition. This study provided information EFL teachers could utilize to address the documented problem of low levels of oral proficiency among Chinese ESL students (see He & Chen, 2017; Ming & Wang, 2017).

Problem Statement

The problem addressed in this study is that foreign language instructors inconsistently implement instructional practices to support Chinese high school students' learning of oral English language. The research problem is related to the practical problem, which is the low level of oral proficiency among Chinese ESL students (see He & Chen, 2017; Ming & Wang, 2017). A gap in practice exists at the local level where foreign ESL teachers in China are inconsistently implementing instructional practices used to advance oral English language learning in China. In practical terms related to lesson plans, classroom management, individual teachers' strengths and weaknesses, and extrinsic pressures created by tests and assessments, ESL teachers in China implement different instructional practices to develop oral proficiency among Chinese ESL students.

Historical and current documentation shows that (a) the number of qualified foreign ESL teachers is insufficient, and (b) Chinese ESL students tend to lack oral proficiency. Oral proficiency deficiencies among Chinese ESL students suggest that more attention should be paid to identifying best practices and obstacles related to instructional practices in real-world Chinese ESL settings (B. Wang et al., 2017). Addressing these outcomes would enable Chinese high school students to demonstrate the traditional markers of competency that determine a speaker's contextual performance. Specifically,

achieving these outcomes would ensure that these learners perform in ways that identify what is contextually possible for a specific utterance and do so in ways that exhibit knowledge and skill (see Whyte, 2019). Appropriate assessments could then determine that an ESL learner exhibits the skills that align with specific evaluation criteria.

Current Trends in English as a Second Language Instructional Practice

Current literature has provided insight with studies of specific teachers by observing and analyzing the application of instructional practices in their language classes, the theoretical interpretation of ESL teacher's professional development, and the various roles and functions of English teachers (Ming & Wang, 2017; B. Wang et al., 2017). There have also been empirical studies of ESL students' oral performance in school-based assessments (He & Chen, 2017) and intercultural competencies in Chinese language programs (Gan et al., 2017; L. Zhang, 2017). For example, Chang (2018) developed a study regarding instructor learning approaches for ESL in Taiwan. A significant finding of this study was that peer coaching, led by teachers in tandem with collegial collaboration, helped enhance the implementation of evidence-based strategies for ESL teaching and build better teaching communities (Chang, 2018). Hence, applying Chang's research could promote positive social change for teachers and their students, at least in Taiwan.

Similarly, Sato and McNamara (2019) contended that the introduction of laypersons into language assessment processes could improve the quality of feedback English language learners receive. While laypersons are often untutored in evaluating speaker performance according to specific academic standards, they nevertheless provide

important insight related to idiomatic trends associated with specific discourse communities. These perspectives often help guide learner competencies away from structured models and toward understanding how the expectations for linguistic performance transform among various social and professional groups. These concepts, if applied, might represent a solution that addresses the tendency for Chinese public high school students to develop formulaic approaches to language learning and performance, particularly among learners who study using regular academic programs (S. Wang, 2019).

The Problem in Context of Related Research

The limited literature has addressed the role of foreign ESL teachers and the instructional practices used to advance oral English language learning in China (Ming & Wang, 2017). However, previous findings have indicated that the oral proficiency of Chinese ESL students is low (He & Chen, 2017; Ming & Wang, 2017). The research problem is related to previous findings inferring a lack of knowledge related to best practices as well as obstacles to the utilization of instructional practices in real-world Chinese ESL settings, which could be factors in the failure to impart sufficient levels of oral proficiency to Chinese ESL students. These findings indicate the need to standardize foreign teachers' approaches and strategies when helping Chinese public school students obtain culturally specific forms of spoken English and knowledge competency. Emerging forms of practice could include training models that help foreign ESL instructors understand testing standards and expectations for these learners. Applying this concept

would require a contextualized definition of performance that emphasizes the dimensions that align with specific testing outcomes (Whyte, 2019).

The Meaningful Gap in Practice Supported by Current Research

Many language teachers have found that pragmatic competence is essential for intercultural communication, but this research has not often been put into practice in the ESL field (L. Zhang, 2017). Some studies have found that pragmatic teaching can also help teachers, increase motivation, facilitate communication, enhance awareness of cultural differences, and instill confidence (Tsai, 2017). The gap between what students need and what teachers have available regarding pragmatic teaching methods needs to be closed (L. Zhang, 2017). Examining how ESL teachers in China apply instructional strategies through lesson plans, classroom management, and handling extrinsic pressures created by tests and assessments could provide important information on how these instructors could implement best practices and overcome obstacles related to imparting oral proficiency to Chinese ESL students. Exploring these areas from the perspective of both public school educators and the foreign teachers employed by the New Oriental Education and Technology Group or similar programs could also provide data regarding how each population would interpret these concerns (Seeking Alpha, 2021).

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this basic qualitative study was to explore the perceptions of foreign language teachers working in the Hangzhou region of China regarding their implementation of instructional strategies to support Chinese high school students' learning of oral English language. The study examined the problem by identifying how

foreign teachers currently support students' learning of oral English, whereby academic leaders may better understand how to support teachers serving ESL students. Although instructors are initially trained in teaching English to speakers of other languages courses, which are the basics of learning oral English, there is a need for professional development so they can acquire the skills and knowledge necessary to implement oral English teaching principles in a Chinese classroom context.

Sato and McNamara's (2019) general-purpose second-language oral competency theory can be used to explore and better understand the findings related to ESL program evaluation and assessment. Although the theory provides essential insight concerning the value of generally oriented language assessment strategies, its contextualized application can be used to assess its viability in understanding the issues impacting Chinese high school students and teachers. My study's value was also derived from its relative novelty. Currently, no studies have combined interviews and a researcher journal as means of data collection to provide in-depth information regarding the perceptions of foreign language teachers in China concerning their implementation of instructional strategies to support high school students learning of oral English language.

Because little is known about the perceptions of foreign ESL teachers in China regarding how they implement instructional strategies, the phenomenon of interest was how foreign-language instructors use instructional practices to facilitate Chinese high school students' learning of the oral English language. The rationale associated with this current research is its role in generating findings that describe these phenomena. Using Sato and McNamara's (2019) general-purpose second-language oral competency theory

as the conceptual framework, this study explored three aspects of how foreign ESL teachers use the components of this theory in teaching Chinese students oral English: lesson plans, classroom management, and pressures created by tests and assessments. Teachers need more exposure to appropriate teaching approaches and pedagogical skills to help them better understand what is needed to get their students more engaged in oral English comprehension and production in the classroom and beyond (Leong & Ahmadi, 2017).

Research Questions

The RQ and sub-RQs contributed to the study's exploration of preferred ESL strategies among foreign teachers. The feedback generated by the interview-based format also allowed for a critical assessment of these practices. These outcomes could be used to identify the changes needed to improve Chinese high school students' English competencies.

RQ: What are the perceptions of foreign language teachers in China about the instructional ESL strategies they implement in daily instruction in Chinese ESL classrooms?

Sub-RQ1: What are the perceptions of foreign language teachers in China about how they implement instructional practices related to lesson plans to support high school ESL students' learning of oral English?

Sub-RQ2: What are the perceptions of foreign language teachers in China about how they implement instructional practices related to classroom management?

Sub-RQ3: What are the perceptions of foreign language teachers in China about how they implement instructional practices related to extrinsic pressures created by tests and assessments?

Conceptual Framework

Sato and McNamara's (2019) general-purpose second-language oral competency theory was chosen as the conceptual framework of this research to facilitate awareness regarding the nature of foreign ESL teacher oral English instruction. A primary goal of second language teaching and learning is communicative competence, which is most often measured using a performance test. The phenomenon of interest in this research study was foreign teachers' instructional practices in Chinese ESL classrooms.

The phenomenon of instructional practice was subdivided into three research-based subcategories. This design reflects the recommendations by J. J. Zhang (2017). With this study, I explored how foreign ESL teachers at a public high school and private learning center in China apply the ESL instructional process through the lens of Sato and McNamara's (2019) general-purpose second-language oral competency theory. I investigated foreign teachers' perspectives of the following aspects of the second language: (a) instructional practices related to lesson plans, (b) instructional practices related to classroom management, and (c) instructional practices related to extrinsic pressures created by tests and assessments.

Key Elements of the Framework

According to Sato and McNamara's (2019) general-purpose second-language oral competency theory, instructional practices related to oral proficiency can be considered

successful if they (a) impart formal knowledge of vocabulary and grammar; (b) assist ESL students in communicating, regardless of possible errors in vocabulary and grammar; (c) prepare ESL students for tests and assessments; and (d) engage ESL students. To this end, I explored the perceptions of foreign language teachers in China regarding their implementation of instructional strategies to support Chinese high school students' learning of oral English language. The framework facilitates the generation of insights that help teachers understand how learners at a specific age and grade level learn and process primary and secondary languages. These concepts then enable instructors to improve their teaching strategies as they design curricula, lesson plans, and course objectives that correspond with their students' language learning processes.

Relationship of the Framework to the Study and Research Questions

Sato and McNamara's (2019) theory suggests that instructional practices can be studied in terms of formal components, such as lesson plans and assessments, and interaction components, such as classroom management and leveraging teachers' strengths. Therefore, Sato and McNamara's theory provided the basis for each of the sub-RQs of this basic qualitative study. Each sub-RQ was designed to examine and explore the perceptions of foreign language teachers in China regarding the instructional ESL strategies they utilize in daily instruction in Chinese ESL classrooms.

In this section, I use Sato and McNamara's (2019) general purpose secondary language oral competency theory to describe, support, and elaborate on the general components of McNamara's (2018) theory, which is another theory used to maximize student growth and classroom success. I used Sato and McNamara's theory to map the

classroom environment for teachers involved in facilitating English language instruction. I will address lesson plans, extrinsic pressures created by tests and assessments, and classroom management regarding second language acquisition.

While contemporary secondary language oral competency theories are a critique of Sato and McNamara's (2019) approach that details ESL learner knowledge and performance, concepts of this type emphasize a need for foundational learning that can help speakers achieve contextualized forms of grammatical mastery (Whyte, 2019). Accordingly, this theory identifies instruction in the areas of formalized grammatical rules, usage conventions, and other markers as significant aspects of language instruction (Whyte, 2019). Optimal assessment models thus assist in examination of a speaker's awareness of these concepts as an essential aspect of analysis. This applies to lesson plans and, more specifically, to the vocabulary and grammar acquisition segments of Sato and McNamara's theory.

English as a Second Language Learner Encouragement and Motivation

The gap in practice exists because of the absence of documentation and exploration of foreign ESL teachers consistently implementing instructional practices. In practical terms related to lesson plans, classroom management, and extrinsic pressures created by tests and assessments, ESL teachers in China implement different instructional practices for developing oral proficiency among Chinese ESL students. Concerning lesson plans and classroom management, there is a significant element associated with innovative ESL speaker performance assessment models that include teachers' ability to encourage students to utilize their current second language skills without paying strict

attention to grammatical mistakes. Contemporary models reference speaker performance as an aggregate of several categories; simultaneously, the models interpret this construct as a speaker's ability to utilize a secondary language in ways that signal their emerging competencies and skills (Whyte, 2019). A vital element of assessment model analysis refers to its ability to encourage each student's willingness to apply their acquired linguistic skills across varied testing scenarios. According to Sato and McNamara (2019), teachers should not overly interfere and correct students while expressing themselves in their new language.

Testing Skills Preparation and English as a Second Language Student Engagement

There is a prevailing assumption derived from contemporary assessment theory regarding instructional practices related to extrinsic pressures created by tests and assessments. This assumption includes the claim that an ESL learner's performance can ultimately be defined as their ability to communicate in ways that align with a scenario's context and associative expectations (Whyte, 2019). An application of this premise would be an ESL learner's ability to successfully complete a standardized language test.

Accordingly, optimal assessment models would require this feature.

Finally, ideal assessment models should engage ESL learners by helping them develop various forms of linguistic competency. A primary example includes pedagogical approaches to assist the student's awareness of foundational linguistic concepts while cultivating the ability to communicate in ways that appeal to a target audience. A model's ability to engage students would, in turn, improve their ability to perform according to specific assessment standards.

Logical Connections Among Key Elements of the Framework

Sato and McNamara (2019) posited that teaching oral proficiency to ESL students requires successfully coordinating several factors. First, oral proficiency requires imparting grammar, vocabulary, and rules through appropriate lesson plans measured by appropriate assessments. Second, oral proficiency requires interaction within a supportive classroom, where students are appropriately directed and engaged through classroom management, and teachers apply their pedagogical strengths. All these elements are necessary as precursors of oral proficiency development among ESL students, which motivated the development of the sub-RQs associated with the RQ in this study. A more detailed discussion, analysis, and explanation using Sato and McNamara's theory can be found in Chapter 2.

Nature of the Study

The phenomenon of interest in this study was the instructional practices of foreign ESL teachers. This study generated data that reflected the perspectives of instructors working in a public school and private language learning center in the Hangzhou region of China. The subphenomena were (a) instructional practices related to lesson plans, (b) instructional practices related to classroom management, and (c) instructional practices related to extrinsic pressures created by tests and assessments. A qualitative constructivist approach was chosen because the phenomena are subjectively experienced and constructed by teachers. In addition, the research settings constituted two distinct settings: a single high school and a private learning center.

A basic qualitative study is appropriate for exploring subjective experiences because it provides a means for individuals to describe their experiences (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). In this study, I relied on nonrandom sampling to create two groups. The aggregate population selected for the study consisted of eight foreign ESL instructors. Four participants taught in a Hangzhou regional high school, while the four other respondents worked in the region's learning center. Qualitative studies help identify patterns, leading to other research methods, including quantitative (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Therefore, I used qualitative methodology in this study because exploring how instructional practices are applied requires subjectivity, open interpretation, and induction, all of which are hallmarks of this type of research (see Creswell & Creswell, 2018). I relied on semistructured interviews to generate data reflective of the participants' perceptions of lesson plans, classroom management, and extrinsic pressures created by tests and assessments. This approach enabled me to identify and contrast the views expressed by the public school and learning center respondents. This comparative approach provided a descriptive assessment of foreign teachers' views as they analyzed the conditions associated with their respective educational institutions.

Definitions

Communicative competence. The ability to speak both with grammatical accuracy as well as comply with sociocultural rules, including appropriateness, normal discourse, and strategic communication, to ease understanding (Qian, 2016). The concept combines practical communication skills with the knowledge of social and cultural factors to mitigate or eliminate misunderstandings in conversation.

ESL content-based instruction: The term by which it is referred to in the United States, which incorporates a broad spectrum of instructional approaches that make a dual, though not necessarily equal, commitment to language and content-learning objectives (Yu & Du, 2019).

ESL instructional practices: The medium of instruction—the primary language used by the educator—to teach. English should be employed from the start of a course as the primary language; the instructor then adjusts their methodology to support understanding and meaning. This can be accomplished using a large amount of visual information and nonverbal communication to support students' understanding (F. Hu, 2017).

Learner-centered teaching: An approach to education that helps passive learners become active learners and, therefore, more responsible for their education (S. Wang, 2019). Learner-centered teaching values the person in the learning process.

Oral language communication: A three-step process that includes pronunciation, transmission, and perception (F. Hu, 2017, p. 580). The first step is pronunciation, or the transition from psychological to physiological as the speaker's brain governs speech organs (lips, tongue, etc.) to make a sound. The second step, transmission, is the process by which the sound from the first speaker is transmitted to a listener's ears. Finally, the third step, perception, is a reversal of the first step. According to F. Hu (2017), the listener absorbs sound through auditory organs and dissects it for intonation so the listener can recognize and understand the word(s) and correctly interpret the meaning of the utterance(s).

Teacher (teaching) effectiveness: This term is used for the amalgam of various definitions and descriptions used to determine a teacher's influence and is based on the overall achievement of their students (S. Wang, 2019). While teacher (or teaching) effectiveness is evaluated based on ratings by the school's administrator (S. Wang, 2019), the emphasis is placed on the educative process and the students' subsequent response. Practical execution of various educational methods may be employed to achieve effectiveness; therefore, researchers are looking for a common thread that ties the most effective teachers (or teaching methods) together.

Assumptions

Assumptions in this study consisted of those regarding methodologies used in qualitative research (see Creswell & Creswell, 2018). First, it was assumed that the foreign teacher-participants would respond honestly to the interview questions. Second, it was assumed that external research would not bias my interpretation of the interview's events or the respondents' feedback. I ensured this outcome by objectively observing both the interview process and the information generated by the participants before analyzing these developments through the lens of external research.

Semistructured virtual interviews were used to collect data. I scheduled two weekly interviews so that all eight respondents participated within the first month. Interviews took place virtually, with each interviewee participating from their respective home. Given that a new school year had begun and COVID-19 infections were still a threat, the teachers were more anxious and exhausted than usual. Due to these additional stressors related to COVID-19 and its effects on the teacher workforce, virtual interviews

were conducted as a strategy for self-care and to help protect school leaders and their teachers' social and emotional well-being during times of continued uncertainty. This also allowed for interviews to be carried out in a clean, neutral, and confidential environment where the participants could not influence one another during the process. A time limit was not set on the interviews, and the participants were given as much time as needed to answer the 12 interview questions, follow-up questions, and probes. These procedures maintained privacy and confidentiality to maximize truthfulness. With this approach, a framework of the underlying classroom experiences of the foreign ESL teachers became evident as an interpretation of the raw data developed.

Scope and Delimitations

Data were collected in this study using semistructured interviews and my researcher journal to obtain the perceptions of foreign language teachers in China about the instructional ESL strategies they utilize in daily instruction in Chinese ESL classrooms. It did not constitute a generalized study of ESL practices and methods. The study's delimitation included a single Chinese public high school and a single Chinese private learning center. This basic qualitative study was guided by the instructional components recognized in Sato and McNamara's (2019) general-purpose second-language oral competency theory. The instructional components were lesson plans, classroom management, and pressures created by tests and assessments. The basic qualitative design was selected because, at its rudimentary level, it is used to help answer questions about the complex nature of a phenomenon (McGrath, 2019). This was done to

identify, illustrate, and describe the teaching experiences from the participants' points of view.

McGrath (2019) asserted that qualitative findings would likely result in unstructured data that researchers need to organize and define. These datasets can also be contrasted with the end-state data derived from quantitative variants or outcomes that tend to be comparatively predicted and controlled. The information gained from semistructured interviews and the researcher journal provided an in-depth understanding of the perceptions of foreign language teachers in China regarding the instructional ESL strategies they utilize in daily instruction in Chinese ESL classrooms.

This study was limited to a single Chinese public high school and a single Chinese private learning center and could therefore lack transferability. Because the two institutions are different in terms of providing education, there were not enough similarities in instructional practices to infer that the results of one would transfer to the other. To ensure regional transferability in a Chinese context, I offered a rich, thick description of the details necessary to contextualize the data. Specifically, the classroom culture and social contexts that contributed to the settings where the data were collected were documented in my researcher journal. Transferability was not the main objective of this study, as this basic qualitative study's focus was on providing an in-depth understanding of the two environments, not on generating transferable knowledge. While the results could be generalizable, the depth of research necessary regarding the context in a basic qualitative approach suggests that the results are not designed to be generalizable (see Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

Limitations

This basic qualitative study was not without restrictions. First, while data were collected from two types of learning facilities, a public high school and a private learning center, neither sample indicated generalizations for the overall subject as the selected locations differed in both methods and results. One of the limitations associated with the sampled locations included their relatively small size. I addressed this limitation by ensuring that the sample size met the recommended number for this type of study. This selection process ensured data saturation (see Vasileiou et al., 2018). The narrow sample of eight teachers could be considered an additional and related limitation.

To make systemic changes in the school, it would have been necessary to engage all foreign English teachers at the local site to participate in this study. Consequently, the two site-based learning communities (learning center and public Chinese high school) could share a common language when implementing new approaches to oral English acquisition. The study's outcomes indicated that strong collegiality and collaboration in professional learning communities could be replicated to establish a common framework for routine professional conversation. Regardless of data limitations, this present study could provide other researchers and ESL professionals with a proven and tested model. The same model could be used to engage in further exploration of effective oral English practice that is oriented less toward product and more toward process.

It is possible that the results could have been influenced by my perception of the learning process, teaching methods, and the learner's progression, otherwise known as researcher bias (see Shead, 2019). Researcher bias primarily occurs because, when asking

questions, researchers have an idealized outcome in mind. Hence, all phenomena and inquiries became teleologically structured by this controlling feature. It was also possible that the questions used in the semistructured interviews could have led the teachers to complicity identify or validate the construct investigated rather than report their perceptions and expertise.

To reduce the likelihood of bias from a flawed study design, I followed the bias mitigation strategies presented by Shead (2019). As the researcher, I identified my feelings during the interview process. I also developed an appreciation for the participants' difficulty in sharing their views on the topics, cultivated patience with the interview process, noted the participants' feelings of acknowledgment during the interviews, respected their vulnerability, and worked to identify the assumptions I had toward the participants (see Shead, 2019).

Finally, time was also a limitation; thus, the two data collection methods (one-on-one interviews and a researcher journal) were the only methods used. In both cases, these methodologies required me to complete the documentation processes efficiently. I needed to complete the interview on time to ensure my ability to engage with each participant. I also relied on efficient journaling throughout the process to align this practice with the research design. Further research would benefit from a lengthy study that followed and measured both the teachers' instruction and the learners' progress from the initiation of their practice to its completion.

Significance

This study addressed instructional practices used by ESL teachers to facilitate Chinese high school students' learning oral English in Hangzhou, China, with participants from a public high school and a private learning center. This study is significant because English is an essential language for Chinese students to learn as an increasing number use it for global communication and mobility (see B. Wang et al., 2017). The results of this study provide a deeper understanding of the insight of ESL teachers in China and the implementation of instructional strategies for developing English proficiency. With identification and implementation, learning outcomes could improve chances for opportunities abroad and admission to higher education institutions for Chinese ESL students. This study contributes to the understanding and application of best practices in ESL instruction strategies in Chinese high school level classrooms.

The findings of this study could also lead to positive social change in local settings. The beneficiaries would be three-fold: students, foreign ESL teachers, and participating institutions. Students could benefit from increased confidence in language abilities to participate in international business, attend Western universities, and communicate with those from other nations. ESL teachers may benefit from this study as they could learn more about their instructional approaches to students' learning the oral English language. Lastly, the local high school and private learning center could also benefit due to improved ESL teacher training, pedagogies, and influence on curricula, which may help Chinese students interested in post-secondary education abroad.

Summary

The research problem addressed in this basic qualitative study was that foreign language instructors inconsistently implement instructional practices to support Chinese high school students' learning of oral English language. The purpose of this basic qualitative study was to explore the perceptions of foreign language teachers working in the Hangzhou region of China regarding their implementation of instructional strategies to support Chinese high school students' learning of oral English language. The conceptual framework consisted of Sato and McNamara's (2019) general-purpose second-language oral competency theory. The RQ and sub-RQs for this study were designed to examine the perceptions of foreign language teachers in China about the instructional ESL strategies they utilize in daily instruction in Chinese ESL classrooms. The foreign teachers' application of Sato and McNamara's general-purpose second-language oral competency theory in their instruction of Chinese students' learning oral English served as a guide and the interview questions. These addressed lesson plans, classroom management, and extrinsic pressures created by tests and assessments. The study is significant as its findings could lead to positive social change in the local settings. The beneficiaries are students, foreign ESL teachers, and participating institutions.

Chapter 2 includes a review of the research literature related to how foreign teachers apply second language theories in their classrooms. This chapter also provides a discussion of the conceptual framework and the key variables and concepts of this study.

Finally, I present literature regarding how teachers' preparation to effectively deliver oral instruction is a current concern.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

The research problem addressed in this basic qualitative study is that little is known about how foreign language instructors use instructional practices to facilitate Chinese high school students' learning of oral English language. The purpose of this basic qualitative study was to explore the perceptions of foreign language teachers working in the Hangzhou region of China regarding their implementation of instructional strategies to support Chinese high school students' learning of oral English language. Current literature has explored aspects of Chinese students' English language learning in terms of instructional classroom curriculum approaches and theoretical teaching perspectives (B. Wang et al., 2017) and teacher roles and standardized performance assessments (He & Chen, 2017; Ming & Wang, 2017). However, the literature does not explore or detail how ESL teachers in China implement instructional practices (S. Wang, 2019). Therefore, it is not yet understood how instructional practices for improving oral English language proficiency of Chinese ESL students are implemented in their classrooms.

A review of current literature supporting this study included sources regarding instructional ESL practices (He & Chen, 2017) and how foreign teachers utilize second language theories, primarily in secondary schools and private learning centers. The background literature supported the need to improve English instructional practices, assessments, and evaluation of these practices. These studies offer an understanding of how local educational programs could be improved. In this chapter, I provide an extensive review of the research literature. The chapter is divided into sections that

include the literature search strategy, conceptual framework, and literature review related to key variables and concepts.

Literature Search Strategy

My systematic literature search strategy aimed to pinpoint all publications pertinent to the RQ and sub-RQs. In this section, I describe how the studies were identified and defined and how the current study's findings are situated within the existing literature. Creswell and Creswell (2018) indicated that a complete and comprehensive literature search is required to minimize researcher bias. For this study, my analysis of the literature was concentrated on various types of instructional ESL practices administered, the processes involved, and how they connected to the facilitation of learning oral English.

ProQuest Dissertation Database, SAGE Premier, EBSCOhost, Google Scholar, and other academic databases were the primary resources used for online literature searches. Most resources found were peer-reviewed articles published within the last 5 years. The following search terms were used to access the literature in each of the academic databases: *instructional strategies for English curriculum, pedagogy for ESL teachers, delivering classroom instruction for L2 learners, psycholinguistic environments, methodological principles of task-based language teaching, pedagogical procedures for Chinese high school students, and harnessing ESL potential in Chinese high school students*. Other resources were used to examine the key improvement areas for English language instructors relating to instructional practices and strategies.

The iterative search process entailed locating dissertations on English language instruction in China. The following databases were used: Open Access Theses and Dissertations, ProQuest Dissertations, EBSCO Open Dissertations, as well as Walden University Library's Dissertation and Theses database. This process involved use of the following terms in each of these databases: *pedagogy for English language learners*, *teaching ESL in Chinese high school*, *teaching verbal English to Chinese students*, and *learner-centered instruction in ESL*. Both general research and dissertation databases generated hundreds of articles related to the study. Additional sources were located by reviewing the references sections in articles most relevant to the RQ and sub-RQs this study sought to answer.

Conceptual Framework

This capstone project examined foreign language teachers' perceptions in mainland China applying Sato and McNamara's (2019) general-purpose second-language oral competency theory. This theory addresses teaching methods that prioritize the learner's needs and the learning that takes place in the classroom, focusing on specific learners, their capacity, experiences, and interests (Elder et al., 2017). The theory asserts that language can or should be assessed based on the content it conveys or the goal and context of the communication. General-purpose second-language oral competency theory allows for consideration of pedagogy, how teaching transpires, and the most effective methods to encourage maximum levels of attainment and incentives for all learners. I used this theory to map the classroom environment for teachers involved in the facilitation of English language instruction as it applied to (a) instructional practices

related to lesson plans, (b) instructional practices related to classroom management, and (c) instructional practices related to extrinsic pressures created by tests and assessments.

These concepts are collectively addressed using Sato and McNamara's theory.

Key Concepts

Second-language oral competency theories provide strategies that help resolve limitations associated with traditional performance-based theories. At the same time, general competency assessment-based concepts are controversial. Accordingly, recent trends include the tendency for researchers to develop and refine models that can be used to empirically measure a speaker's performance in a given setting (Capperucci, 2019). Related scholarship has recognized the value of broadening competency models in ways that combine linguistic both specialists' and nonspecialists' insights (Elder et al., 2017). Both trends reflect the growing belief among scholars that competency-based models used in specific assessment contexts can generate nuanced appraisals of an ESL learner's holistic speaking and comprehension skills (Sato & McNamara, 2019).

Understanding general assessment theory's potential value begins with an in-depth discussion of its theoretical background and related tenets and assumptions. Whyte (2019) stated that general assessment theory was derived from reactions to Chomsky's assumptions that an ESL learner's skills could be measured through static competence and performance evaluation systems. According to Whyte, Chomsky distinguished these by defining ESL competence as a speaker's conceptual awareness of a newly acquired language's formal structures and features; performance is the same student's ability to apply this knowledge within specific contexts. Later theorists, including Hynes,

challenged this assumption by contending that Chomsky's terms should be linked within a singular model (Whyte, 2019). General competency theories further challenged these claims by contending that a speaker's performance should be assessed in specific settings and in relation to the possible outcomes that the speaker could achieve within a unique setting (Sato & McNamara, 2019).

Competency theories help evaluate speaker linguistic skills by examining four key dimensions that impact the ESL learner's performance. Assessments of what is possible link both considerations of grammatical and mechanical conventions alongside those that address specific cultural or setting-based criteria (Whyte, 2019). Determination of an ESL learner's performance-based feasibility recognizes the likely limits that would negatively impact the student's ability. Analysis, using competency theory related to the speaker's appropriate choices, refers to the individual's understanding of specific discourse community-based settings and the restrictions these cultural variables place on the speaker's skill. Finally, these theories assess the speaker's singular performance after evaluating these combined variables.

One of the challenges derived from Sato and McNamara's (2019) theory includes the need to examine the constructs of selection assessment models and the assumptions that guide these approaches. At one level, analysts have referenced the need for developing empirically guided models to examine the various dimensions of speaker performance according to specific criteria (Capperucci, 2019). These models require input from trained specialists, such as a group of carefully selected examiners familiar with specific assessment models and skilled in evaluating ESL speaker performance

against established criteria. Arguments in favor of this approach have cited the general assessment theory's ability to yield empirical findings that clearly assess the ESL learner's capabilities. Other scholars, however, recognized the value derived from including nonspecialists in the language assessment processes (Whyte, 2019).

Sato and McNamara's (2019) arguments favoring a general assessment model asserted that nonspecialists could contribute to academic-based frameworks. The quality of nonspecialist insights is derived from their ability to analyze a speaker's skill as they perform selected tasks that simulate exchanges in specific professional discourse communities. Elder et al. (2017) similarly contended that including nonspecialists in assessments can broaden the diversity of applied general assessment models and therefore diversify the criteria they apply to individual cases.

An emerging subject related to the general assessment model and its guiding theory includes the important role of interaction in the contemporary evaluation processes. As previously noted, the variables of the appropriateness of an evaluated speaker's performance represent a significant dimension of most applied general competency assessment theories (Whyte, 2019). Models that evaluate a second language (L2) learner's performance by examining their interaction with other evaluated speakers adapt this premise in their unique frameworks. According to May et al. (2020), these models assess speaker-applied competencies as they respond to and build upon the statements provided by previous examinees. Justification for the framework stemmed from its unique ability to measure and evaluate speaker competency as each ESL learner adjusted their responses to the various expectations associated with a particular setting

and in conversationally appropriate ways as they elaborated on previous speakers' comments. Youn's (2020) analysis contributed to these discussions by describing the value that sequential-based methodologies can have in promoting ESL learner competencies. Youn's contentions derived from observations that the framework requires students to engage in applied forms of linguistic performance that test their ability to reply in situationally appropriate ways. Additionally, the models promoted the learner's ability to socially engage with other students as they practiced and mastered their developing linguistic skills.

Related literature references the need for developing empirical assessment models that examine speaker performance across the dimensions of general competency assessment in ways that could yield measurable results. Capperucci's (2019) argument favoring a structured framework derived from specific curriculum and testing frameworks finds a parallel in other sources. Lam's (2018) analysis of interaction-based models referenced a similar need for an empirical framework that could examine these types of speaker performances. Sato and McNamara's (2019) commentary also indicated that the integration of nonspecialist assessors could be implemented within a structured and empirical model.

Synthesis of Primary Writings, Key Statements, and Definitions

Sato and McNamara's (2019) work synthesizes past theories and studies on oral proficiency and is not an original contribution to the conceptual or theoretical literature. In this synthesis, ESL teachers contribute to the oral proficiency of ESL students to the extent that they utilize instructional practices to (a) impart formal knowledge of

vocabulary and grammar; (b) assist ESL students in communicating, regardless of possible errors in vocabulary and grammar; (c) prepare ESL students for tests and assessments; and (d) engage ESL students. There is extensive literature on each of these subcomponents of instructional practice. Imparting formal knowledge of vocabulary and grammar is typically achieved through structured lesson plans, assessment-based feedback, and strict classroom management techniques collectively designed to emphasize formal linguistic rules. Engaging students and assisting them in communicating can be achieved in several ways, including via storytelling and immersion. Assessment is important insofar as, especially in China, it is the basis and bellwether for ESL success (He & Chen, 2017). Finally, classroom management can create the hierarchical structure needed to impart rules and increase engagement by creating an egalitarian environment and creative opportunities for expression (Ebadi & Yari, 2017).

How the General Assessment Theory Has Been Applied

Instructional practices have been studied in the context of lesson plans, assessment, classroom management, and student engagement. However, in applied settings, the emphasis has been on exploring how teachers use these practices, considering their context-dependent and unique characteristics, students, classrooms, and national context. The literature on these subjects cannot be interpreted to suggest that certain instructional practices either work or do not. Instead, the emphasis has been on examining and exploring how instructional practices work in real world settings. In China, much of the research has suggested that instructional practices in ESL settings are

(a) rule-bound and rigid, (b) characterized by high levels of power distance between students and teachers, (c) keyed to assessment, and (d) defined by the pedagogical and other limitations of the teachers themselves (Tsai, 2017).

Literature Review Related to Key Variables and Concepts

English represents a language commonly used globally across the political, business, and educational spheres (Wang, 2019). Accordingly, English language learning programs and institutions have been established throughout centuries across the globe, going beyond teaching the common language to adults (Wang, 2019). Since 2001, the Common European Framework of Reference has gained increasing popularity after its development by a designated European council (He & Chen, 2017). The Common European Framework of Reference created assessments to assist in globalization efforts to influence the widespread use of the English language. Language teaching, language learning, and respective assessments have expanded from European countries to Japan and China (He & Chen, 2017). Today, globalization has also increased the importance of English language learning among high school students (He & Chen, 2017; Wolf & Butler, 2017).

In countries where English is a foreign language, English language classes have formed the basis of the curriculum in middle and high schools, with some academic institutions introducing classes at the elementary school level (Wolf & Butler, 2017). R. Hu and Baumann (2014) noted that the historical perspective of English language instruction and education policies in China is based on studies of Chinese English teachers' instructional practices and their inherent impact on student performance. China

has one of the world's largest populations of ESL learners worldwide. Listening, reading, speaking, and writing are perceived as vital skills; however, many studies have failed to examine high school speaking assessments from foreign teachers' perspectives (Schultz, 2017).

Due to the growing number of EFL and ESL learners, there is worldwide a demand for English language teachers (Tsang, 2017). Although the rapid development in English language education in China has challenged EFL teaching, the literature notes that the lack of qualified foreign English language instructors exacerbates this problem (Ming & Wang, 2017). The field of education has experienced large numbers of English-language teachers in China and other countries; however, teachers must be equipped with the tools and resources to improve English proficiency (Irby et al., 2018; Tsang, 2017). Foreign ESL teachers do not have the time or proper resources to incorporate humor into new grammar topics despite the importance of new language grammar. Even so, the introduction of humor in English language grammar proved to be beneficial in improving comprehension of difficult grammar topics in textbooks (Abdulmajeed & Hameed, 2017).

Limited studies have examined the effect of world Englishes on language instruction (Dogankay-Aktuna & Hardman, 2018). According to their research, the findings of several studies revealed student perceptions of how their native language affects their English and language acquisition. According to Li and Rubie-Davies (2017), few studies have examined the impact of teacher expectations effects among populations of students in secondary institutions. EFL students from two Chinese high schools found that teachers' expectations significantly affected their academic achievement (Li &

Rubie-Davies, 2017). It is possible that teacher expectations are influenced by the results of the types of instruction and assessments administered.

Instructional practices examined by Sato and McNamara (2019) indicated that these could be expressed in lesson plans, classroom management, student-teacher engagement, and assessments. The following literature review has been subdivided into four sections to address each of the variables in Sato and McNamara's (2019) general assessment of second-language oral competency practices, including lesson plans, classroom management, assessment, and student-teacher engagement. General studies regarding instructional practices will also be discussed. Additionally, I will provide a synthesis of what is known and identify what is not known regarding empirical knowledge in these areas.

Lesson Plans

Vocabulary plays a significant role in language instruction, language learning, and oral communication (Ebadi & Yari, 2017). Recently, researchers have focused on using vocabulary to promote language development and testing using dynamic instruction assessment (Ebadi & Yari, 2017). Students have a strong awareness of structures but a weak understanding of functions relative to the English language. Ebadi and Yari (2017) asserted that "when learners have a less extensive vocabulary and strategies for acquiring new vocabulary, they often realize less than their potential" (p. 50). Lack of vocabulary is correlated with difficulty in writing and speaking among foreign language learners (Ebadi & Yari, 2017). Similarly, a longitudinal study of 141 ESL children in Hong Kong

revealed a nonlinear developmental trajectory for English expressive vocabulary during assessment (Liu et al., 2017).

Academic institutions with large populations of English language learners have used literacy assessments to examine teacher instruction of reading and writing. In a sample of 246 eighth grade Chinese English-immersion students who were given reading comprehension and other related tests, findings demonstrated that vocabulary was the basis of reading comprehension problems among lower-performing ESL students. Research on student performance on final exams in intensive reading revealed that Chinese college students majoring in English regularly made errors associated with collocation, grammar, tense, and word classifications (L. Zhang, 2017).

Various studies of ESL learners have frequently indicated that young students exhibit auditory phonological deficits. Metaphoric competence is a key aspect of language fluency and communication (Babinski et al., 2018). Few studies, however, have explored programs based on a randomized controlled trial that examined a new professional development program for teachers (Babinski et al., 2018). Implementing high-impact instruction has yielded improvements in language and literacy skills for English learners of Latino descent (Babinski et al., 2018). However, Chinese L2 learners encounter English comprehension barriers when reading (Babinski et al., 2018).

Few studies have examined writing in ESL instruction (Tsai, 2017). In Tsai's (2017) study, senior EFL students were offered a 100-minute English writing course over 12 weeks. Post-translation student performance improved qualitatively and quantitatively following course instruction with enhanced lexical density, making fewer errors, using

higher level words, and writing more words (Tsai, 2017). However, Babinski et al. (2018) posited that increased enrollment of ESL students in writing courses in colleges and universities has led to more problems with academic writing. Because these issues are exacerbated due to ESL students' age, cultural background, gender, language proficiency, and prior education, foreign ESL instructors must learn to cope with these differences in addition to students' individual needs, writing techniques, and learning styles (Tsai, 2017).

Classroom Management

Classroom management can significantly benefit from dynamic instruction; however, many classrooms have yet to implement it. Primary research has examined various elements of dynamic instruction associated with its effectiveness in uniting L2 instruction and assessment practices within language learning (Ghanbarpour, 2017). Researchers have scrutinized the application of dynamic instruction for learner development in listening comprehension, reading comprehension and word recognition, and speaking and writing skills. However, scholars need to focus on empirical studies regarding dynamic instruction as applied in classroom assessment (Ghanbarpour, 2017). The lack of English language teachers' knowledge and familiarity with the underlying principles of dynamic instruction and professional development are barriers to the effective use of this type of instruction within an educational context (Ghanbarpour, 2017). Focus on a triangulated learning process based on interaction and active collaboration between teachers and students is mediated by dynamic instruction and

assessment instruments that may modify teaching and assessment practices (Yu & Du, 2019).

Assessment

A study by Özdemir-Yılmaz and Özkan (2017) noted the challenges associated with administering assessments to novice EFL learners. In the educational system in Turkey, English is taught from the primary level (second grade) to the tertiary level (eighth grade). Despite the increased exposure to English, Turkish students have struggled to solve language-related problems. According to a British Council report, students at Turkish universities demonstrated inadequacies in speaking English and related proficiency based on the Common European Framework of Reference standards (Özdemir-Yılmaz & Özkan, 2017). Instruction assessment practices associated with speaking among tertiary level English language teachers demonstrated they did not have thoughts and beliefs regarding speaking. This suggested the need for teacher training opportunities in classroom assessment to increase awareness of in-class speaking assessments (Özdemir-Yılmaz & Özkan, 2017).

Pragmatic competence influences interlanguage pragmatics and pragmatic transfer, which are key to cross-cultural communication and language learning (Ming, & Wang, 2017). Limitations in communicative language teaching have led to the emergence of an intercultural approach to language teaching and communicative language learning (Ming & Wang, 2017). The goal of foreign language education has shifted from communicative competence to intercultural communicative competence. EFL teachers have a misperception about what intercultural communication competence assesses,

methods of instruction, and deficiencies when measuring intercultural communication competence in their students (Ming & Wang, 2017).

According to the International English Language Test System-Academic, a student's application of the English language is assessed in their written work and oral ability. Current and diversified forms of writing reflect a student's ability to produce English orally. In International English Language Test System-Reading, effective tactics for reading comprehension enable students to extract information accurately while understanding the meaning of various English-based literature.

Effective language teaching is an approach that requires English language learners to take responsibility for their progress. Data has indicated that teachers believe student grades are associated with the following: (a) judgment of students' work in terms of effort, fulfillment of requirement, and quality; and (b) judgment of students' learning in terms of academic enablers (i.e., non-achievement factors such as habit, attitude and motivation that are deemed important for students' ultimate achievement), improvement, learning process, as well as achievement. (Youn, 2020, p. 93)

Findings have demonstrated that vocabulary learning strategies aid in helping teachers mediate the correlation between motivation and vocabulary knowledge and skills. In a foreign language context, intrinsic motivation has a more significant influence on vocabulary teaching. Relative to Chinese students' intrinsic motivation and preferences, students favored communication language teaching approaches from a native English teacher (B. Wang et al., 2017). On the other hand, extrinsic motivation was based on student preferences for curriculum from local teachers and its relevance to English

exams (B. Wang et al., 2017). The integration of goal setting in reading instructional strategies demonstrated increased reading proficiency and higher levels of adolescent Taiwanese EFL learner motivation compared to traditional approaches (Shih & Reynolds, 2018).

Student-Teacher Engagement

An instruction assessment is one of the most essential aspects of language education (Turnbull, 2017). Dynamic instruction, developed from Vygotsky's theory of cognitive development, is characterized as the "interactions between an instructor-as-intervener and a learner as active participant, which seeks to estimate the degree of modifiability of the learner and the means by which positive changes in cognitive functioning can be induced and maintained" (Ebadi & Yari, 2017, p. 61.). Research studies have focused on the impact of dynamic instruction among L2 learners worldwide (Poehner & Infante, 2016). Dynamic instruction is a composite of instruction or feedback with testing that serves as an active collaboration with individuals that simultaneously reveals the full range of their abilities and promotes their development. In L2 education, a teacher's main goal is to enhance their students' oral communicative competencies and skills through feedback (B. Wang et al., 2017). This approach is followed by teachers' comments on content thinking, logic thinking, and pronunciation.

Dynamic instruction is deep-seated in Vygotsky's zone of proximal development. Vygotsky defined this zone as a division between the autonomous level (actual level) and mediated level (potential level) of a learner's development (Ebadi & Yari, 2017). The zone of proximal development is a form of classroom-teacher assessment that is an

alternative to standardized testing within the classroom setting (Ebadi & Yari, 2017). Instructional and evaluation implications are associated with dynamic instruction assessment due to its ability to provide teachers with diagnostic information regarding their students, allowing instructors to provide student feedback, which may yield better student performance (Ebadi & Yari, 2017). Despite the advantage of dynamic assessment relative to other traditional psychometric evaluations, dynamic instruction assessment evaluators encounter limitations related to the number of L2 learners who can be assisted and the increased time demand of interactions between the learner and instructor.

The sandwich format of dynamic instruction and assessment involves a pretest (top layer of the sandwich), instruction (middle layer of the sandwich), and posttest (bottom layer of the sandwich). Student performance on the pretest is compared with performance on the posttest to ascertain the intervention's usefulness (Ebadi & Yari, 2017). Another form of dynamic instruction assessment, the cake format, is measured in accordance with individual administration (Ebadi & Yari, 2017). Within dynamic instruction and assessment, the cake format requires the examiner to provide hint-based instruction while governing the number of hints a given examinee needs to correctly solve the item (Ebadi & Yari, 2017). In Ebadi and Yari's (2017) study, six EFL learners participated in 15 dynamic instruction assessment sessions, which introduced new vocabulary using varying techniques during each session. Corrective instructional feedback was provided within their zone of proximal development, yielding results that showed improved vocabulary development and knowledge in EFL learners. A potential limitation of the study was evidenced by the rationed sample size.

Junior high school native English teachers' beliefs revealed a multidimensional structure parallel to a constructivism-oriented curriculum (L. Zhang, 2017). These beliefs favored interactive classrooms, student participation, and instruction strategy training focusing on drills and practice, grammar, language form, teacher authority, and rote memorization. S. Wang (2019) also noted that Chinese English language teachers utilized andragogy by assessing student needs, personalizing instruction, and relating to experiences through instructional practices highlighting the importance of lectures, transmission of knowledge, and exams. One novice Chinese EFL teacher stated that his teaching practices were influenced by his students' shyness and English proficiency (L. Zhang, 2017). The instructor's classroom discourse and beliefs regarding writing were shaped by his self-agency and schooling exposure, suggesting that teacher education and effective self-agency can reshape teacher beliefs on writing instruction (L. Zhang, 2017).

Research has further demonstrated the advantages of metacognitive instructional strategies for improving listening skills and comprehension in L2 learners (Cross & Vandergrift, 2018). A heightened degree of proficiency in listening was also observed in EFL students in a Mandarin immersion program (Wolf & Butler, 2017). Learning the sound of a new language is challenging cognitively, psychologically, and socially; therefore, learners must make decisions to ensure successful language attainment by exploring constructs regarding motivation, self-concept, and self-determination (Moyer, 2017).

In their study highlighting L2 speech learning, Saito et al. (2017) examined the motivations linked to 40 first-year university students in Japan. Findings showed that L2

oral proficiency improved based on its correlation with comprehensibility but not accentedness (Saito et al., 2017). Participants demonstrated a strong inherent motivation to study English to enhance their long-term goals and future careers and suggested improvement in oral complexity, comprehensibility, and grammatical accuracy.

General Studies on Instructional Strategies

Thomson (2017) researched English fluency and proficiency among EFL learners who utilized formulaic language instruction in oral assessments. Formulaic language, a significant component of languages, has been studied; however, limited research has been done on its use in textbooks and classroom instruction (Thomson, 2017). Research findings revealed the use of formulaic language by EFL learners who were readily exposed to course books and oral proficiency assessments. EFL learners utilized more formulaic language in paired tasks, which has been linked to higher fluency and language proficiency scores (Thomson, 2017).

The advent of task-based language teaching led to several studies, although few have examined teachers' understanding of its meaning (L. Zhang, 2017). Of the three teachers studied, two of their instructional lessons integrated grammar; however, they faced challenges in utilizing these lessons due to significantly large class sizes. English language instruction in large classrooms has been a common practice in China and other developing countries (Ming & Wang, 2017). Mixed-method research findings showed approximately 92% of Chinese English language teachers have a negative attitude toward teaching the English language in large classes due to managing such a large group of students, their psychological problems, and pedagogical issues (Ming & Wang, 2017).

In 2014, approximately 14.8 million language learners participated in online education (Yeh & Swinehart, 2020). Despite online classes of 50 or more students, 79% of students reported teacher-learner interactions within a synchronous web conferencing classroom. Yeh and Swinehart (2020) employed an online technological tool within a learner-centered curriculum model. This tool enhanced the provision of scaffolding strategies to help ESL students develop into autonomous learners, provide them with the ability to shape the curriculum, and identify their diverse learning styles.

A key indicator of quality instruction is measured according to the time allocated to instructing English language learners on specific skills in the cognitive-academic language proficiency L2 learners must acquire to be successful in a school environment (Sorrell & Brown, 2018). Teachers must actively engage students in learning strategies, content-based knowledge, and higher order thinking activities to develop ESL learners' cognitive abilities. English language teachers who spend more time with cognitive-academic language proficiency produced improved expressive vocabulary, retell fluency, and oral reading fluency in ESLs (Sorrell & Brown, 2018; Tsang, 2017). Recently, research has been conducted on the effectiveness of strategy instruction and the ability to predict the effects and moderators to self-regulate learning and foreign language. Self-regulated learning was used as the study's theoretical framework and focused on the influence of intrinsic and extrinsic motivational factors and learning strategies on vocabulary acquisition among 107 adolescent (10th grade) ESLs in China (Wang et al., 2017). Self-regulation was strongly correlated with the level of academic success.

Summary and Conclusions

The empirical literature discussed in this section provided substantial information on the content and context of ESL instruction in China. The following points of consensus emerged. First, oral proficiency is a problem for many Chinese ESL students. Second, the lack of oral proficiency appears partly a function of Chinese assessment standards, emphasizing reading and writing over speaking and comprehension. ESL teachers in China are likely to be influenced by assessment standards by devoting less time and energy to developing oral proficiency among ESL students. Third, ESL teachers in China who are not native speakers of English appear to be weaker in their ability to impart oral proficiency. These teachers, particularly if they are products of the Chinese educational system, might also have been more trained in reading and writing than speaking and listening. In this case, they will likely struggle to impart fluency to their students. Fourth, numerous structural obstacles to oral proficiency arise from the vast tonal, syntactical, and other differences between Chinese and English. Fifth, Chinese classrooms are hierarchical and highly structured, qualities that might be inimical to the relaxed, interactive, and judgment-free atmosphere necessary for developing oral proficiency. Sixth, ESL teachers in China appear to have utilized various instructional practices to develop all aspects of ESL competence, both in oral proficiency and reading and writing.

Few studies discussed and synthesized in the literature review provided a detailed assessment of both best instructional practices and obstacles related to the development of oral proficiency among Chinese ESL students. Of the case studies, little detail has been

presented that would allow other ESL teachers to understand and adopt the best practices of successful teachers in imparting oral proficiency to their ESL students or avoid obstacles to successful utilization of instructional practices. Details, where they exist, are often based on summary data or a single mode of data collection, such as interviews or research journals.

The research literature indicates there are various instructional strategies applied in Chinese ESL classrooms, including (a) vocabulary development, (b) grammatical instruction, (c) content-based instruction, (d) task-based exercises, and (e) storytelling (He & Chen, 2017). However, there is limited data on exactly how these strategies are applied. The focus of the literature has been on documenting instructional strategies but not on exploring how these strategies are applied in terms of real-world practices, such as lesson plans, classroom management, or the extrinsic pressures created by tests and assessments.

A strength of a basic qualitative design is that it allows the researcher to collect data that can provide in-depth information about a real-world practice in a specific setting instead of summary data that might be comparatively superficial in providing pragmatic guidance (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The basic qualitative design outlined in Chapter 3 was selected to explore how foreign ESL teachers in a public high school and a private learning center in the Hangzhou region of China utilize instructional practices related to lesson plans, classroom management, assessment, and engagement. This basic qualitative study addressed the gap in practice associated with the absence of highly detailed explorations of ESL teachers' real-world utilization of instructional strategies. This

absence has prevented other ESL teachers in China from understanding and adopting the best practices of successful teachers in imparting oral proficiency to their ESL students or avoiding obstacles to successfully utilizing these instructional practices.

The exploration of how foreign language instructors use instructional practices to facilitate Chinese high school students' learning of oral English language has not figured prominently in classroom practice. Jiang and Ribeiro (2017) supported the need to improve English instructional practices, assessments, and evaluation of these practices. Hu and Baumann (2014) noted that the historical perspective of English language instruction and education policies in China had been based on studies of Chinese English teachers' instructional practices and their impact on student performance.

Due to the growing number of EFL and ESL learners, there is a demand for English language teachers worldwide (Tsang, 2017). Although the rapid development of English language education in China has challenged ESL teaching, the literature indicates that the lack of qualified foreign English language instructors exacerbates this problem (S. Wang, 2019). The literature reviewed in this chapter provided an understanding of how local educational programs can be improved to modify approaches and solutions to help prepare both teachers and students as well as assist instructors who face the challenges of improving the oral English abilities of ESL high school students (Gan et al., 2017). The question of how to prepare teachers to deliver oral instruction effectively is now a genuine and significant concern (Anyiendah, 2017). Because oral English as a skill is currently tested in Chinese graduate college and entrance exams, teachers no longer have the option to ignore teaching oral English as a skill in the classroom.

In Chapter 3, I describe the basic qualitative research design of the study and its rationale. I address my role as the researcher and the methodology used to collect and analyze data. Finally, I discuss the study's trustworthiness and the ethical procedures followed.

Chapter 3: Research Method

The purpose of this basic qualitative study was to explore the perceptions of foreign language teachers working in the Hangzhou region of China regarding their implementation of instructional strategies to support Chinese high school students' learning of oral English language. In the following sections, I identify and discuss the participants and the criteria by which their selection was based. Additionally, I present the rationale for choosing the research design and participant sampling strategy. Both data collection instruments will be linked with a description of how content validity was established, followed by procedures for recruitment, participant participation, and the data collection and analysis plan. Finally, this chapter will document the study's trustworthiness and ethical considerations.

Research Design and Rationale

The RQ and sub-RQs that guided this study were as follows:

RQ: What are the perceptions of foreign language teachers in China about the instructional ESL strategies they implement in daily instruction in Chinese ESL classrooms?

Sub-RQ1: What are the perceptions of foreign language teachers in China about how they implement instructional practices related to lesson plans to support high school ESL students' learning of oral English?

Sub-RQ2: What are the perceptions of foreign language teachers in China about how they implement instructional practices related to classroom management?

Sub-RQ3: What are the perceptions of foreign language teachers in China about how they implement instructional practices related to extrinsic pressures created by tests and assessments?

This study, which used Sato and McNamara's (2019) general-purpose second-language oral competency theory as its conceptual framework, investigated the perceptions of foreign language teachers in China about the instructional ESL strategies they implement in daily instruction in Chinese ESL classrooms. This exploration included three aspects of second language acquisition through the perceptions of eight foreign teachers regarding: (a) instructional practices related to lesson plans, (b) instructional practices related to classroom management, and (c) instructional practices related to extrinsic pressures created by tests and assessments. The most effective teachers integrate instructional objectives seamlessly (Short, 2017) when teaching the elements of oral English and use language and meaning-based approaches. Teachers should incorporate techniques that make language concepts accessible with strategies that develop the students' skills in the target language. The phenomenon of interest is how foreign-language instructors use instructional practices to facilitate Chinese high school students' learning of the oral English language. A basic qualitative design was explicitly chosen to gain an in-depth understanding of the perceptions of foreign language teachers in China regarding their implementation of instructional strategies to support Chinese high school students' learning of oral English language.

Some methodological approaches are more advantageous to research inquiry than others (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Because I sought to explore the conditions that

influenced the participants' perspectives, a basic qualitative design was an optimal approach. One area that affected the selection of the research analysis was related to the difference between pure and applied research; the findings of this study were most relevant to the latter of these two types. Applied research explores a selected phenomenon and can be used to identify solutions to related problems (Råheim et al., 2016). It is pragmatic and supported by systematic methodology. Applied research can and often does generate new knowledge and contribute to theory, but its primary aim is collecting and generating data to help further understand real world problems. This study was conducted using this lens to enhance the ability of ESL instructors to advance their students' capabilities.

A basic qualitative design was an appropriate research tradition for this study because semistructured participant interviews and a researcher journal are the data collection methods best suited to gather the most descriptive data. Other qualitative designs, such as phenomenological, ethnography, and grounded theory, were considered but not selected as these would not provide a clear path to address the research problem, RQ, and sub-RQs, or be feasible for the study's settings. The rationale for choosing a basic qualitative design was to gain information from the teacher-participants' semistructured interviews and researcher journal to provide an in-depth understanding of the perceptions of foreign language teachers in China about the instructional ESL strategies they utilize in daily instruction in Chinese ESL classrooms.

In this study, I sought to gain a deeper understanding of the concept through various data sources at more than one local site. A multisite study is useful when the

researcher desires in-depth information and insight that reflect a holistic approach (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). According to McGrath (2019), qualitative studies are used to examine complex issues from the point of view of selected research participants. The multisite study approach also allowed for in-depth data analysis gathered through virtual semistructured interviews and a researcher journal. Comparing interviews with the information recorded in my researcher journal enabled data triangulation to consolidate responses and reduce misinterpretations of the participants' answers to the interview questions. I selected eight ESL teachers, four from a local public high school and four from a private learning center, from the Hangzhou region of China.

Role of the Researcher

My role as researcher was that of a collector and interpreter of data. I interviewed eight foreign teacher-participants in this study to explore their perceptions about the instructional ESL strategies they utilize in daily instruction in Chinese ESL classrooms. Four teachers were employed in a Chinese public high school, and four worked in a Chinese private learning center; I explored their ESL instructional-related strengths and weaknesses. While as a researcher acting as the data collection instrument, I further developed my interviewing skills, thus enhancing the data's depth and quality. The virtual semistructured interviews were audio-recorded, transcribed, and interpreted in relation to the conceptual framework and research literature pertinent to this study.

Professional relationships were important to consider within the context of this study as they included the researcher's relationship with teacher-participants, students, and other school administrators. Scholars have recognized that in qualitative research

interview settings, a concealed power dynamic between the interviewer and interviewee may not only skew their answers but also make the situation ethically uncertain (J. J. Zhang, 2017). Part of this ethical quandary is that the researcher needs the subject's cooperation for their study. To help prevent coercion or ethical breaches, I avoided interviewing tactics that would have exploited the participant or harmed them. I was attuned to the participants but not intrusive to gain an appreciation for potential career-related consequences they may have experienced during the interview process. An example might have included the respondents' concern about their employer's negative response to their participation.

Creswell and Creswell (2018) implied that no research is free of the researcher's biases, assumptions, and personality. I was not a colleague of any of the participants; however, for some qualitative researchers, it is difficult not to be closely connected to the subjects. In this study, I focused on data collection and content analysis in my role as an instrument to investigate the perspectives and insights derived from the participating teachers. I worked objectively to conduct the research with an unbiased view. During the interviews, I treated the participants respectfully, promoting a willingness for them to express their thoughts freely and avoid exploitation. Although I encouraged the interviewees to communicate their ideas and perceptions, I was careful not to intervene with personal opinions regarding their responses. One way of accomplishing this was to avoid leading questions. Instead, I asked questions that mirrored the respondents' language.

As an experienced English instructor for the past 12 years, I have developed a wide range of professional relationships among instructors and administrators. In the secondary school system, my position did not influence school administration. The administrators of local district schools report to the Ministry of Education of the local government in each county or city. I belong to the administration of the in-service department of the Ministry of Education, and my role did not involve administrative authority over or supervision of the teachers involved.

Bias could also be a risk if the researcher's or schools' reputations could be affected by the study's findings. This did not exist in my teaching situation. In addition, this could have been problematic if I had been personally acquainted with any of the teachers, students, or school administration members. Therefore, to eliminate the potential of researcher bias, I conducted the study using a high school, learning center, and teachers with whom I had no prior acquaintance. I did not exercise persuasion or power over the participants; they were informed via emailed written contract that their answers would remain confidential, participation would not impact their jobs, and they would not need to answer questions in a specific manner. Participants were informed of their freedom to answer and elaborate on the interview questions regarding classroom instruction according to their usual teaching mode. No consequences or potential harm would come to the teachers as a result of how they answered the interview questions. This ensured that I did not impose any professional or financial damage or psychological stress on the participants.

Finally, techniques for reducing research bias recommended by Shead (2019) also helped mitigate any undue influence I might have had on the participants. These included appreciating the scope of a topic and the difficulty in doing so, observing the participants' reactions, having patience, identifying my feelings in the interviews, and recognizing personal assumptions about the participants (see Shead, 2019). These strategies, combined with the others outlined for preventing institutional and interpersonal bias and unethical interviewing, helped me collect accountable and honest data.

Methodology

Participant Selection

Eight ESL teachers were purposefully selected for this basic qualitative study. Purposeful selection allowed me to select participants who met the study's specific criteria (see Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Half the participants were from a local public high school in the Hangzhou region of China; the other half were selected from a private learning center in the same region. Public schools are state-funded education systems in China (Ministry of Education of the People's Republic of China, 2018), while private learning centers offer classes targeting communicative and foreign language competence.

The sample size was limited to the pools of available foreign ESL teachers at the public high school and the private learning center. In addition, the participant criteria required that the teachers (a) had at least 3 years of teaching experience, (b) were native English speakers who had spent most of their lives in English-speaking countries, (c) had no prior acquaintance with me, the researcher, and (d) were currently teaching ESL full time to Chinese secondary students. Teacher-participants were classified according to the

following characteristics: (a) educational background, (b) prior professional or work experience, (c) country of origin, and (d) gender. It should be noted that at private (versus public) learning centers, students are commonly given the option to select courses according to their language proficiency.

Due to this study's basic qualitative design, a small number of participants were selected based on my access to both educational institutions. This allowed me to promptly conduct the virtual semistructured interviews, while also gaining in-depth, rich, layered information that could not otherwise be collected from a large number of participants. The high school teacher-participants responded directly to me as instructed by the Ministry-issued research invitation form. The teacher-participants were recruited with the assistance of the high school principal, an agent of the People's Republic of China, which regulates China's education system. The Ministry of Education was consulted regarding the study's participant selection criteria, and I worked with them via an invitation letter to identify appropriate participants. Letters of informed consent (signed by me) were electronically sent to participants who voluntarily replied and agreed to the terms in the solicitation letters. Within these letters, the participants were notified of my intention to use audio recordings of the interviews. These letters were signed by participating teacher-participants and submitted back to me. The role of the high school principal was to help identify and recruit participants as a nonbiased, third-party intermediary. Participants were informed in the consent letters to direct any questions to me via email.

I relied on the following practices while recruiting instructors from the learning center. First, I contacted the center's director and explained the purpose of the study and the need for instructor participants. The director then communicated this information to the learning center's teachers and provided interested parties with my email. After a brief period, I located and recruited four respondents willing to participate in the study. These individuals represented senior teachers and members of the learning center's management team.

The target population of this study was eight foreign English teachers (four from a Chinese public high school and four from a private learning center). All participants had at least 3 years of teaching experience and were male and female. These foreign English teachers were from native English-speaking countries such as Australia, Great Britain, Canada, the United States, and South Africa. All had attained a bachelor's degree and certifications related to teaching English to speakers of other languages. Criteria for the selection of teacher-participants were based on several factors. First, teacher-participants confirmed they were familiar with learner-centered instruction in the letter of invitation to participate in research and expressed their willingness to participate in individual interviews in the study. Second, they confirmed they have continued to implement this approach in their teaching practice. The participants also stated their willingness to express their views openly and honestly concerning implementing a new approach to oral English instruction.

Because identifying enough teacher participants is a potential limitation for an exploratory qualitative study, three to four participants were needed to create quality

datasets. To examine the data within a specific context, the local public high school and a learning center, a limited number of instructors were chosen for this research. As a result, four foreign ESL instructors were selected from the local public Chinese high school and four foreign ESL instructors from the private learning center.

Instrumentation

Creswell and Creswell (2018) listed two basic types of data collection in qualitative research: virtual interviews and a researcher journal. For this capstone project, the data collection process used both. I used semistructured virtual interviews to explore foreign language teachers' perceptions in the Hangzhou region of China about the instructional ESL strategies they utilize in daily instruction in Chinese ESL classrooms. Given that a new school year was approaching, along with the fear of coronavirus infection, teachers were more anxious and exhausted than usual. Due to these additional stressors related to COVID-19 and their effect on the teacher workforce, virtual interviews were conducted as a strategy for self-care to help protect school leaders' and teachers' social and emotional well-being. Eight individual interviews were conducted in October 2021. The interview protocol (see Appendix A) helped establish a framework that enabled me to better understand the teachers' practices and perceptions about oral English instruction, their opinions about the implementation of a learner-centered teaching approach to oral English, and their thoughts about the tools and tactics that might help them improve their oral English instruction.

In the interview protocol, I covered all topics related to the RQ and sub-RQs. The design of the semistructured interview protocol allowed me to be systematic in data

collection. The intent was to be free to explore, probe, and ask predetermined questions, which helped me plan how best to use the limited time available for the interviews. I asked the teacher-participants to state their perceptions, insights, and practices in teaching oral English.

In-depth interviews are one-to-one encounters in which the interviewer uses an open-ended set of questions to guide the discussion. The interviews contained three parts. The first part had two purposes: to welcome and introduce the interviews and explain how the interviews would be conducted, including rules, meaning, and context. The second part included the interview questions and the time allotted for responses. The third part was the interview's closing, where I signaled it was ending. At that point, the participants were given a final chance to express themselves and share their concerns. The questions for the semistructured individual interviews explored the perceptions of ESL teachers in China regarding how they implement instructional strategies to support high school ESL students. The responses and focused outcomes were derived from the interview questions (see Appendix A).

Experts look at the content and format of an instrument and judge whether interview questions are appropriate. My committee chair reviewed the interview questions to ensure they were appropriate and would elicit responses to provide sufficient data for the study. During the interviews, I used clarifying questions to verify and confirm the interviewee's position, such as, "Do you mean . . . ?" "If I understand correctly . . ." "Can you give me an example . . .?"

Journal documentation is predicated on a problematic situation and incorporates a faithful description of an experience and reflection on the nature of the event, activities that ensued, options contemplated, and the possible after-effects (Eckert, 2020).

Researcher journal documentation can expand the scope of reflection beyond problematic situations. In addition to being a record of events, it contains a critical analysis of the context (e.g., the sociopolitical setting in which actions unfold and the knowledge, skills, expertise, values, and assumptions of the researcher). A researcher journal is a tool for observing, questioning, critiquing, synthesizing, and acting.

During the data collection phase of this basic qualitative study, I kept a digital journal in Microsoft Word and an Excel file in a folder on my computer. The Microsoft document contained the methodological steps taken to gather data, including significant persons and organizations. I used an Excel file to record the contact details for the teacher-participants during fieldwork. It also contained eight sheets: one for each teacher participant. Columns included the interview date, email address, years of work experience, country of origin, and work location. I later added descriptive data about the virtual setting in which the interview was conducted. I updated this file when I received confirmation emails from the respondents indicating their willingness to participate and as soon as I completed the interview. Besides a digital desktop working journal, I used my smartphone notebook, which I always carried with me, as ideas and inspirations often came when I least expected them. In the smartphone notebook, I documented the patterns I discovered across the interviews and new ideas regarding current perspectives, articles to check, or website information to investigate. During the interviews, I used a printed

topic list on which I could jot down responses or inspirations. Because there was a need to focus on the teacher-participant and conversation, I processed these on the smartphone and written notebook immediately after the interview.

Procedures for Recruitment, Participation, and Data Collection

When initiating interviews, it was essential to explain the purpose of the study, which was stated in the consent form and the interview early in the process. I expressed my appreciation before obtaining signed informed consent. I explained that interviews would last approximately 30-45 minutes. I used a wide range of active listening strategies (e.g., paying close attention, using positive and supportive body language, responding when required, deferring judgment) and focused on verbal and nonverbal language responses (see Spataro & Bloch, 2018). As the researcher, I made an effort to understand the participants' feelings and respected their views (see Spataro & Bloch, 2018). I paraphrased the interview participants' responses to identify facts and understand their concerns. I deliberately paused at key points for emphasis and asked probing questions to obtain in-depth information. I used several ethical approaches to collect data, such as respecting the participants' time and engagement. I utilized all these strategies to establish a positive relationship with the interviewees. Recruitment consisted of the practices I used to select the respondents from both groups and to ensure they were willing to participate after receiving all information about the interview process.

I conducted semistructured virtual interviews in the first step of the data collection process, scheduling two per week so that all eight participants were interviewed within one month. Virtual interviews took place at a location of the participant's choice. The

COVID-19 pandemic prohibited interviews from being in person, so they were held virtually via Zoom. This allowed the interviews to be carried out in a clean, neutral, confidential, and virtual environment. A time limit was not set on the interviews, although I anticipated each to take approximately 30 to 45 minutes. Participants were given as much time as needed to answer all 12 interview questions in sequential order; therefore, in-depth data were collected regarding the participants' perceptions. I audio recorded the interviews using Zoom, a data recording application I later uploaded to NVivo. This made transcribing the interviewees' responses more efficient. After transcribing the interviews, I submitted written summaries of responses to each corresponding participant to confirm their validity, thus accomplishing member checking.

The one-on-one virtual individual interviews allowed the teachers to overcome any reluctance they could have had in an in-person focus group context. For example, teachers could have hesitated to express their thoughts if they believed their views differed from those of other participants (see McGrath, 2019). One-to-one sessions allowed for opportunities to talk about personal perspectives and let me, as the interviewer, cover topics in depth. The interview protocol guided me to ask questions effectively; the virtual one-to-one individual interviews were in real-time and free of physical distractions. These interviews were the primary source of the teachers' reflections regarding their pedagogy and appreciation of teaching oral English.

I used the researcher journal during the four phases of data collection: before data collection while contacting participants, during the interviews, after the interviews, and after the interviews concluded (see Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Before data collection, I

journalled about how I perceived the teaching world for ESL teachers in China. For example, one assumption I considered significant in my research was that the cross-cultural classroom attitude context could inhibit teachers' abilities to achieve a classroom expectation-outcome balance. I used a reflexive position statement as a purposeful and helpful initiation point of reference; it also permitted a comparison of my stance after completing the study.

Contacting the participants took 2 weeks. During this process, I met many new people, which required me to introduce myself and engage in conversation. The results confirmed my assumption that ESL teachers cannot be studied independently from their nationality and that this influences their work, affecting the classroom expectation-outcome balance. I had anticipated that finalizing the recruitment of the teacher-participants would be time consuming, which could lead me to feel less productive. Applied mitigation strategies enabled me to avoid experiencing this trend. I used my researcher journal to dictate priorities and as a reminder of what I needed to accomplish during the limited time I had to conduct research. Because I occasionally struggled with perfectionism and wanted to produce a respected study, journaling assisted me in becoming more aware of my thoughts and allowed me to focus and work more effectively.

I anticipated the researcher journal to be helpful during the interview phase. My experiences during the process validated this assumption. I took notes on contexts, such as the interviews and the participants' descriptions of their work site location. Even though all the participants came from native English-speaking countries, different

nationalities have distinct cultures. After interviewing some participants, I used the researcher journal to document and explore cultural tendencies and perceptions of foreign language teachers about the instructional ESL strategies they utilize daily in Chinese ESL classrooms. I took notes on the teacher's pedagogical vernacular and how freely they spoke about their ESL classroom experiences. Cultural differences in body language were not noted due to confidentiality concerns. Occasionally, when discussing difficult issues, the participants displayed physical reactions.

During the final phase of data collection data and immediately after the interviews, I reflected and read the notes I made in my researcher journal to help discover patterns. Because I have worked and lived in China, I made an effort not to take certain details for granted and was cautious not to align or adjust my preconceptions to the participants' classroom context. I intentionally distanced myself from the individual interviews and analyzed the information across the teacher-participants' nationalities, gender, and ages. I supplemented the participants' perceptions with my observations as an American researcher working and living in a foreign country. Because I shifted between analyzing within and between countries, I set aside my work to put distance between myself and the data. My researcher journal provided the opportunity to uncover patterns and themes across individuals and their countries of origin.

I used my researcher journal for reflection-in-action (see Alexander et al., 2020). As the data collector, it permitted me to reflect on the themes introduced by the participants while compiling datasets. I mitigated the risk of overlooking participant comments due to their differences from the majority of responses by creating a new

category that contained divergent views. I utilized the journal to record both majority and minority statements. Specifically, my journal contained descriptions of methodological issues and ideas regarding my role as the researcher. I also elaborated on the conditions or situations in which I conducted the interviews. This self-reflexivity assisted in assuring the high quality of the data collected and, in turn, the entire research study, the competency of my current work as a researcher, and any future research I might undertake (see Braithwaite et al., 2017). The journal was a valuable addition to help guarantee the sincerity and rigor of the study.

Data Analysis Plan

Multiple varieties of coding exist to assist perceive information through varied lenses. A priori coding is used to deductively identify participant responses related to codes identified in advance based on the literature, prior research, or what the researcher expects to see (Burkholder et al., 2019). Initial coding breaks down qualitative data into discrete parts by examining and comparing them for similarities and differences (Babbie, 2017). In vivo coding keeps data rooted in the participants' language (Saldaña, 2018). I first took a deductive approach using a priori coding and then an inductive approach, allowing the data to drive the themes. I employed initial coding paired with in vivo, using participant responses and identifying patterns and trends within the data (see Saldaña, 2018), at which point some a priori codes were discarded.

In this basic qualitative study, data were collected through semistructured interviews and a researcher journal to identify and explore the perceptions of foreign language teachers in China regarding their implementation of instructional strategies to

support Chinese high school students' learning of oral English language. The responses to the interview questions designed to answer the RQ and sub-RQs were deductively coded using a priori codes based on Sato and McNamara's (2019) theory to identify participant responses related to the framework. The a priori codes were developed from the conceptual framework, the interview questions, and research literature regarding lesson plans, classroom management, and extrinsic pressures induced by exams. These were all related to foreign teacher ESL instruction in the Chinese high school classroom. I also inductively coded with NVivo 11, using initial coding to establish patterns, categories, and commonalities, which allowed themes to emerge from the data (see Saldaña, 2018). Data were then triangulated using the researcher journal to compare emergent themes with the RQ and sub-RQs and my notes.

Coding is a cyclical process and can take multiple sequences to perfect (Ravitch, 2020); therefore, I participated in several coding cycles. During the first cycle, I used a priori coding to deconstruct the data in relation to Sato and McNamara's (2019) theory. I applied initial coding to disaggregate the records into discrete fractions by probing and comparing them for parallels and variations. Next, I compared the emergent themes and categories from initial coding to the a priori codes to determine themes. Finally, I coded each interview response and compared them to the RQ, sub-RQs, and a priori codes to identify patterns and commonalities from the teachers' classroom experiences into similar categories, subcategories, themes, concepts, and assertions. I achieved this by using words or short phrases that summarized my observations into concrete meaning (see

Ravitch & Carl, 2020; Saldaña, 2018). I triangulated the data by isolating each interview response for analysis and compared them with the RQ and sub-RQs.

As groupings developed, I categorized the conceptions that became apparent with regards to a smaller or larger grouping, systematising the codes into factions from less encompassing to more inclusive and ensuring not to bias my perception by constantly referring to my records, transcriptions, and missives. I continued to code using NVivo, keeping all categories that emerged in the participants' language. Next, I developed categories that corresponded to the themes introduced by the participants. These words or phrases referred to an emerging concept that the population referenced (see Saldaña, 2018).

Next, I used my researcher journal and coding memos and compared them to the RQ and sub-RQs. The memos included any areas of personal bias; I noted these and left them out of my analysis. The memos also contained insight and outliers that emerged in the data and allowed me to examine the themes introduced by the respondents. Once themes emerged from the codes, they were represented as summary statements, conclusions, explanations of meaning, or how an interviewee felt about a matter. Discrepant cases were included and described to include the perspectives of all participants as I sought to understand the participants' views; all perspectives increased my knowledge of the classroom-instructor phenomenon. All coding was done in a password-protected Excel file stored on a password-protected USB drive that will be kept in a locked box in my permanent residence for 5 years from completion of the study.

Appendix B demonstrates the steps I took to analyze the data concerning the perceptions of foreign language teachers in China regarding their implementation of instructional strategies to support Chinese high school students' learning of oral English language.

How and When Data Were Analyzed

The data analysis began in the fall of 2021. The hybrid coding structure, consisting of deductive coding (a priori) and inductive coding (initial coding), was divided into three main categories: (a) instructional practices related to lesson plans, (b) instructional practices related to classroom management, and (c) instructional practices related to extrinsic pressures created by tests and assessments. Rigorous data analysis was done by offering the reader a thorough explanation of how the raw data were collected, converted, and organized into the research findings (see Nowell et al., 2017). Nowell et al. (2017) noted that sincerity should be the cornerstone of qualitative research. Sincerity can be attained by transparency concerning challenges and methods and self-reflexivity concerning tendencies, subjective principles, and biases. Transparency necessitates a case record or audit trail that clearly reports all critical findings (Creswell & Creswell, 2018), which can be indicated throughout the manuscript or in appendices. While the research protocol is often written before the data collection phase, researcher journal entries can be made at any time, not separated or structured. A researcher journal includes various types of entries, such as data, contextual information, reflections, and ideas (Braithwaite et al., 2017). The replicability of the research protocol and transferability of the results could be

questioned if these elements were not mentioned. Accordingly, I followed a rigorous plan that helped me mitigate this risk.

After the one-to-one interviews were completed, I reviewed the interview data for recurring themes related to the effectiveness of strategy instruction and the ability to predict the effects and moderators pertaining to self-regulated learning and English as a foreign language. The interviews were the primary source of information regarding the teachers' reflections on their pedagogy and their appreciation and perceptions of their instructional ESL strategies in daily instruction in Chinese ESL classrooms. During the virtual interviews, I collected in-depth information about the teachers' perspectives on implementing a learner-centered teaching approach to oral English.

To ascertain teacher practice perceptions, I used hybrid coding whereby a priori codes and thematic content analysis were applied to analyze the virtual interviews. Thematic content analysis was used to eliminate bias and establish my impressions of the data. Teacher-participant interview responses were transcribed to avoid inaccuracies and loss of data. When managing the interview recordings, I adopted an easy to remember nomenclature system that ensured data were organized. When conducted correctly, thematic content analysis can increase traceability, and verification of the analysis can be ensured, thus proving its effectiveness as one of the most trustworthy data analysis methods (Xu & Zammit, 2020). The following 10 steps were taken to analyze the data from the virtual interviews:

Before the first set of interviews, I prepared a priori codes based on Sato and McNamara's (2019) general-purpose second-language oral competency theory.

I transcribed the interview data using NVivo Version 11 and stored the information in an appropriate file.

I constantly compared the data to identify common categories and emerging patterns.

I marked the paragraphs or sentences as they fit into tentative themes.

I constructed a list of inductive coding categories in alphabetical order before numbering for tracing.

I merged inductive (initial codes) and deductive (a priori codes) and integrated them into a single coding scheme with refined meanings developed for consistency.

I compared all the coding data against my researcher journal; some original categories shifted to a subcategory.

I organized and refined the themes and categories.

I summarized key information and findings to answer the RQ and sub-RQs.

I produced a copy of my work and put the original in a safe place with a private password.

I created subcategories from the data collected from one-on-one interviews.

These subcategories represented information on teacher instruction (e.g., techniques and strategies), teacher learning communities, and student engagement for interactive and autonomous learning. A professor colleague and I were the only persons involved in analyzing the data. A constant comparative review enabled me to identify all data carefully. I located themes from the categories, subcategories, and codes. To ensure the credibility of the data analysis, I constantly compared and contrasted the data to prevent

any incorrect interpretation of the data. After a personal review of the analysis, a fellow academic reviewed the findings to ensure the analysis was accurate; they provided constructive input. The peer reviewer signed a confidentiality agreement after providing this service.

Procedures for Dealing with Discrepant Cases

Discrepancies in the data need to be considered. When there were vague or discordant responses from the participants during the interviews, I asked probing and follow-up questions to ensure the information reflected the participants' perspectives. I reexamined the different opinions of the participants by comparing the interview responses and researcher journal, researcher notes, and teacher reflections to avoid focusing on one viewpoint. Member checking and triangulation were tools to compare the data, verify findings, or discover discrepancies. Moreover, a peer-review by an expert was ongoing throughout the research and ensured that the results accurately reflected the data. In doing so, I was able to determine that my findings did not contain any discrepant data that could potentially alter the study.

Trustworthiness

Credibility

The plan for double and cross-checking the information was derived from the RQ and sub-RQs. This involved a strategy for determining that my end-state datasets featured accurate and noncontradictory information. The following steps helped me achieve these outcomes.

The first step was prolonged engagement, which allowed me to spend adequate time in the field to learn and understand the Chinese classroom culture and social setting. This process helped me orient myself, so I appreciated the classroom context properly. Prolonged engagement also assisted me in identifying errors or distortions in the data to improve the quality and accuracy of my findings. Because little is known about the instruction foreign teachers use to facilitate English learning in Chinese classrooms, the second technique employed was the researcher journal. The journal allowed me to identify this problem's most relevant characteristics and elements. The third technique, peer debriefing, was a means to uncover any biases or assumptions about foreign teachers and Chinese classrooms I might have had. This process helped me become more aware of my posture toward the interview data and researcher journal analysis. The fifth technique, deviant case analysis, involved searching for and discussing elements of the data that did not support or appear to contradict patterns or explanations that emerged from the data analysis. Participants occasionally struggled with abstract synthesis, and teachers had different views on subjects. I used the sixth technique, member checking, as an applied practice. Establishing the validity of qualitative research is not the same as quantitative research (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Therefore, I used these principles by developing a data analysis plan incorporating rigor as a key element. I relied on similar techniques to ensure data reliability and compared my findings against original source documents.

Member checking, triangulation, and auditing were used to determine the accuracy and credibility of the findings in this study (see Creswell & Creswell, 2018). I sent a summary of the transcripts to the participants immediately after the interviews

were transcribed. I asked the participants to verify the accuracy of the summaries of the transcripts and discussions of the interviews. Next, I finished the researcher journal data analysis and sent the summary of my field notes to the teacher-participants to review to ensure that I understood their responses. This also allowed the participants to verify the data. Member checking was a quality control process by which I sought to improve the data's accuracy, credibility, and validity.

I used triangulation to corroborate responses from different individuals. The researcher journal and interviews were the two data collection methods in this study. Triangulation helped me compare the interview responses and the researcher journal to verify findings or identify discrepancies. Interviews and the researcher journal provided data for comparison.

Cheung and Hennebry-Leung (2020) suggested that researchers should invite a third-party consultant to review codes and themes. The third-party feedback provided by the peer reviewer was intended to ensure the research accurately reflected the information in the collected data. The reviewer assisted me in examining end-state data and confirmed its reliability. Reliability measures included the reviewer's determination that the data matched the questions posed to the participants. Auditing was conducted through a study review by an outside expert, a professor at a local university, to establish accuracy and credibility.

Transferability

Transferability was not a primary objective of the study; however, thick, rich, and explicit descriptions of the social and cultural relationship patterns in their contexts were

necessary. In this qualitative study, the focus was on understanding two environments in depth. While the results could be generalized, the extensive context research necessary for a basic qualitative study suggests that the results are not designed to achieve transferability.

External validity and qualitative research do not necessarily coexist since qualitative research can have different settings, and each is exclusive (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Transferability is subjectively hinged on the validity of qualitative research and its ability to be generalized and the results applied to other contexts or settings. The goal of this qualitative study was to provide a rich, contextualized understanding of the phenomenon and to avoid generalizing. In this study, I sought to give a detailed account of various field experiences explicitly relating to foreign teacher instruction in Chinese classrooms. The degree to which the results of this study could be transferred to other countries with other respondents is limited because of the specific context, setting, and unique set of policies set forth by the Chinese Ministry of Education.

Dependability

Dependability was increased by documenting each interview's data collection and analysis procedures. By applying uniform procedures, it is more likely the results of the interviews and data interpretation will be dependable (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The study's dependability was increased by the logical alignment between the RQ, sub-RQs, interview questions, and questions that guided the data analysis. Dependability was strengthened by using an external audit that included a separate professional not involved in the research, who examined the process and product of the study. The function of this

independent researcher was to review the process for accuracy and to ensure that the data supported the findings, interpretations, and conclusions. This process, in turn, led to accurate interpretation of the data and the development of detailed findings. Managing these perspectives could have but did not prove problematic.

Confirmability

The confirmability of a study concerns the level of replicable detail in its procedures and the amount of supporting data (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

Confirmability of the study was increased by providing the interview questions and questions that guided data analysis within each sub-RQ. Several types of triangulation techniques allowed me to investigate the consistency of the findings established through different data collection methods. I used teacher-participant interviews and a researcher journal. Triangulation allowed for closer examination of the consistency of separate data sources. Using data triangulation techniques, I examined the end-state datasets from multiple perspectives. Related data interpretation approaches combined with various theoretical perspectives facilitated a deeper understanding of foreign teacher instruction in Chinese high school classrooms. Irrespective of theoretical concepts, qualitative researchers have distinctive criteria to safeguard and gauge the trustworthiness of their findings (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

Ethical Procedures

Treatment of Human Participants

In this research study, I adhered to all established requirements for the ethical treatment of human participants. Specifically, my methods were consistent with the

principles of the *Belmont Report* (Office for Human Research Protections, 2016a) out of respect for persons, beneficence, and justice. I respected the participants by using noninvasive research techniques. I reduced risk by not asking sensitive questions, and maximized benefits by disseminating the findings in a manner that allowed teachers to reflect on their instructional practices. I guarded the participants' identities by using alphanumeric codes, keeping them confidential. Personal information was not released to anyone except the chair of my committee. Ethical recruitment procedures have been established by the Instructional Review Board (IRB) at Walden University and followed with no vulnerable populations targeted for the sample (i.e., no disabled participants, minors, undocumented immigrants, or anyone who would be unable to protect their interests).

Research conducted in China does not include the ethical recruitment practice that no nonnative speaking or fluent English speakers may be recruited. Following the *Belmont Report*, the informed consent letters were: (a) in a language comprehensible to the participants, (b) contained reasonable information for the participants to decide whether or not to join the study, (c) a discussion of any foreseeable risks, (d) a statement of the intent of the research, (e) a description of benefits expected from the research, (f) contact information for answers to any questions, and (g) a reference to the confidentiality and procedures of the study (Office for Human Research Protections, 2016a). The importance of the principles of the *Belmont Report* is emphasized by the Common Rule, a code that 20 different agencies, including the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, have adopted as guidelines for treating human subjects

(Office for Human Research Protections, 2016b). By working within the policies of the *Belmont Report*, this study is aligned with practices of various institutions and established as ethical, which increased its efficacy. The complete certification of adherence to the *Belmont Report* was obtained from Walden University's IRB.

Institutional Permission

During the recruitment phase, I consulted the Ministry of Education regarding participant selection criteria and requested research study permission and to identify appropriate participants. Prospective participants were sent initial contact letters that presented the study, its intent, and the option for voluntary participation. The potential high school teacher participants were identified, contacted, and recruited through the school's principal and the director of foreign teachers in the learning center. The high school principal was consulted regarding participant selection criteria whom I worked with while following IRB guidelines to identify appropriate potential participants. The teachers were informed of the purpose of the study, their expected role, and their right to refuse to participate or discontinue participation at any time. They were informed of how the data would be collected, used, and disseminated and any potential risks to their privacy this might have posed. Once the participants were confirmed for the study, a written letter of consent detailing ethical issues and precautions was obtained, signed by the participant and me. The consent forms are kept and secured in a locked file. Before initiating these activities, I received approval from Walden University's IRB (No. 10-04-21-0377175).

Language learning in private learning centers typically supplements formal education or existing foreign language knowledge. Participants were chosen via purposive sampling. Senior staff teachers have in-depth knowledge of the organization and represent a range of roles within the learning center. This group of participants included representatives from management and teaching teams. Foreign teachers in the learning centers fulfill various subordinate roles and have experiential knowledge. Interviews with the foreign English teachers represented as much diversity as this small number of participants allowed in terms of age, country of origin, gender, roles within the learning center, and length of time involved with the organization. As opposed to the high school teacher-participant recruitment, I did not rely on the local Chinese government or Ministry of Education leaders. The director disseminated the study invitation to help me locate foreign high school teachers in the learning center. The potential participants then contacted me directly and were vetted for the study based on its criteria.

Because the sample size was small, there was some risk that participants could be identified and their privacy violated; I avoided this by using alphanumeric identifiers instead of names for the participants, the school, and the learning center. The participants volunteered via private email after receiving information from the learning center director. I interviewed the participants in their natural, real-life settings rather than researcher-imposed controlled environment, which minimized potential physical injury to participants. Furthermore, I minimized the risk of bias because I had no prior acquaintance with the participants. All the teacher-participants were treated fairly and equally, with the same respect, and provided as much time as needed to answer the

interview questions. I did not exclude participants on any basis of race, ethnicity, religious beliefs, gender, sexual orientation, age, or socioeconomic status.

Treatment of Data

I took precautions to ensure the ethical treatment of data according to Walden's IRB standards. The participants were identified in all study notations by alphanumeric codes, and only I knew their names (and agreed not to disclose them). All data collected by audio recording and researcher notes will be kept in a safe locked box for 5 years following the study's completion and destroyed thereafter. Only I will retain a key. Digital data will be stored on my password-protected computer after the study's completion and publication and deleted after 5 years. During the research, all data were password protected, using two-step authentication. I will have sole access to this data for the duration of its retention.

Measures for Participants' Protection

The measures I utilized for protecting participants adhered to two important principles. First, I followed ethical standards and protocols that preserved respondent confidentiality, and the participants consented to their involvement (see J. J. Zhang, 2017). Second, I monitored the study's progress from the standpoint of situational relativism (Goncalves, 2020). This approach enabled me to identify and respond to ethical concerns as they occurred throughout the study's lifecycle. These combined strategies allowed me to meet key ethical standards as I conducted the research. These standards correlated with the principles of beneficence, justice, and respect for persons.

In addition, a journal helped me to reflect upon and evaluate my ethical research strategy. By documenting issues that occurred during the data collection phase, I managed them in contemplative and reflexive ways (see J. J. Zhang, 2017). For example, some researchers might write and reflect on why one guideline might need to be selected over another (J. J. Zhang, 2017). Because there was no power relationship between me and the teacher-participants, the study also benefited from reflexivity regarding maintaining ethical practices. Being self-reflective helped me to identify the responses to the questions that aligned with the stakeholders' perspectives and minimized the potential for researcher bias. More specifically, the researcher journal captured my prior experience as a teacher, thoughts on my research as a student, and ideas as a researcher. This was a means of identifying the interplay of these elements, thus assisting in the development of the study.

Initially, I explained to the participants that the purpose of this basic qualitative study was to explore the perceptions of foreign language teachers in China regarding their implementation of instructional strategies to support Chinese high school students' learning of oral English language. I also clarified that any information obtained during the interview would be omitted from the analysis if they in any way proved they might be harmful to the teachers (see Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The participating faculty were given a participant consent form, and I assured them they could opt out at any point if they no longer wished to remain in the study. Also, each participant was assigned an alphanumeric code (PS1-PS4; LC1-LC4) to protect their confidentiality and keep track of

the data. I informed all participants of their right to read a summary transcript of their interview for final approval before its inclusion in the study.

In the research participation invitation letter, I informed the participants that the data obtained would remain confidential and not be offered to anyone outside my committee without approval from the IRB at Walden University. The data would be stored in a secure area, kept for 5 years after completion of the study, and then destroyed. I informed all teacher-participants that regardless of the study's results, it would not be used to evaluate or impact the employment conditions of the participating instructors.

Summary

In this chapter, I have provided an in-depth review of the study's methodology, including its design, instrumentation, data collection methods, data interpretation, trustworthiness, and ethical considerations. Using a research design informed by constructivism, I laid the foundation for examining eight ESL teachers' classroom instruction modalities to identify how these teachers apply instructional processes related to lesson plans, classroom management, assessment, and student-teacher engagement. The RQ and sub-RQs in this basic qualitative study concerned the perceptions of foreign language teachers in China about the instructional ESL strategies they utilize in daily instruction in Chinese ESL classrooms. The importance of this study is based on the lack of significant research on the instructional practices used to teach ESL to Chinese students. The instrument used to collect data in this basic qualitative research included semistructured interviews. I triangulated the interview data with my researcher journal

entries. In Chapter 4, I document this study's settings, methods of data collection, data analysis procedures, findings, and evidence of trustworthiness.

Chapter 4: Results

The purpose of this basic qualitative study was to explore the perceptions of foreign language teachers working in the Hangzhou region of China regarding their implementation of instructional strategies to support Chinese high school students' learning of oral English language. The RQ that guided this study included a broad level inquiry, and a series of three sub-RQs helped to clarify and refine the RQ. The following questions directed this study:

RQ1: What are the perceptions of foreign language teachers in China about the instructional ESL strategies they implement in daily instruction in Chinese ESL classrooms?

Sub-RQ1a: What are the perceptions of foreign language teachers in China about how they implement instructional practices related to lesson plans to support high school ESL students' learning of oral English?

Sub-RQ1b: What are the perceptions of foreign language teachers in China about how they implement instructional practices related to classroom management?

Sub-RQ1c: What are the perceptions of foreign language teachers in China about how they implement instructional practices related to extrinsic pressures created by tests and assessments?

Given the study's emphasis on participant perceptions regarding the subject of this research, I decided on an interview-based qualitative research design. This basic qualitative approach structured the analysis by foregrounding the respondents' responses and using this information as the primary data to examine the RQ and sub-RQs (see

Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The participants selected for the study included an aggregate group of eight foreign language instructors working in China. Four respondents worked in a public school setting; four others worked in a privately funded English learning center. By keeping the sample group small and manageable, I was able to generate a concentrated dataset that provided rich, in-depth insight into the participants' attitudes.

In this chapter, I present the results of the data derived from this basic qualitative study. I will first examine issues related to the setting selected to conduct the semistructured interviews and collect data. Second, I will discuss data collection and analysis practices I utilized during the interview process and at its conclusion. Third, I will include an in-depth assessment of the results generated through the participants' feedback. Finally, I will reference the strategies used to ensure the data's trustworthiness before summarizing these findings.

Setting

As I prepared the setting and materials needed to conduct the semistructured interviews, data generation processes were impacted by two external factors. First, because my research entailed the selection of foreign ESL instructors working in Chinese public-school settings, I depended on the nation's Ministry of Education to assist me as I located the appropriate candidates for the interviews. Second, due to concerns related to the COVID-19 pandemic, I relied on a Zoom conferencing format to conduct the interviews with both participant groups. This approach had a disadvantage as it created an artificial distance between me, as the interviewer, and the respondents. At the same time, this format appeared to contribute to the participants' willingness to thoroughly address

the questions as they applied their professional experience and informed opinions when structuring and presenting their answers.

The demographics present in both respondent groups—instructors working in a public school and language center context—reflected the selection criteria. Both groups featured ESL instructors with diverse national backgrounds. The teachers were American, Canadian, British, Australian, and New Zealanders. The groups included an almost equal division of male and female participants, even though women slightly outnumbered men enrolled in the high school samples.

Data Collection

I conducted eight semistructured virtual interviews. This process included interviews with four instructors working in a public school and four in a private learning center. Each interview lasted for approximately 55 minutes. Throughout the interview process, I relied on three primary approaches to data collection. Each strategy represented an approach that Cheung and Hennebry-Leung (2020) recommended for interview-based studies. First, I used a journal to record my perceptions and interpretations of the study's development. Journaling allowed me to reflect on my subjective interpretations of the interviews even as I recorded a set of objective insights, which reminded me to consider the cultural factors related to the subject's diverse national backgrounds and the unique conditions associated with Chinese regional classrooms. Second, I took notes in my researcher journal during the interview sessions. During this process, I jotted down abbreviated comments that reflected each participant's response to the questions. I would later utilize these notes to develop the codes for the data analysis stage. Third, I audio

recorded the interview sessions after receiving each participant's written and verbal permission. I replayed the interviews from Zoom during the data transcription process to ensure accuracy. I transcribed this aggregate data into a single Microsoft Word file, which I kept on an encrypted hard drive. This document included the responses collected from the participants, shorthand versions of field notes from my journal, and codes from which the themes emerged from the data. I accessed and utilized this file when conducting data analysis. Throughout these processes, I relied on manual transcription strategies.

Data Analysis

The data analysis included a three-part process. I used a manual approach for triangulation and techniques to examine the findings from an individual and comparative standpoint. First, I deconstructed the aggregate information into segmented components that reflected each group and participant's response to the interview. Second, I coded this data to create categories that were both descriptive and accessible for reference. Third, I added discrepant cases into the broader dataset. This latter stage ensured the accuracy of the study's findings. It also maintained the ethical principle of recording all responses regardless of their alignment with the broader trends in the interview responses.

I deconstructed the aggregate data generated by the interviews by relying on a nine-step operational process. First, I separated the responses for the individual questions presented to the respondents. During the second step, I subdivided the findings related to the 12 total questions into groups reflective of the themes associated with Sato and McNamara's (2019) theory. These discussion points included issues regarding lesson

plan construction, classroom management, and instructor management of extrinsic pressures induced by exams. This enabled me to identify the themes generated through the responses. Third, I triangulated the themes that emerged from the data collected from both groups as they responded to the individual questions.

These initial steps contributed to the fourth step, which was the organization of primary and secondary themes related to the individual responses. During the Zoom interview, the fifth step, I separated these themes into categories as they were provided by both groups. I then prepared these categories for NVivo processing and classification. The sixth step in this process included presenting advanced themes that emerged from manual and NVivo-assisted data analysis. The seventh step was a secondary approach to triangulation, where I compared the emerging themes from the participants' responses to my impressions recorded in my journal. During the eighth step, I eliminated any primary or secondary findings (i.e., participant responses) that appeared to correlate with my perspective. During the ninth step, I interposed the discrepant data associated with each dataset containing the participants' feedback. This step-by-step process eliminated my bias and ensured the findings' trustworthiness and enabled me to formally present the themes that emerged and accurately reflected the participants' insights.

The emerging themes derived from these steps included information coded into four primary categories. Each participant was assigned an alphanumeric code, and the response was labeled according to their classification. I designated the public-school teachers as PS1, PS2, etc. I utilized a similar process when identifying the group representing the language center instructors as LC1, LC2, etc. The codes additionally

classified each discussion question presented to the respondents during the interview. The themes created through this method reflected each participant's response to individual interview questions, the aggregate themes notable for each group (public school and learning center educators), and the discrepant data related to each question.

Themes reflective of the participants' general insights included issues related to class size. Themes regarding testing materials referred to the need to ensure teacher knowledge of ESL-based concepts and the role that specific resources have in advancing student knowledge. Themes related to classroom management involved the efficacy of specific organizational and communication strategies. Themes reflective of exigent testing pressures referenced classroom instructional models' strategic role in preparing students for these exams. These themes encompassed most respondents' perspectives and a few participants' discrepant views. The discrepant themes reflected minority opinions that diverged from the groups' majority views and only represented the expressed beliefs of a few respondents. These included one learning center participant who viewed their institution's instructional models as representing an effective approach, and an additional learning center respondent who indicated that their organization relies on limited forms of data analysis as they planned their exam preparation-based curriculum.

Results

Results for the Main Research Question

The main RQ in this dissertation was: "What are the perceptions of foreign language teachers in China about the instructional ESL strategies they implement in daily instruction in Chinese ESL classrooms?" Feedback to Questions 1-3 addressed issues

related to instructors' practices when preparing lesson plans. The responses derived from the learning center group indicated that their institution relied on various approaches to media and materials to teach their students. Respondent LC1 stated, "Our agency relies on a multimodal strategy as we incorporate readings, video, and helpful websites. These approaches appeal to various types of learners and students with various levels of English knowledge and mastery." Based on this assessment, the learning center instructors identified the plurality of sources used to guide their students through various stages of the second language acquisition process.

However, other findings within the second group, foreign teachers working in high schools, indicated the instructors' dissatisfaction with their institution's methods. The group's responses expressed this by identifying the tendency among Chinese learning centers to emphasize vocabulary training as an essential aspect of their curriculum. Participant HS3 noted, "Vocabulary teaching represents our [public] school's priority. Much of our focus [in teaching English] tends to emphasize the students' ability to recognize and use specific terms." These comments referenced the conditions that often impact the work of the aggregate of interviewed instructors. Participant LC4 elaborated on these trends by identifying how Chinese educational policy limits the instructor's perceived ability to prepare ESL learners for future challenges:

This method [vocabulary-focused English education] does little to assist students to develop the skills that they need to become fluent in English. While vocabulary can help learners broaden the phrases that they can use, this instruction does not help them understand social contexts. As a result, they may use the wrong term

while attempting to converse. I believe that teaching vocabulary outside of a broader context only confuses their abilities.

Based on this assessment, the participant and the broader group tended to view the external variables that introduce constraints on their teaching methods as limiting factors. Accordingly, the foreign language instructors viewed teacher preparation methodologies as strategies that would not likely prepare or motivate ESL learners' practice of their second language (see Sato & McNamara, 2019).

Results for Subresearch Question 1

Sub-RQ1 asked, "What are the perceptions of foreign language teachers in China about how they implement instructional practices related to lesson plans to support high school ESL students' learning of oral English?" A sample response from Participant HS4 to Question 4's prompt to discuss the types of curricula available to high school teachers highlighted a major perceived problem. According to this participant,

We use very dated textbooks. The school mandates our use of the books, and we seldom have access to newer materials [through the school]. Many teachers solve this problem by finding resources of their own. They frequently use websites. Or maybe someone will bring in a news or magazine article written in English. We do this to provide students with more current information.

This statement indicates the instructor's challenges in balancing the materials provided by the high school and supplementing information that was missing in the documents. This view also demonstrates the respondent's belief that the existing

curriculum requires an instructor's ability to locate additional resources to prepare their students for formal exams and related challenges.

At the same time, responses from the learning center participants showed their innovation when addressing their ESL learners' holistic needs. Respondent LC1 observed, "Games engage our students. They also require them to apply what they learn through lessons, homework, and lectures. This broadens their [language learning] abilities." These insights indicated that the instructor's role in designing curriculum and pedagogical strategies incorporated an emphasis on motivating ESL learners to practice their second language within a formal classroom setting (see Sato & McNamara, 2019). Participant HS1 elaborated on these concepts as they apply in high school settings: "Our [institution's] limitations require teachers to be creative. And so, we often spend much of our time developing methods and materials that we believe will capture our students' interests and motivate them into participating." Based on this assessment, teacher innovations and planning enable the instructors to address their school's resource-based challenges.

Other responses indicated that learners' acceptance of these methods might vary as they develop their second language skills. Respondent LC1 stated, "Since students exhibit different types of strengths and weaknesses at various stages of their [language] learning process, it is always important to use different ways of correcting their speech." This approach reflects the instructor's understanding of their student's tendencies and underscores the necessity of tailoring response methods to a specific learner's skill level and cultural attitudes.

Finally, the participants' interview responses also concerned the teachers' roles in encouraging their student's use of multimedia texts and sources as they gradually enhanced their second language acquisition skills. Respondent LC4's comments provide a primary example:

Learners need ongoing and immersive types of media that will foster their skills outside of the classroom. Diverse media can help them with this process. These options also allow them to explore their interests, like sports, while also practicing their reading, listening, and comprehension skills.

Based on these assessments, the learning center participants indicated that their teaching methods incorporated holistic methodologies that encouraged student learning beyond the classroom. Feedback from the high school group indicated similar responses. When viewed in the context of the group's appraisal of their learning center's organizational characteristics, the comments reflect the belief that an instructor's role needs to incorporate effective forms of planning and innovation to overcome critical barriers. Examples include their institution's tendency not to integrate data review of student performance along with its reliance on a curriculum that will not likely prepare students for the rigors of formal examinations. These trends reflect conditions observed and identified by both learning center and high school groups.

Responses to Question 5 indicated a tendency among the respondents to rely on systematic approaches to ESL education as they present lesson plans to students. Respondent LC4 noted that while the instructor adheres to the organization's curriculum plan, they also assess learning progress among the broader classroom and individual

learners. LC4 observed, “I rely on a methodical approach as I present information to [my students]. My strategy mainly follows the curriculum. At the same time, I will pause and readdress issues that appear to be difficult for my student’s retention.” Similarly, Participant PS2 referred to their selected methodology as a learner-oriented approach: “While [instructors] need to follow the plan for a given semester, we also make allowances for students [who struggle to demonstrate selected skills].” Based on these observations, the participants rely on a combination of curriculum-oriented and student-focused presentation strategies.

Results for Subresearch Question 2

Sub-RQ2 asked, “What are the perceptions of foreign language teachers in China about how they implement instructional practices related to classroom management?” The responses to Interview Questions 6-8 demonstrated how instructors managed situations where they needed to correct ESL learner mistakes. These responses additionally detailed their strategies for encouraging students to extend learning beyond the classroom. These findings demonstrated the participants’ practices regarding engaging their students.

The collective participant responses to Question 6 aligned with sub-RQ2 and included discussions of their roles in correcting speakers within their classrooms. These findings demonstrate the teachers’ awareness of the recommended methods of correcting L2 learner mistakes as well as a simultaneous understanding of the conventions related to Chinese culture. Participant PS2 observed,

As teachers, we always try to strike a balance between what we know the student requires as forms of correction and the methods that we utilize in a situation. Our students do not like to be corrected in front of their friends and peers, and so I often will consult with a learner following a session. Correcting errors in this way reduces their embarrassment.

These comments reflect the Chinese cultural issue of “face,” as it enabled the teachers to correct the students without shaming them in front of peers. At a deeper level, the comments underscore the participant’s awareness that hot correction—methods used as a speaker immediately makes a mistake—do not always represent effective strategies.

Respondents in the learning center group additionally noted that they rely on private correction, particularly in cases where the student would likely be embarrassed by public approaches to hot correction. Participant LC2 argued, “By correcting students in private, we are less likely to cause them public embarrassment in front of their peers. These approaches will also increase the student’s chances of receiving and applying the correction to their speaking.” These insights both identify the drawbacks associated with public correction and the value associated with lessons delivered to the learner at a one-on-one level.

Respondent feedback to Question 7 demonstrated the participants’ belief in their methodologies’ value in encouraging their students’ learning beyond the classroom. The instructors in the learning center group indicated that their approach enabled individual student learning. Respondent LC3 observed, “Private correction and ongoing forms of encouragement improve our students’ willingness to continue their English language

learning [beyond the classroom].” Participants in the public school also reflected similar beliefs. Respondent PS4 observed, “We [teachers] improve our students’ language learning by offering relevant forms of correction. We also seek to enhance their learning by encouraging them to practice their skills within their home or community environments.” These comments reflect the participant’s confidence in their selected methodology’s ability to encourage student learning across the complex L2 acquisition process. The aggregate findings derived from both groups demonstrated similar beliefs.

Responses to Question 8 identified the respondents’ approach to learner engagement and how the instructors achieved this outcome within their classrooms. A recurrent theme was the participants’ reliance on varying methodologies. According to respondent LC1, “Diverse engagement strategies appeal to students with different expressed learning style preferences.” The respondent elaborated on this statement by describing the methodologies used to engage students at the cognitive and social learning levels. Respondent PS3 explained the methods for encouraging students in the classroom and one-on-one instructional settings. Regarding this second setting, PS3 stated, “I utilize the [engagement] approaches that best align with the student’s skill level and comfort level in utilizing their linguistic skills.” Participants in both groups recognized the importance of using diverse engagement strategies that correspond with various educational settings.

Results for Subresearch Question 3

Sub-RQ3 asked, “What are the perceptions of foreign language teachers in China about how they implement instructional practices related to extrinsic pressures created by

tests and assessments?” The participants in each group addressed the issues related to this in their responses to Questions 9-12. Question 9 prompted the participants to discuss their institution’s role in utilizing data to make teaching decisions that prepare learners for exigent institutional pressures. These pressures can be defined as the requirements for learners in public school and learning center environments to pass formal English exams. Responses from both groups indicated that their institutions did not rely on these methods. Participant PS1 noted, “Our schools do not apply retrospective data to prepare students or exams.” Similarly, respondent LC3 indicated that these methodologies “do not represent organizational priorities” in their learning center.

Responses to Question 10 further identified instructors’ approaches in utilizing various pedagogical interventions that prepare their students for exigent challenges. Respondents from both groups indicated they rely on several methods to achieve these outcomes. Participant PS2 referenced the instructor’s use of focused preparation methodologies to structure and guide the “lesson plans for the entire course,” including integrating material directly related to the exam content. Similarly, Respondent LC4 identified “longer-term and success-based strategies” as the approach that adequately prepared students for the pressures presented by exams. Primary examples included the development of a long-term study plan that provided learners with opportunities for mastering exam-related material over 3 months.

Question 11 asked the participants to assess public school and learning center strengths in preparing students for exigent pressures. Respondents in the public-school group indicated the belief that their institution adequately prepares their learners for these

challenges. According to PC4, “Our institution prioritizes exam-based instruction and allocates time and resources to student preparation.” In contrast, the participants in the learning center group identified their school’s weaknesses in this area. Respondent LC2 summarized this theme by observing: “While our school recognizes student preparation as a concern, its focus in terms of curriculum design and course emphasis often limits the direct instruction that would allow for student success.”

Responses to Question 12 identified factors that could prevent students from achieving success as they prepare for formal ESL exams and other exigent pressures. Public school instructors referenced student-oriented variables, such as anxiety and lack of adequate personal preparation, as primary concerns. Participant PC3 noted, “We can prepare our students for [exams]; . . . however, we are not always successful in convincing them to follow the practices that will improve their performance.” However, respondents in the learning center group referenced institutional factors and instructional limitations as primary contributing factors. Participant LC1 observed,

Our school’s approach to exam pressures can be viewed as a potential challenge to student success. While teachers [within the institution] rely on approaches that can improve their performance, the limited time that we have often detracts from positive outcomes. I attempt to resolve these challenges by recommended strategies that students can learn to prepare for exams over a long-term period.

Both populations’ instructors identified several factors that could potentially limit student success as learners prepare for exams and exigent pressures. Table 1 outlines the themes, categories, and codes derived from the participant interviews.

Table 1*Research Question, Subresearch Questions, Themes, Categories, and Codes*

RQ and sub-RQs	Themes	Categories	Codes
RQ: What are the perceptions of foreign language teachers in China about the instructional ESL strategies they implement in daily instruction in Chinese ESL classrooms?	Theme 1: Instructional strategies used in ESL classrooms.	Pedagogical strategies.	Descriptive features Noted participant preference
	Theme 2: ESL model effectiveness in teaching formal English grammar and vocabulary.	Assessment and critique of applied ESL instructional framework.	Attributional features Strengths Weaknesses Limitations
	Theme 3: How the models contribute to student formal linguistic knowledge.	Linkage between ESL pedagogical methodology and measured student performances.	Linkages. Strengths Weaknesses Limitations.
Sub RQ1: What are the perceptions of foreign language teachers in China about how they implement instructional practices related to lesson plans to support high school ESL students' learning of oral English?	Theme 1: Teacher role in ESL curriculum implementation.	Curriculum design and implementation. Teacher involvement in the process.	Involvement Decision making Limitations Insights
	Theme 2: Describe the instructional methodologies used to present ESL lesson plans to students.	Description of pedagogical strategies. Linkages to student performance and success.	Linkages Attributional features Strengths Weaknesses
Sub RQ2: What are the perceptions of foreign language teachers in China about how they implement instructional practices related to classroom management?	Theme 1: Strategies for encouraging ESL students to practice English despite their mistakes.	Models for generating ESL student participation. Overcoming ESL student anxieties.	Descriptive features Linkages Motivational factors
	Theme 2: Model effectiveness in motivating student ESL practice.	Models for generating ESL student participation. Model effectiveness.	Attributional features Strengths Weaknesses Limitations
	Theme 3: Methods for engaging ESL learners. Recommended practices.	Models for generating ESL student participation. Preferred approaches selected and justified by the participants.	Linkages Noted participant preferences Strengths Limitations

(table continues)

RQ and sub-RQs	Themes	Categories	Codes
Sub-RQ3: What are the perceptions of foreign language teachers in China about how they implement instructional practices related to extrinsic pressures created by tests and assessments?	Theme 1: Institution use of data to prepare lesson plans that anticipate external pressures.	Data-oriented planning. Approaches in managing external pressures.	Noted participant preferences Data management External pressures
	Theme 2: Implementation of instructional interventions that prepare students for external academic pressures.	Instructional interventions. Approaches in managing external pressures.	Student anxieties Instructional practices External pressures Noted participant preferences
	Theme 3: School strengths and gaps in preparing students for external pressures.	Institutional assessment and critique. Approaches in managing external pressures.	External pressures School readiness Strengths Weaknesses Limitations
	Theme 4: Potential limitations, gaps, and barriers that can prevent students from successfully completing external academic requirements.	Institutional barriers. Instructional limitations. Student anxiety. Institutional assessment and critique.	Linkages Attributional features Strengths Weaknesses Limitations

Evidence of Trustworthiness

Throughout this study, my strategies related to the study's design, data collection, and analysis ensured reliability and validity. These same methodologies ensured credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. I incorporated a diverse set of approaches to achieve each.

Credibility

The methodologies used in this study ensured the research findings' credibility in the following ways. First, I developed an interview-based qualitative design that included two primary groups of respondents. The groups consisted of four foreign instructors working in a Chinese public school and four working in a private learning center. Second,

I developed 12 questions that reflected the dissertation's RQ and sub-RQs. Third, I relied on various strategies to ensure that I accurately recorded the feedback presented by the participants. This step included methods to protect the emerging data against the risk of researcher bias. Finally, my data collection and analysis processes followed rigorous protocols that ensured the findings' credibility. The comments attributed to the participants accurately reflected their views. Additionally, I defined the concepts of majority and minority views by differentiating between the themes that reflected the beliefs of most participants and discrepant opinions.

Transferability

My approach to this qualitative research design and the development of the interview questions used to elicit responses from the participants ensured the study's potential for future transferability. The main RQ and sub-RQs used to guide the study were general inquiries that can be applied in future cases involving ESL education in China as well as other regions. The interview questions reflected Sato and McNamara's (2019) general assessment theory. Future scholars could develop similar studies to examine ESL instructional trends related to other contexts. In addition, the categories for designating the respondent groups reflected China's unique educational features and the region's tendency to rely on public schools and language centers to instruct its ESL students. Future studies could retain this study's basic research design features while reworking them to fit the needs related to different settings or cultural contexts.

Dependability

I achieved dependability of the study's findings by utilizing the following practices. First, in developing the interview questions, I ensured they aligned with the study's guiding main RQ and sub-RQs. Second, the interview questions addressed thematic issues that aligned with the RQs and the concepts of Sato and McNamara's (2019) general-purpose second-language oral competency theory. Third, asking all respondents the same questions achieved consistency in the research findings.

Confirmability

I relied on several methods to ensure the research findings' confirmability. During the data analysis stage, I determined that the participants provided feedback that matched the subject of the interview questions. After reviewing the sampled population's aggregate responses, I contacted any participant who presented ambiguous information. This process helped me clarify any area of uncertainty within the study's datasets. Another approach consisted of my role in ensuring rigor during the data analysis stage. I confirmed that the thematic findings were accurate and aligned with the groups' feedback during this stage. This approach guarded against the potential for researcher bias to influence the results. Finally, by recording both the respondents' majority and minority views and by tabling discrepant data, I accurately presented the feedback provided by the respondents.

Summary

The data generated by this study provided for an in-depth analysis of the current conditions potentially impacting ESL students' learning and acquisitional competencies

in the Chinese Hangzhou national region. Data were provided through interviews with eight instructors; four critical themes related to ESL instructional quality were identified and examined. Responses to the first three interview questions aligned with the primary RQ. The emerging themes demonstrated the ESL instructional methodologies used by teachers in both Chinese public schools and learning centers. These themes also showed a critique of the effectiveness of the grammatical and vocabulary instruction strategies used by public school and learning center teachers. Finally, these themes indicated the participants' observations and assessment of the methodologies' effectiveness in improving students' formal linguistic knowledge of ESL.

Feedback to Interview Questions 4 and 5 correlated with sub-RQ1. Teachers in both groups described their ESL curriculum design strategies and the methodologies they use to present critical concepts to their learners. Responses from public school and learning center instructors emphasized the importance of teacher innovation, particularly as both groups seek to balance the gaps associated with their institutions' curriculum and course design methodologies.

Feedback to Interview Questions 6-8 correlated with sub-RQ2. Participant responses in both groups referenced their approaches to encourage students to continue to practice their English despite their mistakes. The instructors identified the importance of guided correction even as they referenced the need for respecting Chinese cultural concerns related to avoiding shaming others. The participants also critiqued their methodologies' effectiveness in enhancing learners' willingness to participate in ESL

practice during course sessions. Finally, the instructors identified their preferences for utilizing specific ESL instructional strategies.

Questions 9-12 generated responses that corresponded with sub-RQ3. The participants first discussed their institutions' tendency not to utilize retrospective data when preparing current ESL classes for exigent pressures, including exams. The respondents then discussed their selected methodologies for preparing their learners for these challenges. Aggregate feedback was a critique of the strengths and weaknesses associated with their institutions' exam preparation strategies. Finally, the respondents discussed the potential barriers that could prevent students from adequately preparing for their exams. In Chapter 5, I interpret the study's findings, limitations, recommendations, and implications.

Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

The purpose of this basic qualitative study was to explore the perceptions of foreign language teachers working in the Hangzhou region of China regarding their implementation of instructional strategies to support Chinese high school students' learning of oral English language. In this study, I explored the views and perspectives of foreign teachers working in China as they assessed the quality of ESL teaching and training programs located in two types of learning institutions. I conducted eight interviews with participants who worked in a public school and learning center within the region. By relying on a small yet internally diverse population sample, I sought to identify the trends associated with both types of institutions, including their similarities and differences.

The interview questions corresponded with Sato and McNamara's (2019) general-purpose second-language oral competency theory. The questions addressed issues related to the participants' views of teaching preparation methodology quality, the classroom methodologies used by instructors in both settings, and the effectiveness of these methods in adequately preparing students for end-of-the-year exams and other exigent academic pressures. A better understanding of this subject is essential to developing Chinese instructional institutions. The participants identified the strengths, weaknesses, and limitations associated with the current practices utilized in both public school and learning center settings. Their importance is derived from the observation that effective types of ESL instruction require integration of improved methodologies that address the multifaceted needs of learners (Lee, 2017).

The study's conceptual framework and research design directly paralleled Sato and McNamara's (2019) general-purpose second-language oral competency theory. The 12 interview questions corresponded with practices related to (a) classroom preparation strategies used by ESL instructors, (b) classroom management techniques used when presenting information to students and helping learners foster multidimensional linguistic competencies, and (c) strategies for readying students for required exams and other types of exigent academic pressures. The findings were derived from the participants' responses and included the following themes.

First, responses to the first three interview questions designed to answer the main RQ indicated a broader belief that the current preparation methods used by public school and private academy instructors were limited and ineffective. The participants specifically noted that these methods likely did not represent approaches that would foster ESL learner growth across multiple areas of language acquisition skills. In their feedback to Questions 4-5, which were designed to answer sub-RQ1, however, the participants noted that educators working in both the public school and learning center relied on several methods that enabled them to help encourage ESL student development. These practices included activities to motivate students to use their language beyond the classroom. Finally, the respondents indicated their belief that current ESL instructional strategies utilized in both settings often did not adequately prepare students for their end-of-the-year exams and other performance pressures.

Responses to Questions 6-8 indicated that participants in both groups relied on varying strategies that encourage ESL student learning and development both within and

beyond the classroom. These data corresponded with the themes presented by sub-RQ2. Responses to Question 6 illustrated that learning center and public school instructors encouraged students to practice their English outside the classroom by watching videos, listening to music, and engaging in similar practices. Further, responses to Question 7 broadly indicated that these strategies could help students develop their skills, even though they noted that in many cases, learners could not use English during daily activities or interactions. In their feedback to Question 8, the learning center and public school participants demonstrated that they encourage their students by applying various strategies.

The participants' answers to Questions 9-12 correlated with the themes presented in sub-RQ3. In their responses to Question 9, the majority indicated that neither the learning center nor the public school institutions applied the previous years' data to the development of exam-based curricula. Answers to Question 10 illustrated the awareness of the learning center and public school teachers regarding the need for developing specialized interventions that can help students prepare for exigent pressures, including formal exams. These responses also align with the feedback by both groups in their answers to Question 11. In their replies, they identified both groups of instructors' broader belief that their schools' exam preparation methodologies will not likely contribute to their students' success. Finally, in their responses to Question 12, both learning center and public school participants identified student-oriented and institutionally related barriers that can negatively impact learner performance on exams.

Interpretation of the Findings

The task of interpreting the study's findings and identifying their significance required a two-part approach to the analysis. First, it was essential to link and align the participants' responses to the interview questions with the themes noted in Chapter 2's literature review. Second, a follow-up approach demonstrates my role in comparing the findings against the study's guiding conceptual framework. Both assessments allow for a thorough discussion of the findings' importance and value to related areas of research. While these themes directly apply to the ESL instructional trends utilized in Chinese regional public schools and learning centers, these insights could potentially contribute to scholarship that addresses similar issues in other national or regional settings.

Comparison of Findings with Literature Review Themes

The findings derived from the interviews can be first interpreted from the perspective of the themes presented in the literature review in Chapter 2. The participants' insights on classroom preparation methods, classroom management strategies, exigent pressure planning, and anticipation corresponded with the themes presented by external sources. The study's data additionally indicated key areas of convergence and divergence when compared with related research.

Responses to Questions 1-3 corresponded with the main RQ. Feedback from learning center and public school participants demonstrated their approaches to ESL education in their classrooms. The participants additionally assessed and critiqued the quality of their approach to ESL education. Both learning center and public school participants identified their schools' salient strengths and weaknesses. Finally, in their

approach to Question 3, the respondents identified how the schools' selected methodologies could improve their learners' formal skills. Learning center and public school instructors communicated mixed beliefs in their schools' strategies for achieving this outcome. These findings align with the research literature that indicates Chinese educational institutions have been unevenly divided in their ability to adequately prepare ESL learners for the challenges of developing and refining L2-related skills (Ming & Wang, 2017).

Interview Questions 4-5 corresponded with sub-RQ1 as they addressed issues related to instructor methodologies as they prepared materials and pedagogical approaches when teaching ESL learners. The key areas of emphasis included the classroom materials that instructors utilized in both settings as well as the print and online resources available to the educators. Research has demonstrated that these areas represent factors that can impact the quality of ESL training a student receives (Ebadi & Yari, 2017). While the participants echoed many of these same ideas regarding the importance of materials, they also argued that the current curriculum utilized in both the public school and learning center tended to be ineffective when preparing students for the rigors of second language acquisition. Accordingly, one of the themes that emerged from the study was the incompatibility of these current methodologies when preparing an ESL teacher's classroom. These materials often require teachers working in both settings to supplement existing resources.

Responses to Questions 4-5 also addressed issues related to the methodologies instructors use to prepare their lesson plans and refine their approaches. They described

their methods when adjusting to their available materials and curriculum limitations. Research has indicated that these processes represent critical areas that can impact the quality of instruction ESL students receive (L. Zhang, 2017). The participants indirectly reflected this premise as they identified classroom management strategies as an essential component within classroom settings in both public school and learning center environments. Their feedback directly addressed this subject as they described the varied approaches used to motivate ESL student classroom participation and improve competencies effectively. Responses to Question 5 expressly indicated that Chinese instructors working in both settings rely on varying classroom management strategies that engage students in different learning types. The participants referenced the tendency for teachers to rely on innovative and effective student engagement strategies to overcome the limitations associated with their available materials.

The participants' responses to Questions 6-8 helped identify themes related to sub-RQ2. In their feedback to Questions 6 and 7, the respondents discussed Chinese instructors' management strategies when correcting student errors. They specifically noted that the educators relied on approaches theoretically grounded in ESL instructional concepts and reflective of Chinese cultural themes and issues. Preserving face for the student presented a specific challenge for teachers working in the public school and learning center. These findings align with Ming and Wang's (2017) research that demonstrated cultural awareness and sensitivity as critical variables that should influence an instructor's correctional methodology (Ming & Wang, 2017). Responses to Question 8 also provided strategies that Chinese ESL teachers use when helping their students foster

ongoing forms of language learning and acquisition skills. These assessments correspond with research that has shown instructor influence is an immediate and continuous factor that can impact ongoing forms of ESL mastery (Özdemir-Yilmazer & Özkan, 2017).

Finally, the participants' responses to Questions 9-12 correlated with sub-RQ3. The feedback was a critique of the current methodologies utilized by both the learning center and public school to prepare Chinese ESL students for exams and that exigent pressures represented ineffective methodologies. The participants indicated that the public school and learning center did not rely on external data to reform their test preparation strategies. Teachers tended to conflate exam preparation approaches with anxiety reduction methodologies, and the applied curriculum in both settings did not address the issue of test preparedness. Learning center instructors often did not focus on readying students for exams. Collectively, these findings reflect the institutional, curriculum, and pedagogical barriers often impeding ESL learner development as they prepare to take mandatory exams. These findings directly contradict Sorrell and Brown (2018), who indicated exam preparation was a significant aspect of quality ESL instruction.

Application of the Conceptual Framework

An analysis of the study's findings from the perspective of its conceptual framework demonstrates three main themes. First, this analysis identifies the areas where the end-state data corresponds and aligns with Sato and McNamara's (2019) general-purpose second-language oral competency theory's guiding premises. Second, this approach has notable areas of divergence (i.e., cases in which the findings indicate a lack

of alignment between results and theory). Third, these analyses emphasize the improvement needed to address these gaps.

The main ideas derived from the conceptual framework of Sato and McNamara's (2019) general-purpose second-language oral competency theory helped construct broader categories and informed the development of my RQ and sub-RQs. It additionally provided a framework through which I analyzed and assessed the data from participant interviews. Sato and McNamara's theory can be used to view ESL learning through three primary areas of emphasis: (a) a discussion of instructor preparation methods that analyzes the variables that ESL teachers use when designing their classrooms; (b) classroom management methods that reference an educator's pedagogical strategy and their role when assisting learners with varying aspects of language acquisition and practice; and (c) exigent pressure planning and preparation, including the specific activities of helping students ready themselves for exams, as an essential aspect of ESL instruction. This framework demonstrates these distinct components as equally critical and mutually influential in facilitating a student's linguistic competencies.

The findings from the interviews indicate the respondents' belief that Chinese teachers working in the Chinese public school and learning center rely on effective classroom practices. Their specific activities concerning balancing the limitations presented by the available curriculum and providing culturally sensitive forms of correction represent primary examples. Accordingly, these insights indicate that regional teachers employ classroom management techniques to motivate students, encourage long-

term learning, and help them overcome anxieties related to second language use and practice.

Respondent feedback, however, indicated that the current classroom methodologies instructors utilize in the public school and learning center settings will not likely adequately prepare students for improving their language acquisition skills. The notable limitations in this category are the nature of the curriculum used in public schools, the lack of options that learners have regarding practicing their language outside the classroom, and the tendency among regional institutions to emphasize vocabulary as an area of instructional focus, which contribute to these conditions. Collectively, these trends indicate a need for the Chinese government to implement solutions incorporating these reforms as they redesign their approach to English education. Participant insights additionally showed a tendency for practices used in both settings to rely on methods that will not likely prepare students for the rigors of upcoming exams. When viewed through the lens of Sato and McNamara's (2019) theory, these two dimensions represent areas that require reform and improvement.

Limitations of the Study

The limitations associated with this study stem from three key factors. First, the research design limited the degree to which I could examine the phenomenon. On the one hand, my reliance on an interview-based qualitative study enabled me to identify critical themes reflective of the participants' responses. Professional knowledge and familiarity with ESL educational processes within the Chinese region helped me to generate reliable data that directly corresponded with the study's themes and areas of emphasis. On the

other hand, I selected a limited sample population to keep the data gathering and analysis processes manageable. Accordingly, the insights presented by the respondents cannot be considered broadly reflective of the trends associated with either Chinese public schools or private learning centers. Second, the qualitative nature of the study is subjective, as the participants' feedback cannot be quantified or contextualized. These limitations derive from the study's reliance on an interview-based qualitative framework. This approach provides the respondents' insights but does not allow the researcher to connect these insights to external themes or issues. The application of a mixed-methods study might address these limitations.

Finally, external factors and developments disrupted my research. Due to the restrictions imposed by COVID 19-related regulations, I had to conduct all interviews relying on web conferencing technologies. While this format allowed for convenience as it simplified the requirements for developing a setting conducive to generating participant feedback, it also may have affected the rapport I created with them while conducting the interviews.

Recommendations

Findings from data analysis indicate that the Chinese public school and learning center ESL education discussed by the participants exhibits strength in classroom management. Its weaknesses are in the areas of classroom preparation and exigent pressure anticipation, planning, and management. The performance and quality gaps attributed to the first category largely reflect the limitations of institutional strategies related to curriculum design and ESL program development (see Sato & McNamara,

2019). Instructor weaknesses could be associated with factors outside their direct control. Conversely, many of the limitations the participants identified related to exigent pressure planning and management could be linked to specific instructor-related strategies. Recommendations to improve these broader conditions would be to encourage Chinese ESL teachers working in both settings to transform aspects of their classroom planning and exam preparation strategies to anticipate and overcome the weaknesses associated with institutional-level practices.

The first recommendation in this context would be to encourage instructors to apply the current practices that improve student engagement. Appropriate techniques might include identifying the known weaknesses associated with the required curriculum and developing a list of supplementary materials to help overcome these gaps. These practices might specifically benefit public school teachers who face challenges from outdated or limited curricula. Additionally, a scholastic manual or guide for ESL teachers could be generated.

A second recommendation involves the need among both public school and learning center instructors to better anticipate the exigent challenges facing their students. Micro-level reforms in ESL program design and lesson planning can better ensure the instructors' ability to help their learners develop the skills needed to overcome these challenges. Finally, additional qualitative studies will need to be completed to research broader trends among similarly composed populations. This strategy could address the current study's limitations related to its narrowly sampled population.

Implications

The implications derived from the study reflect current trends notable among Chinese regional public schools and ESL learning centers as both types of institutions strive to enhance their students' language acquisition skills. When viewed through the lens of Sato and McNamara's (2019) general-purpose second-language oral competency theory, these schools tend to benefit learner development in classroom management even as they often fail to yield improvements in classroom preparation and exigent pressure management. The study's social implications reference the trends that both types of institutions need to implement as they reform their approaches to ESL education. The findings generated by the interviews identify the key weaknesses associated with both Chinese public schools and learning centers. The participants' insights related to these gaps could help identify areas for ESL-based educational reform within the nation. At the societal level, these themes could contribute to other educational reform movements to address the recurrent problems notable within China's approach to ESL education at the K-12 level. The study's singular contribution aligns with the efforts initiated by other educators and could assist with the improvement of ESL education in both national public schools and learning centers.

Conclusion

In this basic qualitative study, I relied on Sato and McNamara's (2019) general-purpose second-language oral competency theory to examine the quality of ESL programs utilized within a Chinese regional public school and learning center. The foreign instructors interviewed provided an outsider's analysis that identified the

strengths, weaknesses, and areas of improvement needed for these current practices.

Findings indicated that while native English speakers working as Chinese ESL instructors exhibited important classroom management-related competencies, ongoing weaknesses in classroom preparation and exigent pressure management require improvements.

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Appendix A: Interview Protocol

I want to thank you for taking time to participate in this Zoom face-to-face interview. The process and interviews will be recorded. After the interviews, the data will be transcribed so that I present your responses accurately. I will be asking you to review the summary at later date to ensure the accuracy of your words and thoughts.

Please feel free to share anything you think I would be interested in learning about your perceptions regarding implementation of oral English instruction and how educators are developing a professional learning community as part of that initiative. More specifically, I am interested in your thoughts regarding the instructional and management practices in your classrooms. The following questions will be included in the semistructured interview:

Research Question: What are the perceptions of foreign language teachers in China about the instructional (English as a second language) ESL strategies they implement in daily instruction in Chinese ESL classrooms?

Interview Question 1: Could you please tell me about the instructional strategies you use for your ESL classrooms?

Interview Question 2: How effectively does your school's ESL model improve students' formal knowledge of English grammar and vocabulary?

Interview Question 3: In what ways do you believe these strengths serve to improve the students' formal linguistic skills?

Sub-Research Question 1: What are the perceptions of foreign language teachers in China about how they implement instructional practices related to lesson plans to support high school ESL students' learning of oral English?

Interview Question 4: What do you perceive as the role of teacher in curriculum implementation related to lesson plans used to support high school ESL students' learning of oral English?

Interview Question 5: Please describe the instructional methodologies that you use to present lesson plans to students.

Sub-Research Question 2: What are the perceptions of foreign language teachers in China about how they implement instructional practices related to classroom management?

Interview Question 6: In what way do you encourage ESL students to practice their English despite their mistakes?

Interview Question 7: How do you believe these methodologies will encourage your students to practice their developing English-speaking skills?

Interview Question 8: In what ways do you seek to engage ESL learners? What strategies do you believe are particularly helpful?

Sub-Research Question 3: What are the perceptions of foreign language teachers in China about how they implement instructional practices related to extrinsic pressures created by tests and assessments?

Interview Question 9: How do you use data to make instructional decisions related to extrinsic pressures created by tests and assessments?

Interview Question 10: How do you implement an instructional intervention in the classroom related to extrinsic pressures created by tests and assessments?

Interview Question 11: What strengths do you believe your school's English language instruction program benefit students as they prepare for standardized language exams?

Interview Question 12: What potential gaps, barriers, or limitations impede your ESL students' ability to develop the skills needed to pass standardized language exams?

Appendix B: Data Analysis Phases and Steps

Phases	Data Analysis steps
First cycle	<p>1. Deconstructed the data using a priori codes developed from Sato and McNamara (2019) theory.</p> <p>2. (lesson plans, classroom management, extrinsic pressures induced by exams). Broke down data into discrete parts by examining and comparing them for similarities and differences. Compared emergent themes and categories to a priori codes to determine themes.</p> <p>2a. Coded across each interview response and compare them to RQ to identify patterns, commonalities, and teacher perceptions into similar categories, subcategories, themes or concepts, and assertions using words or short phrases (see Saldaña, 2018)</p>
Triangulation Round 1	<p>3. Triangulated the data through isolating each interview response for analysis.</p> <p>3a. Compared them to the RQ and sub-RQs.</p>
Organize	<p>4. As categories arose, identified concepts that emerge in relationship to a smaller or larger category.</p> <p>5. Organized codes into groups from less inclusive to more inclusive.</p> <p>5a. Made sure not to slant my perspective by continuously referring to my notes, transcriptions, and memos.</p>
NVivo categories	<p>6. Coded, keeping all categories that emerge in language of participants.</p> <p>6a. Took an inductive approach—data drives the themes.</p> <p>7. Used initial coding paired with in vivo coding to use the participant’s own language to identify patterns and trends in the data (see Saldaña, 2018).</p> <p>8. Wrote category as a word or phrase describing the explicit segment of data.</p>
Development of themes	<p>9. Used the category compared to the a priori codes to identify a theme.</p> <p>9a. Wrote the theme as a phrase or sentence used to describe more subtle processes.</p> <p>10. Made sure the theme shows the relationship between two or more concepts.</p> <p>10a. Wrote these ideas as a single noun or noun phrase (see Rubin & Rubin, 2012; Saldaña, 2018).</p>
Triangulation Round 2	<p>11. Triangulated the codes using my researcher journal along with coding memos compared to the RQ.</p>

Phases	Data Analysis Steps
Use of memos and removal of data	12. Memos noted any areas where personal bias appeared. Note it and leave it out of my analysis.
Development of summary statement, conclusion, expression of participant findings	12a. Noted insights and outliers that emerge in the data. 13. Used emergent themes from coding to represent summary statements, conclusions, explanations of what something means, or how the participant feels about a matter (see Rubin & Rubin).
Discrepant cases	14. Represented discrepant cases described to include perspectives of all participants as in this study I sought to understand their perspectives; therefore, all will increase understanding of the phenomenon.
