2022

Experiences of Teachers Using Student-Centered Approaches in China

Raven Roytblat
Walden University

Walden University

College of Education and Human Sciences

This is to certify that the doctoral dissertation by

Raven Roytblat

has been found to be complete and satisfactory in all respects,
and that any and all revisions required by
the review committee have been made.

Review Committee
Dr. Cheryl Keen, Committee Chairperson, Education Faculty
Dr. Katherine Emmons, Committee Member, Education Faculty
Dr. Alice Eichholz, University Reviewer, Education Faculty

Chief Academic Officer and Provost
Sue Subocz, Ph.D.

Walden University
2022

Abstract

Experiences of Teachers Using Student-Centered Approaches in China

by

Raven Roytblat

MA, Brooklyn College, 2012

MS, St. John's University, 2000

BA, St. John's University, 1998

Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Education

Walden University

August 2022

Abstract

Schoolteachers in China are required by the government to transition from teacher-centered to student-centered instruction. Researchers have shown the challenges of and successes in implementing the instructional changes; however, a gap exists surrounding the challenges and successes of reforms from the perspective of teachers. The purpose of this generic qualitative study was to better understand the experiences of Chinese schoolteachers as the system of education in China transitions from teacher-centered to student-centered classroom instruction. The conceptual framework for this study included Schön's concept of the reflective practitioner and Liu and Hallinger and Knapp et al.'s work on the role of school leadership in the experience of teachers during systemic change. The research question focused on what Chinese schoolteachers experience as the education system in China transitions from teacher-centered instruction to student-centered instruction. Using open coding, six interviews were analyzed for emergent codes and themes. Three themes reflected teachers' need for professional development, the development over time of teachers' student-centered practice, and teachers' selection of pedagogy that is supportive of student needs and interests. The results may have implications for positive social change as the government, school leaders, and professional development providers in China find ways to provide development opportunities that are more aligned with teachers' needs. At this time of rapid cultural and economic growth in China, more support for Chinese schoolteachers could help China prepare graduates who are more creative and increasingly innovative thinkers, which is critical for China's 21st century economic advancement.

Experiences of Teachers Using Student-Centered Approaches in China

by

Raven Roytblat

MA, Brooklyn College, 2012

MS, St. John's University, 2000

BA, St. John's University, 1998

Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Education

Walden University

August 2022

Dedication

“If there is not struggle, there is no progress.” ―Frederick Douglass

“Rushing into action, you fail.
Trying to grasp things, you lose them.
Forcing a project to completion,
you ruin what was almost ripe.

Therefore the Master takes action
by letting things take their course.
He remains as calm at the end
as at the beginning.
He has nothing,
thus has nothing to lose.
What he desires is non-desire;
what he learns is to unlearn.
He simply reminds people
of who they have always been.
He cares about nothing but the Tao.
Thus he can care for all things.”
―Lao Tzu, Tao Te Ching

Dedication

I dedicate this work to the three people who while on this journey, have completely changed and deeply improved my life.

Dr. Cheryl Keen who is far more than a professor or mentor, has been such a support and has guided me through this process and much of my life, with such thoughtfulness, precisely calculated amounts of pressure, and care that I never could doubt that I am blessed because the universe made sure that we met…you have made all the difference.

I too dedicate my work to my beautifully brilliant and truly amazing twin boys Joshua and Gabriel, who have never known me not in school and who have made the journey so much more meaningful and truly worth it than it could have ever been without them.

Acknowledgments

The journey has been a long one with the support of too many people to name here, but there are a few that I absolutely must mention.

Dr. Marie Alcock, thank you for being supremely talented, driven, and most of all, kind. Thank you for giving the best professional development sessions of my life when you came to my school of 15 years, Ditmas, I.S. #62, inspiring me to join you, Heidi Hayes Jacobs, Bena Kallick, Jay McTighe, and a host of other amazing educators at Curriculum 21, as an attendee. Thank you also for mentioning Walden University to me and inspiring me to become a student there.

Thank you to Mr. Barry Kevorkian, my assistant principal and principal for 15 years, who taught me so much about education and life, and cared for me so much that I could not have been here without you.

Ms. Rene, thank you for being an amazing caregiver and dear friend. You have given my boys and I so much that has proven to be the foundation that we have built our lives upon.

Thank you to mommy and daddy who gave me the idea of getting my PhD since I was in kindergarten, with my little pink briefcase book bag, telling me that my report card was my paycheck and that my education was the most important thing I could ever get, namely my PhD.

Joe, Santucci, DJ, Mackie, Professor D. J., Simone, JJ, DJ MrT & Kareena, Demelza & Mitch, Bert, JJ, Kam, James, Haydn & Eloise, Svetlana, Lancelot,

MengMeng, and all the good people who have been so kind and supportive of my boys and I both in Brooklyn and Hainan, thank you.

Ms. Sue Lloyd and the rest of my BIBA family, including the Grade 3 Team, and the other amazing friends from Beijing, you are proof that you needn't know people long to be so deeply connected to and uplifted by them. Thank you.

Thank you, China, for allowing me to live here so well with my boys. What an amazing home and journey this has been.

To every bit of life that I have experienced, that which I have asked for and that which I surely didn't want, I am deeply grateful for it all. I could not be here or who I am without it. Thank you.

Last, but certainly not least. To my dear Committee Member, Dr. Emmons, my URR, Dr. Eichholtz, my Chair, Dr. Keen, and my final Editor, Mr. Herrington… thank you for your expertise, wisdom, care, and for helping me grow in so many ways. Thank you and God bless you all.

Table of Contents

List of Tables

Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

A new Chinese governmental curriculum reform has created a dynamic where the cultural, pedagogical, and social norms of the world's oldest school system are being challenged (Wong, 2010; Yan, 2015; Yan & He, 2012; Yin, 2013; You, 2019; F. Zhang & Liu, 2014). The education system of China, which has been teacher-centered for thousands of years, is in the process of transitioning from teacher-centered to student-centered instruction. There is a need for increased understanding of the experience of Chinese teachers as they transition from a teacher-centered to a student-centered approach to teaching. This is particularly important as teachers are expected to provide support to prepare 21st century workers. National policy has required Chinese teachers to shift their classroom instruction to a more student-centered or Western approach to teaching and learning.

It is hoped by the Chinese government that this pedagogical shift will allow China to better keep pace with modern economic development. The series of education reforms that have been launched aim at developing a free-thinking and dynamic workforce that will support China's continued economic development (J. Li & Li, 2019; W. J. Peng et al., 2014; Tan, 2016; Wong, 2010). These reforms were adopted in 2001 and 2011, have had components added yearly, and have goals extending through 2035 (Australian Government Department of Education, Skills and Employment, 2020; T. Wang, 2019). The reforms embody a way of thinking and approach to education that is contrary to what has previously been implemented in the classroom (Fu, 2020; Law, 2014; X. Li et al. 2012; J. Li & Li, 2019; F. Zhang & Liu, 2013). Before the reforms, the mark of an

exemplary teacher included running a teacher dominated classroom where students memorized what the teacher presented. The implication was that students who memorized what the teacher said or wrote would receive high marks on high stakes test and that was all that mattered (S. Liu & Hallinger, 2017; Shengnan & Hallinger, 2021; W. J. Peng et al., 2014; Yan, 2015: Ye & Zhao, 2019). A shift from this norm to student-centered instruction to create deep thinkers of the future, has the potential to create conflict regarding philosophical, cultural, and academic norms between parents and teachers, teachers and students, and teachers and school leaders and within the teachers themselves (Guo, 2013).

China's national college admission's exam, the *gaokao*, is very important as it determines college admissions. As a result of the importance of students' exam scores for school prestige, teachers whose students receive high marks on the exam are rewarded with additional income (Yan, 2015). Preparing students to earn high gaokao scores has little to do with the current reform teaching practices of student-centered teaching. The content associated with teaching in a student-centered manner and the time it takes to prepare student-centered lessons take time away from teachers' ability to cover content that will be tested on the gaokao (Joong et al., 2009; Lo, 2019). By participating in student-centered instruction, students may receive lower result on the gaokao. Lower gaokao results may potentially damage student college admissions prospects and lower teacher income (Tam, 2015; You, 2019).

Currently, teachers are expected to be content area specialists who know their students on a personal level, plan curriculum based on that knowledge, and encourage the

development of critical thinking and self-expression in a classroom (W. J. Peng et al., 2014; Ye & Zhao, 2019). This raises a challenge for teachers, school leaders, and professional development providers as most do not have personal experience with student-centered approaches to teaching yet are expected to adopt student-centered practices (Lo, 2019; W. J. Peng et al., 2014; Ye & Zhao, 2019).

In this study, I sought to capture the experiences of teachers in China as the education system transitions to a student-centered approach to teaching as directed by national curriculum reforms. The findings may support other Chinese teachers in their curriculum implementation efforts and professional development. School leaders, professional development providers, teacher training schools, and the Chinese government may also use this research to make decisions that better support their teachers as they transition from teacher-centered to student-centered classroom instruction.

In this chapter, I provide a background and review of the previous norms regarding education in China. I also discuss the teacher-centered model of classroom instruction, the need for the reforms as outlined by the Ministry of Education in China, the goals of the current student-centered approach to education, and the gap that exists in the research surrounding the challenges and the successes of the reforms from the perspective of teachers. The chapter also includes a discussion of the research problem and purpose, the nature of the study, the research question, and assumptions. Finally, definitions of terms, the scope and delimitations of the study, possible limitations, and the significance of the study are addressed. The results may have implications for positive

social change as school leaders in China find ways to develop policies and professional development opportunities more aligned with teachers' needs. At this time of rapid cultural and economic growth in China, more support for Chinese schoolteachers, government and school leaders, and professional development providers could help China prepare graduates who are creative and innovative thinkers. This is important for China's 21st century economic advancement.

Background

The six main goals of the initial reform issued in 2001 by the People's Republic of China's Ministry of Education (2001) were directed toward moving education from centralized management to one that dealt with national, local, and school curricular management. This change allowed for the tailoring of curriculum to local needs. A shift in pedagogical approaches was made to change the focus from knowledge transmission (teacher-centered rote practices) to learning development (student-centered deep knowledge). Additionally, various curricula were then integrated and adaptable to various student and local needs and were no longer focused solely on predetermined content of a particular academic discipline. Outdated and difficult curricular content was updated or replaced, and a focus on science and technology was added. The goal of pedagogy shifted from rote memorization and drills to active learning and inquiry, whereas assessment was to become more formative, promoting the development of students, teachers, and schools. (Lo, 2019; Ministry of Education, 2001; Organisation for Economic Co-operation & Development [OECD], 2016; Shengnan & Hallinger, 2021).

School leaders in any setting often find themselves trapped somewhere between policy initiatives, district expectations, and school-level concerns. Traditionally, the school system in China has been centralized, teacher focused, and concentrated on having students memorize information so they will pass high stakes examinations and principals have to help make this shift. (Fu, 2020). Some Chinese school principals are expected to lead teacher development and curricular development activities while managing China's three conflicting values of cultural compliance, examination culture, and the new culture of reform (S. Chen & Ke, 2014; Yin & Wang, 2014).

Although studies have shown that many teachers have supported the reforms (Fu, 2020; Guo, 2013; P. Liu, 2016; S. Liu & Hallinger, 2017), the problem remains that teachers are challenged to reform classroom practice while still focused on the high stakes testing (S. Liu & Hallinger, 2017; Joong et al., 2009; Lo, 2019; Yan, 2015). School leaders in China are now required to lead teacher development activities that school leaders may not be prepared for and may lack confidence in (S. Liu & Hallinger, 2017; Hou et al., 2019; Wong, 2012; Yan & He, 2012).

Qualitative researchers have explored teachers' beliefs concerning the impact of the Chinese education reforms on teacher practice, student classroom behaviors, and success in leadership (Guo, 2013; S. Liu & Hallinger, 2017; Wong, 2012; You, 2019; F. Zhang & Liu, 2014). There is a need for increased understanding concerning the challenges and successes of Chinese teachers adopting the national education.

Problem Statement

In order to support the development of a future workforce that is more creative, free-thinking, and supportive of the mindset of innovation for 21st century economic advancement, the Chinese national government sanctioned education reforms (Fu, 2020; J. Li & Li, 2019; Ministry of Education, 2001; W. J. Peng et al., 2014; Tan, 2016; Wong, 2012; You, 2019). The Chinese national reforms, which began in 2001, were revised in 2011 (Law, 2014; F. Zhang & Liu, 2014), and are ongoing in these post-COVID times (Zhou et al., 2020), have required Chinese teachers to shift their classroom practice to a more student-centered or Western approach to teaching and learning. Some research has found the student-centered approach, the core of these reforms, to be contrary to the philosophical, cultural, and academic beliefs of teachers (Guo, 2013; L. Huang et al., 2020; H. Liu et al., 2017; Beckett & Zhao, 2016).

Teachers who have been in support of the philosophical underpinnings of the reforms (Guo, 2013; S. Liu & Hallinger, 2017; F. Zhang & Liu, 2014) may remain challenged to shift their classroom practice. With a slow changing focus away from high stakes testing by which students have been granted or denied high school and college admission (Liu & Hallinger, 2017; Joong et al., 2009; Yan, 2015), school leadership may not be prepared to lead effective professional development for their teachers (S. Liu & Hallinger, 2017; Wong, 2012).

Qualitative research concerning the adoption of the new reforms has explored teacher beliefs concerning the influence of the reforms on teacher practice, student classroom behaviors, and success in leadership (Guo, 2013; S. Liu & Hallinger, 2017;

Shengnan & Hallinger, 2021; Wong, 2012; F. Zhang & Liu, 2014), and has been largely limited to single school sites or two of the 23 provinces in China. Although some Chinese teachers have experienced success in their adoption of the national education reforms (L. Huang et al., 2020; J. Li & Li, 2019; Lo, 2019;), there is an increased need to understand the experience of Chinese teachers as they transition from a teacher-centered to a student-centered approach to teaching. This is particularly important as teachers are expected to provide the support to prepare 21st century workers.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this generic qualitative study was to better understand the experiences of Chinese schoolteachers as the system of education in China transitions from teacher-centered to student-centered classroom instruction. The intent was to explore, describe, and arrive at an understanding of the experiences faced by teachers, and suggest future research that may help improve the experiences of teachers during this transition. This study may be especially important as China positions itself to be a more dominant economic world leader. The improved education of local citizens that supports the free thinking and growth is a benefit to the economic development of their area and these improvements can be facilitated by the experience of Chinese teachers being better understood.

Research Question

What do Chinese schoolteachers experience as the education system in China transitions from teacher-centered instruction to student-centered instruction?

Conceptual Framework

To guide this study, I used a conceptual framework of the theory of the reflective practitioner based on Schön (1983) and learning-centered leadership theory represented by the work of S. Liu and Hallinger (2017) and Knapp et al. (2003). I used Schön's work in designing interview questions to elicit teachers' reflections concerning their experiences transitioning to student-centered measures included in the new curriculum of the Chinese national educational reforms. To better understand the role that school leadership might play in the experiences of teachers during systemic change, I used the learning-centered leadership theory to design additional interview questions. Learning-centered leadership, also referred to as student-centered leadership, focuses on the guidance and participation of school leadership to support teacher professional knowledge and student learning (S. Liu & Hallinger, 2017; Knapp et al. 2003). These two scholarly works, also used in interpreting the results, will be discussed more in Chapter 2.

Nature of the Study

To learn about the experiences of Chinese teachers, I used a generic qualitative research design (Caelli et al., 2003; L. Liu, 2016; Probert, 2006), Using several chat groups on the social media platform WeChat (https://www.wechat.com/), I recruited schoolteachers from public and private schools who had at least 1 year of experience. I reached saturation after interviewing six Chinese teachers, using WeChat as a virtual platform. I analyzed the transcripts using open coding to discern emergent themes.

Definitions

Face: A deeply rooted, culturally expected response to situations that could cause embarrassment for oneself or others. Confrontation is avoided to keep the reputation or social standing of someone intact (Hu, 1944; Yin, 2013; F. Zhang & Liu, 2014).

Gaokao: The high stakes college admissions test in China (OECD, 2016).

Hongbao: A financial offering that people in China give to each other as a sign of thanks (Chao, 2017).

Student-centered: An approach to learning that is based on the concept that the student is an active learner. In this approach, the teacher is not the primary source of learning, but rather a facilitator in the learning (Mascolo, 2009).

Teacher-centered: An approach to learning that is based on concepts that the teacher is the primary source of knowledge in the classroom. Lecture is the primary way information is shared from the teacher to the student. The teacher is active, and the student is passive during this model of learning (Mascolo, 2009).

Teacher learning: The role of leadership and the utilization of professional learning communities (PLCs) by both teachers and leadership to strengthen teaching and to advance the agenda of student-centered instruction (Fu, 2020; S. Liu & Hallinger, 2017; Ng, 2022; Shengnan & Hallinger, 2021).

Assumptions

There were several assumptions in this study. The first assumption was that the participants, Chinese teachers, were proficient enough in English to understand and respond to the interview questions fully. It was reasonable to assume that a Chinese

teacher who signed up for an interview in English would speak English well enough to participate in the interview and would not offer to participate in an interview if their English proficiency was low. This assumption was incorrect. All study six study participants required additional explanation and examples to understand the interview questions. A second assumption was that the teachers who would participate would be open and honest during their interviews. The final assumption was that the participating teachers would have experiences to share because of their professional investment in learning about and applying the provisions of China's student-centered governmental curriculum reforms.

Scope and Delimitations

The scope of this study was initially limited to interviews with Chinese schoolteachers from public schools, including teachers from elementary, middle, and secondary schools. This study was initially delimited to a focus on teachers of English as a foreign language (EFL), excluding math, science, social studies, and the arts, and non-public school teachers. Due to low participation however, the parameters of the study were opened to include all Chinese teachers, not just EFL teachers and not just public school teachers. No longer were private, nongovernmental schools excluded. Although private schools' curriculum are not completely mandated by the Chinese government, those schools are also teaching in student-centered ways. All participants were Chinese nationals who have been teaching for 1 or more years.

Limitations

The application of these findings may be limited. The experiences of the teachers who chose to participate may be different from teachers who did not want to participate in a study about student-centered instruction. My research was limited to Chinese nationals from mainland China to ensure a continuity in the application and understanding of the reforms. The results may have limited generalizability in China as the experiences of teachers in each of the 23 provinces may be different due to government funding, private school approaches, the professional experience and education level of the teachers, and teacher-student ratio in the classroom. A bias towards teachers who show a support for and success with the reforms may have come to be because of my support of the reforms, but I worked to make sure that this did not happen. By reminding myself of this potential bias before interacting with potential and accepted participants, I reduced the chances of this potential bias. I also kept a research journal, where I made notes regarding choices I made and observations I had, so I could question and reflect upon them throughout the study and assist with minimizing bias.

Significance

This study has the potential to contribute to the educational policies of China, particularly as it regards support for teachers enacting the reforms, given that this is a time of rapid cultural and economic growth the findings might help teachers prepare graduates' creative thinking skills. It is also potentially significant as additional Chinese national education reforms are ongoing and will be presented in years to come. Chinese national curriculum reform interests can be supported by this study.

Summary

Using a generic qualitative design, I sought to better understand the experiences of Chinese teachers as they transition from teacher-centered instruction to student-centered instruction. In Chapter 2, I review the theoretical and empirical literature that relate to the study, as well as the search strategies used to find scholarly works.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

The purpose of this generic qualitative study was to better understand the experiences of Chinese schoolteachers as the system of education in China transitions from teacher-centered to student-centered classroom instruction. The Chinese national government sanctioned education reforms to support the development of a future workforce that is more creative, free-thinking, and supports the mindset of innovation for 21st century economic advancement, (J. Li & Li, 2019; W. J. Peng et al., 2014; Tan, 2016; Wong, 2012; You, 2019). These reforms require Chinese teachers to shift their classroom practice to a more student-centered or Western approach to teaching and learning, which some researchers have suggested is contrary to the philosophical, cultural, and academic beliefs of most teachers (Beckett & Zhao, 2016; Guo, 2013; H. Liu et al., 2017). Although some teachers have been in support of the philosophical underpinnings of the reforms (Guo, 2013; S. Liu & Hallinger, 2017; P. Liu, 2016), the research problem focused on the possible challenges in their ability to shift classroom practice. Researchers have noted that teachers have had difficulty implementing the changes of the reforms (S. Tang & Adamson, 2014; Yan & He, 2012; Zhu & Shu, 2017).

The cultural phenomenon of face seemed to also be an impediment to the implementation of curriculum reform because direct thoughts that may cause embarrassment to or are in direct opposition to superiors and elders are not shared, such as those thoughts regarding student-centered practice (Yin, 2013). A few recent studies have found what may be a shift in teacher practice towards student-centeredness. This transition towards student-centered instruction may be a gradual process, often through

collegial sharing or professional development workshops (Lo, 2019; Ye & Zhao, 2019; You, 2019).

An earlier study found that although principals and teachers were in support of the reforms, the principals were not implementing reforms deeply enough to make more than surface level changes (Qian & Walker, 2013). More recent studies have suggested that principals have been more effective in leading their teachers towards change (S. Liu & Hallinger, 2017; Shengnan & Hallinger, 2021; Ye & Zhao, 2019). Teacher learning, the role of leadership in teacher learning, and utilization of PLCs by both teachers and leadership to strengthen teacher learning, may advance the agenda of student-centered instruction (Fu, 2020; S. Liu & Hallinger, 2017; Ng, 2022; Shengnan & Hallinger, 2021). Mutual sharing and collaborative learning have been found to be inseparable practices in Chinese PLCs (J. Zhang & Pang, 2016a; 2016b) and may, along with teacher reflection and teacher leadership (Ng, 2022), help student-centered instruction take hold (J. Li & Li, 2019; Lo, 2019; Ye & Zhao, 2019; You 2019).

I begin this chapter with a summary of my strategy for searching for related scholarly literature and an analysis of theories used in the conceptual framework. In the literature review, I analyze research related to teacher challenges in reform implementation, motivation for and inhibitors of change in classroom instruction, leadership during change, teacher identity and commitment to change, what an effective teacher is, and the role of PLCs in furthering change agendas.

Literature Search Strategy

I located the peer-reviewed articles used in this literature review using Google Scholar and the Walden University Library database system. Databases included EBSCOhost, Education Source, Academic Search Complete, ProQuest, and SAGE. As I found new information, my search took different forms and became more refined. I used the following key words and phrases in my search in various combinations: *school culture group dynamics organizational culture*, *effective teaching empirical research China Chinese, professional learning communities empirical research China Chinese*, *PLC empirical research China Chinese, curriculum reform empirical research China Chinese, teacher student interaction empirical research China Chinese, professional learning communities school leadership teacher effectiveness student learning China Chinese, professional learning communities collaboration China Chinese trust beliefs empirical, teacher efficacy professional development, professional learning communities, teacher self-identity, instructional efficacy, teachers' assessment, teachers China Chinese instructional practices national reforms, student-centered classrooms shift classroom practice, curriculum reform empirical, success,* and *implementation gap new curriculum.*

Conceptual Framework

Two theories comprise the framework of this research study: the reflective practitioner (Schön, 1983) and learning-centered leadership, represented by the work of S. Liu and Hallinger (2017) and Knapp et al. (2003). In this section of Chapter 2, I describe the conceptual framework, identify and define the concepts behind each theory, and share the relevancy and benefit of the theories to my research. These two theories are

well aligned for exploring both the role of the teacher as well as the role of school leaders in curricular reform in China.

The Reflective Practitioner

The theory of the reflective practitioner (Schön, 1983) focuses on the idea that there are elements of expertise that professionals know and ways in which they embody it that are not part of a prescribed way of approaching the area of knowledge. Also, an assumption in Schön's theory is that people are more competent in applying what they know about their profession or duties than they are often able to put into words. Throughout professional practice, workers must deal with issues that arise. Often the problem or the context of the situation is new, complex, or involves many inconsistencies. These issues may require the professional to progress using professional awareness beyond what can be quantified in a manual. Dealing with the situation requires not only identifying the problem, but also developing an in-the-moment response that will correct it, as well as anticipating being more prepared in the future. Schön claimed that this reflection in action is critical to the success of practitioners in multiple fields as well as the organizations for which many practitioners work. It is in the framing and reframing of the situation that has passed where growth and understanding occur (Schön, 1983).

Schön's (1983) work has been used to understand change and professional development in many educational settings. For example, using data from three samples of teachers and schools from the United States, Camburn and Han (2017) sought to learn more about the role of teacher reflection in professional development. Using three

different groups of teachers enabled Camburn and Han to see if there was an association between teacher reflection and teacher learning, if patterns of teacher learning and reflection emerged across different contexts, and which organizational conditions and experiences supported teacher reflection. Over three different periods, three different groups of teachers and schools from different regions of the United States, 509 teachers in 401 schools in total, participated in Camburn and Han's survey research. The researchers found that reflective practice increased as teachers increased the amount of professional development activities they engaged in and when professional development had to do with instruction. Similarly, Schön (1987) pointed to reflection in action, which must involve teachers experimenting with different ways of engaging in instruction as a premise of professional development regarding instruction (Camburn & Han, 2017; see also Sellars, 2017).

Zhao's (2012) case study findings in China supports Schön's (1987) focus on reflection, as findings suggest that teachers might have further developed their instruction based on the dimensions of teaching that they wrote about in their reflective journals. Over 4 years, Zhao analyzed professional journal entries of two elementary school teachers deemed to be of the highest level by headmasters, self-reviews, and peer-reviews. Similarly, they reviewed journals of two teachers of average levels, as well as studied all the teachers' classroom observations and surveys. Zhao found, through the different foci of teacher reflections, that curriculum reform can be successfully implemented through the promotion of teacher learning as it equipped both groups of teachers with what they perceived they needed to make the changes synonymous with

curriculum reform. The core dynamics represented in Zhao's research were also found in the findings of Lo (2019).

Learning-Centered Leadership

The research-based theoretical perspective of learning-centered leadership is about the promotion and delivery of learning to all members of the school community (S. Liu & Hallinger, 2017). The theoretical perspective came to the forefront of research literature in the early 2000s and has been referred to by names including leading for learning, leadership for learning, and student-centered leadership (Knapp et al., 2003). In a learning-centered framework, school leadership can promote school effectiveness and student achievement through planned efforts to lead with the mission to grow and develop teacher learning and teacher professional knowledge (S. Liu & Hallinger, 2017). According to Knapp et al. (2003), school leadership is engaging in learning-centered leadership when school leaders establish a focus for learning, create a professional community that values learning, reach out and use external environments that matter for learning, act in a thoughtful manner that promotes and shares leadership, and create continuity amongst learning systems and goals (professional and student). There are potential leadership conflicts within Confucian societies, such as in China, where people have values that are highly structured and need to be considered (Hallinger, 2018). Yin et al. (2014) found that those in school leadership had a difficult time dealing with China's three conflicting values: compliance culture, exam culture, and the new pedagogic culture of the reforms. Even with these potential conflicts, those in leadership have found

measures of success when they supported teachers in their learning and development (S. Liu & Hallinger, 2017).

Leaders with a clear management plan and vision for learning can support changes and create an atmosphere that is ripe for professional development, which serves to improve the teachers, the schools they are in, and ultimately, their students. Teachers, then, support their leaders as they feel they are also supported (Hallinger, 2018; S. Liu & Hallinger, 2017; Tran et al., 2018). Although the concept of learning-centered leadership was new to Vietnam, Tran et al. (2018) studied four principals who were able to make the importance of teachers' professional development clear to their teachers, which helped promote teacher growth. The principals' approaches included making a speech at a meeting, engaging in one-to-one conversations with teachers, sharing personal learning with staff, recognizing the learning and accomplishments of staff members publicly, asking teachers to share their successes, supporting the teachers as learners, and taking their individual needs into consideration. Although these schools spent a considerable amount of money on professional development that took place outside of school, Tran et al. found that the majority of teachers felt that the most effective professional development took place inside of their schools.

The two theories that comprised the conceptual framework, the theory of the reflective practitioner based on Schön (1983) and learning-centered leadership theory represented by the work of S. Liu and Hallinger (2017) and Knapp et al. (2003), reinforced the choice of generic qualitative design. This design allowed me to focus on

the teachers' experiences of being supported or led in the transition, as well as to invite their reflections about their ongoing efforts to revise their teaching.

Literature Review of Empirical Studies Associated With the Research Problem

In this section, I analyze research pertaining to teacher challenges in reform implementation, motivation for and inhibitors of change in classroom instruction, leadership during change, teacher identity and commitment to change, what an effective teacher is, and the role of PLCs in furthering change agendas.

Teacher Challenges in Reform Implementation

Research conducted during the process of teacher learning and reforms has shown, at times, an incongruous relationship between what teachers have said about how they teach and observational data of their teaching. A study where Chinese teachers' espoused beliefs did not match their practice was evident in the research of Yan and He (2012) who observed three Grade 7 EFL teachers throughout the school day to observe their student-centered teaching practices. When interviewed, the teachers shared positive sentiments about the reforms; however, when teachers were routinely observed, they did not use discussion-rich reform teaching practices which they praised. Teachers shared their beliefs that the goals of the instructional shifts were too drastic and unrealistic for their students and not a priority because the new student-centered curriculum did not match what was tested on their high stakes test.

The Chinese national reforms for English instruction mandate a shift away from the translation method which focuses heavily on grammar, paying little attention to oral language. Yan and He (2012), however, found the translation method was used by

teachers on a regular basis, relying on texts and rote learning, while new curriculum teaching strategies, such as pair and group work, often went unused. When teachers allowed students to answer questions, the student responses were slow and with several errors. This slowed down the progress of instruction, and for this reason teachers explained they did not often allow students to answer questions in the lesson. Y. Peng (2018), who also found rote learning to be the nature of language learning in China, attributed this disconnection in strategy to the Confucian nature of Chinese society. Additionally, Yan and He, as well as Guo (2013), found that extra lessons, which are illegal, were added to the teachers' regular teaching time, which possibly made the transition from teacher-centered instruction to student-centered instruction more difficult.

S. Tang and Adamson (2014) explored the limited implementation of the English curriculum's focus on student individualism and student English language. S. Tang and Adamson found, similarly to Yan and He (2012), that three primary school teachers in three different schools used the English textbook as the primary resource for classroom instruction instead of adjusting topics to fit learner needs or utilizing supplemental materials. Teachers, despite having only a partial knowledge of the curriculum and pedagogies, were mandated by the government to carry out reforms (S. Tang & Adamson, 2014; Yan, 2015; Yan & He, 2012).

The challenges teachers faced because they were expected to fulfill government reforms was exemplified in the findings of a 4-year study by Zhu and Shu (2017). Focusing on one teacher's implementation of a communicative language teaching program Zhu and Shu found that the teacher had a belief in traditional methods of

classroom instruction and language acquisition. Although she reported that she utilized and supported student-centered approaches to instruction, what she described as good teaching had little to do with the reform's student-centered approaches. Yin (2013) attributed these inconsistencies to the Chinese cultural phenomenon of saving face, a means of avoiding embarrassment for oneself and others, as well as a deeply rooted cultural respect for authority (Lou, 2021).

Motivation for and Inhibitors of Change in Classroom Instruction

To understand how four dimensions of teacher motivation (i.e., personal goals, context beliefs, personal beliefs, and emotional connection) interact with each other in the context of the education reforms in China, P. Liu (2016) interviewed 23 teachers from six Chinese schools. The teachers perceived that their commitment to school change increased gradually over time and was influenced by their perceptions of teaching, the number of years taught, school culture, resources, the chance to be a part of the decision making process, the school's perception of teaching, and the school's reform process. Important factors for late career teachers included salary, available resources including professional development, and the determining structures in the school. Newer teachers focused on the importance of gaining a clear knowledge of the reform, the opportunity to be a part of the process where things are decided, and the opportunity to have a new and active school culture to experience reform supporting motivation.

The teaching practices exhibited by teachers has been related to the number of years that a teacher has taught. Older teachers have been found to exhibit teaching practices that do not support the student-centered practices of the reforms (P. Liu, 2016;

T. Wang 2015). In T. Wang's (2015) study, newer teachers felt that they had to follow the ways of more senior instructors who utilized teaching methods that were contrary to the reform. Younger teachers followed the more senior teachers and their teacher-centered practices to respect to the more senior teacher.

Societal and cultural norms such as attention to facework, also referred to by others as face (see Hu, 1944; Kim & Nam, 1988), are factors that influenced curriculum reform implementation challenges and successes (P. Liu, 2016; Yin, 2013; F. Zhang & Liu, 2014). Negative feelings or doubts concerning the curriculum reforms were held by teachers in Yin's (2013) research; however, sharing these feelings was rare. Discomfort and opposition towards leadership or other people of authority are seldom displayed in Chinese culture, no matter how harsh the reality of the situation, because of facework (Hu, 1944; Yin, 2013; F. Zhang & Liu, 2014). Yin (2013) found for example, that teachers did what they are told to do, even if they do not agree. Researchers understood that even if teachers did not do what was requested of them all the time, at least they would when being observed and during teacher evaluations. Yin commented that administration did not point out specific areas of weakness in a lesson to spare the teacher embarrassment. Unlike western teachers who develop in an individualistic and autonomous culture, Chinese teachers have evolved in a collectivist culture, which focuses on team effort and therefore deems student achievement to be a result of this effort (Yin, 2013). The collective nature of instruction could support teachers to find methods, including professional development and peer support, to make the reform a

reality in their classrooms. The cultural phenomenon of face, however, seemed to be an impediment to the implementation of curriculum reform.

Teacher incomes in China are amongst the lowest in the world (Kang, 2019), and one of the only opportunities for increased income has resulted from one's classroom of students getting high scores on the gaokao (Guo, 2013; Pires, 2019). According to Guo (2013), the motivation for teachers to implement student-centered approaches was limited by the reality a that 30% of a teacher's salary came from merit pay based on student gaokao results. More recently, R. Huang (2022) has found that teacher motivation is a mix of their intrinsic beliefs, salary, and additional factors as the respect that they earn from society from doing their work. Since the gaokao does not measure and is not related to the student-centered reforms, teachers are more likely to continue with the teacher-centered practices in which they have confidence (Guo, 2013; R. Huang, 2022; Yan, 2018). Salary concerns were also mentioned by Yin (2013), who found all teachers in the study supported the reforms as they observed liveliness in the students when their instruction was student-centered. However, for reasons of personal income, student exam success, and extended work hours for additional professional development, instructors did not consistently implement reform techniques in their classrooms. The lack of congruency between the high stakes testing of the gaogkao and the curriculum reform was also found in other studies (Joong et al., 2009; Yan, 2015; Yin, 2013; F. Zhang & Liu, 2014). No recent studies were found regarding the influence of earnings on teachers' implementation of the reforms. Teacher financial security is an impediment to reform implementation.

Teachers tend to support the ideological nature of student-centered instruction as it is embodied in the education reforms, but with a dedication to student exam success, these same teachers have also been found to support those teacher-centered strategies that they know will be effective in helping students obtain high college admission test scores (Guo; 2013; Lo, 2019; Shengnan & Hallinger, 2021; W. J. Peng et al., 2014; Yan, 2015; Ye & Zhao, 2019). The majority of teachers in F. Zhang and Liu's (2014) research held both constructivist and traditional pedagogical views, a dichotomy that the researchers attributed to the realities Chinese teachers face. Findings from Zhang and Liu's research, which included surveys from 735 teachers and nine interviews, were consistent with the findings of Guo (2013), Yan and He (2014), and Zhu and Shu (2017). F. Zhang and Liu found the teaching culture was mainly instructor centered, despite the teachers supporting constructivist ideologies, because of their need to prepare students for the national high school entrance exam.

One manner in which school leadership can support school-based teacher professional development is by adopting the use of coaches who can influence teacher learning, as found by Wong (2012). To find out how teacher learning and coaching were impacted by the curriculum reforms in China's basic education, Wong interviewed and observed six mathematics and six Chinese language teachers who each had taught for more than 10 years and were also teacher leaders in teacher research groups for curriculum reform. As a result of working as a group with an outside expert, mathematics teachers saw their instruction as more than a way of preparing students to take the gaokao. The teachers began to view their teaching as an opportunity to support the

development of students' higher order thinking skills (Wong, 2012). However, the Chinese language teachers who worked with an outside expert on an individual level, experienced the expert as the center of authority who worked primarily with issues of the moment as opposed to changing professional outlooks and shifting practice to embrace curricular changes in support of the national curriculum reforms. The community the was formed as the mathematics teachers worked together created an added dimension of learning that changed the way the teachers viewed and carried out their work (Wong, 2012).

Teacher training and experience could be important factors in the ability of teachers to implement the reforms in their classroom practices (Ke et al., 2019; Tan & Chua, 2015). Wong (2012), Yan (2015), and Yan and He (2012) all suggested that if teachers have more experience with the reforms, then they will be more likely to incorporate the reform practices of student-centered instruction into their regular teaching practice. Researchers in previously mentioned studies found that teachers generally approved of the reforms but lacked understanding of and experience in how to use reform practices in the classroom. Q. Li and Ni (2011) studied and compared videos of teachers who were introduced to the reforms 5 years earlier with a second group of primary mathematics teachers who had no introduction to the reforms. Both groups had similar teaching experience and content area knowledge, yet those instructors with prior reform experience demonstrated a higher (between 10% and 20%) use of reform instructional practices (Q. Li & Ni, 2011). The instructional practices included the use of multiple

strategies during instruction, posing questions to develop higher thinking skills, and the integrating hands-on materials into the lessons.

Leadership and Change

This section includes research related to leadership focused on improving student outcomes by improving teacher learning, adjusting school-wide structures or procedures, and exploring changes in how teachers relate to students on an emotional level. School administrators in China and the United States have employed various approaches and have experienced varying degrees of success.

School leaders in China are tasked with having to create a balance between policy initiatives, district expectations, and building concerns. United States education policy trends affecting principals have focused on improving teacher practice to increase student achievement (Leithwood et al., 2017; Reyes, 2012). As previously mentioned, in China, the move to overhaul the education system has required school leaders to lead in the professional development of their teachers (Lai et al., 2017; S. Liu & Hallinger, 2017; Qian & Walker, 2013).

The national reforms in China have created opportunities for school principals in China to develop their teachers and schools in new ways. Qian and Walker (2013) studied three principals' teacher development strategies and roles in the face of nationwide education reforms. The principals in this case study used data to inform their teacher professional development decisions and selection as well as action research tailored to individual teacher development. The principals developed and applied different strategies for each teacher; however, the teachers had minimal support from one

other. Qian and Walker found the principals had mixed feelings about the effectiveness of traditional teaching. All three principals utilized action research, yet they demonstrated a lack of confidence in the instructors' capacity to do more than teach in their classrooms. Under the education reforms, principals were expected to be agents of change; however, Qian and Walker concluded that they lacked the learning and support to be this type of leader.

Principals and their styles of leadership have been found to influence the development of the teachers in their schools. S. Liu and Hallinger (2017) investigated principals in two successful Chinese model schools to understand how successful principals influence teacher learning. In one school, S. Liu and Hallinger found that motivating teachers and giving them ownership of the school allowed creative and collective school development. In the other school, leaders focused on the fact that the high stakes national exam was just one of the important things for which students needed to be prepared. In this school, the principal led teachers to implement an innovative instructional classroom initiative. The leadership in both schools improved teacher learning and as a result improved student achievement. Both principals, despite the hierarchical and administrative hurdles, had strong visions supported by their experience, made resources available which teachers found useful, and had a passion for their work (S. Liu & Hallinger, 2017). S. Liu and Hallinger concluded that these approaches created opportunities for teachers to limit the role of face and to try implementing new student-centered strategies in their classroom.

Teachers can be utilized by school principals to stretch the reach of their leadership agendas. Lai et al. (2017) conducted a case study of two Chinese ordinary schools and found that although the two leaders were quite active in their schools and believed that improving teacher quality was their number one priority, they were top down in their approaches. Both principals believed in the power of teacher observation to improve the instruction of their teachers. One principal demonstrated her leadership around teacher development by having her teachers compete in regional teaching competitions. This principal felt that such public showcasing of teacher talents both promoted the level of teaching at the school as well as enabled teachers to learn from other teachers who were a part of the regional competitions. The other principal's teacher development leadership was focused on the creation of teacher lesson planning collaboration. Although both principals had deep concerns about and personal care for their teachers, teachers were not a part of the decision-making processes in either school. The successful transformation of teacher practice from teacher-centered to student-centered may rely on the school leaders who are responsible for developing teachers in ways that they themselves have limited, if any, experience (Lai et al., 2017; S. Liu & Hallinger, 2017).

In this section I review research related to teacher identity, the role of teacher identity for the teacher as an individual (outside of the teacher's professional role), and the role of teacher identity in teachers' commitment to change the way they teach. For change to happen in a school setting, research suggests teachers must commit to the work that is involved in transitioning from the status quo to the new direction (R. Huang, 2022;

Ke et al., 2019). L. Liu (2016) investigated commitment to change in relation to internal and external school factors using the frameworks of Bandura (1986) and Leithwood et al. (1999). Leithwood et al. noted that there are four elements of teacher motivation: personal goals, beliefs about ability, the situation, and a process of emotional excitement and awareness (as cited in L. Liu, 2016). Organizational goals, when internalized by the individual, serve as motivation for the change process. It is critical, according to Liu, that organizational goals stand apart from personal goals and that they are clear to the teachers, achievable, and short-term oriented. Behaviors related to teacher commitment to change vary and are part of an evolving process that is a low priority at the beginning of school change due to the many reform initiatives that are often introduced all at once. Over time, however, as school reforms develop and are related to internal factors such as the school resources and school culture, opportunities for teachers to be a part of the reform process improve both the reform and the teachers' perceptions of it (R. Huang, 2022; Ke et al., 2019).

External factors such as the teachers' perception of the reform and their profession, also play a role in teacher commitment to change (L. Liu, 2016). L. Liu (2016) found that when teachers received enough training and principal support, they were motivated to support the change. This was found to be especially true for new teachers, while senior teachers needed autonomy to be committed to the changes that came with reforms. Compensation for work as well as positive feedback from parents and school leadership were also found to support teacher motivation for school change.

As a part of a Chinese program to expose Chinese teachers of English in western China to the new and innovative approaches for teaching and developing students, teachers were sent to the United Kingdom to study and D. Li et al. (2016) studied their experience. D. Li et al. found that knowledge creation happened both at the individual and group levels as the result of interaction and conversation around the experiences of the teachers in the United Kingdom. This occurred not only through tacit knowledge (knowledge that does not transfer to another easily by words and is the result of personal experience), but also knowledge derived from cultural immersion and experiences attached to it. Sharing ideas with classmates and colleagues on their return to China and general interaction also improved teacher knowledge. D. Li et al. found that sharing new knowledge and strengthening teacher instructional practice may play a role in a teacher's commitment to change (D. Li & Edwards, 2011, 2013).

D. Li and Edwards (2016) claimed teachers' immersion in another culture and seeing classroom instruction steeped in student-centered practices left a profound impact on the teachers involved, enabling them to identify with these practices beyond the theoretical. However, there are also a limited number of these cultural immersion opportunities for teachers to develop a teacher identity of student-centered instructional practices.

Lee et al. (2013) sought to understand what influence the reform policies had on the emotional experiences of teachers in one city. Lee et al. theorized that there was a lack of continuity between the competing demands the schools and the state placed on teachers. This incongruent demands of state, school, personal beliefs, and culture resulted

in emotional challenges and tension as reported by study participants. The teachers acted in accordance with the expectation of the reform policies and its student-centered approaches; however, teachers and school leaders were in search of balance.

What Chinese middle school teachers deemed as excellent teaching was investigated by J. Chen et al. (2012). Gathering survey responses from 2200 Chinese middle school teachers from 29 schools from nine cities in one Chinese province, J. Chen et al. found that there were five factors of excellent teaching perceived by teachers including (a) a focus on examinations, (b) teachers being student focused, (c) teachers engaging in professional learning, (d) teachers being responsible for engaging students in learning; and (e) teachers developing lifelong learners. Although exams are an intrinsic element of Chinese schooling, the teachers' conception of excellence often did not include drilling and preparation for the exam. There was alignment between the teachers' belief concerning excellent teaching and their self-reported teaching practices. While survey results indicated many of the teaching practices utilized during instruction were strictly teacher oriented, they still utilized a variety of methods, were innovative, connected to the student and their parents outside of class, and encouraged student involvement with student-centered approaches. Survey results also indicated that there was a connection between what teachers believed was good teaching and their classroom teaching behaviors.

Relationships with teachers may impact student emotional and social outcomes (Jagers et al., 2019; Kennedy, 2019). Reyes et al. (2012) surveyed 1,399 students from 63 fifth and sixth-grade classrooms from 44 diverse schools who reported they formed

relationships with teachers they perceived impacted their emotional and social outcomes. Reyes et al. also found students perceived that certain teacher behaviors improved the classroom experience: being sensitive to students' needs, developing warm and caring relationships with their students, taking the perspectives of their students into account, and refraining from being sarcastic or belittling. It isn't clear if these findings, collected in the United States, would be found in China.

Teacher emotions and identity were the focus of research set in more typical schools in South Korea (Jo, 2014). The South Korean based research of Jo (2014) found teacher commitment was not directly related to student-teacher, principal-teacher, or teacher-local education authority relationships. However, there was a significant and strong positive association between teachers' positive emotions and teacher commitment. Given that teacher emotions and commitment were not associated with local education authority relationships and that colleague relationships were not found to be associated with teacher commitment, Jo attributed this to the top-down nature of educational reform and noted that it may be the result of a lack of attachment to these education governing bodies.

Lee et al. (2013) also explored teachers' emotional experiences through interviewing 13 teachers from three schools in China, well regarded for their superior curriculum reform. Teacher professional identities were reflected in their emotional experiences and actions and shaped by the context of personal, district, school, and community factors. Lee et al. categorized four types of teachers: (a) contradictory performers, who did things that were in conflict with their beliefs; (b) active explorers,

who were always innovative in their beliefs in education, some well before the reforms were rolled out; (c) reform leaders, who were identified as being exemplary and used to train other teachers; and (d) novice strugglers, who had yet to define themselves as educators, did what they were told, and were concerned with the management of student classroom behaviors. Other factors Lee et al. identified in Chinese teacher professional identity development included personal factors, policy changes, tension between the curricular reforms and the examination culture of China, inadequate professional development, and Chinese culture being steeped in the Confucian tradition where everyone has a place and is required to do what is expected of them without publicly showing dissent or displeasure.

Resilience in teachers was the focus of Gu and Li's (2013) survey of 568 Beijing based primary and secondary school teachers. The survey results suggested that years of teaching were not found to increase or decrease teacher commitment or resilience. Gu and Li also found that resilient teachers remained optimistic and self-efficacious, two characteristics highly associated with one another. Although the policies of the education reform in China can be viewed as limiting or rigid, Gu and Li's supplementary interviews suggested that that rather than feeling defeated by the reform measures, each teacher's personal approach, drive, and sense of who they are and what they set out to accomplish helped them embrace and champion reforms.

The role of a teacher in China during these times of policy changes, changes in the students being taught, and the increased demands on teachers to meet these needs was the focus of W. J. Peng et al.'s (2014) exploration of poor urban and poor rural high

schools with a significant non-Han student population in China. W. J. Peng et al. sought to identify what teachers found useful in getting their students to connect with them. Useful teacher techniques and attributes involved caring for students and encouraging them to be lifelong learners despite high stakes testing. When it came to the use of competition in school, W. J. Peng et al. noted that one rural student relished it, believing that it created energy and rapid progress, while an urban student believed that one should only compete against oneself to make themself better than they were before.

What Is an Effective Teacher?

The idea of what an effective teacher put forth in the seminal work by Giovannelli (2003) has been researched to find guideposts that leaders in education can use to improve student driven outcomes. S. Liu and Meng's (2009) Chinese interviews suggested that the critical characteristics of classroom teachers that influenced student outcomes were ethics, professional skills, professional development, and professional skills, which included teachers giving students extra help and students receiving good test score results. When compared to data collected in the United States, S. Liu and Meng found that Chinese students and parents regarded test results as the greatest indicator of teacher excellence, having found it more important than the other characteristics.

Meng et al. (2016) found differences in what Chinese and U.S. teachers perceived makes a good teacher using Stronge's (2018) framework. Much of the research in China dealing with teacher perceptions of teacher quality has focused on elementary and middle school teachers, and Meng et al. suggested high school teachers may have different perceptions of what it means to be a quality teacher because they prepare students to take

the nationwide college entrance examination (gaokao) and are expected to have more content knowledge.

Several variables have been found to influence what Chinese teachers view as attributes of good teachers. J. Chen et al. (2012) found that gender, content area specialty, teaching experience, academic rank, leadership, school type, or award for teaching abilities from a teaching competition (common in China) accounted for differences in what teachers held to be qualities of good teachers. Order and routines were found to be more important to teachers with less than 9 years of experience. Reflection was more important to a teacher with 10–14 years of experience than it was to teachers with 20 or more years. The findings were consistent with research of Lee et al. (2013) and W. J. Peng et al. (2014).

Importance of PLCs

PLCs are programs within a school created to assist with the development of teachers to increase student learning. Often in a PLC, a group of teachers are reflective about their learning needs, the learning needs of their students, and instructional problems that occur at their school, and meet together to improve the school community by growing and developing professionally (Hairon et al., 2017). Hord (1997) defined PLCs as groups of collective creativity, shared values and vision, supportive conditions (physical and people capacities), and shared personal practice. J. Zhang and Pang's (2016a, 2016b) research supported Hord's definition and highlighted that leadership that was shared and supportive, along with conditions that gave support at both the individual teacher and school organization levels, were critical for PLC success.

Mutual sharing and collaborative learning were inseparable practices in Chinese PLCs, according to J. Zhang and Pang (2016a, 2016b) in their mixed-methods research involving teachers of varied subject areas taught and varied teaching experience, as in other studies (S. Liu & Meng, 2009; Meng et al., 2016). Chinese teachers were found to have established collective learning, and shared practices, attributed to Chinese collective culture and collective learning that is part of the daily routine of Chinese teachers. It was also found that school leaders must however facilitate the development of PLCs through their creating schedules which allow teachers to have enough time and opportunity to meet collaboratively (J. Zhang & Pang, 2016a, 2016b). In both studies, J. Zhang and Pang found cultural impediments to PLCs were the result of teachers worrying too much about keeping positive relationships, avoiding conflict, and respecting authority as opposed to issues stemming from a lack of desire to share or collaborate, which are also often found in other Chinese as well as western studies (T. Wang, 2015; Wong, 2010).

According to Wong (2010), teacher research groups (or jiayanzu) have sought to "invigorate teaching competence and the working morality of teachers thorough orchestrating a wide range of learning activities for teachers to meet specific professional needs" (p. 626). These have been a part of professional teacher practice in China since the early 1950s but are changing as teachers' professional needs change. As such, the sharing of daily practice is a normed behavior among Chinese teachers (J. Zhang & Pang, 2016).

Although this collaboration and the supporting structures are a part of the routine of Chinese teacher practice, Wong (2010) sought to confirm this collaboration by

studying two PLCs in the same school with very different dynamics. The English language PLC worked as a matter of obligation for the teachers, while the mathematics PLC had high member engagement and flourished. Peer collaboration and external support may have created a dynamic that supported rich growth and risk taking in the math group.

Like Wong (2010), T. Wang (2015) studied two schools, focusing on the structures and the nature of collaboration (contrived or genuine collegiality) in schools noted for teaching and excellent professional development. All the teachers in the two Chinese schools belonged to PLCs that participated in learning activities, lesson planning preparation meetings, open lessons, class observations, and action research. The action research was maintained by teachers of various levels and who had distinct roles in the group. In an attempt for younger teachers to show respect to more experienced teachers and with the desire to keep positive relations with other staff members – a phenomenon that was mentioned previously in studies by Wong (2010) and J. Zhang and Pang (2016a, 2016b)—a negative impact of PLC participation on teacher growth was found (T. Wang, 2015). While the critical elements for PLC success (genuine collegiality, collaboration, and support structures) may be evident, PLC failure may result because the time and care needed for PLC development not being taken and quickly assembled teams cannot endure the many changes needed (T. Wang, 2015).

Perceptions of PLCs can vary within a school system. J. Zhang and Pang (2016a, 2016b) found that schools in the same educational system—both primary and secondary schools—employing and serving people of the same culture, experienced differences in

the development of PLCs. J. Zhang and Pang (2016a, 2016b) believed the divergent results were a reflection of differences in the ability of each school to focus on PLCs as well as large variations and disproportions in regional, economic, social, and cultural development. PLCs can vary in their development, being either mature, developing, fragmented, or static (J. Zhang et al., 2017).

One element of PLC growth and development included in Wong's (2010) study was a two-staged tension, where two stages of unrest exist before sustainable growth takes place. This two-staged tension was shown in much of the PLC research (T. Wang, 2015; Wong 2010; Zhang & Pang, 2015). Although not identified as such in previous research, double-loop learning is usually identified as two-staged tension associated with growth (Argyris & Schön, 1978; Wong, 2010; Zhang et al., 2017. Also, J. Zhang et al. (2017) have noted it is a debatable issue if teacher research groups are indeed PLCs, as teacher research groups are born of mandates. The findings of studies might be muddied because most researchers have treated teacher research groups as Chinese PLCs (T. Wang, 2015; Wong, 2010; J. Zhang & Pang, 2016a, 2016b).

When it comes to school reform, PLCs can play a role by assisting in the development of relationships between teachers, which in turn has been found to lead to openness about the reform (Song, 2012). The management of school change, the reform's value for teachers, and the degree to which teachers were receptive to the reform were found to be highly and positively correlated in a study of 32 Chinese high schools (Song, 2012). Song found that PLCs had the potential to promote the support of change within schools, provide occasions for learning to take place, and assist in the development of the

opportunities necessary for teachers to be actively engaged in curricular reform decision making. According to Song (2012), if provided with support to be a part of the reform, teachers may be more willing to be a part of curriculum restructuring and will have a positive sense of it (Song, 2012). Lastly, behavioral intention and an evaluative attitude, which deal with the teacher's interpretation of the reform and its value, were found to be a predictor of teacher receptivity to the reform.

Teachers' ability to change their beliefs and practices can have an effect on a school, according to Tam (2015), who conducted a longitudinal study of secondary Chinese language arts schoolteachers in one school in Hong Kong. Tam's study provided information concerning how a PLC can be a part of teacher change; most research in this area has not been successful in tracking teachers' beliefs and practices (Tam, 2015). The principal of the school Tam studied began forming a PLC to assist with teacher and student learning during a series of school reforms. Tam found that school-based initiatives could create conflict and tension as members within the same group and community, had different and often deeply rooted beliefs concerning the direction that learning should take. However, leadership was able to support the development of PLCs by creating a reduction in teacher work periods when the distinct learning needs of teachers could be met. This extra time enabled the teachers to develop positive attitudes to support curricular change. Department heads encouraged openness and flexibility to assist with the development of a new shared set of beliefs and understandings around curriculum development, which eventually helped convince others of the need for change. With ideas shared more regularly, valuable concepts and positive relationships

continued to develop and add to the growth of a culture that supported teachers leading curriculum development (Tam, 2015).

When Tam's (2015) longitudinal case study research began, the negativity surrounding curriculum reform in the school's culture was widespread. Having teachers be a part of the reform process through the sharing of their observations and collaboration with department heads and participating in a PLC, teacher beliefs surrounding curriculum, teaching, learning, the roles of teachers, and learning to teach changed gradually over time. Shifts also occurred in the structure of the school which supported collaboration. Teacher trust increased as well as reflection, communication, and interaction around the school culture, curriculum, teaching, and learning. Tam found some school leaders who had not believed that teachers could develop curriculum as well as school leaders and teachers who intended to create student-centered lessons who were in fact engaging in teacher-centered instruction, but conversations and working beyond such issues were what made their reform issues successful. Tam found the impetus for teacher change was the creation and development of the PLC which tapped into teacher belief systems, demonstrating the importance of teachers in successful reform implementation (Han, 2017). Even with such gaps during transformation, by the end of the study, all the teachers' beliefs shifted, and the teachers had adopted a heuristic approach to teaching and learning in their school (Tam, 2015).

Summary

In Chapter 2, I presented a literature review which focused on explaining the ideas of the reflective practitioner (Schön, 1983) and leader-centered leadership (Knapp et al.,

2003; S. Liu & Hallinger, 2017) in relation to the education reforms in China. I also analyzed research on reform challenges, motivations, inhibitors, challenges, and possible structures to support reforms including PLCs, changes in leadership, and understandings concerning what is an effective teacher. In Chapter 3, I will explain the research design and rationale, my role as researcher, the methodology employed, and any issues of trustworthiness.

Chapter 3: Research Method

The purpose of this generic qualitative study was to better understand the experiences of Chinese schoolteachers as the system of education in China transitions from teacher-centered to student-centered classroom instruction. The intent was to explore, describe, and come to a better understanding of the experiences faced by teachers. In Chapter 3, I present the research design and rationale for this study, the role of the researcher, methodology (instrumentation, data collection, and data analysis plan), issues of trustworthiness, and ethical concerns.

Research Design and Rationale

With this research, I sought an answer to the following research question: What do Chinese schoolteachers experience as the education system in China transitions from teacher-centered instruction to student-centered instruction? This study drew on a generic qualitative design, which allows for flexibility, to arrive at an understanding of outcomes, including those that are pragmatic (Caelli, 2003; L. Liu, 2016; Patton, 2015). A generic qualitative design, also referred to as "basic qualitative" by Kahlke (2014) focuses on participants' answers to interview questions and is not dependent on the norms or underpinnings of a specific theoretical, ontological, philosophical, or epistemological tradition (Kahlke, 2014).

To be successful in this research, I had to be attentive to the factor of face in Chinese culture, which mandates that a person refrain from doing something that would embarrass or bring shame to another (Yin, 2013; F. Zhang & Liu, 2014). As a result, it is not uncommon for a Chinese person to avoid sharing their true thoughts or feelings when

asked, if by revealing them someone else, especially superiors, would look unfavorable. I sought to share my appreciation for China with my potential and selected interviewees as well as the respect that I have for teachers, having been one myself for 15 years in the United States and nearly 5 years in China. I sought to become familiar with the study's participants by interacting with them a bit before the interview to decrease the degree to which face was likely to pose a barrier during the interview (Scoggins, 2014; Solinger, 2006). I worded the interview questions carefully and constructed follow-up questions designed to elicit narrowed responses that would relate more closely to interviewee perceptions (Berry, 1999). Based on the cultural phenomenon of face, a generic qualitative design best supports this research, as I did not have to adhere to the outlook of one school of thought when posing questions or adjusting and interpreting research. Not adhering to the outlook of one school of thought allows me to pose questions that I deem most appropriate to get to their authentic perceptions as opposed to some truth within the frame of a particular school of thought.

I did not choose a narrative design, because, generally, there is nothing unusual or unique about the experience of teachers adjusting their environment to follow mandates. Narrative research typically describes the lives of individuals who have something extraordinary to reveal (Harklau, 2011; Pavlenko, 2002), which was not the objective of this research. Narrative inquiry also requires the researcher to engage in several lengthy interviews, which was not necessary for this research.

Although a case study had the possibility of revealing information about implementation of the educational reforms, the likelihood of getting permission to enter a

school for observations was low, particularly given the COVID pandemic and required long periods waiting for approvals. There was also the chance, due to the face-related risks concerning the possible findings, this research may not have been permitted at all (Patton, 2014). If school leadership allowed a researcher into a school where the research findings may reveal that government mandates such as student-centered curriculum were not being implemented, permission to share the research would likely have been revoked.

Role of the Researcher

I am an educator who teaches at a private Chinese school. I have lived in China for almost 5 years along with my children, and we have immersed ourselves in the life of the community rather than solely with foreign associates within the expat community surrounding a school. In China, my children have attended an international school, a Chinese private school, and a private Chinese bilingual international school. My children lived in local Chinese neighborhoods for their first 3 years and have regularly participated as the only foreigners in activities. My experiences in China may have allowed me to be more aware of my own biases, having had to confront them over the past nearly 5 years as I immersed myself in the culture. I have never taught with or had any known contact with the teachers who expressed interest in this study.

My role as the researcher was to recruit Chinese teachers as participants, interview those who were interested in participating and met my study criteria, and to record and analyze the data. I conducted and recorded the semistructured interviews and selected a service for transcribing the interviews. I kept a research journal, where I made

notes regarding choices I made and observations I had so I could question and reflect upon them throughout the study and assist with minimizing bias.

Methodology

Participant Selection Logic and Recruitment

I recruited Chinese teachers for this research. The teachers' designation as schoolteacher was self-identified. I asked that they self-identify as having taught for at least 1 year. I intended to recruit only public school EFL teachers to allow for some of the language barriers to be circumvented with their relative fluency in English and to have a more direct look at the implementation of public policy in the area of EFL curriculum. However, when recruitment was low, I recruited any interested Chinese teacher with at least 1 year of experience to participate in the research.

Using the research of S. Tang and Adamson (2014) as a guide, I sought a group of teachers from different types of schools, with a diverse number of years in the classroom, and a diverse range of years teaching (Hargreaves, 2005; Liu, 2016). The three teachers in S. Tang and Adamson's study taught between 8 and 20 years, in two different types of schools, and were observed teaching three different grades. My sample ideally would have included at least one male teacher, although few men teach K-12 in China. However, I reached saturation before a male teacher expressed interest in participating in the study.

I used convenience sampling, interviewing the first six teachers who responded to my recruitment efforts and invitations (Patton, 2015). I thought that recruitment would be quick because I was a member of the two main professional development WeChat groups

in the region where I taught. WeChat is a vehicle most Chinese citizens and every professional has access to, and it is used daily (Chao, 2017). The first groups I contacted were presided over by the head of English teacher training for the region I initially planned to work with. She gave her permission for recruitment after I was introduced to her by a teacher whom she knew for many years. People showed interest initially, but when it came down to setting up a time and participating in an interview, I was able to interview only two public school EFL teachers from the region. After a month of recruiting, I asked the Walden University Institutional Review Board (IRB) for permission to include any K-12 public or private school teacher who spoke English in China and had taught for more than 1 year. Even with such broad parameters in 12 WeChat groups, each with about 500 members, and having friends re-post my recruit flyer on their WeChat pages, I was only able to recruit four more people, for a total of six research participants.

To discern possible participants' ability to maintain a conversation with me in English, I watched for their ability to express their thoughts and feelings during the recruitment process on WeChat. I excluded one person for as we talked it became clear to me that she was tutor, not a teacher, and did not work in a school setting with school leadership or government mandates. I came to understand that being able to maintain a basic conversation did not mean that participants would be able to express themselves clearly using educational jargon. With all study participants having Chinese as a first language, English as a language that they did not grow up with, and the proliferation of poor English skills across China as a result of the limited instruction in and exposure to

English, communication was hampered during the interview. I used my understanding of English grammar as it is interpreted by many Chinese people in China, to aid in my understanding of what was being said and in order to say things in a way that would be more easily understood (Bengtsson, 2016).

I recruited and interviewed participants until saturation was reached, which became evident when there was nothing new being mentioned in the interviews. This phenomenon, which Sandelowski (2008) referred to as "informational redundancy" (p. 875), is also noted by Guest et al. (2006) and Grady (1998), who described it as the point "when the researcher begins to hear the same comments again and again, data saturation is being reached. … It is then the time to stop collecting information and to start analyzing what has been collected" (p. 26).

Although a generic qualitative research design can move forward with a single participant (Denzin, 2012), I used the guidance of Guest et al. (2006) and set a goal of between eight and 12 participants in this study. When saturation was reached at six participants, I removed all notices for recruitment, notified any additional volunteers, and asked that all who reposted my request do the same.

To begin the process of interviewing, I thanked the potential participants for their willingness to participate. I communicated with participants concerning times to meet for our 45- to 60-minute interview over WeChat. I sent a small hongbao as a gift. Before the interview, by way of WeChat, participants received a letter of consent and a reminder of the arrangements for the interview. I also shared how long I have been a teacher and my dedication to teaching to build a rapport between us. The consent form and statement of

purpose were distributed to the participants over WeChat prior to the interviews. I referred to these at the beginning of the interviews and indicated they could orally consent if they didn't send the consent form back. All participants either wrote in or said over WeChat, "I consent." These measures helped establish credibility with the study participants.

Instrumentation

The interview protocol for this study consisted of open-ended interview questions (see Appendix) and probes through which I sought to ensure content validity and credibility. By focusing on question formulation, the identification of previous research studies, and appraising the studies, the first three steps of Savin-Baden and Major's (2013) process for qualitative research development, I was more equipped to create interview questions. Some of the interview questions were tested with private school teachers in China as part of a university qualitative research course assignment. Based on this initial testing, I adjusted the interview questions and protocol, drawing on the conceptual framework and empirical literature review. The interview questions were drafted to allow an inquiry-based conversation with people who had the ability to give insight (Castillo-Montoya, 2016). I documented changes I made in the interview questions in my research journal, supporting the reliability of my interview questions (Grossoehme, 2014). Brief notes taken during the interviews, audio recordings of the interviews, and a research journal were the only data sources used in this study.

Cortazzi et al. (2011) found that interviews in languages other than the first language of the participant, specifically Chinese in their study, resulted in data that was

up to 41% different from that which would have been gathered if conducted in Chinese (p. 529). Cortazzi et al. also claimed that Chinese interviewees will share some things with a non-Chinese interviewee that they would not share with a fellow Chinese person. A bilingual researcher would have been ideal; however, I am not bilingual. In order to increase the opportunity to have more representative data, I adjusted the wording of my interview questions by speaking in the third person to avoid topics that could risk loss of face.

Data Collection

I collected data in my home via the interviews I conducted over WeChat by way of video calls and texting during these calls if there were words that needed to be clarified. This was an option because WeChat has translation technology as a part of the platform. I recorded the interviews on my iPhone and iPad to ensure that in the event of a technical malfunction, there would be a backup recording available.

At the end of the interviews, participants were again told that their identities would be kept confidential and that they would be given a hongbao of 28.88 RMB (approximately 4 U.S. dollars) over WeChat. I sent digital copies of the recordings to Otter.ai cloud software, and I cross-referenced these with the audio of the interviews. These steps supported the dependability of my data.

Data Analysis Plan

Understanding the experience of those who participated in my study was central to my generic qualitative research, so I listened carefully to what participants communicated, considering the context being communicated as well (see Merriam, 2019;

Seidman, 2006). As a first step, I listened to the interviews, thought about their experiences, and considered the meaning behind their words while I made corrections to the transcribed interviews. The lack of English proficiency on the part of participants made it necessary for me to re-write quotations by adjusting word order, verb tenses, and usage for the quotations that I chose to include in Chapter 4, to make them clear for readers. Having lived in China amongst the people for almost 5 years, my understanding of the cultural context enhanced my ability to reflect on and understand what research participants were talking about (Bengtsson, 2016).

As a second step, I took notes on the transcripts and wrote the words and phrases that jumped out to me above sentences and in the margins. I read my data repeatedly until I could assign "symbolic meaning" from the data (Elliot, 2018, p. 2852), which became my first layer of codes. Although a phrase or sentence sometimes had multiple codes that could be attached to it, I avoided assigning multiple codes to them (Elliott, 2018). I also summarized chunks of text using phrases or a few words. I then wrote the words and ideas, condensed versions of the transcript interviews in three columns with three participants per page. I further reduced these notes by circling key words and phrases and writing one-word categories that linked the data. Lastly, I created six columns on one sheet of paper, one column for each interview, charting across the columns these key words and themes that remained. I kept the elements of the conceptual framework separate while coding clusters of data. Later in the process, I found it useful to look at all the data again and trace my steps back to the most recent state of codes, so that I could review and reconnect with the path I took to make various connections (Elliott, 2018).

Through this process, my codes became clear and as short as possible, facilitating my use of them.

This generic qualitative study design allowed for the data analysis not to be limited by the underpinnings of a conceptual framework or methodological tradition, but rather allow for connections between ideas shared in interviews to be fully explored. I took occasional mid- and postinterview notes in my research journal so that I could more easily refer to things that caught my attention during the interview when analyzing the transcripts as well as minimize bias.

Although I conducted data analysis within the four stages of decontextualization, recontextualization, categorization, and compilation as described by Bengtsson (2016), it was a fluid and intuitive process for me where those stages acted as signposts letting me consider what stage I had reached. Since I am a novice coder, I took the advice of Saldaña (2016) and coded everything that was related to my research question. I made this choice because, although Elliott (2018) explained that experienced researchers can discern what information need not be coded and as a result make choices concerning what is coded, I was not an experienced coder. With only a beginning familiarity with coding, a researcher may conclude that some information is insignificant and not code it, when in fact it may be significant. I checked my coding to understand the patterns that developed as rounds of coding led to the development of themes. There were no discrepant findings.

Issues of Trustworthiness

To maintain credibility, I made clear to the participants the purpose of the research and their participation. I needed to be aware of the general experiences of teachers in China, who often are underpaid and overworked, and where a 12-hour workday (J. Liu & Xie, 2021; T. Wang, 2015; Song et al., 2020) as well as having 40 students in a classroom is not uncommon (W. J. Peng et al., 2014; Y. Tang, 2018; T. Wang, 2015; S. Wang et al., 2020). Credibility was also increased by inviting a wide range of viewpoints from study participants with open-ended questions and probes, letting them know they will not be judged or scrutinized for what they say, and that they were free to leave the study at any time. I used probes to help me recognize and question inconsistencies in participant responses or to prompt further reflection (Shenton, 2004). I also followed the processes implied by the generic research design (Kahlke, 2014).

Transferability was increased by including thick descriptions of the participants' demographic variables and interview data that illuminated the boundaries of study and the diversity of participants involved. There is a likelihood that participants coming from different schools will also improve transferability.

Dependability is informed by the credibility of the research; however, there are additional steps that can ensure that if the study is repeated within the same context, the results would be similar. These steps I took included being clear regarding research design and how the data were collected. By keeping a research journal, I kept myself aligned with my intended research design, data collection and analysis. I kept track of moments with participants that I connected with or learned from, as well as thoughts that

I had from the way that my being quiet allowed for a participant to add information that I didn't ask but found very valuable. In the development of this qualitative research, I also used the process of Savin-Baden and Major (2013), focusing on question formulation, the identification of previous research studies, appraising studies, finalizing the sample, and reflecting upon the process, which was an additional check for trustworthiness.

To enhance confirmability and neutrality of my research, I created and maintained the previously mentioned research journal. In it I considered similarities among interview transcripts, thought about questions that were answered in the data without having been explicitly asked, and noted how I could better prepare future research to avoid issues in the future, as well as how I would overcome those that arose. I also made comments about how the flow of each interview was different and ways to improve my interviewing technique including striking a balance between just letting participants talk, as in many cases they answer the questions being asked and stopping them to make sure they answer the question being asked.

Ethics Procedures

After Walden University IRB approval (Approval no. 06-10-21-0383574), I began recruiting participants and conducting interviews. Building connection and protecting an interviewee's privacy are important to collecting rich, quality data (Merriam, 2019). Confidentiality was maintained throughout the study by collecting informed consent agreements from the participants. Before the interviews, I provided an information guide to all my participants, which included the purpose of the study, what to expect during the interview, and the use of pseudonyms to protect their identity. The

informed consent followed the guidelines of Walden University. To ensure confidentiality of the records, recordings, emails, informed consent forms, and transcripts of the interviews are secured on my password-protected home computer. All collected data for this study will be destroyed after 5 years.

Summary

In Chapter 3, I described the method by which I carried out this generic qualitative research study of the experiences of Chinese E teachers as they transition from teacher-centered to student-centered instruction as mandated by the Chinese national education reforms. I sought out the participation of eight to 12 people who self-identified as Chinese teachers but reached saturation by the sixth interview. I also described the plan for data collection and analysis, which included measures to support trustworthiness and validity in the collection of data.

Chapter 4: Results

The purpose of this generic qualitative study was to better understand the experiences of Chinese schoolteachers as the system of education in China transitions from teacher-centered to student-centered classroom instruction. In this chapter, I provide the results of the study. I begin with a description of the setting and the participants' demographics. Next, I describe the data collection and data analysis process, review elements of trustworthiness, and provide the results.

Setting

The setting for this study was virtual, and I interviewed six participants from several locations in China. I had planned to only interview teachers on the island of Hainan, but challenges in recruiting enough participants resulted in broader recruitment, until saturation was reached after six interviews. The data collection took place during the COVID-19 pandemic, so interviews were conducted via videoconferencing instead of in person. I urged participants to find a private setting for the interview and I also found a confidential space from which to conduct the interview.

Demographics

All six participants self-identified as teachers in China who had taught for at least 1 year. Four were EFL teachers, one was a Chinese language arts teacher, and one was a math teacher. Two were public school teachers, and four taught in private schools, with one of the four private school teachers working in a training school. All six participants were women, and all were nationals of China. In order to keep the identities of the

participants confidential, I created pseudonyms for them. See Table 1 for several demographic characteristics of the participants.

Table 1

Participant Demographics

Pseudonym	Gender identification	Years as a teacher	Subject(s) taught	Type of school
Amy	Female	1-5	English	Training center
Sue	Female	5-10	Chinese	Private
Patricia	Female	11-15	English	Public
Robin	Female	5-10	Mathematics, statistics	Private
Eve	Female	5-10	English	Public
Inna	Female	1-5	English	Private

Data Collection

I began collecting data when I received permission from Walden University's IRB office. I recruited participants for the study by posting a recruitment invitation with basic information about the study on WeChat, a social networking platform that is central to life in China. I began advertising the study to EFL teachers in Hainan but received very little interest. I then contacted the IRB and gained permission to expand recruiting nationally to any K-12 schoolteacher with 1 year of experience. I posted the recruitment invitation on my personal WeChat page and placed additional postings in 12 teacher groups, some of which were then forwarded by other users.

I had intended to interview eight to 12 participants, but it was difficult to recruit that many people. Comfort with being interviewed by an American in these days of political strain between our governments may have deterred more Chinese teachers from

volunteering. While conducting my fourth interview, I perceived saturation to have been met, however I interviewed two more people to confirm that saturation had in fact been reached. Among the six interviews I heard no discrepancies. Efforts to recruit male participants were unproductive. I had only one potential participant who was male contact me. After making appointments with me and cancelling, he eventually shared that he was uncomfortable with the idea of me recording his interview and was no longer interested in participating.

I conducted all six interviews using the videoconference platform on WeChat. Interviews were scheduled during the morning or evening to accommodate the participants' work schedules. All participants participated in one-on-one interviews where video cameras were on, and the audio was recorded. Each interview lasted an average of 50 minutes depending on the depth of answers provided. All six participants answered all seven interview questions, and I followed each question with one or two probing questions. Most of the participants answered the interview questions and probes with in-depth responses, and I did not need to request any follow-up interviews.

All study participants were citizens of China, from the mainland, and English was not their first language. The proliferation of English language learning in China is a relatively new focal point of the government (Bolton & Graddol, 2012; D. Li & Edwards, 2011). In addition, English is not a part of the daily lives of a vast majority of Chinese people (Bolton & Graddol, 2012). As such, most Chinese people do not speak English, and of those who do speak English, few speak it very well. In interviews, I often had to express somewhat technical jargon representing concepts in education and their

classroom practice, in simpler ways to reach clarity. I found interview questions had to be repeated, re-worded, or explained with examples of what I was asking. For example, when I asked if there was a particular instructional strategy which a participant preferred, no participant could give a response without me having to further elaborate on what an instructional strategy and offering examples of instructional strategies.

Each interview was transcribed using the Otter.ai cloud software. Participants had the chance to read their transcript to review their responses and confirm accuracy, offer feedback, suggest edits, or elaborate on their responses. All participants responded by email noting that their transcript accurately reflected their interview. Two participants emailed me new thoughts they had on some of the interview questions, which I added to their interview transcript. As a token of my appreciation for their participation in my study, I electronically sent participants a 28.88 RMB hongbao (red packet).

Data Analysis

I took notes after each interview that consisted of my impressions of moments in our interview. Each participant was given a pseudonym so that I could identify them. I did not know the Chinese names of any of my participants as WeChat, the primary social media platform that I used to recruit and communicate with participants, allows users to post or share with different usernames of their choice depending on whom they are in contact with in certain modes, and the six teachers used their English names which are different from their Chinese or government names which are written in Chinese character.

Overall, I analyzed the data in a way that helped support the dependability of my results (see Braun & Clarke, 2013; Savin-Baden & Major (2013) and engaging in the four stages of decontextualization, recontextualization, categorization, and compilation as described by Bengtsson (2016). I identified chunks of meaning (decontextualization) and then took a break from the data to clear my mind a bit in order to look at the transcripts and condensed notes with fresh eyes, as encouraged by Bengtsson. I then condensed sentences and other phrases into fewer words during categorization. During the compilation stage, I wrote up the conclusions or findings that I reached.

I photocopied each transcript onto paper with a dimension of, 11.7 x 16.5 in., to create more room for me to take notes on. I read each transcript repeatedly while hearing the voice of the person in my head and recalling the emotion they shared or visual tics that surfaced. I then underlined and circled key words and phrases using colored pens. I read my data repeatedly until I began to assign "symbolic meaning" from the data (Elliott, 2018, p. 2852). Meanings that I gathered became my first layer of codes, as suggested by Elliott (2018). There were no discrepant findings.

My emergent codes arose from participant responses, and I found it difficult to not notice similar situations that emerged in my literature review and professional experience. I worked to increase my objectivity as I reduced data and connected to my participants using not only what was said, but also connecting what was said and what was meant, based on my understanding of expressions, phrasing, cultural norms of many of the Chinese people that I have come to know in my nearly 5 years living in China. I used these abilities to reflect on what research participants were talking about in order to

connect with the meaning of what was said (Bengtsson, 2016; Patton, 2014). See Table 2 for the categories (which led to subthemes) and themes.

Table 2

Overview of Thematic Structure

Themes	Categories/subthemes
Teachers expressed a need for professional development	1. Formal professional development, 2. Informal professional development, 3. Urban areas support self-designed professional development
Teachers' student-centered practice style developed over time	
Teachers select pedagogy supportive of student needs and interests	

Results

Three themes emerged from the data analysis of what Chinese schoolteachers experience as the education system in China transitions from teacher-centered instruction to student-centered instruction. These three themes address the research question of this study. The first theme is that teachers expressed a need for professional development. It was the most dominant theme and has three subthemes (formal professional development, informal professional development, and urban areas support self-designed professional development.) The other two themes are that teachers' student-centered practice style developed over time and that teachers select pedagogy supportive of both student needs and interests.

The themes are illustrated with quotes from the participants. Having lived in China for nearly 5 years, I have developed an intuition of what people mean when they

speak English in a way that holds meaning but is not grammatically correct. The word choice, grammatical usage, and phrasing of many of the Chinese people who speak English is not standard and can be challenging at best to understand. For instance, it is common for words that sound like the word that is wanted to be substituted for other similar sounding words. Alongside frequent substitution errors are omissions, the wrong use of prepositions, articles, pronouns, and leaving out the subject altogether. Nouns are often referred to using the incorrect pronouns and there are commonly misused words that in China are recognized and accepted to mean things that they don't exactly mean in English. To avoid the reader's misunderstanding while reading the words of the participants, I have adjusted the words used and the grammar of my participants when included in the Results section, keeping their intended meanings intact, but making it comprehensible for the reader.

Theme 1: Teachers Expressed a Need for Professional Development

The first theme reflects the teachers' perception that they need professional development to transition into more student-centered teaching. The three subthemes of this theme are formal professional development (school-organized formal professional development), informal professional development (professional development from knowledgeable colleagues or experienced by the teacher in isolation over the internet), and teacher-initiated structured professional development in urban areas.

All six participants said that they were constantly learning. All six participants also shared that the professional development provided by their schools or the government was more useful than the professional development they were able to obtain

in isolation by way of the internet. Four of the six participants experienced a positive balance of professional development opportunities. Study participants also reported that they experienced growth in their understanding of and ability to provide student-centered instruction to their students. Additionally, to make this change in instruction happen, study participants reported that large time commitments were needed to know their students' social and emotional needs, learning preferences, and to prepare student-centered materials that supported their learning. Time also influenced the choices that the teachers made regarding professional development.

Formal Professional Development

The formal professional development opportunities provided for the teachers that were aimed to advance their student-centered instructional practices were indicated to be of value by all six study participants. For instance, Amy, a former training center owner who recently returned to the classroom as a full-time teacher, often drew professional development in her current workplace, a training center, to get things done. She explained that she found weekly meetings where professional development takes place to be very helpful. Amy reported that she and the other teachers meet with the school leaders weekly to share problems, offer solutions, and to learn from each other:

> Every Wednesday, we have a teaching meeting together. It's 2 hours long and we share what we want to share: any problems, any solutions, or any plans. So, we share during the meeting. During the days, we also can always ask each other.

Robin, a private school mathematics teacher who had transitioned from teaching college students to middle school and high school students, found useful the professional

development opportunities which took the form of demonstration lessons and research group breakout sessions.

Even with a strong background in student-centered instruction, Eve said she had learned a lot of "modern" student-centered techniques in various programs and in a cutting-edge training center, before moving into public school. She said that at her public school, "We have professional development workshops monthly or every other month which every teacher needs to go to." She credits these experiences as giving her such a clear understanding of what being a student-centered teacher is about and helping her to be one.

Informal Professional Development

In addition to formal opportunities to grow professionally, teachers also found it very useful to have informal opportunities to grow. Informal opportunities included connecting with colleagues and asking them for advice. An informal environment that supported innovation and professional growth was named by four of the six teachers as an important support to aid in their transition from teacher-centered to student-centered instruction.

This kind of rich informal environment was spoken of by Sue, a teacher in her 20s who works in a top tier international school in a large metropolis in China. In her school, every teacher has a professional development plan that they create with the school leader. Her professional development plan consists of a goal that the school has made for her, as well as a goal that Sue has made for herself. This yearly practice of goal setting is then reflected in planned lesson observations, professional development opportunities, and the

informal opportunities of working with an “exceptional” team of teachers whom she can rely on for additional professional growth. As Sue explained, “I work with a group of teachers who help me to develop my teaching skills as a student-centered teacher, but my time is very limited.”

Imbalances in formal and informal professional development opportunities of teachers seemed to be based on the location of the school the teacher worked in. Inna, the only teacher in this study from a rural school, and the only Grade 9 teacher in her school, shared feeling a sense of isolation. As a result, Inna experienced a lack of people to whom she could reach out for pedagogical advice. She said, “I don’t have anyone to talk to and I don’t get second chances to improve upon a lesson.”

Inna, the most novice teacher in this study, had been teaching for a year and a half, and was a homeroom teacher for the first time. She felt isolated from informal professional development opportunities because of the relative inexperience of teachers around her. She said that when it comes to student-centered teaching,

> I will always ask for those experienced who care to help me, but those teachers have only been teaching a year longer than me. Although they know more than me, they really don’t know that much. Also, I am the homeroom teacher right now, it this is difficult because I have never done this job before. I need to manage more outside of teaching and have to deal with more problems. Sometimes I am in a panic because I have no idea how to deal with the students and to deal with their parents.

Although Inna stated her need to experience more professional development so that she can create her own unique teaching style, she reported that she experiences stress and is not comfortable with the "experimental" nature of her work, as she termed her efforts in student-centered teaching. Inna believed that she would benefit from having a mentor. Inna said,

> It's like I need to ask lots of advice from those experienced teachers; someone who can help me when I am in difficult times, like… a mentor. I need a teacher who I can ask questions about how to teach better. I don't have the kind of person at my school who can give me lots of suggestions and help me teach better.

Inna's isolation resulted in a reliance on the internet as teaching and learning resources and a means of informal professional development. She said,

> I think there are also some challenging parts to my work. I believe that if someone wants to learn something however, they can find a way to learn it. Sometimes I just search some materials from the internet when I want to find something out.

The internet was named by all six participants as a resource that they used regularly given its convenience and the time constraints the teachers experience. All the teachers used the internet to seek out new student-centered ideas for instruction, lessons, and information.

Urban Areas Support Self-Designed Professional Development

Eve, a public-school EFL teacher with over 6 years of experience, went to Beijing to grow professionally. She started out as a teacher and found that the training offered in Beijing helped her grow a great deal. As she recalled the shift in her understanding of teaching she said, "Yes. After that training, I began to become more concerned about the

actual oral English ability of my students." Eve found experiential learning to be very useful for her in teaching her English language lessons.

Patricia, a teacher of over 10 years who reported having had many professional development experiences at high level institutes in Beijing, mentioned that the resources in the big cities are much greater and develop the teachers much faster. When reflecting on her experiences learning about student-centered teaching in Beijing almost a decade ago, she said,

> What's important is that in urban areas, it's very easy for teachers to get to get the resources from universities. They have lecturers at the university who are available to give teachers professional development workshops and to tell them how to improve … their teaching style and teaching skills. There are many such institutions available so teachers can get the help that they need. When teachers receive this type of training they are programmed to teach well, and it becomes automatic. When teachers are able to attend professional development over a week or a month, teachers are able to master the content, so they really grow very rapidly.

Amy also spoke of how urban areas allow access to rich resources, and wished she had such access in her somewhat rural area.

> The people in Shanghai or in Beijing, they have more resources to help them learn more about teaching as well as to know the world outside of China. They know of the world outside of China and people from around the world who are much greater than the rest [of us in China] are.

Having the experience of having had training in a large urban area in China foe three of the teachers, or, for two of the teachers, international training in a large urban area, seemed to also be a positive resource for these five of six teachers. The participants mentioned schooling and working in the United States, training in Beijing, and work in an international hotel. Those three teachers who had such experiences, shared more information about student-centered teaching and the different student-centered pedagogical choices that they make when teaching than those teachers without these big city and international experiences.

Theme 2: Teachers' Student-centered Practice Style Developed Over Time

The second theme reflects reports from all six teachers that they experienced and tailored changes in their teaching style which they perceived was unique to them. All six study participants said this growth and comfort in teaching style development took, time. The teachers mentioned initially needing to understand the job in general and then as the years passed, gradually learning how to increasingly teach in a student-centered manner. Even Patricia, the one participant who said she had always been a student-centered teacher, also said she needed time to feel confident in the choices that she was making; that assurance came over time as she became educated in student-centered teaching. In time she could justify that the choices which she was making were educationally sound.

Sue shared that when she began teaching 8 years ago, she was most concerned with getting the work done and making sure that she did the things that were going to be checked by leaders in her school. A few years later, she was more confident in her work because she had "taught primary for a few years" and knew her students' "reactions" and

their ‘knowledge levels,” making her work easier. In her third year, Sue still felt that since she had taken her time to prepare the lesson using resources that she felt were of a high quality, that the students should have been able to understand the work. Sue said of the students, “they should understand the material that I just taught them because I thought that my manner of instruction was good.” It wasn’t until after her fourth year or so that she started to look at who her students were as people and learners and employ “differentiation” into her planning.

Robin who was new to the concept of differentiation, said that her teaching has improved over time due a great part to the reviews and games that she incorporates into her lessons. She said,

> I think my teaching skill has improved a lot. I tried to get my classes to like my lessons more and to find them more interesting. In the beginning I would just ask one question at a time and listen to one student at a time. Now I review work from the previous class, I design games, include some sort of drawing, or whatever will allow for them to practice the work in a fun way. Before I never did this.

Amy said she learns from the teachers around her by observing them, illustrating another example of self-designed, informal professional development. She then decides on the different strengths of the teachers, pairing them with her strengths and her students’ needs. The manner of student-centered teaching that Amy adopts, she claims, is based primarily on the needs of her students. When describing this process Amy said,

> I just pick their strengths, what I can from this teacher and that teacher, and I combine them to make my own way. I’m like a copy from them. So that’s the

> first. But when I get to more teachers, I pick their different strengths and combine them. And so that's how I adapt my way of teaching. And then I find you can learn from them, you can copy them, but it will never be your best way of teaching because you need to find a way that suits you and suits your students. So, then I start to make adjustment to my own way of teaching. I have my own classroom, own style … I don't just copy it. I copy and change, copy and change, and then I start to have my own way of teaching.

Amy emphasized the importance of getting to know her students.

> And the more I get to know the student, I figure out the student, the best way for them to learn, not the best way to teach. Because the best way to teach is the way that offers them the best way to learn.

Inna, with 1.5 years in the classroom and who teaches in a rural private school, explained that she experiments with different ways of teaching encouraged by teachers who have more experience. Inna gave me the impression of having less confidence than the other participants in the process of discovering and developing her own teaching style. At this stage in her development as a teacher, she implied her method is not the result of understanding herself, her students, or what works best, but rather, her testing of the waters, As Inna said,

> Yeah, I always do what has worked based on my experience and add to it different ways that I will try out. They are more like experimental products. The experienced teachers have always encouraged me to just try different ways.

When reflecting on the development of her teaching style, Patricia, the public school teacher in this study who had been teaching the longest, expressed that learning theory supported her innately developed practice of teaching in a student-centered manner. She shared that learning student-centered pedagogical theory gave her confidence to continue with this manner of instruction:

> I have always had a very good sense of how to teach in a student-centered way, but I didn't know if what I was doing was right or not, so I went back to learn theory to see if what I knew to do naturally was the right thing to do. I needed to learn theory to support my ideas.

With many new ideas to learn and decisions to make, Eve, who developed a teaching approach that includes a great deal of roleplaying, has experienced that it takes a great deal more time to prepare for her lessons than teacher-centered teaching did. She stated, "So just before class, I think I'm much much busier than before when I taught in a teacher-centered manner. So, these days before class I need to search on the internet for the right materials and activities for my students."

As shared earlier in this theme, Sue, a Chinese language teacher at an international school, shared that after 4 years of teaching she developed a teaching style that took her students' needs into consideration. Sue shared that her shift from teacher-centered instruction to student-centered instruction was gradual, intentional, and represented what she found to be most useful for her students. She said,

> I thought my students understood their work because they were doing their work and understood the questions that I gave them. When we had some conversations

> during their recess time however, I realized that the students only got it on the surface. When I started with student-centered teaching my students were not very good at to using the knowledge. I started to think about how knowing the children could help them have a deeper understanding. Now when I design my teaching, I think about differentiation, how students should be grouped, and one or two knowledge points that I feel each student can really get after the lesson.

Amy experienced something similar in her development as Sue had experienced, in choosing specific elements to become a part of her teaching practice. Amy said,

> During my first year when I was a TA (teacher assistant), I actually only worked with two teachers. I just pick their strengths, and I combined them to make my own way … When I became a teacher and had more contact with more teachers, I picked their different strengths and combine with what I had learned and who I was. That's how I adapted and developed my way of teaching.

She also came to understand that what she chooses to adopt into her teaching practice is not just a matter of what she is partial to as a teacher but based on the needs of her students. She said,

> Then a little while later I found that you can learn from other teachers, you can copy them, but it will never be your best way of teaching because you need to find a way that suits you and suits your students. So then I started to make adjustments to my own way of teaching. I have my own classroom, own style. If it's a game [that another teacher] used to play [with her students], I change it a little bit to what I think will work better for this group … because the best way to

> teach is to offer them the best way for different students to learn. But now it's like, "You are comfortable to learn this way. I will teach you this way." So, I have different ways of teaching for different students.

Choices made by teachers in their development not only considered student learning preferences and teacher partiality to certain types of activities, but it also took into account that they have a limited amount of time to deliver content through their instruction and must make some decisions based on this reality. As Inna said,

> I used to use more student-centered techniques, but I also need to complete the curriculum so I couldn't go that slow. It's a shame that we can't do a lot of activities. All we do is we need to continue to finish our curriculum. That's too bad because I used to have an opening class with specific tasks and cooperative learning.

Eve also shared her feelings concerning the decision that need to be made when working to demonstrate a balance between old teacher-centered and new student-centered teaching methods. Eve said,

> We had a training where the trainer said that he didn't believe that we need to teach grammar, and I agree, but I can do for a class or two, but no more than that. If I don't teach grammar at all, the kids will think that they didn't learn, and their parents will think that all the kids did was play. Parents believe that if the work isn't written in the notebook that it didn't happen. Also, I think there a kind of a dilemma where on one hand I know the right thing to do for their language development, but on the other hand the students need to face the exam.

Theme 3: Teachers Select Pedagogy Supportive of Student Needs and Interests

The third theme reflects the teachers' perceptions that they create activities that move the work of the students' learning from themselves to the students as a means to transition from teacher-centered instruction to student-centered instruction. These choices are closely related to the Theme 2's focus on the development over time of the teaching style of the teacher but the focus of Theme 3 is on the students that are being taught. Some of the activities they devised/used (or some of the pedagogical strategies they used were peer teaching, group work, games, roleplaying, assigning participant roles during shared reading that highlights student strength, and having the students actively choose the tempo of the learning. Some of the practices shared here were mentioned in the previous section, Theme 2, but the difference is that this section illuminates why the teachers perceive the practice has been chosen, sometimes including pedagogical implications for the choices made on student learning.

As Robin spoke about her experiences, she shared that she found having students teach each other to be a very powerful pedagogical tool that she employs her student-centered classes. She said,

> One of the best ways to help your students learn is to have them teach their classmates. This activity creates an ownership of the knowledge for the student. Then as a teacher I do some quick assessment to finish the lesson. You can also split the students into several groups, then you ask one to teach another. You can ask students to use their own language to teach the other students. You know that a student really gets what you are teaching if they can teach it.

Eve shared that she found student-centered learning easier for students, as it was a more effective tool than teacher-centered methods. The pedagogy of student-centered approaches enables her students to learn and use English effectively as the students are attracted to the methods and use them quite readily. Eve said,

> I think it's easier to conduct student-centered teaching. When working in a student-centered way, I will arrange a lot of activities for students. Previously, I would just talk like teachers always talk and the students take notes and remember all the sentences and phrases and prepare for the exams, which are very popular and intense.

Eve went on to share the difference between a teacher-centered approach and a student-centered approach to a lesson, and how a student-centered lesson supported the development of active learners in her English class. Eve said,

> Previously, if we gave a lesson on shopping, I would give them the words that they need to know, tell them how to ask for the price and express the price. I would tell the students to read them, write them down in their notebook, and then ask them to recite it. Later they would get a test on this. Now, I give the same information, but now I tell them that I will take them to a supermarket and in little groups (after having arranged this with the market of course) with small labels on the books, toys, or other items we are focusing on, give them fake money, and have them use the language while acting out the roles.

When in a training center with small class sizes, Eve was able to take her students to the store for this shopping experience in order to learn the vocabulary. Now, with more

students in her class, she mimics these experiences in her classroom with items that she brings into the class. Amy and Patricia also used this kind of roleplaying.

It was the experience of Amy that games and competitions were the best tool for her to use to motivate her students to learn. As Amy said,

> So, I figured out that the classroom needed to be a place where my students become motivated, so I thought about the kind of game they would enjoy. … [using a] competition game or just a normal game, would depend upon how the students reacted … I use a lot of game-based learning because most of my students are kindergarten students and elementary school students. They're still young so game-based learning is the most effective way for them to learn. That maybe the best way for them to do. All kids like to play and teaching and learning should bring joy to them. So, I think that we play game together, that is the best way to explain that teaching and learning can bring joy.

One of Sue's experiences around student-centered instruction dealt with her finding suitable roles for children when they are engaging with a read-aloud of a playscript. She recounted the tale of one of her learning-disabled students who not only finds a way to feel secure and important by reading aloud as he contributes to the learning of, but the students learn that students who are different and struggle with learning exist and still have a function that is critical for everyone. Beyond the overt objective of the lesson, there is a more subtle and deep learning about life and society, that she felt was learned by these students. As Sue said,

> He has a mental impairment so he couldn't read very well. He was, however, a good actor. My student with the mental disability usually acted out the parts in these readings although on occasion his partner acted out some text too. He loved to do this because it was his way to show what he understood about the text in this play. Everyone in the class was also invited to participate by taking such a role, but he was always one of the best in my classroom. He was really great because his actions would make us laugh. Our reaction made him feel more confident about Chinese. And so that is what I'm glad to say that because he felt like we accepted him. We know he's different, but we accept him. He could do something which was good in front of everyone.

Similar to using play scripts, Amy is quite fond of getting her students to engage in public speaking over the course of a few lessons. She explained the pedagogy of how she slowly builds student skills and understanding in her classroom.

> When I want them to get baby steps to the public speaking. First, they will practice reading little stories in storybooks. After they get better and better in reading, I start to let them to think about what they read. I will tell them, "Your task is not only reading this passage. You need to understand this passage too." So, I then start to ask them questions after they have read, like, "What is the favorite part of the story? And who was the character? What's the problem in the story? How did they solve the problem?" Soon the students will be able to explain that to me. After that, when they can read and they can learn, I start to let them do their little speech. They will do something like present a story or just tell us

something such as a speech about their favorite animal or something. I will introduce the animal. Once they get better or good enough, I will raise up the level of elements required in responses as well as add elements to how these students would be assessed to challenge them, just past their comfort level, but they will still get it. It's a little bit difficult, but not that difficult, not too difficult for them. Such adjustments were aimed at creating a challenge for themselves so they can learn and see how they get progress better and better.

Summary and Conclusion

In this chapter, I provided the results of the study. I began with a description of the setting and the participants' demographics. Next, I described the data collection and data analysis process, reviewed elements of trustworthiness, and provided the results. In Chapter 5, I will engage in an interpretation of the results in light of the conceptual framework and empirical research, review the limitations of the findings, and offer recommendations for possible implementation of the findings, as well as future research.

Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

The purpose of this generic qualitative study was to better understand the experiences of Chinese schoolteachers as the system of education in China transitions from teacher-centered to student-centered classroom instruction. The intent was to explore, describe, and arrive at an understanding of the experiences faced by teachers and suggest future research that may help improve the experiences of teachers during this transition. The research question was: What do Chinese schoolteachers experience as the education system in China transitions from teacher-centered instruction to student-centered instruction? Six self-identified Chinese schoolteachers who had taught for at least 1 year were interviewed. Three main themes and accompanying subthemes that addressed the research question emerged from open coding of the interviews. Themes and subthemes were as follows:

- Teachers expressed a need for professional development (subthemes were formal professional development, informal professional development, and urban areas support self-designed professional development).
- Teachers' student-centered practice style developed over time.
- Teachers selected pedagogy supportive of student needs and interests.

In this chapter, I interpret the findings in light of the conceptual framework. Next, I discuss the ways that the findings confirm, disconfirm, or extend knowledge garnered from current, peer-reviewed studies. Then, I describe the limitations of the study and offer recommendations for further research. Lastly, I describe the potential impact for positive social change.

Interpretation of Findings

In this section, I interpret the findings in light of the conceptual framework and empirical literature in the field.

Interpretation of Findings in Light of the Conceptual Framework

Schön's Theory of the Reflective Practitioner

At the heart of the theory of the reflective practitioner (Schön, 1983) are two key concepts. The first is that professionals know how to do things that they were never taught to do, rising to the occasion as a matter of their professional expertise. The second key concept embodied in this theory is that, through reflection, one can improve one's professional practice. The three themes that emerged from data analysis are represented in Schön's theory of the reflective practitioner: the teachers expressed a need for professional development that included reflection and dialogue, teachers' student-centered practice style developed over time, and the teachers' selection of pedagogy that was supportive of student needs and interests. This development happened because of the experience and reflection of teachers who selected pedagogy supportive of student needs and interests, opposed to relying on school leaders to tell them what to do.

The teachers in this study demonstrated that they understood what was best for their students as student-centered teachers; they perceived that this understanding was not directly the result of a specific professional development workshop or professional development prescribed to them by school leaders, but developed within them as they grew as practitioners, as Schön (1983) would have suggested. Teachers in this study may have been working with students on a grade level that they had not worked with before,

but by reflecting on their previous experiences, the teachers said they were able to make decisions concerning how best to increase student interest or have students improve skills. The sense of knowing what the students needed, whether it be emotionally, socially, or academically, came from understanding gained through reflection, as well as pursuing what they needed as educators. For example, teachers confronted various situations, from one teacher who was working with a student with a learning disability to a few students who were not understanding the material being taught beyond the surface level. The teachers made decisions concerning these issues that remedied the problems. In none of these situations did the participants say they reached out to a mentor or administrator or specific person in a role of guidance for more information. Some teachers mentioned a formal practice they used for reflection in the beginning of their careers, but all of the teachers mentioned that there are practices for teaching reflection that they have incorporated into their teaching. The process of asking themselves what worked or did not work, asking themselves why, and then making an adjustment in their teaching was described by one participant as a "type of experimentation," using the same wording Schön (1987) used to describe such adjustments.

Schön (1987) explained that reflection takes place beyond the space immediately following an event and is an ongoing process. Teachers interact with problems and events on an ongoing basis throughout which they experience changes and development in who they are, resulting in the generation of new thoughts, solutions, and ways of interacting with problems they reflect on (Schön, 1987). When Eve dealt with the challenges of getting her students real-world experience in using English, she came up with the idea of

recreating real-world situations for student learning involving role modeling, initially in a local store and later in her classroom. As a result of her formal professional development, throughout which she reflected on how to improve that lesson, she established new ideas to consider during lesson preparation and after her lessons in order to improve them. As Sue became a more developed teacher, she continued to elevate her knowledge of how best to approach problems that she faced in her classroom. She did this by using reflection and professional development, which supported the changes made. The experiences shared by Eve, Sue, Inna, Patricia, Robin, and Amy confirm the research of Schön (1987) and Zhao (2012).

Learning-Centered Leadership Theory

The role of school leaders in changing the learning environment of schools through the ways that school leaders deliver learning to their teachers is well documented (Knapp et al., 2003; S. Liu & Hallinger, 2017). However, the findings of this study disconfirm the learning-centered leadership theory of S. Liu and Hallinger (2017). The study participants did not give any indication that it was the leaders of their schools who were creating a learning environment or PLC that promoted student-centered learning or tailoring professional development to their needs. None of the participants talked about school leaders in response to the initial open-ended interview questions about their experiences transitioning to student-centered learning. When questioned about the leaders of the school and the role that they played in the development of the participants' student-centered teaching, participants shared that they were unclear about the role that the school leaders played. When I asked Patricia about the role of principals in her school, she said,

"What are you asking? You mean like the government?" and then spoke about the professional development initiatives that the government has put in place for teachers. One study participant mentioned that the leader of their school created a professional development platform that was based on school goals and teacher-chosen areas of professional development, and two other study participants mentioned that there was a professional development program in place in their school. One participant mentioned that the leader of the school was not interested in student-centered instructional practices. It is not clear whether participants' limited English language acquisition made it hard to describe the school leaders' role or that each of the six teachers' school leaders did not play an integral role in the learning and development of student-centered teaching cultures.

Studies by Guo (2013), Yan and He (2014), Yin (2013), F. Zhang and Liu (2014), and Zhu and Shu (2017), demonstrated that there were Chinese teachers and Chinese school leaders who said they were supportive of student-centered student instruction, however when teacher practice was described or observed, non-student-centered instructional practices were documented (Lo, 2019; W. J. Peng et al., 2014; Ye & Zhao, 2019). The disconnect between espoused beliefs concerning student-centered instruction and classroom practices was disconfirmed by the findings of this study, perhaps reflecting the self-reported claims of participants who may have believed they excel at the application of student-centered instruction. However, all the teachers who participated in this study described several ways they use student-centered instructional practices, and they also reported many ways that they work to make this instructional practice useful for

their students. Only the first theme, that teachers expressed a need for professional development, is somewhat represented in the learning-centered leadership theory. The study design did not permit observations to confirm the teachers' perceptions with collection of other types of data, such as in a case study design.

Interpretation in Light of Empirical Work in the Field

The findings of this study have confirmed the findings of empirical research that the more a teacher has experience with the reforms, the more they will incorporate student-centered practices into their daily practice (Wong, 2012; Yan, 2015, Yan & He, 2012). The experience of becoming more student-centered in their approach to classroom instructions was echoed by all six teachers in this study. The findings may extend this phenomenon, as the five participants who were introduced to the concept of student-centered teaching in an international setting or an urban area projected a higher level of confidence in their instructional practices, a factor represented in the research of D. Li et al. (2016).

The value of an international context playing a role in the adoption of student-centered instructional practices, as addressed in the research of D. Li et al. (2016), came up in the interviews, as the two teachers who spent time in the United States. One of the teachers visited the United States specifically to learn student-centered instructional practices, yet both learned many things that they perceived they would not have learned if they had experienced this learning in China. One study participant, Amy, observed the Western teachers who she worked with in California, who mentioned they were interested in allowing their students to make mistakes. Amy felt this approach

encouraged student independence. Amy's Californian teacher/mentor also spent a great deal of time explaining her student-centered instructional approaches to Amy, which really helped Amy understand student-centered teaching. Our study participant indicated that much explaining of why certain pedagogical decisions were made would not have happened in China.

Limitations

There are several limitations to generalizing the findings to other settings. The first limitation of this study pertains to the relatively low English proficiency of the participants. As a result, participants may not have been able to express themselves as fully as they would have wanted to. Specific jargon that may have brought light to a point was likely lost in the English that most of these second language learner Chinese teachers spoke.

Another limitation of this study is that I did not know the school leadership structures of each school or the inner workings of these structures and I did not ask enough probing questions to understand the structures from their perspectives. It was unclear whether the leaders they discussed were the leader of their department, grade level, or the school. Also of interest would be the different responsibilities of each leader and how their role relates to the government in building leadership mandates and programs.

Given the current political landscape, namely the strained relationship between the United States and China, what seemed to be a trickle-down effect was experienced in recruiting (Medeiros, E., 2019; Z. Wang & Sun (2021). It is plausible to speculate that

some Chinese people have become less interested in dealing with Americans in general. As a result, the number of teachers willing to participate in my study, six teachers, while allowing me to reach saturation, may have been less than it would have been at another time. The teachers who did participate in this climate are then likely to represent a considerable outlier of the general population of teachers in China. As a result, the data collected from them may also reflect ideas that are not common. It was interesting to find out that, of the six participants, five came from a professional setting different from the one they currently are in. One participant previously worked in a hotel, another worked in finance, a third was an au pair, a fourth was a business owner, and lastly one participant was a college professor and then became a classroom teacher. As a result of having already reinvented themselves to become K-12 teachers, they were possibly more willing to reinvent themselves as educators during a time of curricular change and more willing to share that journey with a researcher.

Recommendations for Future Research

The findings of this study raised questions that could point to further research about the experience of teachers as they transition to student-centered instruction. Further exploration could provide a broader understanding of why some teachers in China embrace and find success implementing the reforms around student-centered teaching whereas others, as reported in the literature, do not. I recommend the following areas to study:

- A study of the different roles that school leaders play in Chinese schools and how the leaders in those roles interpret and disseminate government mandates.

Findings may improve understanding of the influence of leadership on professional development and teacher learning.

- A study using the same design but led by a Chinese person who speaks Chinese to see ways language and cultural comfort may have played a role in the results of this current study.
- A comparison of the transition to student-learning by teachers who had received their student-centered training abroad and those who did not go abroad for student-centered training.
- A mixed-methods study of Chinese teachers from public and private K-12 schools that explores the level of student-centered teaching that teachers perceive they provide their students. Variables could include student gaokao and other government exam scores analyzed along with interview data from the teachers see whether a relationship exists between the teachers' preferred instructional method and student scores.
- A case study of high school teachers whose students are taking the gaokao to see what student-centered instruction looks like in their classrooms.
- A qualitative study to learn more about how teachers' perceptions of how pay and other financial incentives around student gaokao results influences the teachers' choices.

Implications for Social Change

This study highlights some critical points that teachers are likely to reach while on the road of educational and cultural change. The first two themes point to the importance

of formal and informal professional development and the time it takes for teachers to make student-centered teaching a practice to call one's own. These two themes may extend a sense of hope to teachers who are adopting more student-centered instructional approaches in China. Ultimately, this study can be part of a paradigm shift in the ways teachers, school leaders, and professional development providers approach the expectation and use of professional development. Teachers, by way of this study, can be fortified with the belief that they too can successfully make this transition to student-centered teaching and have an idea of what it may look like for them.

School leaders and teachers can design and provide the type of professional development that is related to the student-centered curriculum they are asking teachers to facilitate. The findings of this research can also be used by school leaders to better provide a school environment which allows teachers to experiment with how they will provide student-centered instruction with comfort and expertise. This study may give teachers and school leaders confidence in the pedagogical decisions that they make as they better understand the supports that may be needed.

Collaboration with and mentoring from more experienced teachers was one of the kinds of informal professional development opportunities desired by the teachers. School leaders could work on staffing such mentors to support newer teachers. The extra time that student-centered instruction takes surfaced in each of the three themes. School leaders can work to provide supports to each teachers' search for curricular resources and pedagogical strategies. Finally, school leaders could seek out more urban and international experiences for teachers, particularly those in rural areas.

Conclusion

This study focused on the experience of Chinese teachers who are transitioning from teacher-centered instruction to student-centered instruction. With China being on the forefront of the world as it has lifted itself from poverty in less time than thought possible. Now that China has transformed and asserted herself, she understands that what got her to the top of the world stage, will not keep her here (Tan & Chua, 2015; Whalley & Zhao, 2013; Zhao, 2020). Educators' creativity, independence, and strength are necessary to produce the minds and workers of the future, there must be an education system in place that not only encourages, but also develops minds that are wide open and therefore ready to meet the challenges of world that seems to become increasingly complicated (Kegan, 1998, 2018)).

In China, the school system and society, which have been teacher-centered for thousands of years, have looked at the changes in our world and anticipating changes to come. They have decided that it is within China's best interest to shift the focus of the education from teacher to student. With this pedagogical shift will come a fundamental reordering of life in China's teacher-centered society, from a society where personal roles and rank rule, to something different. As the seeds of change regarding what it means to be an authority in China has been sown, we can look to more shifts in education as to where that seed took root (J. Li & Li, 2019; Whalley & Zhao, 2013; You, 2019).

This study can be used as a snapshot, where a people of a teacher-centered and exam-centered school system, begin to grow and change, loosening themselves from its roots, and taking on a new vision of the role of a teacher in a classroom.

An education system steeped in ideologies and practices void of student choice, experimentation, and independent thought is not going to produce the robust minds that will be needed in China. The government has begun to set in place student-centered instruction. Making this transition in instructional practice happen, not only with the few teachers who participated in this research and others like them, but with those teachers who would rather stay with how things used to be, and everyone else in between, is the challenge ahead.

References

Argyris, C., & Schön, D. (1978). *Organizational learning: A theory of action perspective*. Addison-Wesley.

Australian Government Department of Education, Skills and Employment. (2020, April). *China's education modernisation plan towards 2035*. https://internationaleducation.gov.au/international-network/china/PolicyUpdates-China/Pages/China's-education-modernisation-plan-towards-2035-.aspx

Bandura, A. (1986). *Social foundations of thought and action: A social cognitive theory*. Prentice-Hall.

Beckett, G., & Zhao, J. (2016). Deweyan student-centered pedagogy and Confucian epistemology: Dilemmatic pragmatism and neo-patriotism? In C. P. Chou & J. Spangler (Eds.), *Chinese education models in a global age* (pp. 265-277). Springer.

Bengtsson, M. (2016). How to plan and perform a qualitative study using content analysis. *Nursing Plus Open*, *2*, 8-14. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.npls.2016.01.001

Berry, R. S. Y. (1999, September). *Collecting data by in-depth interviewing.* Paper presented at the British Educational Research Association Annual Conference, University of Sussex at Brighton.

Bolton, K., & Graddol, D. (2012). English in China today: The current popularity of English in China is unprecedented, and has been fuelled by the recent political and social development of Chinese society. *English Today*, *28*(3), 3-9. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0266078410000118

Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2013). *Successful qualitative research: A practical guide for beginners*. Sage.

Caelli, K., Ray, L., & Mill, J. (2003). 'Clear as mud': Toward greater clarity in generic qualitative research. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, *2*(2), 1-13. https://doi.org/10.1177/160940690300200201

Camburn, E. M., & Han, S. W. (2017). Teachers' professional learning experiences and their engagement in reflective practice: a replication study. *School Effectiveness and School Improvement*, *28*(4), 527-554. https://doi.org/10.1080/09243453.2017.1302968

Castillo-Montoya, M. (2016). Preparing for interview research: The interview protocol refinement framework. *Qualitative Report*, *21*(5). https://doi.org/10.46743/2160-3715/2016.2337

Chao, E. (2017, January 2). How WeChat became China's app for everything. *Fast Company*. https://www.fastcompany.com/3065255/china-wechat-tencent-red-envelopes-and-social-money

Chen, J., Brown, G. T., Hattie, J. A., & Millward, P. (2012). Teachers' conceptions of excellent teaching and its relationships to self-reported teaching practices. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, *28*(7), 936-947. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tate.2012.04.006

Chen, S., & Ke, Z. (2014). Why the leadership of change is especially difficult for Chinese principals: A macro-institutional explanation. *Journal of Organizational Change Management*, *27*(3), 486-498. https://doi.org/10.1108/JOCM-07-2013-

0121

Cortazzi, M., Pilcher, N., & Jin, L. (2011). Language choices and 'blind shadows': investigating interviews with Chinese participants. *Qualitative Research, 11*(5), 505-535. https://doi.org/10.1177/1468794111413225

Denzin, N. K. (2012). Triangulation 2.0. *Journal of Mixed Methods Research, 6*(2), 80-88. https://doi.org/10.1177/1558689812437186

Elliott, V. (2018). Thinking about the coding process in qualitative data analysis. *The Qualitative Report, 23*(11), 2850-2861. https://doi.org/10.46743/2160-3715/2018.3560

Fu, G. (2020). The knowledge-based versus student-centered debate on quality education: controversy in China's curriculum reform. *Compare: A Journal of Comparative and International Education, 50*(3), 410-427. https://doi.org/10.1080/03057925.2018.1523002

Gelinas, L., Pierce, R., Winkler, S., Cohen, I. G., Lynch, H. F., & Bierer, B. E. (2017). Using social media as a research recruitment tool: Ethical issues and recommendations. *The American Journal of Bioethics, 17*(3), 3-14. https://doi.org/10.1080/15265161.2016.1276644

Giovannelli, M. (2003). Relationship between reflective disposition toward teaching and effective teaching. *The Journal of Educational Research, 96*(5), 293. https://doi.org/10.1080/00220670309597642

Grossoehme, D. H. (2014). Overview of qualitative research. *Journal of Health Care Chaplaincy, 20*(3), 109–122. https://doi.org/10.1080/08854726.2014.925660

Gu, Q., & Li, Q. (2013). Sustaining resilience in times of change: Stories from Chinese teachers. *Asia-Pacific Journal of Teacher Education, 41*(3), 288-303. https://doi.org/10.1080/1359866X.2013.809056

Guest, G., Bunce, A., & Johnson, L. (2006). How many interviews are enough? An experiment with data saturation and variability. *Field Methods, 18*(1), 59-82. https://doi.org/10.1177/1525822X05279903

Guo, L. (2013). New curriculum reform in China and its impact on teachers. *Comparative and International Education/Éducation Comparée et Internationale, 41*(2), 6. https://doi.org/10.5206/cie-eci.v41i2.9205

Hairon, S., Goh, J. W. P., Chua, C. S. K., & Wang, L. Y. (2017). A research agenda for professional learning communities: Moving forward. *Professional Development in Education, 43*(1), 72-86. https://doi.org/10.1080/19415257.2015.1055861

Hallinger, P. (2018). Bringing context out of the shadows of leadership. *Educational Management Administration & Leadership*, *46*(1), 5-24. https://doi.org/10.1177/1741143216670652

Han, I. (2017). Conceptualisation of English teachers' professional identity and comprehension of its dynamics. *Teachers and Teaching, 23*(5), 549-569. https://doi.org/10.1080/13540602.2016.1206525

Hargreaves, A. (2005). Educational change takes ages: Life, career, and generational factors in teachers' emotional responses to educational change. *Teaching and Teacher Education, 21*(8), 967-983. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tate.2005.06.007

Harklau, L. (2011). Approaches and methods in recent qualitative research. In E. Hinkel

(Ed.), *Handbook of research in second language teaching and learning* (Vol. 2, pp. 175-189). https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203836507.ch11

Hord, S. M. (1997). *Professional learning communities: Communities of continuous inquiry and improvement* (ED410659). ERIC.

Hou, Y., Cui, Y., & Zhang, D. (2019). Impact of instructional leadership on high school student academic achievement in China. *Asia Pacific Education Review, 20*, 543–558. https://doi.org/10.1007/s12564-019-09574-4

Hu, H. C. (1944). The Chinese concepts of "face." *American Anthropologist, 46*(1), 45-64. https://doi.org/10.1525/aa.1944.46.1.02a00040

Huang, L., Zhang, T., & Huang, Y. (2020). Effects of school organizational conditions on teacher professional learning in China: The mediating role of teacher self-efficacy. *Studies in Educational Evaluation, 66*, Article 100893. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.stueduc.2020.100893

Huang, R. (2022, March). Motivating EFL Students in Learner-centered Classroom. In *8th International Conference on Education, Language, Art and Inter-cultural Communication (ICELAIC 2021)* (pp. 132-137). Atlantis Press.

Jagers, R. J., Rivas-Drake, D., & Williams, B. (2019). Transformative social and emotional learning (SEL): Toward SEL in service of educational equity and excellence. *Educational Psychologist, 54*(3), 162-184. https://doi.org/10.1080/00461520.2019.1623032

Jo, S. H. (2014). Teacher commitment: Exploring associations with relationships and emotions. *Teaching and Teacher Education, 43*, 120-130.

https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tate.2014.07.004

Joong, P., Xiong, Y., Li, L., & Pan, C. J. (2009). Investigation into the perceptions of students, parents, and teachers in China's education reform in Grades 7 and 8. *International Electronic Journal of Elementary Education*, *1*(3), 141-154. https://www.iejee.com/index.php/IEJEE

Kahlke, R. M. (2014). Generic qualitative approaches: Pitfalls and benefits of methodological mixology. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, *13*(1), 37-52. https://doi.org/10.1177/160940691401300119

Kang, D. (June 25, 2019). *Where are teachers paid the most & the least compared to other professions in Asia?* Value Champion. https://www.valuechampion.sg/where-are-teachers-paid-most-least-compared-other-professions-asia

Ke, Z., Yin, H., & Huang, S. (2019). Teacher participation in school-based professional development in China: does it matter for teacher efficacy and teaching strategies? *Teachers and Teaching*, *25*(7), 821-836. https://doi.org/10.1080/13540602.219.1662777

Kegan, R. (1998). *In over our heads: The mental demands of modern life*. Harvard University Press.

Kegan, R. (2018). What "form" transforms?: A constructive-developmental approach to transformative learning. In K. Illeris (Ed.), *Contemporary theories of learning* (pp. 29-45). Routledge.

Kennedy, K. (2019). Centering equity and caring in leadership for social-emotional

learning: Toward a conceptual framework for diverse learners. *Journal of School Leadership, 29*(6), 473-492. https://doi.org/10.1177/1052684619867469

Kim, J. Y., & Nam, S. H. (1998). The concept and dynamics of face: Implications for organizational behavior in Asia. *Organization Science*, *9*(4), 522-534. https://doi.org/10.1287/orsc.9.4.522

Knapp, M. S., Copland, M. A., & Talbert, J. E. (2003). Leading for learning: Reflective tools for school and district leaders. CTP Research Report.

Lai, M., Wang, L., & Shen, W. (2017). Educational leadership on the Chinese mainland: A case study of two secondary schools in Beijing. *London Review of Education, 15*(2), 317-328. https://doi.org/10.18546/LRE.15.2.13

Law, W. W. (2014). Understanding China's curriculum reform for the 21st century. *Journal of Curriculum Studies*, *46*(3), 332-360. https://doi.org/10.1080/00220272.2014.883431

Lee, J. C. K., Huang, Y. X. H., Law, E. H. F., & Wang, M. H. (2013). Professional identities and emotions of teachers in the context of curriculum reform: A Chinese perspective. *Asia-Pacific Journal of Teacher Education, 41*(3), 271-287. https://doi.org/10.18546/LRE.15.2.13

Leithwood, K., Jantzi, D., & Steinbach, R. (1999). *Changing leadership for changing times*. Open University Press.

Leithwood, K., Sun, J., & Schumacker, R. (2017). How school leadership influences student learning: A test of "The Four Paths Model". *Educational Administration Quarterly*, *56*(4), 570-599. https://doi.org/10.1177/0013161X19878772

Li, D., & Edwards, V. (2011). Confucius, constructivism and the impact of continuing professional development on teachers of English in China.

Li, D., & Edwards, V. (2013). The impact of overseas training on curriculum innovation and change in English language education in Western China. *Language Teaching Research*, *17*(4), 390-408. https://doi.org/10.1177/1362168813494124

Li, D., Zhang, X., & Edwards, V. (2016). Innovation and change in English teaching in the western provinces of China: The impact of overseas training. *Educational Development in Western China* (pp. 191-215). Brill Sense.

Li, J., & Li, J. (2019). Educational policy development in China in the 21st century: A multi-flows approach. *Beijing International Review of Education*, *1*(1), 196-220. https://doi.org/10.1163/25902547-00101014

Li, Q., & Ni, Y. (2011). Impact of curriculum reform: Evidence of change in classroom practice in mainland China. *International Journal of Educational Research, 50*(2), 71-86. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijer.2011.06.003

Li, X., Ni, Y. J., & Li, Q. (2012). Influences of curriculum reform on instructional practices in primary mathematics. *Chinese Education and Society*, *45*(4), 22-41. https://doi.org/10.2753/CED1061-1932450402

Liu, H., Lin, C. H., & Zhang, D. (2017). Pedagogical beliefs and attitudes toward information and communication technology: A survey of teachers of English as a foreign language in China. *Computer Assisted Language Learning*, *30*(8), 745-765. https://doi.org/10.1080/09588221.2017.1347572

Liu, J., & Xie, J. C. (2021). Invisible shifts in and out of the classroom: dynamics of

teacher salary and teacher supply in urban China. *Teachers College Record*, *123*(1), 1-26. https://doi.org/10.1177/016146812112300104

Liu, L. (2016). Using generic inductive approach in qualitative educational research: A case study analysis. *Journal of Education and Learning*, *5*(2), 129-135. https://doi.org/10.5539/jel.v5n2p129

Liu, P. (2016). Chinese teachers' perspectives on teachers' commitment to change. *International Journal of Comparative Education and Development*, *18*(1), 2-18. https://doi.org/10.1108/IJCED-10-2015-0005

Liu, S., & Hallinger, P. (2017). Leading teacher learning in China: A mixed methods study of successful school leadership. In K. Leithwood, J. Sun, & K. Pollock (Eds.), *How school leaders contribute to student success* (Vol. 23, pp. 279-303). https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-50980-8_13

Liu, S., & Meng, L. (2009). Perceptions of teachers, students, and parents of the characteristics of good teachers: A cross-cultural comparison of China and the United States. *Educational Assessment, Evaluation and Accountability*, *21*(4), 313-328. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11092-009-9077-z

Lo, L. N. K. (2019). Teachers and teaching in China: a critical reflection, *Teachers and Teaching*, *25*(5), 553-573. https://doi.org/0.1080/13540602.2019.1632823

Lou, M. (2021). Classroom activities in chinese secondary EFL classes: Teachers' uptake of the learner-centered curriculum reform. *International Journal of TESOL Studies*, *3*(2), 168-186. https://doi.org/10.46451/ijts.2021.07.04

Medeiros, E. (2019). The changing fundamentals of US-China relations. *The Washington*

Quarterly, *42*(3), 93-119. https://doi.org/10.1080/0163660X.2019.1666355

Meng, L., Munoz, M. A., & Wu, D. (2016). Teachers' perceptions of effective teaching: A theory-based exploratory study of teachers from China. *Educational Psychology*, *36*(3), 461-480. https://doi.org/10.1080/01443410.2015.1008402

Merriam, S. (2019). Introduction to qualitative research. In Merriam, S. & Grenier, R. (Eds.), *Qualitative research in practice: Examples for discussion and analysis* (pp. 3-18). Jossey-Bass.

Ministry of Education, The People's Republic of China. (2001). *Outline of the curriculum reform for basic education curriculum reform* (Pilot). (Google Trans.). http://en.moe.gov.cn/

Ng, A. (2022). Teacher leadership in teacher development for school improvement and student achievement. In: Khine, M.S., & Liu, Y. (eds.) *Handbook of research on teacher education*. Springer. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-16-9785-2_46

Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development. (2016). Education in China a snapshot. https://www.oecd.org/china/Education-in-China-a-snapshot.pdf

Patton, M. Q. (2015). *Qualitative research and methods: Integrating theory and practice.* SAGE Publications.

Pavlenko, A. (2002). Narrative study: Whose story is it, anyway? *TESOL Quarterly*, *36*(2), 213-218. https://doi.org/10.2307/3588332

Peng, W. J., McNess, E., Thomas, S., Wu, X. R., Zhang, C., Li, J. Z., & Tian, H. S. (2014). Emerging perceptions of teacher quality and teacher development in China. *International Journal of Educational Development*, *34*, 77-89.

https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijedudev.2013.04.005

Peng, Y. (2018). Foreign language education in China: When reforms meet tradition. *Canadian Journal for New Scholars in Education/Revue canadienne des jeunes chercheures et chercheurs en éducation*, *9*(2). https://journalhosting.ucalgary.ca/index.php/cjnse

Pires, M. D. J. (2019). Gaokao: Far more than an exam. *Revista Diadorim*, *21*(3), 168-185. https://doi.org/10.35520/diadorim.2019.v21nEspa27418

Probert, A. (2006). Searching for an appropriate research design: A personal journey. *Journal of Research Practice*, *2*(1).

Qian, H., & Walker, A. (2013). How principals promote and understand teacher development under curriculum reform in China. *Asia-Pacific Journal of Teacher Education*, *41*(3), 304-315. https://doi.org/10.1080/1359866X.2013.809050

Reyes, M. R., Brackett, M. A., Rivers, S. E., White, M., & Salovey, P. (2012). Classroom emotional climate, student engagement, and academic achievement. *Journal of Educational Psychology*, *104*(3), 700–712. https://doi.org/10.1037/a0027268

Saldaña, J. (2016). The coding manual for qualitative researchers. Sage.

Sandelowski, M. (2008). Theoretical saturation. In: Given, L.M, editor. The Sage encyclopedia of qualitative research methods. pp. 875–876. Sage.

Savin-Baden, M., & Major, C. (2013). *Qualitative research: The essential guide to theory and practice*. Routledge.

Schön, D. (1983). *The reflective practitioner: How professionals think in action.* [Kindle DX version].

Scoggins, S. E. (2014). Navigating fieldwork as an outsider: Observations from interviewing police officers in China. *PS: Political Science & Politics*, *47*(2), 394-397. https://doi.org.10.1017/S1049096514000274

Seidman, I. (2006). Interviewing as qualitative research: A guide for researcher in education and the social sciences (3rd ed.). Teachers College Press.

Sellars, M. (2017). *Reflective practice for teachers*. Sage.

Shengnan, L., & Hallinger, P. (2021). Unpacking the effects of culture on school leadership and teacher learning in China. *Educational Management Administration & Leadership*, *49*(2), 214-233. https://doi.org/10.1177/1741143219896042

Shenton, A. K. (2004). Strategies for ensuring trustworthiness in qualitative research projects. *Education for Information*, *22*(2), 63-75. https://doi.org/10.3233/EFI-2004-22201

Solinger, D. J. (2006). Interviewing Chinese people: From high-level officials to the unemployed. *Doing Fieldwork in China*, 153-167.

Song, H. (2012). The role of teachers' professional learning communities in the context of curriculum reform in high schools. *Chinese Education & Society, 45*(4), 81-95. https://doi.org/10.2753/CED1061-1932450406

Song, H., Gu, Q., & Zhang, Z. (2020). An exploratory study of teachers' subjective wellbeing: understanding the links between teachers' income satisfaction, altruism, self-efficacy and work satisfaction. *Teachers and Teaching*, *26*(1), 3-31. https://doi.org/10.1080/13540602.2020.1719059

Stronge, J. H. (2018). *Qualities of effective teachers* (2nd ed.). Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.

Tam, A. C. F. (2015). Exploring teachers' beliefs about teacher learning in professional learning communities and their influence on collegial activities in two departments. *Compare: A Journal of Comparative and International Education, 45*(3), 422-444. https://doi.org/10.1080/03057925.2013.872025

Tan, C. (2016). Tensions and challenges in China's education policy borrowing. *Educational Research, 58*(2), 195-206. https://doi.org/10.1080/00131881.2016.1165551

Tan, C., & Chua, C. S. (2015). Education policy borrowing in China: has the West wind overpowered the East wind?. *Compare: A Journal of Comparative and International Education, 45*(5), 686-704. https://doi.org/10.1080/03057925.2013.871397

Tang, S., & Adamson, B. (2014). Student-centredness in urban schools in China. *London Review of Education, 12*(1), 90-103. https://doi.org/10.18546/LRE.12.1.09

Tang, Y. (2018). What makes rural teachers happy? An investigation on the subjective well-being (SWB) of Chinese rural teachers. *International Journal of Educational Development, 62*, 192-200. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijedudev.2018.05.001

Tran, N. H., Hallinger, P., & Truong, T. (2018). The heart of school improvement: A multi-site case study of leadership for teacher learning in Vietnam. *School Leadership & Management, 38*(1), 80-101. https://doi.org/10.1080/13632434.2017.1371690

Wang, S., Christensen, C., Cui, W., Tong, R., Yarnall, L., Shear, L., & Feng, M. (2020). When adaptive learning is effective learning: comparison of an adaptive learning system to teacher-led instruction. *Interactive Learning Environments*, 1-11. https://doi.org/10.1080/10494820.2020.1808794

Wang, T. (2015). Contrived collegiality versus genuine collegiality: Demystifying professional learning communities in Chinese schools. *Compare: A Journal of Comparative and International Education*, *45*(6), 908-930. https://doi.org/10.1080/03057925.2014.952953

Wang, T. (2019). Competence for students' future: Curriculum change and policy redesign in China. *ECNU Review of Education*, *2*(2), 234-245.

Wang, Z., & Sun, Z. (2021). From globalization to regionalization: The United States, China, and the post-Covid-19 world economic order. *Journal of Chinese Political Science*, *26*(1), 69-87. https://doi/10.1007/s11366-020-09706-3

WeChat became China's app for everything. (2017, January 2). *Fast Company*. https://www.fastcompany.com/3065255/china-wechat-tencent-red-envelopes-and-social-money

Whalley, J., & Zhao, X. (2013). The contribution of human capital to China's economic growth. *China Economic Policy Review*, *2*(01), 1-22. https://doi.org/10.1142/S1793969013500015

Wong, J. L. (2010). Searching for good practice in teaching: A comparison of two subject-based professional learning communities in a secondary school in Shanghai. *Compare, 40*(5), 623-639. https://doi.org/10.1080/03057920903553308

Wong, J. L. (2012). How has recent curriculum reform in China influenced school-based teacher learning? An ethnographic study of two subject departments in Shanghai, China. *Asia-Pacific Journal of Teacher Education, 40*(4), 347-361. https://doi.org/10.1080/1359866X.2012.724654

Yan, C. (2015). 'We can't change much unless the exams change': Teachers' dilemmas in the curriculum reform in China. *Improving Schools, 18*(1), 5-19. https://doi.org/10.1177/1365480214553744

Yan, C. (2018). Balancing change and tradition: A Chinese English teacher's experiences of curriculum reform. In *International perspectives on teachers living with curriculum change* (pp. 61-82). Palgrave Macmillan.

Yan, C., & He, C. (2012). Bridging the implementation gap: An ethnographic study of English teachers' implementation of the curriculum reform in China. *Ethnography and Education, 7*(1), 1-19. https://doi.org/10.1080/17457823.2012.661585

Ye, J., & Zhao, D. (2019). Developing different identity trajectories: Lessons from the Chinese teachers. *Teachers and Teaching, 25*(1), 34-53. https://doi.org/10.1080/13540602.2018.1532408

Yin, H. B. (2013). Societal culture and teachers' responses to curriculum reform: Experiences from China. *Asia Pacific Education Review, 14*(3), 391-401. https://doi.org/10.1007/s12564-013-9266-9

Yin, H., Lee, J. C. K., & Wang, W. (2014). Dilemmas of leading national curriculum reform in a global era: A Chinese perspective. *Educational Management Administration & Leadership, 42*(2), 293-311.

https://doi.org/10.1177/1741143213499261

You, Y. (2019). The seeming 'round trip' of learner-centred education: a 'best practice' derived from China's New Curriculum Reform. *Comparative Education, 55*(1), 97-115. https://doi.org/10.1080/03050068.2018.1541662

Zhang, F., & Liu, Y. (2014). A study of secondary school English teachers' beliefs in the context of curriculum reform in China. *Language Teaching Research*, *18*(2), 187-204. https://doi.org/10.1177/1362168813505940.

Zhang, J., & Pang, N. S. K. (2016a). Exploring the characteristics of professional learning communities in China: A mixed-method study. *The Asia-Pacific Education Researcher*, *25*(1), 11-21. https://doi.org/10.1007/s40299-015-0228-3

Zhang, J., & Pang, N. S. K. (2016b). Investigating the development of professional learning communities: Compare schools in Shanghai and Southwest China. *Asia Pacific Journal of Education*, *36*(2), 217-230. https://doi.org/10.1080/02188791.2016.1148851

Zhang, J., Yuan, R., & Yu, S. (2017). What impedes the development of professional learning communities in China? Perceptions from leaders and frontline teachers in three schools in Shanghai. *Educational Management Administration & Leadership*, *45*(2), 219-237. https://doi.org/10.1177/1741143215617945

Zhao, M. (2012). Teachers' professional development from the perspective of teaching reflection levels. *Chinese Education & Society*, *45*(4), 56-67. https://doi.org/10.2753/CED1061-1932450404

Zhao, W. (2020). Epistemological flashpoint in China's classroom reform: (How) can a

'Confucian do-after-me pedagogy' cultivate critical thinking? *Journal of Curriculum Studies*, *52*(1), 101-117. https://doi.org/10.1080/00220272.2019.1641844

Zhou, L., Wu, S., Zhou, M., & Li, F. (2020). 'School's out, but class' on': The largest online education in the world today: Taking China's practical exploration during the COVID-19 epidemic prevention and control as an example. *Best Evidence of Chinese Education 49*(2), 501-519. https://doi.org/10.15354/bece.20.ar023.

Zhu, Y., & Shu, D. (2017). Implementing foreign language curriculum innovation in a Chinese secondary school: An ethnographic study on teacher cognition and classroom practices. *System*, *66*, 100-112. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.system.2017.03.006

Appendix: Interview Questions

I would like to thank you again for agreeing to meet with me so that I can interview you. If at any point in time you have a question or would like to say something, please do. If you change your mind about allowing me to interview you, please let me know and we will end it. Okay? Thank you.

1. (WARM UP) How are you today? When did you get off work?
2. Please tell me about some of your experiences as a teacher during this transition from teacher-centered instruction to student-centered instruction.

   Possible probes:

   a. What do you think are the most important things for a high-quality student-centered teacher to do to in order to teach well? Please tell me about your experiences with those things.
   b. How would you describe yourself as a teacher?
3. Thinking about what you have taught and how you may approach the instruction differently, explain the role that reflection has played, if any, in your teaching process.
4. Please describe how you teach your students.
   a. What do you do in a typical class?
   b. Explain the instructional strategies that you use most often?
   c. Would you describe yourself as an effective teacher? Please explain why or why not.
   d. How long have you taught in this way?

    e. Has your instructional style changed over time? How?

5. What is your commitment to change in your teaching style?
    a. Are there some changes that are required? Can you tell me about them?
    b. How do you deal with changes that you are required to make?
    c. What or who supports you in making these changes?
    d. Are there things that school leaders can do to make these changes easier or smoother for you?
    e. Do you want to ask if there are some changes they cannot or will not do (for whatever reason)?
6. Are there ways that school leaders in the building you work in or agencies outside of the school building where you work, support your ability to grow, develop, and identify as a teacher who needs to implement the education reforms in your classroom? If so, can you tell me about them?
    a. I touched (mentioned) this earlier, but I wanted to find out more about things that school leaders and outside agencies can do to help you become a more student-centered teacher. Are there things that you find particularly helpful or hurtful in your development as a student-centered teacher?
7. Is there anything else that you would like for me to know?