Mandarin Chinese Teachers across Borders: Challenges and Needs for Professional Development

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Abstract

The learning and teaching of Mandarin Chinese as a second or foreign language (CSL/CFL) has been gaining momentum around the world, leading to a shortage of qualified Chinese teachers. Thus more research is needed into the training and professional development of Chinese teachers. This study investigates the challenges and difficulties that native Chinese-speaking teachers of Mandarin have encountered in British schools and the professional development that they desire. A questionnaire survey and semi-structured interviews were used for data collection from native Chinese-speaking teachers of Mandarin in Confucius Institutes (Hanban teachers) in the UK. Results show that participants have encountered linguistic, pedagogical and socio-cultural challenges. Major challenges reported by the Hanban teachers include lack of English proficiency and intercultural competence, lack of knowledge about the local education system, and lack of effective pedagogical methods and classroom management skills to work with disruptive students, students with special educational needs, as well as teaching assistants. The study concludes that training and professional development tailored to the local context seems imperative for this group of teachers to facilitate their effective teaching and localisation.

Keywords: Chinese as a second or foreign language, Hanban teachers, Confucius Institutes, professional development

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1. INTRODUCTION

Mandarin Chinese has been identified as one of the most needed languages for the UK's success post-Brexit (British Council, 2017a). According to a research report released by the British Council, Mandarin Chinese ranked number two among the top five priority languages for the UK's future prosperity and global standing (Tinsley & Board, 2017). A significant increase has been reported in the teaching/learning of Mandarin Chinese in secondary schools in the UK: In 2005, only 7-8% of state secondary schools were offering Chinese; by 2015/2016, the rate had risen to 13%, alongside 46% of independent schools (CfBT Language Trends 2015/2016, cited in BACS, n.d.). The latest statistics shows that GCSE entries in Chinese increased from 2,480 in 2011 to 3,654 in 2017 and that 8% of state schools and 32% of independent schools offer Mandarin Chinese as a GCSE option (Tinsley & Doležal, 2018). In addition, the Mandarin Excellence Programme, launched in 2016 to enable over 5,000 young people to become proficient in Mandarin Chinese by 2020, represents the UK Government's drive to promote Chinese learning (GOV. UK, 2016).

Along with this growing interest in the learning of Mandarin Chinese is an urgent need for qualified Chinese teachers. Many scholars (e.g. Luo, 2016; Orton, 2011; Wang, 2019; Wang & Higgins, 2008; Zhang & Li, 2010; Zhao & Huang, 2010) have reported the shortage of qualified teachers for Chinese as a second/ foreign language (CSL/CFL) programmes in different countries around the globe. In the UK, teacher supply has been identified as the most pressing issue due to the fact that very few UK institutions offer accredited teacher training courses for Chinese (Tinsley & Board, 2014; Zhang & Li, 2010). Most recently, Zhang and Li (2020) highlighted that the supply of teachers was still one of the major challenges for the sustainable development of Chinese Language Teaching in the UK. They pointed out the fact that Mandarin Chinese programmes in many British primary and secondary schools were usually delivered by teachers temporarily seconded from China through British Council's Teaching Assistant programme or

Confucius Institutes (CIs) or Confucius Classrooms (CCs) "with no UK teaching qualifications" (Zhang & Li, 2020, p. 577).

The majority of the Mandarin teachers in CIs or CCs are selected and deployed by the Office of Chinese Language Council International (also known as Hanban). According to the latest Annual Development Report (Hanban, 2019), there have been 548 CIs, 1193 CCs and 5665 teaching cites established in 154 countries and regions by the end of 2018, and the total number of directors, teachers, and volunteers dispatched to CIs across the world has reached 105,000. Currently, there are 29 CIs in the UK, and the CI where this study took place is located in the south of England. Its role is to facilitate the teaching and learning of Mandarin Chinese as well as organising cultural activities in local communities and schools.

Hanban teachers are either highly skilled teachers on secondment from their regular teaching positions or volunteers who are graduates or postgraduate students enthusiastic about Chinese teaching and cultural exchange (Hanban, n.d.; Tinsley & Board, 2014). These native Chinese-speaking teachers of Mandarin have received their teaching qualifications and/or pre-service training in China. However, Tinsley and Board (2014) reported that researchers were not able to ascertain how much of their pre-departure training was specific to the UK context. Research has shown that the Chinese teacher education programmes in Mainland China tend to be centralised and decontextualized with a focus on theory-based content knowledge (Wang, Moloney & Li, 2013). When teaching in countries outside China, "Chinese teachers of Mandarin frequently find themselves having to work together in the same school with very different philosophies of teaching and different educational values" (Kramsch, 2014, p. 299). Therefore, they not only need to have the knowledge of the language and of how to teach the language, but also need to "gain a whole new understanding of the school system, the domestic culture and the needs of the students and their non-Chinese colleagues" (Wang, 2018, p. 505).

One solution to this problem is to provide further training or professional development opportunities. Initial teacher training prepares novice teachers for the teaching profession, whilst in-service training, or rather, continuing professional development (CPD) equips teachers with the ability to adapt to changes (Richards & Farrell, 2005) and is "a critical element in successful education systems, enhancing teacher quality, organisational effectiveness and student outcomes" (Borg, 2015, p. 2). Teachers' professional development is perceived to be of vital importance for improving the quality of student learning (e.g., Kelly, 2011; Johnson & Golombek, 2011), facilitating teachers' personal growth (e.g., Clarke & Hollingsworth, 2002; Guskey, 1985, 1986; Subitha, 2018), and ensuring the successful implementation and sustainable development of Mandarin Chinese programmes (e.g., Tinsley & Board, 2014).

The objective of this study is to investigate the challenges and difficulties of Hanban teachers and their needs for professional development (PD). Understanding the challenges and difficulties of this group of teachers and their PD needs can help stakeholders at various levels (e.g. policy makers in government organisations and teacher educators in higher education institutions, universities hosting CIs and local schools offering Chinese programmes) provide more targeted training and support for these teachers. And such endeavours will facilitate the preparation and development of qualified Hanban teachers who are able to teach Chinese effectively in global settings and to offer quality Chinese language teaching.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

In this section, we will first review the relevant frameworks for language teacher education and professional development. Then we will synthesise relevant research and outline the challenges that Mandarin Chinese teachers may encounter while teaching abroad.

2.1 Theoretical frameworks for language teacher education/ professional development

In terms of frameworks for teacher education and/or professional development, considerable effort has been made by the British Council in the project "Teaching for Success," which resulted in the production of *Continuing Professional Development (CPD) Framework for Teachers* (British Council, 2015), *Contemporary Perspectives on Continuing Professional Development* (Borg, 2015) and *Continuing Professional Development (CPD) Framework for Teacher Educators* (British Council, 2017b). More specifically, the CPD framework for teachers include twelve professional practices: planning lessons and courses, understanding learners, managing the lesson, knowing the subject, managing resources, assessing learning, integrating ICT, taking responsibility for professional development, using inclusive practices, using multilingual approaches, promoting 21st century skills, and understanding educational policies and practice. These frameworks provide a general frame of reference for teachers of all subjects, including language teachers.

With regard to foreign language teacher education, the seminal work by Freeman and Johnson (1998) proposes a framework which comprises three domains: the "teacher-learner", the "social context", and the "pedagogical process" (p. 406). They postulate that the focus of teacher education should be teacher-learners, who are individuals with various prior experience, knowledge and beliefs. The social context includes both schools and schooling, the former referring to the physical and socio-cultural settings in which teaching and learning take place and the latter the historical and socio-cultural environments in which norms and values are situated. The pedagogical process concerns the activity of teaching and learning. The authors argue that "any theory of SLA, any classroom methodology, or any description of that English language as content must be understood against the backdrop of teachers' professional lives, within the settings where they work, and within the circumstances of that work" (Freeman & Johnson, 1998, p. 405).

This tripartite framework adopts a sociocultural perspective and views language teacher education as happening within sociocultural environments. Although this framework is intended for the education of teachers of English for Speakers of Other Languages and was proposed two decades ago, we believe that it is still applicable in the present day and to Chinese teacher education and professional development as well.

More specifically, in terms of Chinese language teaching and teacher development, the "Standards for Teachers of Chinese to Speakers of Other Languages" issued by Hanban in 2007 provide an overall framework for the knowledge, competency and quality required of CSL/CFL teachers and serve as a basis for CSL/CFL teacher education and certification (Hanban, 2008). The standards consist of five modules: 1) linguistic knowledge (including both Chinese and foreign language), 2) cultures and communications, 3) theory of second language acquisition and study strategy, 4) teaching methodology and 5) overall quality. However, the standards have been criticised to have been "written in a very general manner" and missing essential elements such as "pedagogical content knowledge, personal practical knowledge" and "classroom management skills" (Wang, 2018, p. 505). More recently, Wen and Wu (2017) took students' learning needs in the digital era into consideration and proposed a professional proficiency framework for Singapore Chinese language teachers, which consists of three aspects: subject content and professional knowledge, Chinese teaching practice and pedagogy, and knowledge of technology and its application. Furthermore, Duff (2008) reviewed the crucial components of language teacher knowledge and expertise and contended that, apart from content knowledge and pedagogical knowledge, "[t]eachers must also understand the contexts in which they are teaching--institutional, political, social, cultural, and curricular--in order to be effective. They must understand the needs, goals, and proficiency levels of students and others who have a stake in the language learners' success (e.g., parents, employers, institutions of higher education)" (p.25).

These frameworks served as the bases for our conceptualization of teacher knowledge and the design of our questionnaire and interview questions, which will be explained in the third section on Methodology.

2.2 Research on challenges for Mandarin Chinese teachers

In the following paragraphs, the challenges that Mandarin Chinese teachers may encounter are categorised into three principal areas: linguistic, pedagogical and sociocultural.

2.2.1 Linguistic challenges

Linguistic challenges come from the unique feature of the Chinese language. Firstly, Chinese is a logographic language whose orthography is character-based. For learners of Chinese whose native language is alphabet-based, the large disparity between the different writing systems makes the learning of reading and writing especially difficult (Everson, 1998, 2008; Yue, 2017). Teachers of Chinese will also face the question of whether to introduce Chinese characters at the very beginning of Chinese teaching/learning or to delay the character introduction to a later stage (for a review of the debate on immediate versus delayed character introduction, see Ye, 2013). In addition to the reading and writing of Chinese characters, the Pinyin and tonal system, together with a myriad of homophones, also presents a great challenge for learners of Chinese. With regard to grammar and sentence structure, although the Chinese language does not contain inflections or conjugations, it does have its own word order and sentence structure, which may be difficult for English-speaking learners as a result of interference from their native language (Yue, 2017). Tinsley and Board (2014) argue that "the subject knowledge needed by teachers of Chinese goes beyond simple native speaker competence" (p. 71). In addition, as Orton (2016) has pointed out, many native Chinese-speaking teachers of Mandarin are unaware of the difficulties that their foreign students encounter and lack effective strategies to address their difficulties. These are all unavoidable issues that Hanban teachers need to address in their teaching of CSL/

CFL.

For CSL/CFL teachers who teach overseas, apart from sufficient knowledge in the target language (Mandarin Chinese in this case), another aspect of linguistic challenge is their proficiency of the language of their host country. Due to its status as a lingua franca, English is generally the working language of CSL/CFL teachers for explaining features of the language and culture to pupils in the classroom as well as for daily communication in their life and work environment; therefore, the level of Mandarin Chinese teachers' English will, to a large extent, determine the quality and success of their teaching.

2.2.2 Pedagogical challenges

Pedagogically, many aspects have been identified as problematic, among which teaching practices, classroom management and variability in student levels and needs present the greatest challenges.

In terms of teaching practices, it has often been claimed that teachers tend to teach in the way they were taught. Although empirical studies (e.g. Cox, 2014; Oleson & Hora, 2014) have revealed this statement to be somewhat simplistic, the researchers do acknowledge that a teacher's previous experiences as a learner play an influential role in shaping his/her teaching practices. For Mandarin teachers who are native speakers of Chinese, teaching CSL/CFL will be a great challenge because they cannot resort to their first language literacy experience in a second/ foreign language classroom since the educational settings are different (Everson, 2008; Orton, 2016). More importantly, the teaching practices that Chinese teachers are used to or familiar with may not be congruent with the pedagogical approaches in their host countries (Pérez-Milans, 2015; Wang, S. 2007; Wang, X, 2011; Wu, 2017). Pérez-Milans (2015) reported that Hanban teachers used to rely on "choral repetition around the key vocabulary items and sentences", about which students complained as being "too mechanical and boring" (p. 167).

Wang (2011) investigated Mandarin Chinese teachers' perceptions of communicative language teaching (CLT) pedagogy which is the prevalent

pedagogical approach in British language classrooms and discovered ambivalent attitudes among the participants. She found that while some teachers embraced this approach to create good atmosphere and promote communication in class, others expressed reservations towards this approach out of pedagogical or cultural concerns. Some teachers considered "drilling", "testing" and "copying" to be more effective for the learning of Chinese characters (Wang, 2011, p. 17). Wang further argued that CLT may not be a Mandarin-specific methodology but may have "potential pedagogical deficiency in literacy instruction in Chinese" (p. 10) and cited evidence from cognitive research of character acquisition to show that "for non-cognate language speakers, not only more curriculum time is needed, but vigorous strategies like rote-learning and memorisation are necessary to master the complex and intricate linguistic knowledge of the Chinese orthography" (p. 10).

Classroom management is another problematic area for native Chinese-speaking teachers. Wang and Higgins (2008) reported that nearly two thirds of the Chinese teachers had concerns about classroom management problems. A research study by the National Centre for Languages in the UK reported that teachers from China may not be familiar with the English system of discipline and may lack the abilities to manage disruptive pupils due to their "different, perhaps unrealistic, expectations of pupils" (CILT, 2007, p. 12). Similar problems have also been reported in studies of CFL classrooms in North America. Xu's (2012) study revealed that teachers tended to spend large amounts of time disciplining and monitoring disruptive students and that even experienced teachers found it challenging to maintain class rules and routines. Similarly, in Yue's (2017) study, participants reported that classroom management was one of the top three challenges and that disciplining could sometimes take two thirds of the class time. Furthermore, participants in Zhou and Li's (2015) study also reported challenging demands of American classroom management due to their unrealistic expectations of students' behaviour and their lack of effective strategies for such management.

In addition to the mismatch between teachers' expectations of students'

classroom behaviour and the reality of discipline issues, one complicating factor in classroom management is the variability of students' levels and backgrounds. Unlike the homogenous classes that most native Chinese-speaking teachers are used to in China, the Chinese language classes in western countries often consist of CFL learners as well as heritage learners whose first language is Chinese. Adding to this complexity is the inclusion of special needs students in normal classes. Xu (2012), Zhou and Li (2015), and Wang and Kuo (2016) cited in Yue (2017) all highlighted the challenges that Chinese teachers face when handling special needs students in US classrooms. Such diversity in the language backgrounds and profiles of students requires teachers to adopt differentiation strategies so as to meet the varying needs of students.

2.2.3 Sociocultural challenges

As Freeman and Johnson (1998) postulated, social context is an indispensable aspect of foreign language teaching and teacher education. Many of the pedagogical challenges discussed above are directly associated with the sociocultural aspect of teaching and learning because teachers' teaching practices tend to emerge from their values, beliefs and expectations, which are generally shaped by their sociocultural backgrounds. Sociocultural challenges can arise from the different "cultures of learning" (Cortazzi & Jin, 1996) that underlie the various expectations and behaviours of teachers and learners from different cultures. It is generally believed that Chinese teachers from the Confucian culture, which values collectivism and conformity, tend to expect students to be obedient and well-behaved (e.g., Xu, 2012; Zhou & Li, 2015); therefore, when they are faced with a group of students who seem, according to their traditional standards, to be non-compliant and badly behaved, they may feel unprepared or ill-equipped to deal with such situations, through lack of experience and effective strategies.

A number of scholars have explored the interplay of sociocultural knowledge in CFL teaching. Wang (2007) investigated the Chinese language teaching in the US and pointed out that an "understanding of US socio-cultural-education expectations and institutional practices" was crucial to Chinese teachers' success (p. 43). Wu (2017) probed into this sociocultural aspect from the perspective of

"cultural script" (Stigler & Hiebert, 1999, cited in Wu, 2017) which refers to "the mental script that people from the same culture often share when envisioning what teaching and learning is like" (Wu, 2017, p. 3). Wu argued that "such a script is learned implicitly when one moves through school, and explains how classrooms run successfully because both teachers and students with the same script in mind know what to expect and what roles to play respectively" (ibid.). She examined data from a Mandarin classroom taught by two teachers from Taiwan and discovered that teachers' understandings of the culture of learning in Taiwan and the US influenced their classroom teaching. She attributed this to the fundamental differences between the two cultures embedded in education and concluded that "[t]he study also suggests that the teacher … who had gone through a teacher training program and taught in the Taiwanese educational system seemed to have a more rigid cultural script of learning and teaching, cast more doubt on CLT, and experience more frustration in her teaching in the United States" (Wu, 2017, p. 15).

The same frustration has also been reported by Mandarin Chinese teachers in the UK. Wang (2011) found that three out of the four Mandarin Chinese teachers she investigated were either doubtful or dismissive of CLT, which was criticised for "undervaluing development of knowledge and rigour in education" (p. 21). Wang interpreted this phenomenon from the cultural perspective and argued that CLT "displays great discrepancy with the Confucian model of learning that emphasises an epistemology of a body of well-defined knowledge structure and expectation of learners' inner desire for knowledge, good discipline and diligence" (p. 21).

Despite the increasing number of publications on the teaching and learning of CSL/CFL, the research on native Chinese-speaking teachers of Mandarin dispatched by Hanban to the Confucius Institutes in host countries (Hanban teachers) is scarce. In this study, we aim to explore the situation of Hanban teachers in the UK. More specifically, we attempt to investigate the following two research questions:

1. What challenges and difficulties have Hanban teachers experienced?

2. What are their needs for professional development?

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1 Procedure for data collection and analysis

This study adopted a mixed methods approach which consists of collecting both quantitative and qualitative data. For collection of quantitative data, a questionnaire was first developed based on a review of the knowledge base for CSL/CFL teachers and relevant research into challenges and professional development (PD) needs of CSL/CFL teachers. The questionnaire consists of 31 questions, among which five questions have multiple items for rating on a 5-point Likert scale. Apart from items on the respondents' demographic information, the questionnaire is organised into two main parts: 1) PD needs, including teachers' perceived importance and difficulty on different aspects of knowledge: UK education system, knowledge of Chinese language and culture, and English linguistic competence; 2) Classroom management challenges, including teachers' views on their adaptability, problem-solving ability, pedagogical and intercultural elements, and skills in using resources and tools efficiently in local contexts.

The questionnaire was piloted with the third author who was at that time a Hanban volunteer teacher in the Confucius Institute where this study took place, and she also worked as a research assistant on this research project. She acted as a pilot participant who went through the survey items to ensure the clarity of the wording and its suitability for this group of targeted participants. The questionnaire survey was administered to 31 Hanban teachers in Southern England in Spring 2018. The overall reliability measured by Cronbach's alpha is .874.

In addition, semi-structured interviews were carried out with seven participants (selected from survey respondents) with the aim of collecting more in-depth accounts of their challenges and difficulties, as well as gathering their views on professional development needs. The interview questions touched upon

aspects including, but not limited to, Hanban teachers' experiences teaching Mandarin Chinese in their host schools, the challenges and difficulties that they have encountered, the training and/or PD that they have received, and the type of training/PD that they wished for. The interview protocol was piloted with the third author before it was rolled out.

Individual interviews were conducted either face-to-face with the participant or via Skype video calls. Each interview lasted 30-40 minutes. The language used during the interview was Chinese, the first language for both the researchers and the participants, in order to elicit more in-depth answers to interview questions. All the interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim. The transcribed versions of the interviews were then translated into English for data analysis. The three authors individually analysed the translations and created major and minor codes, which were discussed and analysed further and categorised into emerging themes during group meetings.

3.2 Participants' demographics

The respondents and interviewees all come from China but are from a variety of backgrounds. Among the 31 survey respondents, 21 were female and 10 were male. In terms of the age range, the largest group was between 30 and 39 years old and accounted for nearly half of the respondents (47%), whilst the second largest group was between 25 and 29 (22%). A majority of these teachers had a Master's degree (75%), with majors in linguistics and applied linguistics (28%), education in general (25%) and Chinese international education in particular (13%) ranking as the top three. As teachers, they held relevant certificates. Out of the 31 respondents, 22 (71%) held the Teachers' Qualification Certificate (TQC) awarded by the Ministry of Education in China; seven held the Certificate for Teachers of Chinese to Speakers of Other Languages (CTCSOL) awarded by the Confucius Institute Headquarters/Hanban, among which four held both TQC and CTCSOL; five teachers who had stayed in the UK for a long period of time had the British

PGCE certificate, among whom one also held TQC; one teacher held a TESOL certificate and one teacher had completed GTP (Graduate Teacher Programme, an employment-based teacher training route). With regard to prior Chinese teaching experiences, 60% of all the respondents had less than five years of experience teaching Chinese in China, and another 25% had no prior Chinese teaching experience at all. In terms of overseas teaching experience, a majority of these respondents (78%) had less than five years of Chinese teaching experience in the UK. They represent a large number of Hanban teachers teaching Mandarin Chinese in British schools.

4. RESULTS

In this section, answers to the two research questions will be presented based on the survey and the interview data.

4.1 Research question 1: What challenges and difficulties have Hanban teachers experienced?

Teachers reported that they encountered many difficulties in life, including adapting to the different weather and food, along with feelings of loneliness. When foreign colleagues showed willingness to converse, some Chinese teachers could not fully understand what they were talking about, because they could not understand due to lack of background knowledge, for instance about local popular culture. They had few opportunities to collaborate with local teachers, which made it difficult to build close relationships. They noticed that British people generally had a higher demand for personal privacy and space than Chinese people. Despite the kindness always shown to them by their British colleagues, Chinese teachers found it difficult to develop deeper friendships.

In addition to the above difficulties, teachers also reported considerable challenges and conflicts that they had encountered in their work in the UK. We have categorised our findings into five themes: lack of English vocabulary; lack of

knowledge about local systems; students with different profiles and needs; different teaching philosophy and pedagogies; and different expectations and practices.

4.1.1 Lack of English vocabulary

Six out of the seven interviewees mentioned situations in which they were not able to answer students' questions for various reasons. The most frequently cited reason was their lack of English vocabulary. Owing to their limited English proficiency, they were sometimes unable to understand slang expressions used by students and colleagues, sometimes they found it difficult to explain specific Chinese grammar points, and sometimes they found themselves searching hard for vocabulary in order to discuss popular topics, such as TV series and music bands with students and colleagues. When facing students of very young age, e.g. kindergarten children, teachers often felt a generation gap, which sometimes gave rise to difficulties in understanding children's vocabulary.

4.1.2 Lack of knowledge about local systems

Teachers reported that they lacked knowledge about local schools and education systems. The following quote from one interviewee typifies a common phenomenon among the teachers, *"no channel to learn about the local policy before arrival, very little chance to gain systematic knowledge about it after arrival; we just started teaching right away" (Interviewee 1)*. They had no information about how classes were divided up, how grades were assigned, what the safety regulations were or what the dress code was. In short, there seems to be an urgent need for them to be inducted into their new teaching environment.

4.1.3 Students with different profiles and needs

Teachers reported that they worked in various types of institution, including primary and secondary schools, colleges and universities. One interviewee stated that she taught in eight schools with students ranging from infants to senior citizens. Such a wide diversity of schools and students has caused difficulties

in teaching and communication. In addition, teachers have come to realise that different groups of students have different motivations and needs in learning. As participants noted, young children tended to learn for fun and therefore teachers recognised it was important to create interesting activities and maintain a lively atmosphere in the classroom; teenagers who were preparing for examinations would prefer to learn effective and efficient methods for passing tests; whereas adult learners seemed, to participants, to be more interested in cultural knowledge about China.

Another frequently mentioned topic was students with Special Education Needs (SENs). Teaching students with SENs such as dyslexia, anxiety disorder or bipolar disorder is completely new for most Hanban teachers, because mainstream schools in China do not accept SEN students, who are usually sent to special education schools. Therefore, very few Hanban teachers have had experience working with such students unless they specialise in SEN education.

4.1.4 Different teaching philosophy and pedagogies

Teachers reported differences in their own teaching philosophy and pedagogies compared with those they observed in British schools. The most prominent difference seems to be the objectives of their lessons: they were puzzled whether they should teach to instil knowledge or to maintain students' interest. The following quote shows a teacher's adjustment of her teaching pedagogy to cater for her students' interests, as well as her concern over compromising the amount of knowledge she was able to impart.

For example, in a 50-minute class, I wanted to teach 4-5 new words. Now I would reduce to 3-4. ... I will spend more time on games. I used to spend 10 minutes. Students think it's not enough. In order to maintain their interest, I would spend another 5 minutes on games. Efficiency will be lower than before, in my view.
(Interviewee 6)

4.1.5 Different expectations and practices

Teachers commented on many differences they had experienced relating to the expectations and practices in their home country. For example, some teachers found that the teacher-student relationship was very different in the UK from that in China. They commented that in China, students tended to be very respectful towards teachers and would usually listen attentively without much questioning, whereas in the UK, students would often move around in the classroom. If British students were not interested in the content, they would not pay attention at all. The relationship between teachers and students in the UK seemed more relaxed and casual. Some teachers enjoyed such a relationship with students, but some felt uncomfortable and a sense of lack of respect from the students.

Teachers also reported differences in practices in their workplace. Those teaching in primary schools found that students in lower grades would often sit on carpets and that the layout of the classroom was very different from traditional ways in which desks and chairs were put into rows and columns. Teachers also reported that emails were much more frequently used for communication at work in the UK, whereas in China social media such as WeChat would most customarily be used to exchange information about work. They also noted that British people seemed to have a clear sense of being either at work or off work, but for many Chinese people there seemed to be no clear-cut division between working hours and personal time.

Teachers also reported that classroom management was an important issue for them. Teachers often had to spend a great amount of time on disciplining rather than focusing on the teaching of content knowledge. Teachers observed that discipline was rarely an issue in China since students were usually obedient and well-behaved and would comply with school rules. In contrast to the strict rules in Chinese schools, British schools seemed to be too tolerant towards students in these teachers' opinion. Such tolerance made it more difficult for teachers to manage the class. One teacher mentioned that in one of the local schools where

she worked, actions had been taken to deal with this issue as shown in the BBC documentary 'Are Our Kids Tough Enough?'

Another issue that teachers highlighted was the presence of Teaching Assistants (TAs) in the classroom. As discussed above, incorporating SEN students in mainstream schools is quite common in British schools, and they usually require a TA in the classroom. In addition, it is also stipulated that foreign teachers without a DBS certificate – a criminal record check issued by the Disclosure and Barring Service – need to be accompanied by a TA in the classroom. However, the presence of TAs in the classroom was an entirely new phenomenon for most Hanban teachers, a phenomenon to which they needed to become accustomed. Some teachers reported that TAs could not support their language teaching. Instead, they sometimes found TAs superfluous to their teaching, or even disruptive at times.

4.2 Research question 2: What are their needs for professional development?

In terms of the actual training and professional development (PD) that Hanban teachers have received, an overwhelming majority have had such experiences. Among the 31 respondents, only one teacher indicated that she had not received teacher training. Five of the respondents reported being trained in China, eight had received training in the UK, and the remaining 17 had received training in both countries. Almost all the teachers had developed their careers in Chinese teaching out of personal interest in the Chinese language and culture, as well as in teaching and communicating with people around the world. They expressed their willingness and desire to further their training and PD in this profession. However, not all institutions have the resources or willingness to provide training and PD. Only about 65% of teachers reported that their schools provided necessary resources for PD. Some of the teachers revealed that they were excluded from PD sessions because they were not considered regular staff of the schools in which they worked.

Table 1 presents the survey results of the perceived importance of PD-

related aspects for the Hanban teachers. The 5-point Likert scale has been used in the questionnaire. The means for the items range from 2.94 to 3.75, which shows that in general these teachers consider these aspects important in PD. The most desirable aspect is approaches to language teaching (3.75), followed by understanding students' needs (3.63), knowledge of assessment criteria (3.63), adaptability (3.63), problem-solving ability (3.63), and communicative competence (3.63). The standard deviations for these aspects range from 0.44 to 0.77, which indicates that the teachers' ratings are fairly similar to each other.

Table 1. Importance of different aspects of PD for Hanban teachers

Aspects	Mean	SD
Planning lessons	3.47	0.51
Knowledge of the subject	3.53	0.62
Teaching materials and resources	3.28	0.63
Language testing and assessment	3.16	0.77
Approaches to language teaching	3.75	0.44
Understanding students' needs	3.63	0.55
Technology application	3.16	0.63
Knowledge of the UK education system	3.50	0.62
Knowledge of school policy	3.38	0.66
Knowledge of assessment criteria	3.63	0.55
Classroom management	2.94	0.76
Using interlanguage	3.56	0.56
Adaptability	3.63	0.55
Problem-solving ability	3.63	0.55
Communicative competence	3.63	0.49
Intercultural competence	3.47	0.51
Ability to work efficiently with co-workers	3.53	0.62

Table 2 lists the means and standard deviations of the 15 aspects based on the respondents' ratings on their perception of the difficulty and their need for improvement in each of the aspects. The means range from 2.22 to 2.75, and the most difficult and most needed aspect is classroom management (2.75), followed by planning lessons (2.72) and language testing and assessment (2.69). The standard deviations range from 0.72 to 1.07, which indicates a higher level of variability in these teachers' ratings than those of their importance.

Table 2. Aspects which Hanban teachers find difficult and need to improve

Aspects	Mean	SD
Planning lessons	2.72	0.77
Knowledge of the subject	2.50	0.98
Teaching materials and resources	2.63	0.87
Language testing and assessment	2.69	0.74
Approaches to language teaching	2.59	0.98
Understanding students' needs	2.53	0.92
Technology application	2.50	0.84
Knowledge of UK education system	2.47	0.80
Knowledge of school policy	2.47	0.72
Classroom management	2.75	1.05
Using interlanguage	2.41	0.91
Adaptability	2.22	1.04
Problem-solving ability	2.41	1.07
Communicative competence	2.34	1.00
Ability to work efficiently with co-workers	2.25	1.02

Data from semi-structured interviews seem to corroborate the results from the questionnaire survey. Teachers reported an urgent need for localised professional development. They welcome a PD programme that hones their classroom management skills in response to challenges and issues in local schools (e.g. disciplining); they want to learn specific ways to plan and teach lessons

and methods to assess students' progress and achievements; they hope to learn approaches to maintaining an engaging and fun learning atmosphere in the class; they wish to obtain more suitable resources to enrich their teaching content and motivate their students; and they desire to gain more knowledge about local schools and British education system in general.

In addition, interviewees also commented on the training that they received, both in China and in the UK. Some noted that the training they received in China was neither sufficient nor very effective. Teachers revealed that they were not interested in lectures on theories which tended to be too general. Some training touched upon complex points of grammar in the Chinese language which were too advanced for the language learners at the schools in which they taught. In contrast, the sharing of experiences of the volunteers who had taught overseas was reported to be much more helpful. Compared with the training received in China, most teachers found the training and professional development they received at the Confucius Institutes in the UK more practical and useful. The PD workshops offered by the CIs provided the teachers with some knowledge of the local education system and specific techniques for teaching and classroom management. The sharing of fellow teachers' experiences was found especially helpful.

Nevertheless, teachers also suggested that more practical and targeted PD sessions be provided by CIs or local schools. One teacher found the wide variety of students in class challenging and hoped to learn techniques of differentiated instruction to cope with the situation. Two teachers expressed their desire to observe lessons given by experienced teachers. One teacher underscored the importance of apprenticeship and hoped to have the opportunity to shadow his predecessor who taught the same course. He also believed that it would be more effective and conducive to his improvement if someone else could come to observe his lessons and provide him with constructive feedback. Another teacher suggested that peer observation might be a useful practice for fellow teachers to learn from each other.

Teachers also discussed the changes they experienced over time. It seems that with more time and experience, they became more familiar with their students and the local context; therefore, they gained more confidence. One interviewee commented that:

"The change is dramatic. In the 1ˢᵗ year, the different teaching environments and systems shocked me. While in the 2ⁿᵈ year, I have adapted to it and become braver. I am more natural and open in the class. I communicate with students more fluently. ... At the beginning, I was weak on class management, because I was timid and did not know how to handle it. Now I am familiar with the school rules and know how to react to students' behaviour."
(Interviewee 3)

In summary, it seems that these Hanban teachers hoped to obtain more practical and targeted professional development to facilitate their adaptation to the local educational context and improve the quality of their teaching.

5. DISCUSSION

Chinese teachers' responses to the questionnaire survey and interview questions revealed various challenges and difficulties that they faced and the PD needs that they desired. It seems that the shortage of a steady and ample supply of qualified Chinese teachers identified by many scholars still exists in the UK. Some teachers reported that they had to travel around to teach in multiple schools to a variety of students with different backgrounds, which added to their challenges. The results suggest an urgent need for practical and localised PD programmes. In this section, the findings will be discussed in terms of linguistic, pedagogical and socio-cultural challenges and needs for professional development, followed by implications and recommendations.

5.1 Linguistic challenges

With regard to language barriers, our respondents and interviewees admitted that their English proficiency was sometimes a hindrance to effective communication, both in their daily lives and in the classroom. Due to their limited English vocabulary, they sometimes found it difficult to understand their students and colleagues fully, to express their own thoughts freely, or to explain points of Chinese grammar clearly in English. This aspect is closely related not only to their competence as language teachers, but also to their competence as intercultural communicators.

Linguistic challenges coming from the unique features of the Chinese language, as discussed in the literature review section, were not mentioned by our respondents and interviewees. One reason for such a lack of concern might be that the phonological, morphological, syntactic and orthographic challenges discussed earlier are mainly challenges for learners of Chinese rather than for teachers, whereas the focus of this study is on teachers' challenges. Another reason might be, as Orton (2016) has pointed out, these teachers are unaware of their students' difficulties. Meanwhile, the question of when to introduce the writing of Chinese characters does not seem to be a concern, which might be explained by the fact that teaching materials are usually designated by CIs or the local schools; therefore, these teachers do not have to be bothered with answering this question or making such a decision.

5.2 Pedagogical challenges

In terms of pedagogical challenges, the participating Hanban teachers' comments are consistent with many of the findings in previous research. As has been reported by Xu (2012), Yue (2017), and Zhou and Li (2015), the Hanban teachers in the UK also found maintaining discipline to be a major problem in classroom management, which was considered challenging and time-consuming. Hanban teachers tended to expect that pupils would behave themselves in the same way as more obedient Chinese pupils would do. As a result of their lack of

experience in dealing with disruptive behaviours in the classroom, they found disciplining a most challenging task. The results of CILT (2007) still hold true, even though the study was conducted over a decade ago.

In addition, the presence of SEN students was mentioned as an unexpected challenge by the Hanban teachers in the UK, which is consistent with the results of Xu (2012), Yue (2017), and Zhou and Li (2015) in the USA. This is associated with the fact that in China most SEN students go to special schools whereas in the UK and the USA many SEN students attend mainstream schools. In the UK, SEN students may be accompanied by TAs in the classroom to assist their learning, which is also a new practice for Hanban teachers. Most Hanban teachers are not used to the presence of SEN students and TAs in the classroom and also lack strategies for dealing with these individuals. Thus, they are in desperate need of familiarising themselves with these local customs and improving their classroom management skills in coping with such challenges.

5.3 Socio-cultural challenges

In addition to language barriers and pedagogical challenges, the results of this study also underline many aspects of socio-cultural challenges. In terms of education systems, our participants reported a myriad of differences in Chinese and British schools. Similar to the participants in Lü and Lavadenz's (2014) study, Hanban teachers in our study found many discrepancies between the realities they experienced and their prior expectations, from classroom layout to students' behaviour, from pedagogical beliefs to classroom practices. This is consistent with CILT (2007) which reported that teachers from China had unrealistic expectations of British pupils. Teachers were puzzled about the objectives of their lessons: whether to impart knowledge or to cultivate and maintain interest? Teachers had to lower their expectations and adjust their goals for their lessons (e.g., teaching fewer words in one lesson). The same problem has also been discussed by Pérez-Milans (2015) who reported that Hanban teachers had high expectations of student progress in terms of the number of characters that students were expected to learn.

Such socio-cultural challenges can be attributed to the notion of "culture of learning" (Cortazzi & Jin, 1996) or "cultural script" (Stigler & Hiebert, 1999, cited in Wu, 2017). According to Cortazzi and Jin (1996), the cultures of learning of the Confucian model and the western model are vastly different. Even though there have been changes in cultural practices, as reported by Jin and Cortazzi (2006), the fundamentals arguably remain unchanged and distinctive. More recent studies (e.g., Wang, 2011; Wu, 2017) have also found that cultural knowledge of Mandarin teachers played a vital role in their attitude towards some western pedagogical approaches such as communicative language teaching.

What seems to have exacerbated their situation is the fact that a quarter of these teachers had no prior teaching experience at all and that they were required to start teaching shortly after their arrival in the UK without proper training or induction, especially in regard to their familiarisation with the local context. This finding is consistent with that of Zhou and Li (2015), which emphasises the importance for teacher preparation programmes to be "context-specific" (p. 25) and for teachers to learn the local school culture (e.g., Duff, 2008). The social context, as one of the three constituents of the knowledge base of language teacher education in Freeman and Johnson's (1998) framework, is undoubtedly an indispensable element in teacher education and professional development.

5.4 Needs for professional development

The survey results show homogeneity in participants' ratings of the items in both the importance of and their needs for professional development. This could be related to the possible fact that being trained and dispatched by Hanban, these teachers have received similar training prior to their deployment and therefore have similar beliefs and values regarding the teaching of Mandarin Chinese.

In terms of professional development needs, Hanban teachers considered the training they had received rather impractical and inadequate. This might be explained by the research results of Wang, Moloney and Li (2013). According to these scholars, the curricula of CFL teacher education in mainland China are

largely centralised and decontextualised. The Master of Teaching Chinese to Speakers of Other Languages (MTCSOL) programmes in mainland China have been found to be theory-based, focusing on content knowledge such as general linguistics, Chinese linguistics, and second language acquisition theories, with very few hands-on practice of teaching techniques. Even the course on teaching methodology focuses on the history of teaching approaches (ibid.). In a more recent study, Wang (2018) pointed out that the "Standards for Teachers of Chinese to Speakers of Other Languages" issued in 2007 by Hanban "prescribe areas of core knowledge, competency and quality that a CSL/CFL teacher should possess" but "mention little of pedagogical content knowledge, personal practical knowledge, classroom management skills, intercultural communication skills and modern second language teaching approaches – elements that are essential to catering to the diverse learning needs of students" (Wang, 2018, p. 505).

Thus, Hanban teachers in our study expressed wishes for practical and targeted training and PD sessions to learn about norms and practices in local schools so as to facilitate their localisation. They also longed for opportunities for lesson observations in both ways so as to learn from experienced teachers and receive feedback on their own teaching. This is in keeping with the principles of a sociocultural perspective (e.g. Johnson & Golombek, 2011; Singh & Richards, 2006). According to Johnson (2009), teacher learning is socially situated and achieved through participation in the communities of practice (Lave & Wenger, 1991). Through learning about the social context of their working environment, observing experienced teachers' classes and obtaining feedback on their own teaching, novice teachers will be able to acquire the necessary knowledge and skills for their profession and to move from the peripheral to the centre of their community of practice.

5.5 Implications

The results of this study have implications for both Hanban teachers and directors of Confucius Institutes. For Hanban teachers, if English proficiency is a

hindrance to their effective and successful communication either in daily life or in the classroom, they may need to make more efforts to improve their English. They will also need to be adaptable to the new social context and quickly learn the educational system, pedagogical practices and cultural expectations of their host country and their institutions. For directors of Confucius Institutes, among other teacher qualifications, they may need to place relative importance to candidates' English proficiency. When circumstances allow, they may need to find ways to better deploy their Hanban teachers so that the latter do not need to frequently travel to different schools. More importantly, they will need to provide practical and targeted training and professional development so as to support their teachers to adapt to the new social educational context. They can also arrange director or peer observations to provide feedback to teachers so as to help them improve classroom management and teaching effectiveness.

The results of this study may also have implications for policy makers and teacher educators in higher education institutions. The standards for CSL/CFL teachers and the curricula for CSL/CFL teacher education programmes should shift the weight from theory-based content knowledge to incorporate more practical pedagogical knowledge and context-specific cultural knowledge as well as hands-on practices and problem-solving skills so as to better equip novice teachers or teachers who will be new to their host countries for effective teaching and classroom management.

In terms of efforts required to support Hanban teachers to meet the challenges or PD needs, some may bring immediate results while others may take longer to effect. For example, induction could be provided for newly arrived Hanban teachers to assist them to become familiar with their working environment, including the rules and regulations of their schools, the routines and particulars of teaching practices and assessment requirements. For continuing professional development, regular training sessions could be organised for Hanban teachers to support them to learn more about the local education system and culture and

to share their experiences and best practices. Observations could be arranged for Hanban teachers to observe experienced teachers teaching in the classroom so as to learn techniques to work with TAs and SEN students and improve their classroom management skills. Nevertheless, other challenges, such as improving English language proficiency or building better communities of practice, may need more time and effort. As has been pointed out by Orton (2011, p. 164), "native speakers, especially those educated in a Chinese society, will need very special, long-term development of their intercultural understanding and practical competence." Producing teachers who are equipped with sufficient and appropriate training and continuing professional development, is a long-term teacher education endeavour, which would require the efforts of all parties involved.

6. CONCLUSION

"Good quality education depends on giving teachers the best possible training, not only before they start teaching but also throughout their careers" (UNESCO, 2014, p. 236).

The present study investigated the challenges and difficulties that Hanban teachers had experienced in the UK, as well as their PD needs. The results show that this group of teachers have encountered various challenges and difficulties and that they are in urgent need of localised PD that is practical and targeted. Challenges and difficulties in the classroom arise from major differences in the cultures of learning, approaches, policy, pedagogy, and practices in education between China and the UK. Areas where PD is particularly needed include familiarisation with the local education system, proficiency in the language and familiarity with the culture of the host country, effective pedagogical methods and classroom management skills, many of which have been listed in Asia Society (2010). In particular, the study shows that teachers hope to learn techniques for differentiated instruction, to improve their skills in collaborating with TAs and dealing with SEN students, and to observe lessons in order to learn from

experienced or fellow teachers. Therefore, localised PD seems imperative for Hanban teachers to gain a better understanding of the local education system and pedagogical practices to facilitate their adaptation, localisation and teaching effectiveness. As has been highlighted by Guo, Tao and Gao (2019, p. 136), "teacher development is a long and tortuous process requiring support and guidance from experienced teachers and language teacher educators," therefore, it is suggested that educators of CSL/CFL teachers provide practical, targeted and localised teacher training to address these teachers' professional development needs. Strategic leadership and support from Confucius Institutes and local schools would greatly facilitate Mandarin Chinese teachers' professional growth.

With regard to its limitations, this study only investigated a small number of Hanban teachers in the south of UK. The limited sample size may not adequately reflect the genuine reality of Hanban teachers all over the UK, let alone across the world. Nonetheless, we hope that this study opens a window to understanding the challenges and difficulties that Hanban teachers have encountered or may encounter and their needs for professional development. Future studies could be extended by collecting data from other areas of the UK and other countries around the globe so as to provide a better understanding in a wider context. It is also hoped that more tailored PD suggestions might be provided to both Hanban teachers and teacher educators to facilitate teachers' development and growth in their profession as well as their localisation to cater for the characteristics of the context in their host countries.

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Table 1. Importance of different aspects of PD for Hanban teachers

Table 2. Aspects which Hanban teachers find difficult and need to improve

汉语教师在海外教学的挑战和职业发展需求

吕燕彬、郑英、林诗涵

摘要

汉语作为第二语言或外语的学习和教学在世界范围内蓬勃发展，导致合格的对外汉语教师的短缺。随之而来的是需要在对外汉语教师的培训和职业发展方面进行更多更深入的研究。这项研究调查了以汉语为母语的汉语教师在英国学校教学时遇到的挑战和困难，以及他们所希望得到的职业发展。本研究的数据来自于对英国某个孔子学院汉语教师（汉办教师）的问卷调查和半结构化访谈。研究结果表明，对外汉语教师所面临的挑战可以分为语言方面的、教学方面的以及社会文化方面的挑战，其中主要包括欠缺英语熟练程度和跨文化交际能力，缺乏对当地教育系统的了解，以及缺乏有效的、有针对性的教学方法和课堂管理技能以应对学生纪律问题、教授特殊需求学生和与助教进行合作。该研究的结论是，为了促进这一群体的汉语教师的有效教学和本地化，针对当地情况量身定制的培训和职业发展是必不可少的。

关键词：汉语作为第二语言或外语　汉办教师　孔子学院　职业发展需求

吕燕彬，理启蒙大学。
郑英，南安普敦大学。
林诗涵，北京师范大学。