

**An Investigation into the Characteristics of  
Teacher Professionalism in a Chinese Higher  
Educational Institution**

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## **Abstract**

This qualitative research seeks to investigate the characteristics of construction and enactment of teacher professionalism and its changes, through a qualitative study carried out in a Chinese higher educational institution. To achieve this, the study examined the factors contributing to the formation and change of the characteristics based on the three rounds of semi-structured interviews with fifteen participants from a University in China. The findings show that teachers' professional responsibility is a multi-faceted and relatively stable concept and plays an important role in their perceptions of professionalism. The findings also reveal that factors including personal biography, institutional environment and social culture intertwine to shape the formation, fluctuation and development of responsibility. In addition, the study reveals that responsibility is an expression of a particular professional identity and identity is an indication of the strength of responsibility. Both professional responsibility and identity serve as important integral aspects of professionalism. Moreover, teacher professional responsibility has significant impact on teacher passion and agency in enacting professionalism and professional development. The research contributes to a more nuanced understanding of teacher professionalism by identifying teacher professional responsibility as the core element of professionalism in the context of Chinese higher education. This research also serves to add knowledge about, and advance the understanding of professional responsibility, identity and professionalism by uncovering explicit connections among them.

This research has important implications for higher education front-line teachers by developing their awareness of the importance that needs to be attached to the maintenance and development of professional responsibility. It also serves to raise university policy makers' awareness of the significant influence the leadership, nature of institution and policies could exert on teachers and to suggest that leaders re-examine the way they design policy and the support they provide to the teachers.

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## **List of Abbreviations**

BA: Bachelor's degree

CECR: College English Curriculum Reform

CEE: College Entrance Examination

CER: College English Reform

CET: College English Test

CPD: Continuing Professional Development

MA: Master's degree

MOE: Ministry of Education

SCA: Student centred approach

TCA: Teacher centred approach

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## CHAPTER ONE

### INTRODUCTION

#### **1.1 Background**

This study aims to explore the nature, contexts and characteristics of teacher professionalism through a qualitative-based study conducted in a Chinese university involving a group of English language teachers. This chapter provides the context and rationale for this study. It firstly introduces the educational and policy context for this study by focusing on three aspects, namely the Chinese higher educational context, importance of College English education, and the requirement and challenges for College English teachers. This is followed by a brief introduction to the background of the researcher. The chapter then elucidates the purpose and significance and presents the research questions of the study. Finally, the structure of the thesis is outlined.

#### **1.2 Educational and policy context**

This section introduces the contextual background to education and policy in Chinese higher education where this study was carried out. The primary focus of this section is on the context and importance of College English Education (CEE) as this study mainly investigates how participants of college English teachers have enacted professionalism. The requirements imposed on teachers and the challenges they face are discussed with a view to providing a changing and challenging context for the study and, more importantly, to facilitating the understanding of its influence on the changes of the teachers' behaviour and attitudes.

### **1.2.1 Chinese higher educational context**

#### ***Historical review of Chinese higher education***

Higher education has been playing an increasingly important role in the Chinese educational system. It has experienced fluctuations since 1978, however, under the impacts of political unrest such as that of the Cultural Revolution and the resultant economic downturns, some of which even resulted in the cessation of higher education entrance examinations for ten years. Teachers were also overthrown by the Cultural Revolution for a decade. However, after 1977, the Open Door Policy gave rise to reconsideration of the significance of, and attention to, higher education. It recognized the necessity of re-establishing higher educational system, aiming to restore Chinese higher education to its former glory and to help it re-emerge in the international educational scene. A series of documents are exemplary of such importance attached to higher education. For example, ‘Higher Education Law of the peoples’ Republic of China’, ‘Action Plan for the Revitalization of Education towards the 21st Century’ and ‘Decision of the CPC Central Committee and the State Council on Deepening Education Reform and Promoting Quality Education in an All-round Way’. The purpose of issuing the policy and law has been to re-establish the higher educational system. On the one hand, borrowing and learning the successful experiences from other countries played an important role in this. On the other hand, taken into account the Chinese context, Chinese higher education policy makers had learned from the previous experience and managed to eliminate the negative and retain the positive with a view to reconstructing and developing Chinese higher education. Indeed, higher education institutions, as an important base for cultivating talents, have shouldered the responsibility of imparting knowledge pertaining to different areas. Among those areas, College English Education has been an important one in the Chinese higher education system.

### ***The management model in Chinese higher education***

The managerial model in Chinese universities is featured as ‘Hierarchical management’ (Zhao, 2004). It means that there appears a pyramid structure of the managing system which contains top level leaders, meso level managerial staff and grass-root implementers. The policy making power is centralized around top leaders. Centralization is a feature of this managing model where power goes from top down (Wang, 2003). University teachers are located as the grass-root implementers who need to listen and be controlled by the higher level managers including department leaders and university leaders. Working under such system, teachers are in a situation where it is hard to disobey the higher authority’s demand, especially when the demands are documented into policy. Although there have been changes and improvements to this model, the hierarchical feature still plays a major role in the Chinese university management (Yao, 2000).

### ***Multiple roles for higher education teachers***

Working in a higher education institution in China, a teacher is expected to play multiple roles. Teaching is normally a basic duty he or she to perform. In addition, they are also expected to play the role of researcher. Research is considered to be an important part of university teachers’ workload. Firstly, if teachers do research on teaching-related issues such as teaching pedagogy improvement, they are expected to enhance teaching quality (Cheng and Xiao, 2018). Secondly, research is considered to be beneficial for the development of the subjects teachers teach. This is because the exploration over a particular subject may help update the knowledge construction of that subject (Wei, 2011). Thirdly, research is also valuable for the development of the university. It is because the research achievements such as the amount of high-quality publications, number of approved national and international projects and the team of experts and scholars within the university are considered as the criteria to evaluate and rank a university’s quality and reputation. Chinese universities (including both key and ordinary universities) can be divided into

three types, i.e. teaching-oriented, teaching- and research-oriented, and research-oriented universities. This means that, for different universities, the weighting assigned to research could vary according to the type of the university. Taken the investigated university as an example, it was until the beginning of twenty-first century that the university leaders decided to transit from teaching-oriented to teaching-and-research oriented university. As a consequence, policy regarding to research achievements became more demanding afterwards. However, the weight attached to research and teaching may still vary in different departments within the same university due to the nature of department and the leadership style.

### **1.2.2 College English Education in higher education**

#### ***Introduction to College English Education***

College English Education (CEE) is one of the compulsory courses in the higher education teaching system. The nature of the course is that English has been designed as a compulsory course for undergraduates who major in other areas than English in Chinese higher education teaching syllabi. The College English syllabus has experienced three major developments and reforms, namely the National College English Teaching Syllables (NCETS 1985/1986), the National College English Syllabus (NCETS 1999) and the College English Curriculum Reform (CECR2007). The purpose of the CEE is to cultivate students' capability of using English after graduating from university. The criteria to test and evaluate students' learning outcome are the national College English Tests (CET) Band Four and Six. The scale of test score is 100 points and the passing grade is 60. The CET test has been a dominating English language ability testing and assessment instrument till now. The importance of CEE is not only reflected in its national assessment but also the demand of English language user of the social market.

The development of society requires more and more English language



users to communicate with the outside world in various aspects. Thus, basically, graduates with certificates of CET Band 4 and/or 6 or TOFEL/IELTS are becoming more and more popular in job hunting and have higher chance of securing a job compared with others without. The growing demand for qualified English language users elevates the importance of English learning and the College English Education in university. Teachers who are teaching College English at the forefront are playing core role in equipping university graduates with better English ability.

### ***Nature of English Department in Chinese university***

College English Department can be found in almost every Chinese university. It consists of all the College English teachers who are responsible for teaching all the non-English major undergraduates of the first two-year university study (He, 2005). The Department is typically viewed as ‘service units rather than as academic department’ (Borg and Liu, 2013). It prescribes that College English teachers should carry out teaching activities such as designing teaching curriculum and syllabus, preparing teaching materials, making decisions over teaching textbooks and reference books, setting exam papers, marking papers, assessing students, arranging learning-related activities for students, and teachers’ professional development. Meanwhile, it functions as the organization to control, manage and evaluate teacher performance. The teachers in this department generally carry heavy teaching workload and are mainly in charge of teaching English to undergraduates. However, despite the teaching-focused service nature of the department, demands for research output are increasingly imposed upon teachers. Research performance is not only embedded into the appraisal system but also into teachers’ promotion condition (Bai and Hudson, 2011).

### **1.2.3 Challenges for College English Education teachers**

#### ***Importance of front-line teachers in higher education***

Given the importance of higher education, the main focus is placed on the development of higher education teaching quality. In order to achieve this purpose, the Chinese Ministry of Education (MOE) has put much effort into teaching quality enhancement. In addition to the curriculum reforms, textbook revisions, teaching facility upgrade, the core of teaching quality development is the professional development of front-line teachers' quality and professionalism. This is because teachers are the direct implementers of higher education policy and the users of teaching curriculum and facility. The expectation for cultivating more qualified students is not solely technical work, but more importantly work relating to person (Fu, 2001). Only when teachers can better understand the importance of higher education and expected goals of reform could it be possible to enhance higher education quality. Thus, there is growing importance that needs to be attached to teacher professional development. This study investigates higher educational teachers' professionalism, aiming to identify its characteristics and attempting to examine implications for teacher development. For College English teaching, English teachers, as the front-line implementer of the CEE play a crucial role. The English language proficiency of these English teachers and the way they teach are therefore of fundamental importance for students' English learning (Ma, 2012: 15).

### ***Challenges for College English Teachers***

In the Chinese higher education system, the College English teachers have been faced with multiple challenges in their career. Firstly, with regard to teaching, the previously mentioned development and reform of CEE have kept posing ongoing challenges. For example, the first two syllabi (NCETS 1985/1986 and 1999) mainly placed emphasis on students' vocabulary and grammatical knowledge. The basic aim was to help students develop a relatively high ability in reading, a moderate ability in listening and an elementary ability in writing and speaking (NCETS, 1986: 1). The textbook as the means of teaching was revised accordingly with the major focus on

reading ability enhancement. After the syllabubs had been in use for almost fifteen years, the modified version of the syllabus for all non-English major undergraduates was issued in 1999. The teaching objective for this new version was then changed to ‘developing, in students, a relatively high level of competence in reading, an intermediate level of competence in listening and speaking, writing and translating’ so that students could communicate in English (NCETS 1999: 1). Later in 2007, College English Curriculum Reform was issued to shift focus further to developing students’ all-round abilities in English, particularly in their communicative competency in terms of listening and speaking. The focus of the teaching objective has thus gradually shifted from emphasis on reading to the development of students’ speaking and communicative ability. Working under such changing context, English teachers would obviously be faced with challenges brought by the reforms, particularly in terms of how to teach according to the constantly changing syllabus and curriculum.

Another challenge for College English teachers is related to the research aspect. Research activities are incorporated into university teachers’ workload. Such requirements and demand are documented into multi-layer policies which state the expectations and requirements that are meant to guide teachers’ work towards achieving the standards (Gao, 2017). However, studies of university teachers’ research engagement documented that not only university teachers’ research ability was relatively weak but also their understanding and engagement of research was moderate (e.g. Borg, 2007). Thus, for university teachers, the requirements for research have become another important part of work which has posed challenges for them.

Based on the understanding of higher educational context and the challenges teachers may encounter in enacting teaching and research activities in the changing context, the present research seeks to investigate the characteristics of the English teachers in construction and enactment of teacher professionalism and its changes, through a qualitative-based study in a

Chinese higher education institution. Before stating the significance and purpose of this study, it is necessary to provide a description of the present researcher's background.

### **1.3 Researcher background**

As the researcher of this study, I had my undergraduate study in a Chinese higher educational institution. Although I was majoring in English, I observed and witnessed how non-English students to learn English and also had personal experience of how the Chinese higher educational system was running. After pursuing Master's study, I became one of the members of College English teachers of a higher educational institution in China. With eight years' teaching experience, I understand the meaning of Chinese culture and the institutional culture well. I have been able to make sense of the working university context, policy demands and reforms and experienced the enactment of teaching and the influence brought by external contexts in person. The observation and discussions with colleagues have enabled me to understand the teaching profession better from others' perspective. Meanwhile, the difficulties, encountered by me and colleagues, have kept challenging us to improve ourselves. All these experiences laid a solid foundation and basis for me to conduct a study among a group of teachers that I am familiar with. Except the familiarity, passion has been also aroused to do research in a context which seems to be familiar with, but still contains surprises and uncertainties. Such curiosity has led me to unpack the complexity and myth of the teachers' live through uncovering the superficial level of phenomena and explore the deeper underlying pattern.

These inspired me to pursue my PhD study overseas to conduct a systematic investigation. In order to secure approval from my university for my study in the UK, I had negotiated with the president and vice-presidents of university, the Human Resource officers and the head and associate heads of

the English department. After months' efforts, I was finally granted a study leave. During my study leave, my teaching position in the English department was reserved but with nearly half of the salary deducted. Therefore, I had to self-fund my PhD study in the UK. In order to collect data, I conducted the fieldwork in the English department of the university where I teach. Being one of thirty-seven teachers in the English department, I was lucky to be able to recruit fifteen teachers who were all my colleagues. Since I was not holding any admin positions, there was no power distance or status difference between me and the participants. As both a researcher and an insider, there are both advantages and disadvantages in conducting insider research. Firstly, undertaking research in an organization where the researcher works and among the researcher's professional peers can bring advantages. For example, the insider researchers' understanding of the working context can help to explore more of the environment because it is 'the key to delving into the hidden crevices of the organization' (Labaree, 2002: 98). The familiarity with the working institution and department can indeed be helpful for me to understand the research context better. The harmonious interpersonal relationship with the participants has laid a strong foundation for them to join the interviews willingly. Meanwhile, the 'proximity' with research participants can 'make it easier to gain access to research respondents and achieve deeper levels of trust' (Kitzinger and Wilkinson, 2013: 252).

However, disadvantages may also exist. For example, research respondents' participation might be driven by the unequal power relation between them and the researcher. However, since the research participants in this study and I shared equal status and position in the English department, there was little possibility that their participation was the result of the researcher's 'position of authority or manager' (Simmons, 2007). The equal status between me and the participants further allowed them to freely share with me their thinking. However, the proximity may still lead to bias in interpreting participants' responses. In order to minimize such bias and

enhance objectivity, I adopted a formal approach to creating a sense of distance between me and participants. This measure was suggested by Mannay (2010) that by 'entering role play and asking naive questions to prompt participants to answer more fully' (Hanson, 2013: 392). Meanwhile, I obtained informed consent from the participants and made every effort to protect their anonymity and confidentiality. For example, pseudonyms were used to replace the participants' real names in order to protect their personal information from being identified in the report of the study. By maximizing insider research advantages and minimizing its disadvantages, the research was smoothly carried out.

#### **1.4 Purpose and significance of this study**

As stated earlier, the higher education and its College English Education are playing a crucial role within Chinese educational system. This study, from individual front-line College English teachers' perspective, provides a probe into their professional life. Specifically, how teachers construct and enact teacher professionalism is the major purpose of this study. Further, teachers are facing multiple challenges, such as policy and reform changes and increasing research demands. This study aims to explore the characteristics of Chinese College English teachers' construction, understanding and enactment of professionalism in contexts of national reforms. This gives rise to more specific research questions encapsulated as follows:

1. What are the characteristics of teacher professionalism among participating teachers?
2. What are the key factors that contribute to shaping teacher professionalism?
3. Are there any changes in teacher professionalism throughout participants' professional career? If so, what are the changes and what are their causes?

Through answering the above specific research questions, this study, therefore, aims to provide a clear picture of the key features of Chinese College English teacher professionalism and how it is shaped and, if at all, how it changes.

### **1.5 Thesis structure**

This thesis begins with an introduction to the educational and policy contexts, researcher background and the proposed research questions in Chapter One. Following this, Chapter Two provides an overview of the literature of relevant concepts both theoretically and empirically. Chapter Three describes the design of research methodology and how the study was conducted. The key findings of this study regarding the characteristics of professionalism and professional identity are presented in Chapters Four and Five. Chapter Six provides a discussion on the key issues emerged from the findings. Finally, Chapter Seven concludes the thesis, where the contributions are discussed, implications, and limitations of the study are addressed and further research directions are suggested.

## CHAPTER TWO

### LITERATURE REVIEW

#### 2.1 Introduction

This chapter reviews the key concepts and previous studies which are relevant to the present study. Since the present study focuses on exploring the construction of teacher professionalism in a Chinese higher educational institution, it is necessary to review the relevant literature from which a theoretical framework can be generated.

This chapter first reviews the key concept of professionalism from the perspective of its nature and unpacks its meaning through illustrating its key dimensions. It then moves to the illustration of a relevant concept i.e. teachers' professional identity, reviewing how it is related to professionalism in order to gain a better understanding of the concept of professionalism. Finally, a tentative theoretical framework is put forward which serves to frame the research design and guide the research method in the present study.

#### 2.2 Introduction of the concept of teacher professionalism

The concept of professionalism is complex because different researchers define it from different perspectives and with different focuses. Evans (2008) and Hargreaves and Goodson (1996: 4) point out that there is no 'consensus' on the definition. According to Whitty's (2008) suggestion, it is better to consider professionalism as it contains a number of meanings and understandings rather than a static and definite concept with unified definitions.

As the research literature reveals, there have been more studies, both



empirical and theoretical, on school contexts than on higher education contexts. Many researchers have discussed the meanings of professionalism and its application in schools, but much less in higher education. Although my research will be conducted in higher education context, it is still informative to review how professionalism is conceptualized in the school context given that the literature is relatively rich. This is to establish a theoretical base and to facilitate an in-depth understanding of the concept. Following this, I move to review research that explores how professionalism is applied to higher education based on the theoretical foundation established in the discussion of the school context. The following section presents the nature of teacher professionalism and unpacks its meaning through some key dimensions.

### **2.2.1 Competing versions of professionalism**

Before unpacking the meaning of professionalism in detail, multiple terms referring to professionalism with different focuses need to be reviewed. Professionalism is represented in various ways with different focus which can be divided into two main categories. The first category focuses on professionalism under external control from organizational and authorities' perspectives. For example, required/demanded professionalism (Evans, 2008), managerial professionalism (Whitty, 2008) and organizational professionalism (Evetts, 2009). The second one focuses on professionalism from practitioners' perspective of perceptions, feelings and participations. For example, enacted professionalism (Evans, 2008), collaborative professionalism (Whitty, 2008), democratic professionalism (Whitty, 2008) and occupational professionalism (Evetts, 2009). The examples do not include an inclusive list of termed professionalism.

As mentioned above, the first category focuses more on the external control from organizations. According to Evans (2008), required or demanded professionalism is seen as a set of 'accepted shared norms and behaviour code'

(11) set ‘officially’ (12) by authorities. In this sense, it is an ‘official version’ (Evans, 2008: 12) which reflects the expectations and demands from organization managers’ perspective rather than practitioners’ perspective. In the same vein, Whitty (2008: 38) claims that for managerial professionalism, the government, organization managers and policy makers have ‘real enthusiasm’ in raising requirements and expectations on teachers’ daily teaching pedagogy and teaching content rather than leaving it to professional judgment alone’. Similarly, organizational professionalism, as pointed out by Evetts (2009: 23), focuses on ‘control’ by organization administrators that are in favour of managing teachers through ‘standardization of work procedures and process’. Teachers in this group of professionalism have to perform according to the ‘achievement targets and performances indicators’ (Evetts, 2009: 23) set by the organization managers.

However, unlike the first category, the second shows more concerns over allowing practitioners to express feelings and to participate. Firstly, enacted professionalism, according to Evans (2008:13), allows practitioners’ daily practices to be ‘observed, perceived and interpreted’ by teachers themselves, so practitioners could evaluate and improve their own working performance (Hilferty, 2008: 163). Similarly, in collaborative professionalism, teachers not only give attention to their views in real practices but also work collaboratively with others (Whitty, 2008: 42) within or outside of the field of education, so they may seek help and get benefits through collaboration with others. Furthermore, democratic professionalism widens its concern for all relevant stakeholders like organizations, students and parents, ‘aiming to build a more democratic education system’ (Whitty, 2008: 44). Additionally, occupational professionalism adopts the same perspective to see professionalism ‘within professional occupational groups’ (Evetts, 2009: 23). Hence, teachers in this category of professionalism are given chances to control themselves and their control is different from the one imposed above but is ‘operationalised by the practitioners themselves’ (Evetts, 2009: 23).

Based on this division, professionalism is seen to have different natures for different groups of people and different versions of professionalism may always compete with each other for a dominant position. Since this study examines teacher professionalism from the individual teachers' standpoint, it will not attempt to identify which termed professionalism is executed in the investigated university. Rather, it aims to investigate how participating teachers in their working university understand and enact professionalism. Further, based on these teachers' perceptions, the characteristics of teacher professionalism could be identified. In order to establish a theoretical base for examining the key dimensions of professionalism, the following section will take a closer look at the meaning of professionalism.

### **2.2.2 Professionalism is a multi-dimensional concept**

Hargreaves and Goodson (1996:4) describe the concept of professionalism as 'something which defines and articulates the quality and character of people's actions within that group', whilst Boyt et al. (2001: 322) consider the concept as consisting of 'attitudes and behaviours' one holds in his or her profession possesses toward one's profession'. However, in order to clarify what the 'something', 'attitude' and 'behaviour' are, we need to look at the dimensions of professionalism that emerge from various researchers' definitions. The most commonly identified and emphasized dimensions appear to be the following three: specialized body of knowledge (e.g. Hoyle and John, 1995; Macdonald, 1995), autonomy (e.g. Bull, 1988; Johnson, 1992; David, 2000), and accountability and responsibility (e.g. Solbrekke and Englund, 2011). Furthermore, these dimensions do not exist in isolation but closely interrelate with one another. Furlong et al. (2000) explains the interrelationship among them:

*'It is because professionals face complex and unpredictable situations that they need a specialized body of knowledge; if they are*

*to apply that knowledge, it is argued that they need the autonomy to make their own judgments. Given that they have autonomy, it is essential that they act with responsibility – collectively they need to develop appropriate professional values.’ (Furlong et al., 2000: 5)*

Hence, it is necessary to look at these three key dimensions respectively in order to understand teacher professionalism.

### **2.2.3 Meanings of three dimensions of professionalism**

This section first reviews each dimension of professionalism (i.e. teacher knowledge, teacher autonomy and teacher responsibility) through unpacking their meanings and examining how the meanings are derived in the broad education context. Then it moves to introduce how each dimension is applied in the higher education context in particular. Although fewer studies have been conducted on teacher professionalism in higher education than in schools, this section reviews studies that draw particular interests on the application of dimension of professionalism in higher education.

#### ***Teacher knowledge***

Knowledge has been seen as ‘factual’ and ‘objective’ (e.g. Fenstermacher, 1994; Meijer, Verloop and Beijaard, 2001; Smith and Siegel, 2004) entity that teachers possess. Teachers’ knowledge can be expressed by explaining their behaviour (Meijer, 2010) and is ‘observable to them via discussions’ in which teachers provide rationale for their perceptions and behaviors (Grimmett and MacKinnon, 1992). Shulman (1986, 1987) presents a seven-dimensional framework for teacher knowledge. These include 1) content knowledge; 2) general pedagogical knowledge; 3) curriculum knowledge; 4) pedagogical content knowledge; 5) knowledge of learners and their characteristics; 6) knowledge of educational contexts; and 7) knowledge of educational ends, purposes and values, and their philosophical and historical grounds.

This framework has been adopted as a theoretical basis for investigating

teacher knowledge. In this framework, the pedagogical content knowledge (PCK) which means ‘special amalgam of content and pedagogy’ that represents teachers’ own understanding of the profession (Shulman, 1987: 8). This category of knowledge differs from the general pedagogical knowledge in that it mainly focuses on the pedagogy which is made to suitably fit in the realization of facilitating students to understand particular content knowledge rather than the general pedagogy which is applicable for all subjects. The PCK holds a prominent position because it ‘represents the blending of content and pedagogy into an understanding of how particular topics, problems, or issues are organized, represented, and adapted to the diverse interests and abilities of learners, and presented for instruction’ (Shulman, 1987: 8).

The relation of specific subject matter knowledge and the pedagogy which is appropriate and effective to unpack it to students can be revealed in the pedagogical content knowledge. The knowledge of learners emphasizes the necessity to know about one’s students’ characteristics which may include their existing proficiency of a particular subject matter, ways that suit their learning, students’ personality and so on. For language learners, it may cover ‘knowledge of students’ oral language development, learning experience and proficiency levels, knowledge in assessing and diagnosing students’ performance, and knowledge about how to maintain students’ motivation’ (Chen and Goh, 2014: 84). The grasp of such knowledge can help students understand in an effective way (Chen and Goh, 2014:84) and further the application of knowledge towards understanding of students and can in turn help the adjustment of pedagogical content knowledge. This is because teachers may alter or adjust PCK based on individual students’ features in order to better suit each students’ needs when explaining content knowledge to them.

A number of empirical studies have focused on investigating the characteristics of teacher knowledge among different groups of teachers aiming to find out how specific dimension of knowledge is manifested in

reality. For example, Zhao et al. (2016) examined six hundred and thirty in-service EFL teachers in China based on a survey to investigate their knowledge about teaching reading. Findings indicated participants' ability to teach language knowledge regarding phonemic awareness and morphemes. Furthermore, Moats' survey (1994) shows that teachers, including experienced teachers cannot distinguish phonetics, phonology and phonics or master basic language concepts well. This type of study focuses on how a specific detailed piece of knowledge, e.g. subject matter knowledge of language was acquired by language teachers.

The other type of empirical studies of knowledge focuses on investigating teachers' knowledge and its relation with students' achievement (e.g. Carlisle et al., 2009; McCutchen et al., 2013). For example, Piasta et al. (2009) reveals that teachers' knowledge about reading in terms of explicit decoding instruction can help students learn more in word reading. Such instruction includes activities such as breaking words into pronounceable syllables and sounding out word using phonic rules and so on.

Some researchers have examined Chinese EFL teachers' knowledge base. For example, Gong (2011) and Zou (2009) purport that Chinese EFL teachers lack subject matter knowledge and updated teaching pedagogy. Gao and Ma (2011) appeal for the necessity for promoting Chinese EFL teachers' language knowledge and instructional methods.

There have also been studies investigating how and why teacher knowledge changes and grows. Teachers' personal experiences and background, as shown in studies such as Verloop, Van Driel and Meijer (2001), can be an influencing factor which causes the formation or development of knowledge. There is also evidence showing that knowledge is not a static construct but can change through multiple approaches. For example, Turner (2009) shows that individual reflection and community participation can facilitate teacher knowledge growth. Similarly, Allas et al. (2017) also shows that oral and written reflections can serve the change in construction of

teacher's practical knowledge. Karimi and Norouzi's (2017) study suggest that novice L2 teacher update their knowledge through expert mentoring initiatives. In their study, four novice teachers and four experienced teachers were involved. It was found that four novice teachers' pedagogical knowledge base grew after receiving a mentoring program which included analysis of teacher performance, teacher observation and guidance by experienced teachers. The next section focuses on the application of teacher knowledge in higher education.

### ***Teacher knowledge in higher education***

Different from research conducted in school context that focuses on types of knowledge teachers need to acquire for better teaching quality, Robson (2005: 15) indicates that 'research into what teachers know (and might need to know) in the post-school phase is scare'. Teachers in higher education are required to both master 'specialist knowledge' and how to teach the knowledge to students (Robson, 2005: 14). This shows that the subject matter knowledge and pedagogy knowledge is important for teachers of post-school phase including university.

Instead of focusing on what types of knowledge teachers should be equipped with in higher education, researchers are focussing more on the 'practice of teaching and research into teaching and learning' (Robson, 2005: 15) in higher education. Researchers seem to show stronger interests in the evaluation of teacher knowledge and professional development programs to enhance teachers' knowledge in higher education. With regard to the studies related to the evaluations, Zvarych (2013) makes comparison of the evaluation of teacher pedagogical knowledge in higher institutions between Ukraine and USA. The study mainly shows results supporting such evaluation's benefits for teacher pedagogical competence enhancement and suggests that the evaluation should 'exercise not only by comparing the results obtained with the standards ... but also with previous diagnosis' for 'teachers' individual self-perfection' (Zvarych, 2013:1308). Except for teacher knowledge

evaluation, there are various studies on professional development strategies for knowledge enhancement in higher education. For example, attending courses or conferences are supposed to be good ways for teachers according to Becher (1996) who shows that teachers appreciate such mode since they have more time to think and reflect on their own teaching and learning. Hossain (2010) reveals the usefulness of open and distance learning mode for teacher knowledge development in Bangladesh and reports that teachers who ‘are unable to go to campus whether at home or abroad leaving their work and families behind’ (124) are enthusiastic and benefit much.

Although similar attention has been given to the specific types of knowledge as introduced in the foregoing section, importance has only been attached to the knowledge evaluation and development. Further, the majority of the studies have been conducted in Western context and few have been done to investigate how teachers view the importance of knowledge in Chinese higher education context. This present study will attempt to redress this imbalance and explore from a Chinese perspective. As Furlong et al. (2000: 5) point out, for teachers to apply knowledge, ‘they need the autonomy to make their own judgments’. The next section moves to explore teacher autonomy and its application in higher education.

### ***Teacher autonomy***

The word autonomy has its root from Greek stem ‘autos’ which means self and ‘nomos’ law and rule. Autonomy is by nature ‘self-rule’ which implies ‘the right for a person to determine freely the rules to which one submits oneself’ (Benson and Voller, 1997: 166).

Autonomy is defined differently in the research literature. For example, Little (1995: 179) considers it as the ‘capacity for autonomous teaching’. Thavenius (1999: 160) emphasizes teachers’ ability and willingness to help learners work on learning and developing autonomous and independent learning ability, i.e. learner autonomy. Since teachers are playing multiple roles in the educational institution, e.g. they are teachers, researchers and



learners at the same time. A teacher is not only an ‘instructor’ for students but also a teacher researcher and teacher learner. Hence teacher autonomy should be included in the teaching and learning process for those who ‘have the capacity for autonomous learning’ (Xu, 2007: 202). Huang and Benson (2007: 35) and Vieira (2008: 200) see teacher autonomy as more distinctively and explicitly defining two parts i.e. teacher-as-teacher autonomy and teacher-as-learner autonomy. Vieira (2008) considers not only the autonomy in teaching practice but also the constant learning of teaching as an important part of autonomy. McGrath (2000) views it as ‘self-directed professional development and Freedom (from control by others)’. Similarly, Smith (2003: 4) also includes the dimensions of self-directed professional development in the definition of autonomy from both the perspective of freedom from control and capacity.

Based on the aforementioned ways of defining autonomy, there appear to be two basic elements in understanding it (Nguyen and Walkinshaw, 2018). The first element is the professional freedom that is externally affected by the institutional structure (Benson, 2001; Pearson and Hall, 1993). The second element is the capacity of teachers to deal with the constraints and limits in the working institution to implement teaching practice (McGrath, 2000; Trebbi, 2008).

In order to distinguish from another key concept of this study, i.e. self-efficacy, which is associated with teachers’ capacity, it is necessary to clarify that self-efficacy refers more to the degree of belief of being able to do something with certain level of confidence (Bandura, 1997: 480). It focuses more on the belief of a teacher in one’s ability of doing. However, the concept of autonomy lays the emphasis on the extent to which teachers perceive that they should be able to make decisions within restrictions. The focus of autonomy is on the space that teachers perceive they could make use of in their work.

In addition, the perception of the professional space to make decisions is

different from the first element in understanding autonomy, i.e. professional freedom which is also related to the professional space that is externally restricted by institutions. The difference mainly lies in that this element of professional freedom indicates the professional space objectively given by the working context. In other words, this cannot be determined only by teachers themselves. The second element of capacity reflects the teachers' own judgement over how much they can utilize the given space to make decisions of their work. In other words, teachers make sense of the objectively given space and freedom in a particular context. This shows teachers' interpretation of the context. As proposed by the second element of autonomy, autonomy is about the capacity to deal with restrictions. In other words, autonomy is relevant to taking actions to cope with restrictions. Then, it is also necessary at this stage to distinguish autonomy from one more key concept of this study, i.e. teacher agency which focuses on the intended actions teachers take. To distinguish them, the second element of autonomy focuses more on the perception of how much teachers can do in response to restrictions rather than the actions teachers can take in reality. Moreover, in order to avoid overlapping and confusion in the key concepts of this study, I would like to point out at this juncture that the scope of working definition of autonomy in this study covers how much teachers perceive they could make use of the profession space, or cope with restrictions, to make decisions.

There have been considerable empirical studies on teachers' perceived autonomy in the teaching domain. However, there appear to be fewer studies in teachers' perceived autonomy in the research domain. Insufficient studies on teacher autonomy have been documented in the teacher-as-learner aspect as well. It is necessary to view teacher autonomy from multiple perspectives rather than solely from the teaching perspective in order to achieve a more holistic understanding of teacher autonomy. This is echoed by Smith (2003) who adds a dimension which is termed teacher-learner autonomy into teacher autonomy. This takes account of teachers' role as learner of their profession, in

which they are involved in ‘setting learning aims, designing course content, or assessing their own achievement’ (Ngyuen and Walkinshaw, 2018: 23). This resonates with Jimenez Raya and Vieira (2015). Meanwhile, more empirical studies have been done on teachers’ perceived autonomy in the western context. Nevertheless, it is not appropriate to ‘impose a western-orientated idea of autonomy on a non-western context’ (Ngyuen and Walkinshaw, 2018: 23) as autonomy may inevitably have its own manifestations in different cultural contexts. This study, based on a theoretical framework developed from consideration of western context, mainly examines how teachers perceive autonomy in their work from the perspectives of being a teacher, researcher and learner at the same time.

Based on the above consideration, a closer review of teacher autonomy in higher education is presented in the ensuing section.

### ***Teacher autonomy in higher education***

With respect to autonomy in the higher education context, previous research shows that rather than solely investigating individual teacher’s autonomy, researchers have been interested in investigating the relationship between institutional autonomy and individual autonomy. Dearlove (1997) concurs that higher educational institutions enjoy less autonomy when funding council takes over the authority of evaluating quality of teaching and researching. However, Hawkin (2000) argues that there is a trend of policy shift from centralization of government to decentralization, which means ‘power is delegated from the central to the subordinate levels of an organization’ (Wong, 2008: 267). This appears to have resulted in universities having gained more autonomy in decision-making. Having said that, Enders, De-Boer and Weyer (2013: 21), based on a case study conducted in the Dutch context, point out that the institutional autonomy is in line with ‘governmental goals and performance expectations’ and that government’s control is still in function. In this situation, institutions are given more autonomy to formulate their own policies without violating governmental goals, and such institutional

policies may directly influence individual teacher's autonomy (Hoyle and John, 1995). For example, Hoecht (2006) examines the quality management in UK higher education where the university management systems determine the 'reward and sanction' (547) while academics are struggling to meet the requirements. Many interviewees in his study felt that 'they were less trusted and more controlled than they had been in past' (Hoecht, 2006: 556). Dee et al. (2000: 212) show that teacher autonomy is restricted when teachers are not being able to 'determine the structure and processes of their work' in Taiwan. Nokkala and Bladh (2014: 17) show typical concern about the autonomy of research domain in Nordic context, revealing that decision of 'what kind of research to perform' is restricted by 'faculty boards and academic leaders and the governmental funding system' and that academics are not fully free to choose the research they are interested in.

Most of the studies reviewed above have been conducted from the perspective of institutional autonomy, investigating how autonomy is restricted by the government control and how it further influences individual teachers. Individual autonomy remains to be a less examined aspect. There exists a research gap in investigating from within the situation of individual autonomy and the restrictions teachers face and the conditions for enhancement. Thus, how individual teachers in higher education in China make sense of autonomy is worthy of investigation.

When teachers are given autonomy by their institution's governing body, 'it is essential that they act with responsibility' (Furlong et al., 2000: 5). The next section will unpack the meaning of teacher responsibility.

### ***Teacher responsibility***

Responsibility has been defined in the Oxford English Dictionary (OED) as 'the state or fact of being accountable or to blame for something'. Researchers have attached more emphasis on its nature of the personal aspect of motivation for an action (Cummings and Anton, 1994: 262). Meanwhile, responsibility has been conceptually related to accountability and many

researchers tend to view responsibility and accountability as interchangeable concepts. Among studies in higher educational context, it is understandable that researches would always link responsibility to the examination of accountability systems because teachers may not be able to develop their sense of responsibility based on their own wishes but are required to be responsible for what are required according to external accountability systems. Thus, rather than solely looking at what teachers believe they should be responsible, researchers lay more emphasis on how their responsibilities be determined by the accountability mechanism in higher education. For example, Martin (1996: 6) asserted that accountability in higher education in the UK was linked with 'quality assessments of research linked directed to funding' and 'external reviews of teaching quality'. Such accountability system is also examined in other countries. For example, Vidovich (2002) analysed the characteristics of quality assurance (QA) policy which is one of 'a suite of accountability mechanism' (391) in higher education context of Australia. Vidovich (2002) observes that the QA was seen as from 'managerial device' (393) of 'both the sector and individual institutions' (401) by the government in 1990s to a 'marketing device' (399) which dealt with 'marketing to student-customers, especially overseas' (401). Vidovich (2002) suggests that this function be the instrument of government control which is seen as 'steering at a distance' (402) and asserts the controls 'have not lessened but have changed form' (391). This finding presented the current situation which is not distinguished too much from previous time during which studies have been done by Marginson (1997) on power relations in higher education of Australia. As pointed out by Marginson, 'performance management and quality assessment have all been used to steer academic work' (63). This point of view is echoed by Kickert (1995) who has found similar evidence in Dutch higher education context that government serves as guiding controller on the higher education accountability management.

The accountability and responsibility, as Bracci (2009) point out, have

different perspective and meanings though they appear to be similar. Hence, it is essential to understand accountability and its differences from responsibility. Accountability mainly refers to imposed obligations externally to individuals, whereas responsibility refers to self-determined commitment. This means responsibility should lay more emphasis on the inner motive and willingness to commit obligations. However, can teachers be considered to be responsible if they have fulfilled the required accountabilities? The answer appears to be negative because, according to Solbrekke and Englund (2011: 854), accountability lays more emphasis on the ‘duty to account for one’s actions and concerns what is rendered to another’ while responsibility is weighted more in ‘obligation assumed by oneself, or bestowed upon a person to be used’. That is, it is not necessarily the case that the accomplishment of accountability equals to responsibility. It is possible that the accomplishment of accountability is the result from being forced or imposed by external forces rather than being driven by self-willingness or internal voluntariness. Indeed, people can be ascribed by any different duties required to fulfil. What teachers are accountable for may not be determined completely by teachers’ wishes but by the accountability mechanism and their agency to some extent. For example, teachers are required to fulfil the duties like what to teach, how to teach, what to research and other commitments in terms of ‘standards, outcomes and results that can be measured’ (Green, 2011: 85) based on the expectations of their organizations.

When assigned duties, whether teachers can take the responsibility for their obligations is not a must for all of them. This is echoed by Bracci (2009: 296) who states that being accountable does not equal to being responsible for ones’ actions and choices. He claimed that, compared with the accountability which is an external process, responsibility is more ‘an internal path’. For people who fulfil obligations, although such obligations may be imposed from above externally, it is not the external push that actually drives the commitment of obligations, but the internal intention that is triggered to fulfil

the obligations. Thus, responsibility is part of accountability which carries broader meanings (Schlenker et al., 1994). In other words, teachers with a sense of accountability may not necessarily hold internal willingness which features a sense of responsibility. On the other hand, teachers with a sense of responsibility would be accountable for the obligations they are required to fulfil. From this perspective, responsibility may be defined as ‘a sense of internal obligation and commitment’ (Lauermann and Karabenick, 2011) or similarly as ‘attributions to internal and presumably controllable causes’ of teacher actions (Lauermann and Karabenick, 2013: 14).

Based on such understanding, an approach, i.e. ‘internal versus external attributions’ has been found to be useful in understanding teacher responsibility (Lauermann and Karabenick, 2013: 14). For example, Guskey’s (1981) participating teachers were asked to evaluate students’ performance in examinations and analyse how the causes from internal or external attributions were linked to the degree of responsibility for learning. Similarly, Rose and Medway (1981) also investigated whether internal or external attributions were the major causes for two positive or negative classroom events. They share a common understanding of responsibility that it is the teacher’s internal attributions that cause actions, i.e. teachers taking actions because of their motives from within rather than imposed from outside. In other words, being responsible implies that no matter what teachers are told or required to do, they hold the feeling of ‘internal obligation to...implement actions’ (Lauermann and Karabenich, 2013: 14). The feeling is that one should do rather than have to do it. In short, it is them who want to do rather than be required to do. More specifically, Lenk (2018:627) identified six components of professional identity, i.e. ‘someone: the subject or bearer of responsibility (a persona or corporation) is responsible for: (something actions, consequences of actions, situations, tasks, etc), in view of: an addressee (object of responsibility), under supervision or judgement of: a judging or sanctioning instance, in relation to: a (prescriptive, normative) criterion of

attribution of accountability within: a specific realm of responsibility and action’.

It can be seen from the foregoing that teacher responsibility has been linked to positive viewpoint toward teaching (Halvoren, Lee and Andrade, 2009), positive effect toward teaching (Guskey, 1984), and student achievement (Lee and Smith, 1997). In addition, taking responsibility also entails that ‘being willing to accept blame after a failure or set back occurs, and involves a willingness to experience recrimination and negative affect’ (Sheldon et al., 2018: 64). Internal willingness to take the action, in spite of the positive or negative outcome it may produce, has been embedded in the meaning of responsibility. Thus, how teachers do and exercise agency can express and reflect the way they enact responsibility.

In other words, internal willingness is the key to understanding responsibility and meanwhile distinguishing it from accountability. Although responsibility differs from accountability, the institutional accountability systems and higher-level policies producing such mechanism indeed have played a role in influencing teachers’ responsibility. To date, less research has been done on the individual practitioners’ perception of such mechanism and how the mechanism influences their sense of responsibility. Among this type of research, Huisman and Currie (2004) have focused on the practitioners and reveal that ‘a little over a third’ (545) of respondents questioned the accountability mechanism in the university since they considered such mechanism reduced their motivation in research instead of enhancing it. Meanwhile, the relevant research literature shows that there is much more space left for researchers to conduct studies in different cultural contexts. This study aims to fill in this gap by focusing on how teachers cope with the accountability mechanisms and how they are influenced by these mechanisms to build their sense of responsibility in higher education in the Chinese cultural context. A review of studies on teacher responsibility in higher education is presented in the next section.



### ***Teacher responsibility in higher education***

Research on teacher responsibility in the higher education context is often linked to the examination of accountability systems in universities due to that teachers may not fully determine their responsibility based on their wishes but are required to perform according to accountability systems. Thus, rather than solely looking at what teachers believe they should be responsible for, researchers often place more focus on how teachers' responsibilities are determined by the accountability mechanism in higher education. For example, in the UK, Martin (1996: 6) asserts that accountability in higher education is linked with 'quality assessments of research' and 'external reviews of teaching quality'. In Australia, Vidovich (2002) analysed quality assurance (QA) policy which is one of 'a suite of accountability mechanism' (391) in higher education. Vidovich observes that QA functioned as the instrument of control from a 'managerial device' (Vidovich, 2002: 393) of 'both the sector and individual institutions' (401) by the government in 1990s to a 'marketing device' (399) which dealt with 'marketing to student-customers, especially overseas' after 2000 (401). In the Dutch system, Kickert (1995) observes that government performs the role of guiding controller for the higher education accountability management and critiques that less attention has been paid to the individual practitioners' perception of such mechanism and how the mechanisms enhance their sense of responsibility and ethical concerns. Influenced by the accountability management mechanisms, Huisman and Currie (2004) have drawn interests to the practitioners and reveal that 'a little over a third' (545) of respondents question the accountability mechanism in the university since they consider such mechanism as reducing their motivation in research instead of enhancing it. Current research literature shows that there is still much space left for researchers to conduct studies in higher education context within multiple countries in different cultural contexts. This study aims to further the understanding of how individual teachers cope with the mechanisms and how teachers construct their sense of

responsibility in Chinese higher education context under the influence of the mechanisms. In order to understand how the responsibility is formed and developed, the next section explores the possible factors that contribute to shaping teacher professionalism.

#### **2.2.4 Factors influencing teacher professionalism**

There are various factors influencing teacher professionalism. For example, policies, structure, agency, culture of the country, and other factors that we may not even know at present. Nevertheless, there is some research showing evidence of possible influences. This section will mainly introduce how personal biography, performative policy and culture influence teachers.

##### ***Influence of personal biography***

Personal factors have been thought to be influential in teacher professionalism in literature. For example, Koster and Berg (2014) explored teachers' self-understanding through writing personal biography and reflection. Their findings suggested that teachers' previous experiences had impact on how they understood the teaching profession. For instance, one teacher recalled his previous teachers' influence on him. He had shifted from de-motivation in learning to potential stimulation with the help of 'his mentor in teaching education institute' (93). This positive experience inspired him to become a teacher with 'educational motives' updated. What he gained from his mentor was crucial for his later professional development.

Gender and professionalism also attracted the interest of researchers such as Dillabough (1999) and Rodriguez (2014). Dillabough (1999) examined the 'role of gender in shaping teacher professionalism' and 'the exploitation of women teachers' labours' (373). Maguire (2002) also stated that female teachers were found to contribute more time and energy to professional service than male teachers did. Murrey (2006) found that female teachers were 'struggling to (re)produce their professional practices in the setting of modern

diverse universities' (392). Similarly, Reay (2001: 163) claimed that 'new forms of femininity' were suggested to 'broaden the possibility of gender'. Weiner (2000: 244) noted the feminist challenges in the teaching profession and suggested a feminist perspective to be embedded in teacher education. Moreover, in Yumarnantos' (2017) study, the research respondent Ratna exemplified that 'her roots in teaching can be traced back several generations'. Her ancestors 'who were teachers influence her choice and understanding of teaching profession'.

Thus, personal biography, including gender, educational experiences and family background has impact on teachers' understanding of professionalism. In addition to these, the institution where teachers work also plays an influencing role in professionalism construction. This will be reviewed in the next section.

### ***Performative policy influence***

The tendency of widely used decentralization by central government can be observed in the 'institutional devolution and site-based management' (Ball, 2003: 219). This would result in a competition in which institutions would like to make themselves 'stand out and improve' (Ball, 2003: 219). With such goals, institutional managers start to set performing criteria for teachers. This is the major characteristic of performativity, which plays an important role in institutional management. Performativity, as Ball (2003: 216) defines, is a 'technology, a culture and mode of regulation that employs judgments, comparisons and displays as means of incentive, control, attrition and change based on rewards and sanctions (both material and symbolic)'. Teachers are expected to perform according to the institutional regulation. Therefore, their performances 'serve as measures of productivity or output, or displays of 'quality', or 'moments' of promotion or inspection' (Ball, 2003: 216) and teachers' performance is examined or evaluated based on a regular frequency by institutional inspectors.

In higher education, performativity mechanism is commonly used as

reference for staff to consider ‘promotion, tenure, (and) dismissal’ (Casey et al., 1997: 465). In western literature, the performative policies in higher educational institutions are seen as ‘instruments of new forms of governance and power...that are designed to engender amongst academic staff new norms of conduct and professional behaviour’ (Shore and Wright, 1999:557). Thus, teachers in higher educational institutions have to behave and fulfil commitments under the monitoring of the performative system and be evaluated according to a benchmark. There are mainly three categories of commitments for university teachers, namely teaching, researching and public service. Zia’s (1998) study in a Pakistan higher education institution illustrates that within teaching responsibility, teachers are expected to ‘use appropriate teaching techniques...giving feedback to students’ (117) and so on. As to researching responsibility, teachers are assessed by amount of research outcome such as ‘number of publications’ (118) and so on. Additionally, teachers are required to fulfil other related activities like ‘contribution to departmental activities...extra-curricular activities’ (120). Reviewing the literature examining performative policy's influences, we can find both negative and positive voices claiming impacts on teacher professionalism.

As regards negative influences, due to the imposing accountability and teachers’ limited choices of alternatives, perhaps the most visible restriction performativity has on professionalism lies in the dimension of autonomy (Seddon, 1997; Adcroft and Willis, 2005). As Lo (2012: 15) argues, ‘dealing with the demands for accountability and the force of performance measures indicates the erosion of professional autonomy in their work’. Working in an institution characterised by performativity, teachers are required to perform according to what to do and even how to do. In this sense, they may not have enough autonomy to choose what to do, so their autonomy is threatened.

Without, or with a little, autonomy to perform according to personal interests, teachers may become de-motivated. Ball (2008: 52) argues that performativity ‘works most powerfully when it is inside our heads and our

souls' and 'when our moral sense of ourselves and our desires' are in line with what we are expected to do. In this respect, de-motivated teachers may not put the imposed duties inside their mind and may therefore fail to perform with enough ethical willingness. Consequently, this may result in lower sense of responsibility. In Arthur's (2009) research, he investigated teachers' response to the student evaluation which is an instrument for 'quality assurance systems and performance management' (442). He found that although a few positive evaluation recipients got benefit for the 'boost' of 'morale' (448), more teachers' with negative feedback had an 'adverse effect' on 'motivation' (448). As Lo (2012: 16) mentions that teachers 'actions rely as much on emotions as on intelligence and it was the motivation and will that trigger their action. Therefore, it is reasonable to argue that those de-motivated teachers may become less passionate and responsible for their work. As a result, those teachers may just perform for the purpose of meeting minimal requirements and perform according to students' preferences without considering whether such expected performance is ethically reasonable or not. Additionally, Blackmore (2009: 861) states that 'when quality assurance is management-led, it quickly becomes a part of the process of responsabilization of the workforce'. However, teachers' sense of responsibility becomes relatively weaker when they cope with the imposed accountability and requirement.

However, a coin has two sides. Performative policies also have gained proponents due to its purpose of ensuring quality in higher education. Teachers may still benefit from performativity which stimulates teachers to achieve more qualified and effective work. Teachers cannot tolerate and even feel guilty when they failed to do so. (Ball, 2008: 51). Teachers may make use of the system for personal development in knowledge, sense of responsibility and so on. For instance, Middlehurst and Campbell (2001: 12) point out that 'quality assurance' is essential for teachers' professional professionalism. It is useful to build 'institutional reputation or brand in a competitive local and global arena...' and that practitioners' professional development cannot be

executed without quality assurance. Because of the connection between performative policy and rewards, teachers may utilise the system to compete for better performance to achieve rewards and promotions when they meet the expected requirements (De Bruijin, 2002). In this sense, teachers may be put into a competitive working environment where constant self-learning and development are implicitly necessary for better performance.

Current literature suggests that the majority of research on performativity has been conducted in the Western context. The performative policies are not universal in all countries and how policies are formulated is influenced by differing cultural traditions and values in different countries. Moreover, cultural features may also determine to what extent the performative policies influence, negatively or positively, teachers' sense of professionalism. There has been relatively weaker research base on how the performative policy is characterised in the context of Chinese higher education and how the Chinese culture influences teachers' responses to the policies. These are the issues the present study will investigate and attempt to address.

### ***Cultural influences***

The cultural influences on teachers represent another factor to be examined. Culture refers to 'the collective programming of the mind which distinguishes the members of one group or category of people from another' (Hofstede, 2001: 9). Although culture is 'never written down', it is a 'precondition for group survival' and 'no group can escape' (Hofstede et al., 2010: 12) from culture. According to Hofstede (2001; 2010), culture can be divided into five dimensions, i.e. power distance, uncertainty avoidance, individualism and collectivism, masculinity and femininity, and long-versus short-term orientation. People from different nations present different characteristics of these cultural dimensions. Their behaviour and performance are guided by different cultural norms. Since the present research will be conducted through a qualitative study of a Chinese university, this section will introduce some Chinese cultural characteristics and their influences on

Chinese teachers.

As regards the dimension of power distance, power is defined as ‘the potential to determine or direct (to a certain extent) the behaviour of another person or other persons more so than the other way round’ (Mulder, 1977: 90). Power distance is regarded as a means for measuring the influence brought by different power between superior and ‘subordinate’ (Hofstede, 2001: 83). In a country where power distance appears to be low, the subordinates are more likely to ‘disagree with superiors’, whereas in a country with high power distance, subordinates rarely show disagreement with superiors (Khastar et al., 2011: 321). Based on investigations into 76 countries and regions by Hofstede in 2010, China gains a high power distance index value of 80 and ranks at 12-14. Drawing on the features of high power distance, people in Chinese context may rely more on superiors and comply with superiors’ decisions and may be less likely to disagree with superiors. Indeed, Chinese people possess an agreed view that ‘the stability of society is based on unequal relationships between people’ where ‘junior partner owes the senior respect and obedience’ (Hofstede, 2001: 354). In addition, there is a ‘highly refined status-consciousness’ and ‘bureaucratic administrative mentality’ (Smith, 1988: 433-434) implicitly embedded in Chinese culture. These result in that Chinese people may show more respects and obedience to the ones with higher status or with more experiences. More specifically, as shown in Razak et al.’s (2010: 198) study of cultural influences on teacher commitment, Chinese teachers appear to accept and implement ‘a hierarchical structure and an inequality of power distribution’ in educational settings’ and to ‘respect... authority’ more. Similarly, Xing (2014) reveals that senior teachers who are elder or have longer working experiences are considered to deserve more respects from junior teachers and their opinions weigh more heavily.

In addition to the dimension of power distance, Triandis (1990) emphasises that the differences between individualism and collectivism determine to a great extent the nature of a culture. China is a country with

collectivism embedded in its culture. Evidence can be found from Hofstede's (2010: 97) data on individualism index value in which China gained a considerably low score of 20 and a ranking of 58-63 among 76 countries. This shows that China is a country with a typical cultural feature of collectivism. Collectivism refers to 'the subordination of individual goals to the goals of the collective, and a sense of harmony, interdependence, and concern for others' (Hui and Triandis, 1986: 244-245). Collectivism depends more on 'shame than on guilt and reflects moral considerations' and collectivists see 'duty, politeness, conformity to in-group authorities' as important issues (Triandis, 1990: 59). In other words, people in this culture will feel shameless if they do not fulfil the duties or do not comply with the authority within their group or community to achieve harmony (King and Bond, 1985: 30), so the face protection remains top priority (Hofstede, 2001: 235) in Chinese culture. Face is defined as 'a projected image of one's self in a relational situation' (Ting-Toomey, 1988: 215). People from collectivist cultures tend to show more concerns on saving others' face in order to show respect, politeness and appreciations towards others (Ting-Toomey et al., 1991). Hence, in collectivist culture, 'confrontations and conflicts should be avoided' in order not to 'hurt anyone' (Hofstede, 2001: 235). For example, in Hue's (2008) study, teachers in Hong Kong share their views that it is necessary to be aware of students' individual characteristics and needs during teaching so that everyone's needs could be satisfied to a better extent (Hue, 2008: 307) and no one would feel frustrated or losing face.

With respect to the dimension of long- and short-term orientation, in Hofstede's study (2010: 255) of the 93 countries and regions, China demonstrates a considerably high score (87) and ranked at four in terms of the long-term orientation index value. It shows that China is greatly influenced by the Confucian tradition. Indeed, China, with a history of more than 5000 years, is greatly influenced by Confucianism that was developed by 'the greatest Chinese philosopher, Confucius' (Huang and Gove, 2012: 10). For instance,



the Confucian tradition's great emphasis on 'teacher professional ethics' (Peng et al., 2014: 79) is embedded in Chinese culture. There is a 'moral suasion over codified law as the primary means of maintaining social order and harmony' (Smith, 1988: 433). This shows Chinese awareness and concern on the importance of ethics. For example, the promotion of teacher professional ethics has been included in the recent educational developmental plan by Chinese Ministry of Education. MOE had issued in January 2018 the document regarding 'Comprehensively Deepening the Construction and Reform of the Teaching Staff in the New Era' in which teachers' moral conduct and ethics were laid special emphasis. This importance has been noticed by many researchers in China, such as Gu (2011) and Jin (2010), supporting the importance of professional ethics for teachers to be role models for students and claiming that all teachers should draw attention to their ethical development.

Another Confucian tradition is that a 'deep reverence for education' (Gao, 2008: 155) is embedded in the collectivist Chinese culture. Chinese people's strong desire for pursuing better performance and success (Huang and Gove, 2012: 11) results in great concern for the quality of education and high expectation for teachers. Hence, teachers are imposed 'high cultural expectations' (Gao, 2008: 156) by parents, society and the public to demonstrate high quality in terms of knowledge, responsibility and ethics. For example, they are expected to be knowledgeable experts in their discipline (Cheng, 2002; Gao, 2008). A teacher is seen as the one who is 'imparting knowledge and resolving doubts' (Hui, 2005: 20) and the one who helps students solve problems (Hue, 2008: 309). He/She is also expected to possess high moral quality and be responsible for not only delivering knowledge to students but also cultivating moral quality of students (Boyle, 2000). For example, Hue (2008) argues that in addition to the knowledge development of student, the more important responsibility for teacher is to 'empower their inner self, awaken their moral awareness' (308). All these expectations are

implicitly influencing teachers to be more knowledgeable, responsible and ethical in China.

In this respect, Chinese culture with its own unique characteristics will inevitably influence Chinese teachers. The above discussions have demonstrated some examples of cultural influences on Chinese teachers in terms of knowledge, ethics, responsibility and sense of autonomy. However, there appears to be relatively little research literature describing how culture influences teachers and their sense of professionalism in general. Such literature is even scarcer as far as the context of Chinese higher education is concerned. Thus, this study aims to fill in this gap and attempts to uncover in depth how Chinese culture influences university teachers' sense of professionalism.

Teacher professionalism is the major focus of this study. Meanwhile, another concept, i. e. teachers' professional identity frequently emerges in the studies of professionalism. There appears to be a paucity of research explicitly examining how the two concepts are related to each other, whether they are the same or distinguish from each other, or whether they belong or interact with each other. Further studies are clearly warranted to answer these questions. In order to have a more nuanced understanding of professionalism, the present study takes into account the meaning of professional identity with the purpose of exploring how professional identity is related to professionalism and how it contributes to a better understanding of teacher professionalism. Before that, it is necessary to review the concept of professional identity.

#### **2.2.5 Necessity of linking professionalism and identity**

Professionalism and identity appear to be two highly relevant concepts in studies focusing on either or both of them (e.g. Day, 2002; Edwards and Nuttall, 2014; Pupala, Kascak and Tesar, 2016; Brindley, 2015). For instance,

Hendelman and Byszewski (2014) examined professionalism of students, faculty and administrative staff. In their article, they discussed the lapse of influence on students' professional identity formation and emphasized the importance of improving learning environment for faculty professionalism development. Colmer (2017) studied the collaborative professional learning as a helpful approach to both professional identity and professionalism development. Particularly, he argued that implementing a mandated curriculum framework could enhance both educators' identity and professionalism

In these studies, professional identity and professionalism were never separated, but little had been explicitly explored to establish the boundary between the two. In other words, less had been studied on the relationship between the two concepts. To be more specific, studies such as Tran and Nguyen (2015: 958) who aimed to being 're-imaging teachers' identity and professionalism in international education' mainly reviewed dimensions of professional identity and presented findings on the teacher as the 'intercultural learner' (964) and 'adaptive agent' (968). Although both identity and professionalism were included in the discussion of the positioning of teachers in homeland contexts, the two concepts were less clearly differentiated. In Nielsen's (2016) exploration of professional identity of second career teachers, the review was centred on professionalism rather than identity, and the findings mainly reported teachers' views on professionalism. His discussion later moved to focus on the identity transformation, recognition and misrecognition in the field of teaching.

Although professionalism and identity had both been touched on in current studies, the similarities and differences between them were still less discussed. The above review does not mean that researchers muddled up identity and professionalism, but that they did not specifically focus on exploring the relationship between them. Indeed, a limited number of studies touched upon this area. For instance, Edmond and Hayler (2013) examined

the teachers' professionalism from the perspectives of identity as teacher assistants and teacher educators. In their study, professional identity was used as an examining angle to study professionalism. It is through studying how teachers see themselves that teachers' understanding of professionalism in that particular identity can be revealed. Unlike Edmond and Hayler (2013), Barnhoorn et al. (2018) built up a multi-level professionalism framework including identity-based perspective to guide the remediation of unprofessional behaviour. They considered that the framework could encourage reflections on all important influences on professionalism including identity. Hence, they perceived identity as one of the influences of professionalism. No matter what sort of relationship the research literature has identified to exist between professionalism and identity, at least, the research literature has indicated that it is helpful to take both of them into consideration in studies of either of them. Thus, when it comes to this study, for the purpose of understanding teacher professionalism in a more comprehensive way, professional identity will also be examined to enrich the meaning of professionalism. Meanwhile, given the relatively limited understanding of relation between professionalism and identity, the researcher of this study has also been inspired to explore the possible linkage between them, for example, whether one is part of the other, and the possible relations between dimensions of professionalism and identity. The understanding of relation can be helpful in making sense of professionalism. In order to achieve this goal, the review of literature regarding professional identity is also essential. The next section will be devoted to this.

### **2.3 Introduction to professional identity**

Professional identity has gained widespread attention of researchers in the field of education since the 1990s. It has played an important role in studies examining professionalism. People attached meanings to themselves

and others also attributed different understandings upon them (Beijaard, 1995) and the process of making sense of the meanings determines professional identity, i.e. who or what someone is. Mockler (2011) suggests identity is about ‘who am I in this context?’ Identity at the same time determines and is determined by how one makes sense of himself in a particular context (Olsen, 2014). Referring to Beijaard et al. (2004) who reviewed twenty two studies on professional identity in teaching from 1998 to 2000, the concept of professional identity is defined differently or not defined clearly at all. Beijaard et al. summarized three types of studies in this field, i.e. studies focusing on teachers’ professional identity formation, studies focusing on the characteristics of teachers’ professional identity, and studies investigating professional identity through narrative stories.

Since identity has been defined differently or not clearly defined, it is necessary to grasp the common essence among different understandings of identity to build up a theoretical foundation. Professional identity is commonly viewed as an answer to ‘who am I at this moment?’ (Beijaard et al., 2004: 108). It is ‘not something one has, but something that develops during one’s whole life’ (Beijaard et al., 2004). Role indeed becomes a useful factor in understanding identity because researchers have placed emphasis on teachers’ roles to unpack the meaning of professional identity. Park (1950: 249) calls our attention to that ‘everyone is always and everywhere, more or less consciously, playing a role’. Similarly, Kogan (2000: 210, cited in Clark et al., 2013: 9) asserts that people perform roles which are ‘determined by the communities and institutions’ where they serve. Hence, it is in these roles that people know themselves. In other words, every person is playing a role or multiple roles in reality which allows them to make sense of ‘who they are’ if we are to explore a person’s identity. This is echoed by Goodson and Cole (1994) and Volkmann and Anderson (1998) in which professional identity has been defined as teachers’ perceptions over their roles. Such sense and perceptions are demonstrated in how they ‘explain, justify and make sense of

themselves' in the particular role they are performing (Maclure, 1993, cited in Hao, 2011: 5). Similarly, Preuss and Hofsass (1991) do not explicitly define professional identity but see it as similar to roles. Beijaard et al. (2004: 123) continue to add that 'identity is not something teachers have, but something they use in order to make sense of themselves as teachers' and that it is the 'way they explain and justify' the meanings of roles they play that expresses their professional identity. That is to say, identity is manifested and understood through how individuals fulfil their internalized roles (Wah Tan, 1997). It is from fulfilling/performing particular roles that the teacher's professional identity has been derived. What needs clarifying is that it is not solely the roles that individuals play matter, but more importantly, the meanings people attach to themselves in playing the roles and the meanings attributed by others define identity as well.

In reality, there are more than one role a person needs to play, Moore and Hofman (1988) define professional identity as the degree one negotiates and find harmonious balance during his multiple roles. It is in the negotiating and balancing among different roles and making sense of the combined roles that the professional identity is created.

Empirical studies on professional identity have been largely presented in how it is manifested in different roles. The illustration of the different roles teachers take is not limited to the description of the role they play solely, but more about the meaning teachers attach to each particular role. On this basis, the meaning attached to each role challenges 'the core of teacher professional identity' (Berger and Van, 2019:164).

Komba (2013) reveals three major categories of identity among participating teachers, i.e. primarily a teacher, a researcher and a consultant. The process that teachers experience themselves through participating corresponding activities helps 'reconcile various forms of identity into one' (Komba, 2013:199). Beijaard, Verloop, and Vermunt (2000) analysed the professional identity of teachers through how they see themselves as 'a

subject matter expert', 'a pedagogical expert' and 'a didactic expert' and how they negotiate the three sub-identities. The process of negotiation appears to be an on-going one rather a fixed one.

### **2.3.1 Professional identity as an on-going process**

Professional identity is neither a fixed attribute and nor a stable entity of a person (Coldron and Smith, 1999). According to Gee (2000), it can be understood as an on-going process within which a person is making sense of himself in particular contexts (Day et al., 2007). The self-interpretation of oneself in a given context (Kerby, 1991; Day, 1999; Beijaard et al. 2004) is an on-going process rather than 'a stable entity' (Clarke et al, 2013: 8). The process of making sense of 'who they are' takes place in the process of negotiation with the context. It is the 'interaction between teachers' personal biography and institutional culture (Hao, 2011). That is to say, 'professional identity implies both person and context' (Beijaard et al., 2004: 122). This interacting process is 'transactive' rather than 'linear' so that 'teacher identity is continually being informed, formed, and reformed' in the individual teachers' professional development process overtime (Cooper and Olson, 1996: 80). Peel (2005: 496) puts forward that the interaction between personal and professional aspect shapes considerably the development of 'sense of self'. More specifically, in Attia's (2014:11) study, the participating teachers' prior impressively 'positive and negative experiences' as a learner have impact on their in real teaching method. In addition, the influence from significant others and 'wider social connections' (12), 'beliefs constructed early in life' and experiences in educational phases (12) shaping teachers' identity. In the same vein, in Kreber's (2010) study, departmental factors were found to be influential in shaping teacher identity, such as teacher Jim who described the necessity to 'publish in certain journals for research assessment exercise purpose' (182), while teacher Tom complained that too much 'teaching-related

tasks' (182) constrained the time for research. However, teacher Ellen who worked for longest time found herself more confident to make a change and request for more freedom. Except factors in department, the relationship with learners such as 'feedback from students or colleague' (184) is also influential in defining how teachers see themselves as a professional.

In the course of making sense of who they are, teachers are making 'a complex and dynamic equilibrium' seeking for balance among various roles (Volkman and Anderson, 1998 cited in Beijaard et al., 2004: 113). Because of making sense of a variety of roles they are expected to play, the different roles teachers play evoke multi-identities which are more or less in harmony (Mishler, 1999). Others' expectation for a person and how much the person allows others' views to influence him affect the formation of identity (Reynolds, 1996). Based on each individual teacher's distinctive experiences and histories, the sense of identity as a teacher will be influenced by 'what surrounds' him, 'what others expect from' him, and what they 'allow' to influence him (Clarke et al., 2013: 10). Tickle (2000) observes that professional identity is influenced by both external expectations for what teachers should do and teachers' own expectations for themselves based on their prior experiences and educational background. When the sub-identities are in conflict with each other, the more solid and stronger a sub-identity is, the more dominant and unchanged it remains to be. When they work in a collaborative way for each other, sub-identities may exist in a harmonious or supportive manner or an opposite way. However, although teachers are assigned different roles by their working institutions, the institutional demand cannot completely determine the professional identity teachers develop. That is because how much willingness teachers have to accept playing the assigned roles and how to make sense of the role is mainly decided by themselves and the interaction with the context. As Brooke (1994, cited in Beijaard et al., 2004: 120) asserts, professional identity is the combination of 'being a professional who is partially defined by the profession and partially defined



by the teacher him/herself through interaction with it’.

Studies on professional identity in Chinese contexts are limited (Hao, 2011). Most of the research done by Chinese researchers has focused on reviewing foreign studies of professional identity (e.g. Wei and Shan, 2005). Limited empirical studies have been done but have been mainly confined to investigating the identity characteristics at present situation (e.g. Wei and Shan, 2005, Wei, 2008). Insufficient research has been done to explore the complex identity formation process and the negotiation between individual and the contextual factors. For example, Gu (2007) and Liu (2011) have conducted studies in FL educational context, investigating the teachers’ professional identity formation in the language learning and teaching experience. The next section continues to unpack the understanding of professional identity through relative components, i.e. agency and sense of self-efficacy. Before reviewing the meanings of these components, the following section illustrates why these are relevant components of professional identity and how they can help understand professional identity.

### **2.3.2 Components of professional identity**

As illustrated above, the concept of professional identity is a complex construct (Block, 2007) and it is hard to directly state the exact meaning of it. In order to have a more specific understanding of how teachers make sense of the different roles they are performing, it is necessary to unpack professional identity into components which reflect how teachers see themselves in playing different roles. Such components can also be seen as the embodiment of professional identity.

Among research that aims to explore professional identity, there often emerges the concept of self-efficacy. Indeed identity and self-efficacy can predict each other. Identity is an abstract concept which has been defined by a number of related concepts, such as efficacy belief (Lamote and Engels, 2010)

because self-efficacy can influence identity. Similarly, Rozati (2017) argues that a ‘significant positive association between EFL teachers’ professional identity and their teaching efficacy’ exists in the sense that they can predict each other. Thus, we can unpack the meaning of identity through the lens of self-efficacy. Eren and Rakıcıoğlu-Söylemez (2017) studied 128 pre-service teachers to investigate the mediating role of efficacy played in the realisation of professional goal. They suggest that efficacy beliefs of being capable in success should encourage teachers to maintain the professional construction of being effective teachers even when they receive negative feedback. Thus, efficacy can help reinforce or consolidate the strength of identity as a teacher. Hence, the present study will argue for that self-efficacy can be an embodiment which is associated with the meaning of professional identity of participants. Thus, in order to have a better understanding of teachers’ professional identity, this study will take self-efficacy as an analytical lens through which teachers’ professional identity can be examined more closely.

In addition to the perceived self-efficacy, another component involving professional identity is teacher agency. This is because after reviewing studies of professional identity, agency is found to be ‘connected to the nature of professional identity’ (Vähäsantanen, 2015: 3). Tran and Nguyen (2015:960) claim that one way to ‘make teacher identity visible’ is ‘through displaying one’s agency in practicing ones’ choice for actions among different possibilities’. As earlier mentioned, teachers may be balancing multiple sub-identities, some of which can be conflicting and some in harmony. This view is echoed by Lampert (1985: 178) who considers ‘teacher as dilemma manager’ who can negotiate the conflict he/she is engaged in. The way teachers deal with it requires actions and taking actions are considered as the ‘representative’ of the teacher and ‘indicative’ of who a teacher considers him/her to be (Volkman and Anderson, 1998: 295). Dilemmas, by their nature, are not a constant presence. Thus, action taking can reveal teachers’ identity. As one participant in Lampert’s study (1985: 183) put it, ‘by holding

conflicting parts of myself together, I find ways to manage the conflict in my work'. Taking actions intentionally is the key feature of teacher agency. Therefore, it is reasonable to state that agency is a crucial part of professional identity (Beijaard et al., 2004: 122). This can be further confirmed by Eteläpelto et al. (2013) who assert that the teachers' exercise of agency is linked to professional identity because the professional identity 'implies' (Eteläpelto et al., 2015: 664) agency. That is because although sociocultural conditions can shape professional identities and renegotiation of identity, it is the actions (how teachers exercise agency) that result in the 'transformations and maintenance' of identity (Eteläpelto et al., 2015: 664; Akkerman and Meijer, 2011; Ruohotie-Lyhty, 2013). Thus, it is vital to 'elaborate professional agency if one is to understand... professional identities' (Vähäsantanen, 2015: 3). Beijaard et al. (2005) resonate that in changing educational context, professional agency features the formation and development of professional identity. When social and institutional structure change (such as policy change or curriculum reform), teachers are designated by an expected identity, whether such expected one can be concurring with existing one will cause the re-negotiation of identity (Billett, 2006). And the professional agency in response to the changes may differ individually and the manifestation of agency indicates choice of identity after being re-negotiated. In other words, there are different manifestations of agency in the process of identity formation and re-negotiation. Vähäsantanen et al. (2009) reveal that when teachers' existing identity concurs with the expected identity, existing agency is reinforced and such agency may differ individually.

In order to unpack the meaning of professional identity through the above-mentioned two components, i.e. teachers' perceived self-efficacy and teacher agency, the following section will illustrate each of them in more detail.

### ***Teachers' perceived self-efficacy***

Self-efficacy is a concept grounded in Bandura's social cognitive theory

(1978, 1986, and 1997). Perceived self-efficacy refers to 'beliefs in one's capabilities to organize and execute the courses of action required producing given attainments' (Bandura, 1997: 3). Put simply, perceived self-efficacy is 'the confidence teachers hold' in their ability to teach and influence students academically (Klassen et al., 2011: 21). Teachers' efficacy is 'difficult to assess with certainty' (Hebert, Lee and Williamson, 1998: 224). The meaning of teacher efficacy could be understood as 'a numerical level of confidence' (Wheatley, 2005: 749). This reflects that the concept of efficacy could be illustrated in 'individualistic language' (Wheatley, 2005: 753).

What needs clarifying is that the belief and confidence are within teachers' own capacities rather than their actual performance (Tschannen-Moran and Woolfolk Hoy, 2001). It is possible that teachers' efficacy may 'underestimate, overestimate or reflect actual teaching outcome' (Wheatley, 2005: 749). Perceived self-efficacy is 'not a measure of the skills one has but a belief about what one can do under different situations with whatever possessed skills' (Bandura, 1997: 37). It is interpreted as '*can do*' rather than '*will do*' because *can* is 'a judgment' of ability while *will* is a 'statement of intention' (Bandura, 1997: 43). Based on the individual's perceived self-efficacy, correspondingly, collective efficacy is 'a group's shared belief in its conjoint capabilities to organize and execute courses of action required to produce given levels of attainment' (Bandura, 1997: 477). The individual teachers' belief about capacity may influence the strength of collective efficacy of teachers as a whole group. On the other hand, when individual self-efficacy is negatively affected by the challenges and failures, it may be 'ameliorated by beliefs in their colleagues' collective capacity' (Klassen et al., 2011: 23).

Two dimensions of self-efficacy have been identified by Bandura (1997), i.e. outcome expectancy and personal efficacy. Outcome expectancy focuses on the particular outcomes that certain actions may produce and it is a 'judgement of the likely consequence' that ones' actions could cause (Bandura,

1997: 3). On the other hand, personal efficacy is ‘a belief about the level of competence in a given circumstance’ (Settlage et al., 2009: 104).

There are multiple influencing factors shaping the self-efficacy. Mastery experience has been a major focus among researchers who investigate the sources of self-efficacy. Mastery experiences which may influence self-efficacy are diverse and complex and such complexity indicates that it is better to investigate how mastery experience could raise or lower self-efficacy from a qualitative perspective (Morris and Usher, 2011: 233). Morris and Usher (2011) found that teachers’ past successful experiences, the mastery of content and pedagogical skills were the sources of mastery experience that influence self-efficacy. Meanwhile, mastery experience plays a significant role in influencing self-efficacy formation because it provides the first hand experience which can guide one to succeed. The sense of efficacy requires experience in successfully dealing with challenges with self-efforts. ‘Difficulties provide opportunities to learn how to turn failures into success by honing one’s capabilities to exercise better control over events’ (Bandura, 1997: 80). In the process of working out ways to overcome toughness by themselves, self-efficacy becomes stronger and abler.

The direct mastery experience can indicate not only self-efficacy but also the vicarious experience when people observe from models. Such observations ‘abound during one’s own learning experience and in the media’ (Morris and Usher, 2011: 233). Usher and Pajares (2009) point out that it is difficult to measure vicarious experience and the influence on self-efficacy. Studies conducted by Knoblauch and Woolfolk (2008) show that students who observed and learned from self-efficacious teachers found themselves to be more confident than before. Thus, researchers, such as Bruce and Ross (2008) regard learning from competent models as a useful way to enhance self-efficacy. One participant in Morris and Usher’s (2011: 239) study viewed his/her father as ‘coping model persevering the face of setbacks and failures’. People learn from and imitate the model example of others’ success through

observing successful examples of others. The feeling of confidence about themselves becomes stronger accordingly with the belief that 'if others can, they too have the capabilities' to improve their performance (Bandura, 1997: 87).

Social persuasion is the third source that influences self-efficacy. It refers to the 'evaluative message instructors receive from others affect their perceived capability' (Morris and Usher, 2011: 233). Gardner (1997: 149-152) points out that when people deal with negative experience, they did not focus too much on the 'bright side of a setback as the learning opportunity' and that it requires ones' ability to gain 'meaning-and even uplift - in an apparently negative experience'.

The fourth factor influencing self-efficacy is the affective states. This seems to be a weaker influencing resource than the other three to change self-efficacy (Poulou, 2007). Still, some studies have investigated such influence (e.g. Mulholland and Wallance, 2001). Ross and Bruce's (2007) study found, when they minimized the stress in managing classes, that there was no significant influence on self-efficacy in either teaching strategies or managing students.

However, among studies investigating perceived self-efficacy, Tschannen-Moran and Hoy (2001) acknowledge that little is known about how these resources operate practice. More recently, Henson (2002) notes that research exploring the sources of teaching self-efficacy is 'practically non-existent' (142). Klassen, Tze, Betts and Gordon (2011:29) shows that only 8.7% of 218 from 1998-2009 of efficacy study are in nature of qualitative study. Hence, the present study will aim to look into teachers' perceived self-efficacy and the sources influencing it by adopting a qualitative approach.

### ***Teachers' professional agency***

Although there have been a large number of studies of professional identity that have touched on the analysis of the agency, there is a scarcity of research on using professional agency as an approach to understand

professional identity. This study, explicitly taking the perspective of teachers' professional agency, aims to advance the understanding of the meaning of professional identity.

In this section, the two key elements in understanding teachers' professional agency have been discussed, namely actions and intentions, based on the review of multi-definitions of researchers. The influencing factors shaping professional agency from the intertwining of personal and sociocultural resources and constraints have also been discussed. Moreover, the diversified nature of the manifestation of individual agency in different contexts has been introduced. Finally, empirical studies of various forms of agency and their relevance to professional identity have been presented. The ensuing section will provide a more detailed look at teachers' professional agency.

### ***Theoretical perspectives of professional agency***

The individualists view the agency as agents that can act according to their desire free from social cultural context (see Giddens, 1984; Ahearn, 2001). Taking a social-cultural approach, researchers define agency as 'embedded across social circumstances' (Vähäsantanen, 2015: 3; see also Kayi-Aydar, 2015; Lipponen and Kumpulainen, 2011). Both the individualistic view of agency, which considers agents as 'context-free' to act intentionally, and the social deterministic view, which emphasizes agency in the aspect of being controlled by 'social cultural structures', have received criticism from researchers (e.g. Priestley et al, 2012). Currently, more researchers tend to integrate the above two perspectives and highlight the interaction of personal resources and social contexts (e.g. Biesta and Tedder, 2007; Archer, 2003). Such integration of the two perspectives is termed 'subject-centred social-cultural approach' (Vähäsantanen, 2015: 3). It suggests the need to take into account the contributions of both individual and social culture to influencing professional agency.

The integration of individual and socio-cultural perspectives of agency

provides a theoretical basis for this study which investigates different forms of agency of individuals in a situated context. Although this study examines agency more from individual teacher's perspectives, the important influences from social-cultural restrictions and resources will also be acknowledged. Adopting this combined theoretical perspective, it is necessary to provide an operational definition of teacher agency to be used in this study. This will be the focus of the next section.

### ***Defining professional agency***

The concept of agency has been extensively theorized. For example, according to Giddens (1984), agency is considered as an intentional action with consequences. He states that agency 'refers to doing' (10) actions which can cause different results (Giddens, 1984: 14). The realisation of these actions depends on actors' intentions and capacity to make a difference. An actor with intention 'knows, or believes, will have a particular outcome', and uses whatever he or she could to achieve the intended goal (Eteläpelto et al., 2013: 49) before carrying out the actions in reality. Those intended actions aim to make a change to the current situation with which the actors might not be satisfied. The condition is that actors should also have the capacity to mobilize whatever available to achieve the intended outcome. In this respect, only when people have both the intentions for changing something and the capacity to enable the actions can they be considered as practicing agency. In the similar vein, Bandura (1997: 3) claims that agency refers to 'acts done intentionally'.

Despite multiple versions of the definitions, two basic elements or attributes that constitute agency have emerged. Firstly, agency is about taking actions rather than possessing something. Robinson (2012: 232) regards agency as 'about taking action (even if the action is passive)'. The nature of doing in understanding agency can be revealed in making choices that tend to 'change or maintain routines' (Robinson, 2012: 233) and making use of teachers' capacity to 'take action' (Charteris and Smardon, 2015: 116) to



realise their intentions.

The next is that human actions in exercising agency should be intentional actions (Ketelaar et al., 2012; Priestley et al., 2012). Giddens (1984) clarifies that the intentional acts mean that one knows that such actions can cause a particular outcome. Verberg et al. (2016: 535) explain that the intention of making things happen is ‘opposed to simply letting them happen’. This means teachers with intentions are able to ‘take initiative’ (Day et al., 2007: 111) to realise their aims. The intended outcome is of aiming to influence their work and make a difference. Similarly, such intention is usually for making ‘a significant difference’ (Toom et al., 2015: 615). As noted by Hilferty (2008: 167), agents are taking actions for the purpose to ‘actively and purposefully direct their own working lives within structurally determined limits’.

In order to take the intended actions to achieve intended purposes, there are also two necessary conditions. Firstly, it is about capacities. People need to have the capability for doing the actions that they intend to. Dovemark (2010) and Lasky (2005) also emphasize that the agentic teacher should be able to have the ability to act under their intentions. In addition, they also need to have the power to execute such actions and make a difference. Similarly, Bandura (1997: 3) notes that ‘the power to originate actions’ to achieve an expected goal is a key feature of agency.

Thus, professional agency is not a construct which can be determined completely by personal but also contextual suggestions. This suggests that the factors shaping professional agency are derived from both individual and contextual aspects. The next section focuses on the factors influencing the formation of professional agency.

### ***Factors shaping professional agency***

Both personal and contextual factors can shape and influence teachers’ agency. Contextual factors can be exemplified by social conventions and values, policy in institutions and so on (Dovemark, 2010). The agency view of Priestley et al. (2012: 197) emphasizes the ‘contextual conditions’ from where

agents are situated. In the same vein, Lasky (2005: 900) argues that agency is ‘mediated’ by the ‘interaction’ between individual and the social surroundings, but there is more. Thus, human beings cannot be absolutely ‘autonomous agents’ nor be completely ‘controlled’ by external factors (Ray, 2009: 116).

Thus, it is not difficult to understand that the social, cultural and individual level resources and restrictions may differ in different situations and the degree of interplay of the two may differ as well. Hence, in different structured contexts, it is possible to find the same teachers vary in their forms of agency in response to the changing negotiation social contexts. The forms and manifestations of professional agency may differ among different individual teachers and even within same teacher in different situations. Meanwhile, along with the changing contextual suggestions and personal resources, the manifestations of professional agency may ‘remain stable or change over time’ (Vähäsantanen, 2015: 1) accordingly.

A body of empirical studies has been conducted to explore teachers’ professional agency and identity in different contexts. The interplay between contextual and personal factors is highlighted as important in shaping professional identity. For example, Hökkä et al. (2012) studied eight university teacher educators and their findings suggest that participants have strong sense of agency in the construction of teacher identity but weak one in researcher-identity. In Vähäsantanen’s (2015: 5) study, he identified ‘different manifestations of professional agency’, varying from ‘weak’ to ‘strong’ agency in ‘influence on one’s work’ and ‘reserved’ to ‘progressive’ agency during ‘involvement with the reform’. Eteläpelto et al. (2015) investigated thirteen novice teachers through open-ended interviews in Finnish schools to examine their perceptions of professional agency during initial years of their work. Eleven participants reported the nature of agency in the classroom context to be strong. However, four interviewees reported that the discrepancy between theory and practice prohibited them to apply theories learned in pre-service teacher education. They decided to exercise agency in terms of

adopting the traditional instruction modes. That implied the renegotiation of professional identity when they found the ideal theoretical understanding of teaching was not practical. Lai et al.'s (2016) research examined fourteen Chinese language teachers who varied in professional agency regarding professional learning in cross-cultural teaching context. 'Critical and balancing' agency regarding learning teaching pedagogy and 'unreserved and adaptation' agency as to interacting with students were identified. All these were claimed to be shaped by 'social suggestions and personal particularities' (20). Meanwhile, the teacher's self-identification as 'disciplinary experts' (20) was manifested in the agency of 'persisting with traditional Chinese pedagogic practices' such as adopting exam-focused approach.

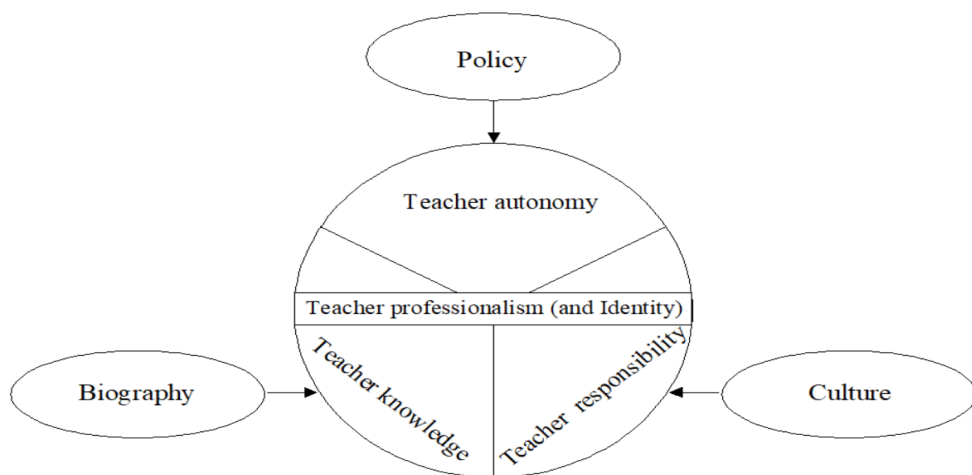
### **2.3.3 Relation between perceived self-efficacy and agency**

Teachers' perceived self-efficacy and agency do not exist in isolation. Perceived self-efficacy is a 'major determinant of intention and efficacy beliefs affect performance both directly and by influencing intention' (Bandura, 1997: 43). Based on Bandura's theory, Cantrell, Young and Moore (2003: 177) maintain that 'roots' of human agency is the 'sense of self-efficacy'. The strength of teacher's self-efficacy can indicate teacher action in future (Bandura, 1997). Not only can the efficacy beliefs influence intention, they can also influence 'the action people choose to pursue, how much effort to put forth in given endeavours, how long they will persevere in the face of obstacles and failures' (Bandura, 1997: 3). For example, a study done by Cantrell et al. (2003: 177) found that teachers with higher level of self-efficacy are more likely to devote greater energy to achieve goals, 'persist longer in the face of adversity, and rebound from temporary setbacks'. Therefore, sense of self-efficacy serves to be crucially influential of human agency. Indeed, when teachers 'believe they have no power to produce results, they will not attempt to make things happen' (Bandura, 1997: 3).

Based on the above literature review, it is worthwhile to examine how the concept of teacher professionalism and its dimensions apply to the teachers in the Chinese university context to be investigated in this study. Meanwhile, it would be of great interest to find out whether there are any characteristics among the participating teachers in their construction of professionalism, how the concept of professional identity is connected to the formation and development of professionalism, and how such connection can enhance the understanding of teacher professionalism in the investigated context.

Based on the review of literature on teacher professionalism and professional identity in this chapter, a tentative framework is proposed which serves to guide the research design of this study (see Figure 1). The proposed framework presents the concepts of professionalism, its components, tentative relation between professionalism and influencing factors.

**Figure 1: A tentative framework of teacher professionalism and influencing factors**



In Figure 1, the concept of teacher professionalism is centralized since it is the major research focus of this study. Its three major components, i.e. teacher knowledge, teacher autonomy and teacher responsibility are positioned within the realm of professionalism. Currently, they occupy equal weighting owing to the importance of the three in constituting professionalism as demonstrated in the research literature. The feature of the components and the relationship among them will be further explored in this study.

Around the circle which represents teacher professionalism, multi-factors which may have influence on the construction of professionalism are suggested. They may include institutional policy, social culture values, personal history and professional identity.

Since the concept of identity, as shown in the review of literature, is highly relevant to professionalism, it has also been included in the tentative framework. What is more, since the relation between professionalism and identity has been less explicitly discussed in literature, the framework currently places identity close to professionalism, indicating its relevance and meanwhile leaving space for this study to explore more about their relation.

Self-efficacy and agency, being the relevant components of professional identity, are embedded in the concept of identity though they are not shown directly in the figure.

The detailed exploration is conducted of how and to what extent each factor may influence teachers' understanding and behaviour. The tentative framework not only provides theoretical basis for the study but also opens up more possibilities for updating the current conceptualization based on the findings of the study. In the light of the framework, the next section illustrates how the present study is methodologically designed and carried out.

## CHAPTER THREE

### RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

#### 3.1 Introduction

This chapter presents how this study was conducted methodologically. It begins with the unpacking of the philosophical underpinnings, followed by the introduction of the selected method and specific instruments used. The chapter then described in detail how the data were collected. Finally, researcher's role and means to ensure trustworthiness as well as the ethical issues were discussed.

#### 3.2 Philosophical underpinnings

##### 3.2.1 Ontology

Ontology refers to our views on 'the nature of the phenomena, or entities, or social reality' (Mason, 2002: 14). In other words, it is about our views on 'what constitutes the social world and how we can go about studying it' (Barbour, 2014: 35). People may have different ontological perspectives on the constitution of the social reality. Some people may consider the reality to be made up of 'objects, things, rules' while others may think that 'understandings, perceptions, experiences' (Mason, 2002: 15) constitute the reality. The key issue of ontology is whether people view the social reality as objective entities which exist independently and are external to social actors or as entities that are 'built up from perceptions and actions of social actors' (Bryman, 2012: 32). In this research, I adopt the view that the reality is constructed and reinforced by the social actors' perceptions, understandings, experiences and feelings partly because I believe that different teachers have

different sense of professionalism and partly because this study aims to explore teachers' different understandings, experiences and changes. This ontological stance directly leads to my epistemological perspective.

### **3.2.2 Epistemology**

Epistemology refers to the views on 'what might represent knowledge or evidence of the entities or social reality' (Mason, 2002: 16) and the concerns on 'the principles and rules by which you decide whether and how social phenomena can be known and how knowledge can be demonstrated' (Mason, 2002: 13). My ontological stance leads to the adoption of the constructivist epistemological perspective which asserts that 'knowledge is viewed as indeterminate' and 'social phenomena and their meanings are continually being accomplished by social actors' (Bryman, 2008: 19). This perspective allows me to understand the knowledge of teachers' sense of professionalism through investigating how the contextual and cultural factors shape and change their sense of professionalism. Having discussed ontological and epistemological perspectives, I now consider the choice of paradigm.

### **3.2.3 Paradigm**

Guba and Lincoln (1998) established four categories of paradigms, i.e. positivism, post-positivism, critical theory and constructivism. Barbour (2014) highlighted three paradigms, namely positivism, interpretivism and critical paradigm. Cohen et al. (2011), on the other hand, suggested classifying paradigm into two major groups, i.e. positivism and interpretivism/anti-positivism. The positivism paradigm adopts the ontological perspective that there is an independently existing reality and makes the ontological assumption that there is 'a set of firm, unquestionable and indisputable truth' (Mark, 2010: 7) waiting for researchers to discover. Positivists prefer to do research through large amount of data in quantitative

methods. They aim to uncover universal theories for human behaviours that ‘formulate laws, thus yielding a basis for prediction and generalization’ (Scotland, 2012: 10).

However, unlike positivists, interpretivists do not view the social reality as facts to be uncovered. But Interpretivism allows researchers to understand the world through how people interact with social contexts in different ways (Morrison, 2012). Thus, this implies that the meaning of a particular phenomenon or event can be understood through participants’ eyes (Cohen et al., 2007). Interpretivism also allows researchers to examine how participants interact with social structures to make sense of the world. Meanwhile, the social contexts are changing rather than static in interpretivists’ views. Thus, they are also interested in understanding such changes and the outcomes of the changes.

As regards this study, in order to explore the complexity of how Chinese university teacher professionalism from the individual participating teachers’ perspective, including their perceptions, practices and the influencing factors shapes their thinking and behaviours. It is more appropriate to adopt the interpretivist paradigm which paves the way for a qualitative nature of this research.

### **3.3 Qualitative research**

Since the interpretivist paradigm can ‘understand, explain and demystify social reality through the eyes of’ different participants (Cohen et al., 2007: 19), the choice of interpretivist paradigm leads to the choice of qualitative study. The specific reasons for adopting the qualitative approach with interpretivist paradigm for the present study are as follows: Firstly, the present study aims to examine the perception and enactment of professionalism in a Chinese university context. It focuses on exploring in-depth individual participant’s understanding and behaviour rather than generating patterns



across Chinese teachers nor predicting causal relations between factors and outcomes. Thus, the quantitative research with positivism paradigm does not fit the research purpose because it is mainly for ‘seeking of causal determination, prediction and generalization of findings’ (Hoepfl, 1997: 2). Instead, qualitative research with interpretivist paradigm which aims to explore a ‘wide array of dimensions of social world, including the texture and weave of everyday life, the understandings, experiences and imaginings’ of participants (Mason, 2002: 11) can help researchers to examine the ‘richness, complexity’ of the investigated phenomenon (Cohen et al., 2011).

Furthermore, because qualitative study allows researchers to ‘study things in their natural settings..., make sense of, or interpret phenomena in terms of the meanings of people bring to them’ (Denzin and Lincoln, 2011: 3), the context-based data can assist researchers to investigate the participants’ behaviours and feelings in relation to real situations. In this study, I am able to select participants from a particular context and ‘contact with people in settings where subjects normally spend their time’ such as ‘classroom... teachers’ lounges’ (Bogdan and Biklen, 2007: 2), office and working department and so on. Qualitative data collected in this way can assist me to examine how the factors in teachers’ real situations interplay with each other and influence their feelings and sense of professionalism. This is in line with interpretivists who focus on the exploration of the complexity of a phenomenon in natural settings, especially how the phenomenon is influenced by multiple possible factors. Thus, the qualitative data collected in this way were then used to assist me in this study to examine how factors in the teachers’ real situations interplay with each other and influence their feelings and sense of professionalism.

### **3.4 Research design**

As Kvale (2007: 1) mentioned, ‘if you want to know how people

understand their world and lives, why not talk with them? Conversation is a basic mode of human interaction' because it is through conversations that we 'get to learn about their experiences, feelings and hopes and the world they live in.' Interview is an appropriate research method for those who are interested in 'understanding the lived experience of other people and the meaning they make of that experience' (Seidman, 2006: 9).

My choice of interview has taken into consideration the present study's purpose, i.e. 'understanding depth and complexity in say, people's situated or contextual accounts and experiences' (Mason, 2002: 65) of professionalism. The interview helped me in this study to gain 'concrete examples supporting' (Kvale, 2007: 44) for their claims on the sense of professionalism whereas a close-ended questionnaire could not achieve.

The qualitative interviews were conducted to investigate the participants' understanding and experiences of how factors influence their sense of professionalism. This is because the interview is considered particularly suitable for 'studying people's understanding of the meanings in their lived world, describing their experiences and self-understanding, clarifying and elaborating their own perspective on their lived world' (Kvale, 2007: 46).

As for the interview mode, semi-structured face-to-face interview was adopted. A structured interview is similar to 'a questionnaire and tends to be made up of closed questions' (Coleman, 2012: 252), so it may not be able to help the researcher gain detailed examples and explanations for the questions. Meanwhile, it is imperative that 'interviewees should be given more freedom in and control of the interview situation than is permitted with structured approaches' (Mason, 2002: 66) because if the interviewer 'controls the content too rigidly', interviewees may fail to 'tell his or her story personally in his or her own words' (Bogdan and Biklen, 2007: 104).

Mason (2002: 62) holds that 'no research interview can be completely lacking in some form of structure'. Semi-structured interviews, which contains 'a few major questions, with sub-questions and possible follow-up

questions', often represent a good choice so that interviewers can 'use prompts, offering the respondent a range of choices for their response' (Coleman, 2012: 252). Both individual and focus group face-to-face interviews have the advantage of allowing interviewers to 'observe visual clues' and 'body language which might indicate comfort or discomfort' (Coleman, 2012: 254). Hence, semi-structured face-to-face interviews were considered best suited for this study and were adopted in the data collection process. The interviews were conducted with some major structured questions, which worked as guidelines to avoid losing directions during the interview.

Three rounds of semi-structure interviews were conducted. The first two rounds aimed to explore the perception and enactment of professionalism at two different time periods, i.e. present and past. More specifically, the first round of interview collected data from interviewing the participants, focusing on teachers' sense of professionalism at current stage of their working career. The second round of interview was conducted to collect data from interviewing the participants, focusing on teachers' sense of professionalism at the beginning of their working career. In order to understand how teachers' sense of professionalism changes overtime, it was necessary to investigate both their sense now and in the past. The fifteen interviews with the participants in this phase focused on how they perceived the sense of professionalism when they started their career in a university. This required them to recall and activate their memory of past experiences. The focus was on eliciting the information about how they perceived professionalism and how factors influence them at the beginning of their careers.

The third round of interview collected data from interviewing the participants, focusing on changes in their sense of professionalism during their working career. In this round, interviews were conducted, focusing on detecting any significant changes in the working process. During the process, it might be hard for participants to think of every single significant or small change. Thus, they were asked to recall the critical incidents that they felt had

significantly contributed to making a change happen. A critical incident usually ‘comes from history where it refers to some event or situation which marked a significant turning point or change in the life of a person... or in some social phenomenon’ (Tripp, 1993: 24). The critical incident technique was developed during World War Two as an outgrowth of the Aviation Psychology Program of the US Air Force for selecting and classifying aircrews (Flanagan, 1954, cited in Shapira-Lishchinsky, 2011: 649). Then the technique became a widely used qualitative research method in diverse disciplines, including education and teaching (Le Mare and Sohbat, 2002; Tirri and Koro-Ljungberg, 2002). For example, in a research carried out by Angelides (2001), participants were invited to share the critical incidents which carried significance and special meanings that a teacher made sense of and felt attached to.

### **3.5 Selection of sites and participants**

This section illustrates how the site, i.e. a higher educational institution and the participants, i.e. teachers working in that institution were selected.

#### **3.5.1 Selection of site**

In this study, J University (also referred to as ‘the University’) was selected as the research site. J University is located in an inland province in the southern part of China. It is situated in a non-capital middle-sized city of the province and has more than 2000 teachers and 30000 students. Since Chinese universities are divided into key and ordinary ones, J University is a Science and Technology University which belongs to one of the 876 ordinary universities. The university was founded in 1958, with a history slightly longer than 60 years. This history enables J University to experience almost all the educational reforms and administrative style shifts that have taken place in Mainland China. J University is directly under the administration of

Ministry of Education of China and receives financial supports directly from the government. Although J University recruits students from all over the country and offers programmes in multi-disciplines of both science and arts, it has a strong focus on sciences, being a university upgraded from a metallurgic institute' which could reveal its scientific focus and nature of the institution. The University has enjoyed good reputation and is the largest in the local city.

Although the majority of the students are non-English majors, English courses have been compulsory and essential in J University, like all the other universities in Mainland China. In J University, undergraduate students across all majors are required to learn English for two years. All teachers of English are under the aegis of the English department in the University.

Since it is relatively rare to study a group of English teachers based in a science-oriented university, it is meaningful to conduct the study in this type of university. In addition, being one of the staff members in the English department of this university, I have established good relationship with my colleagues, which enables me to gain easier access to the resources in the university. As pointed out by Stake (1995: 4), both 'time and access for fieldwork are almost always limited', so we need to select participants which are 'easy to get to and hospitable to our inquiry'. The next section introduces the selection of participants at different levels.

### **3.5.2 Selection of participants**

In order to select participants who could better provide information to answer research questions, several criteria were set for the selection of participants. The first criterion was the year of teaching experience. Drawing on research literature, Day et al. (2007) identified that school teachers with one to three years of experience were in the first phase of professional lives focusing on 'survival and discovery', teachers with four to seven years of experience were in the phase of 'stabilization', and teachers with eight to

eighteen years saw ‘new changes’ and could have ‘new concerns’. Thus, teachers in different phases would provide different understanding of professionalism. Although the exact time division of years may or may not exactly apply in the investigated context, years of working experience was indeed an important criterion to be taken into account in selecting the participants for this study. In addition, teachers’ personal biographical differences such as gender, age, previous learning/working experiences, professional ranking could be potential factors influencing their insights into professionalism. Thus, taking into account all these possible factors, I decided to select the participants who could maximize the diversity of the above-mentioned factors.

Hence, I purposively selected the participants according to their working experiences, i.e. early, middle and late career phases. Teachers at later career phase normally have longer working years, relatively more teaching and/or researching experiences, relatively higher professional rankings and more experiences in policy changes. Teachers at different career phases, however, may differ from educational experiences. In addition, all the teachers, especially the more experienced teachers at later career phase may have experienced a process of sense changes of professionalism from the day they started career to the present. The other personal biographical differences, such as age, gender, educational background, family and professional ranking were also taken into consideration. With all these factors being considered, fifteen participants were selected.

The fifteen participants were randomly assigned a pseudonym in the table according to the Book of Chinese Family names composed by Mingqing Wang in Chinese Song Dynasty. This helps minimize the possibility that others may recognize them through any hints of their names or part of their names.

The details of these participants are shown in Table 3.5.2.

**Table 3.5.2: Selected participants' information**

No	Participants	Gender	Years of working experience	Age	Educational background	Professional ranking
1	HUA	Female	3	27	MA	Lecturer
2	SHEN	Male	3	28	MA	Lecturer
3	HAN	Female	5	31	MA	Lecturer
4	WU	Female	6	32	MA	Lecturer
5	WEI	Female	8	36	MA	Lecturer
6	ZHU	Female	11	38	MA	Lecturer
7	YANG	Female	14	39	MA	Associate professor
8	KONG	Male	15	42	BA	Lecturer
9	SUN	Male	17	44	MA	Associate professor
10	QIAN	Male	19	47	MA	Professor
11	CAO	Female	21	48	BA	Lecturer
12	JIANG	Male	22	49	MA	Associate professor
13	ZHOU	Female	26	50	BA	Associate professor
14	ZHENG	Female	27	52	BA	Associate professor
15	FENG	Female	29	54	BA	Associate professor

### **3.5.3 Gaining access to and establishing contact with the participants**

Thanks to the previously established rapport with English department of J University, I had got support from both the university and the English department after discussions with them. The head of the English department provided me a complete list of teachers in the English department who might be willing to participate in the study. I then narrowed down the possible range of participants by excluding those who were on medical leave or study leave and looked for those who could meet the selection criteria. I then approached the teachers who met my selection criteria and recruited twenty of them on

voluntary basis. Four of them were invited to participate in the pilot study. One withdrew due to work transfer. As a result, fifteen were included as the participants in the formal study interviews. Modern technology (e.g. smart phone, QQ and WeChat which are popular social network communicating software platforms in China) allowed me to establish and maintain contact with these participants. The interviews were conducted successfully at the time slots most convenient for the participants.

### **3.6 Researcher's roles**

Value-free research is hard to achieve (Johnson and Onwuegbuzie, 2004), especially for qualitative research which is particularly value-laden (Cohen, 2011). How much a research can be value-free is influenced by the researcher's personal background and his or her role in the research (Postholm and Madsen, 2006).

In this study, I played two types of roles, i.e. both an insider and an outsider. Firstly, as one of the staff members working in the investigated university's English department for almost eight years, I could be considered as an insider. There are both advantages and disadvantages for being an insider. The advantage mainly lies in the fact that the working experience in the university helped me to better understand the context of both the university and the department as well as the lives of teachers working there. Being an insider also allowed me to gain an easier access to both the workplace and the potential participants with the help of the already established relationship. Thus, this lessened the possibility of my finding and working with less cooperative participants.

However, there are also disadvantages. The familiarity of the context and the participants might result in subjectivity when interpreting the data. Thus, in order to reduce the bias and subjectivity, I also played another role, i.e. as an outsider. Having to play two roles, during the data collection and analysis



processes, I kept reminding myself not to interrupt the participants' voice that came from their own perception and feelings and not to ask them leading questions which might reflect my own view. Moreover, during data transcribing and translating periods, I invited the participants to double check whether their real meanings were captured in the data.

With both advantages and disadvantages considered, my roles were well performed, which helped me successfully complete the study. Maintaining objectivity and trustworthiness is no easy matter. To ensure the objectivity of data collection and analysis in the present study, I had to frequently put myself in an outsider's position, which also served to increase the trustworthiness of the study.

### **3.7 Data collection**

This section describes how the interview questions were designed, how they were tested in the pilot study, and how they were implemented in the formal interviews.

#### **3.7.1 Developing interview questions**

Interview questions (see Appendices C, D and E) were designed in order to answer research questions. Thus, the principle to design interview questions in this study was guided by the literature review on research questions, but was open to new possibilities of emerging issues. The interview questions were designed to be used for three rounds of interviews with different focuses for each round to better tackle the characteristics of teacher professionalism in the investigated context and to detect changes and actors that contribute to the formation of such changes.

The first round of interview focused on the participants' understanding of teacher professionalism at the present stage of their working career. The second round aimed to recall their understanding of professionalism when

they started working in the university. Finally, the third round of interview aimed to capture the major changes throughout their working career.

Interview questions were developed based on the theoretical framework (see Figure 1) which identified the nature of professionalism. According to the theoretical framework, professionalism consists of three essential elements, namely knowledge, autonomy and responsibility. Thus, in this study which focuses on exploring participants' sense of professionalism and change, it is necessary and reasonable to tackle each specific dimensions of professionalism. Accordingly, questions were designed in relation to the three elements. During the interviews, participants were asked to share their own understanding of knowledge, autonomy and responsibility freely.

For all the three rounds of interviews, the questions were related to teacher professionalism, more specifically, the dimensions of professionalism, i.e. teacher knowledge, autonomy and responsibility which play an important role in professionalism. For instance, in the first round of interview, general questions such as 'What do you think a teacher needs to know for teaching?' were asked to allow the participants to generate information that they considered to be important. If they could not provide such information, more specific questions regarding specific types of knowledge such as Shulman's (1986) seven categories of knowledge structure were asked to prompt them. These would include questions like 'What do you know about the subject you are teaching?', 'In what way do you teach?' and so on. Afterwards, questions regarding factors which shaped their understanding of professional knowledge were asked to generate information about 'Why's'. In order to allow the participants to share more naturally their understanding and the rationale behind it, questions relating to the factors were immediately explored when they uttered their perceptions and views. Similarly, regarding exploring participants' perception of professional autonomy, general questions like 'In what aspects do you think you are given rights to make decisions over your work?' were asked. More specific questions were asked to prompt them in

case they were unable to answer such questions. With the similar effect, for the dimension of professional responsibility, general questions like ‘In what aspect, do you feel you need to be responsible for’ and more detailed questions like ‘Who do you think you need to be responsible for?’ can produce. Since research literature shows that the three dimensions of professionalism does not exist in isolation, the last part of the designed questions were designed to tackle the relations among those three dimensions.

As already mentioned earlier, the second round of interview aimed to record the teacher professionalism at the initial stage of the participants’ working career. Thus, participants were asked questions similar to those that had been asked in the first round, but this time the focus was on the past. Hence, during the interviews, I kept reminding the participants to provide information about what had happened in the past.

Unlike the first two rounds, the third round of interview aimed to detect changes in teacher professionalism development and the relevant factors. Questions were therefore asked to elicit information about whether there were changes in any of the dimensions of professionalism. If there existed any changes, questions focusing on what the changes were, how the changes happened and why they happened were immediately asked.

The rationale for why the interview was designed to be implemented in three rounds is as follows. Firstly, this not only allows me to obtain richer information from all the fifteen participants but also to have more opportunities to establish rapport with and better understand the participants after interviewing them for three rounds. Secondly, the time gap between each two rounds of interviews could allow me to initially analyse and make sense of the issues that had emerged in the first round as well as the problems that remained unclear which would be worthy of further exploration or clarification in the next round of interview. This kind of design could guide me to properly and gradually finetune the next round of interview to better fit the research purpose. Thus, with the help of this approach, the collected

information could be richer and more comprehensive than that collected from single-round interviews or multi-round interviews without any time gap between. With the interview questions being discussed in detail, I now move on to describe the pilot study.

### **3.7.2 Pilot study**

A pilot study was conducted before the formal interviews were implemented. The purpose was to test whether and to what extent the research instrument and design could work to achieve the expected research purposes. Four participants from the English department of J University were recruited to participate in this pilot study. They were two male teachers with Bachelor's degrees and fourteen and twenty years of working experience respectively, one female teacher with Master's degree and five years of working experience, and another female teacher with Bachelor's degree and twenty nine years of working experience. All three rounds of interviews were piloted. In general, during the pilot study, the four participants responded well to the three semi-structured interview questions. The pilot study was successful in confirming the research design. Meanwhile, the pilot study yielded some useful findings and insights that would illuminate the formal interviews. Firstly, the participants could naturally articulate their understanding of professionalism and the factors that influenced their understanding. So it was in the process of sharing understanding of professionalism that the influencing factors were revealed. Secondly, the participants tended to talk about their working lives from the perspectives of both teaching and research. Thus it was found necessary to integrate the questions about teaching and research into the same round of interview. The original questions tended to ask about the concepts like knowledge through unpacking its meaning into a more easily understood manner assuming that the participants may have difficulty in understanding the concept. The participants in the pilot study tended to

automatically utter ‘knowledge’ and ‘responsibility’ by themselves with a proper understanding of the concept. Hence, it is suitable for me to use both the terms ‘knowledge’ and ‘responsibility’ in the formal interviews.

One problem was detected in the pilot study. The respondents seemed to have difficulty recalling what had happened when they started their working career in the first round of interviews, especially so for those who have relatively longer years of working experience. Based on this observation, when conducting the formal interviews, I shifted the focus of the first round of interview to investigating teacher professionalism at the current working period. This allowed the respondents some time to recall their experience in the earlier phase of their career, which would be further explored in the second round of interview. This modification was found to be effective during the formal interviews.

### **3.7.3 Formal Data collection**

With the interview questions revised and refined after the pilot study, the fieldwork was ready to start. I firstly worked out the available time slots which were most convenient for the participants. . In addition, a comfortable and quite place was prepared for the interview to allow face-to-face individual communications. Technical support, including two audio recorders and some field note taking materials, were carefully prepared. The fieldwork was scheduled as shown in Table 3.7.3.

**Table 3.7.3: Scheduled timetable for fieldwork**

No.	Participant	1 <sup>st</sup> round	2 <sup>nd</sup> round	3 <sup>rd</sup> round
1	QIAN	19 August 2015	20 January 2016	23 July 2016
2	SUN	20 August 2015	18 January 2016	17 July 2016
3	ZHOU	21 August 2015	24 December 2015	8 July 2016
4	WU	24 August 2015	30 December 2015	14 July 2016
5	ZHENG	26 August 2015	28 December 2015	8 July 2016
6	FENG	27 August 2015	31 December 2015	13 July 2016
7	ZHU	29 August 2015	17 January 2016	20 July 2016
8	WEI	2 September 2015	11 January 2016	29 July 2016
9	JIANG	4 September 2015	16 January 2016	9 July 2016
10	SHEN	7 September 2015	7 January 2016	12 July 2016
11	HAN	10 September 2015	23 December 2015	7 July 2016
12	YANG	14 September 2015	14 January 2016	10 July 2016
13	KONG	15 September 2015	13 January 2016	30 July 2016
14	CAO	18 September 2015	4 January 2016	Cancelled due to breast cancer
15	HUA	20 September 2015	19 January 2016	11 July 2016

Each participant was invited to attend three rounds of individual interviews. Each round of the interview lasted for approximately one and half to two hours. All the interviews were conducted in a face-to-face manner. In addition, the university provided me with temporary access to an empty office for the interviews. The office was located in the university administration building. It was quiet and equipped with air conditioning, desks, sofas and a drinking water purifier. The comfortable environment was helpful for conducting interviews in a relaxing atmosphere without disturbance.

### 3.8 Data analysis

The audio-recorded interview data were processed in two steps, i.e.

transcribing and coding. Transcribing was done immediately after each round of individual interviews. The issues emerged in one round of interview were taken into consideration in the next round of interview, either for further checking or raising new questions. This means that transcribing and data analysis were not done in isolation. Instead, data analysis was started at the beginning of the interview and carried out alongside the interview process.

Furthermore, after all the interviews were completed and transcribed, I conducted a careful review of the transcripts for the purpose of getting more familiar with the information. Meanwhile, the transcripts were shown to the individual participants for verification to ensure the accuracy of what they meant during the interviews. Based on the literature review and the research questions formulated for this study, a short list of initial codes was predetermined. However, the analysis was not confined by these codes, more diversity and rich codes were expected to emerge. It was through reading and re-reading of the typed transcripts, both codes regarding predetermined and new issues were emerged. In other words, the study was both guided by the research questions and open to new possibilities that the codes were identified. Working under this principle, codes such as ‘technology-assisted teaching’; ‘English language knowledge delivery’ and ‘academic writing quality improvement’ were emerged.

When there were no more new codes emerging, codes with similar meanings were merged and developed into higher-level categories which carried richer and broader meaning (Lodico, Spaulding and Voegtler, 2006). For example, categories like ‘the way participants conduct research’ and ‘sense of responsibility for students’ were identified.

The next step was to translate the categorized themes into English. Instead of translating all the transcripts, the part which contained major patterns and themes were translated. After the translation, a fluent speaker of Chinese and English was invited to cross-check the language expression and ensure the translation conveys the accurate meaning of the interviewees. The

process of data analysis was conducted in a cyclical rather than linear way. It involved interpretation, re-interpretation and modification of the themes.

Taking how the themes regarding participants' 'perception over autonomy in teaching' were developed as an example to illustrate the data analysis process. Data analysis was conducted manually. The analysis was both guided by the literature review and open to other new possibilities. Firstly, I read through all transcripts of participants' utterances. Take YANG's response:

*I find the curriculum has become more and more fixed these years. Now it starts to require us to follow fixed teaching steps (for example, the unified teaching courseware requires that Unit One must be taught first; within Unit One, explanations of new words are designed to teach first before the structure analysis). There is also suggested time spent on each step of the teaching. When everything is fixed, I find nowhere to insert or add what I want to teach'.*

To make sense of this utterance, I identified it as a piece of information on the degree of deciding what participants teach. While reading, similar meaning also popped up in other participants' responses. For example, this can be seen in the responses of HAN and SHEN:

HAN: *There is always a fixed teaching syllabus for you to follow. There are units and texts that teachers must teach.... Our department decides that, including the choice of textbook.*

SHEN: *I feel the curriculum is fixed in terms of requiring teachers to teach only the knowledge in the unified textbook (for example, explaining meaning of passages and explaining relevant grammar rules used in the passage). It becomes more and more fixed when requirements start to arrange the exact teaching content for each class (for example, the first three*



*paragraphs plus exercise one in today's class).*

These were identified to be a group of codes that contained similar meanings to understand how much participants can decide what to teach. In order to take note of them, highlighters with same colour was used to mark these codes. Later, these codes were gathered together and developed into a higher-level category labelled as 'autonomy in deciding teaching content'. Within this category, all codes served as evidence to support meaning of the category. By adopting the same approach, the other two categories, i.e. 'autonomy in deciding teaching pedagogy' and 'autonomy in class management' were developed. It revealed that all the three categories' meanings were relevant to the participants' perceived autonomy in the teaching process. Thus, with the responses being grouped into three categories, a theme which carried broader meaning was developed, i.e. 'perceived autonomy in the teaching domain'. The three categories constituted the evidence to support this theme. That is how the pattern which helps understand teachers' perception of autonomy in teaching was identified.

After development the patterns, how to present them in a clear and reader-friendly way was another concern. I decided to present the weight participants gave to each theme or sub-theme in order to help readers more quickly and clearly make sense of what views participants mainly held before reading followed-up texts. The notes of criteria for presenting the weight given by participants are as follows:

**Notes:**

+: attach a little positive importance to the theme/sub-theme by raising the issue

++: attach positive importance to the theme by raising the issue and explaining with detailed examples

+++: attach strong positive importance to the theme by raising, explaining with examples and further emphasize in later interviews again

-: attach a little negative importance to the theme/sub-theme by raising the issue

--: attach negative importance to the theme by raising the issue and explaining with detailed examples

---: attach strong negative importance to the theme by raising, explaining with examples and further emphasize in later interviews again

X: refers to 'have no importance' attached to the theme after being asked

\ : refers to having not raised by participants

Taking the example of participant HAN whose first round interview transcripts has been attached in Appendix F to illustrate how weight she gave to the theme 'perceived autonomy in teaching' was identified. The weight she gave to this theme is as follows:

**Table 3.8: An Example of weight given to a theme**

Participant \ Themes	Perceived autonomy in teaching		
	Autonomy in deciding teaching content	Autonomy in deciding teaching pedagogy	Autonomy in class management
HAN	-	+++	- - -

As shown in the Table 3.8, firstly, she expressed her perception on 'autonomy in deciding teaching content' to be insufficient briefly in the first round of interview by saying '*There is always a fixed teaching syllabus for you to follow. There are units and texts that teachers must teach...Our department decides that, including the choice of textbook.*' She neither used detailed examples to help illustrate it nor further explained in later interviews or other rounds of interviews. Thus, one '-' (minus) was marked to show her opinion visually. It was because the autonomy she considered as insufficient rather than sufficient that the interpretation was a '-' (minus) rather than '+' (plus). However, her perception of 'autonomy in deciding teaching pedagogy' was marked with '+++' because she had not only expressed her views on it by saying 'I feel I am free to decide how to teach or in other words the way of

teaching in my class', but also used detailed examples to illustrate her point by saying

*That is also why I like teaching. I have said I always try to update my teaching ways as experience accumulates. The purpose is to try new things in class and check whether they work and which works better. For example, I try group discussion this time and I find debate might be another good way. Then I will try debate in next class. The university administrative managers will have no way to intervene how I teach. Afterall, they are not experts in English. English is a special course. If you do not understand it, then you are not qualified to ask me how to teach it. So I can, yes, I can decide how to implement my thinking in teaching....*

Further, she revisited her view when she made comments on university policy later in the first round of interview by saying again '*I like teaching because I can communicate with so many young adults and make friends with them. It is also because I can freely impart knowledge to students and express my thinking to them using the way I like.*'

Her example showed that she not only raised the issue but also used examples to explain and further emphasize in later interviews. Thus, she was marked three pluses (+++) for this theme. Similarly, for her view on the managerial policy, she had firstly stated that she considered autonomy in managing students insufficient by saying '*The most annoying aspect is that we are strictly regulated by the university in how we control our own class, especially control how students behave in class.*' Later she used detailed personal experience and observations to illustrate the point by saying that

*If students are playing mobile games, sleeping or reading other books, all these will be the teacher's fault. It is not possible for me to control students and teach at the same time. It's not necessary either. Students are*

*already adults. Learning is their individual thing, and how can teachers force them to learn? We always have more than sixty students in one class. How can I control all of them at the same time? If I have to observe what they are doing all the time, my teaching pace will be affected.*

This point was later revisited and emphasized in her third round of interview when she described the changes she experienced in dealing with students by saying ‘*Our university has become more and more stricter in asking us to control students in these years. When I entered the university, I remember the student management rule was general. But later more specific rules on how teachers should manage students were introduced for us to follow.*’ Since her view on this theme is negative and she had expressed emphasis on it, ‘---’ were marked for her.

In a nutshell, it is through manually coding, categorizing and abstracting themes that patterns are developed in the process of data analysis. Detailed illustrations of themes in texts are available after the presentation of each table in Finding Chapters.

### **3.9 Trustworthiness**

Trustworthiness is required in all sorts of research (Davies and Dodd, 2002). Merriam (1998) points out that trustworthiness addresses the matching between what the research questions are designed to explore and how a study is designed to achieve the research purpose. Researchers have proposed different components to address trustworthiness. For instance, Guba and Lincoln (1998) emphasize credibility, transfer-ability, dependability and confirmability. Long and Johnson (2000) note that the use of alternative terms is identical to the traditionally termed validity and reliability. In qualitative research, the major concern to ensure trustworthiness relies on the validity and reliability of data collection and analysis.

Validity means that a particular method measures what it is supposed to

measure (Maxwell, 1996). This means an instrument is valid when it can collect information which accurately describes and illustrates a phenomenon. Reliability refers to whether the same findings can be achieved through a research design. It can be understood as the matching between the collected data and the actual occurrence in the naturally investigated settings. In other words, reliability is about whether the research findings can be in consistency with the collected data (Merriam, 1998). Given the importance of trustworthiness, there have been multiple ways to ensure the validity and reliability such as triangulation, respondent validation, prolonged involvement, peer examination, reflective journal and audit trail (Merriam, 1998).

In this study, I used several means to ensure trustworthiness. Firstly, after each round of the interview, the participants were invited to cross-check whether my understanding and transcripts of the interview accurately represented their original meanings. After the completion of the three rounds of interview, the participants were again invited to cross-check the accuracy of the transcripts of the interview and if there remained any unclear issues. Secondly, when the translation of the transcripts was done, a colleague who could speak both fluent Chinese and English was invited to double check the translations to ensure that the transcripts were accurately translated and the no important information was left out. Thirdly, the data were collected through three rounds of interviews rather than one, which took a long period of time (approximately one year). As mentioned earlier in this chapter, this gave me sufficient time to reflect on the round of interview that has been completed and to come up with necessary adjustments that needed to be made to the subsequent rounds of interviews. Fourthly, I spent some time discussing with staff members and fellow PhD students to exchange ideas and opinions regarding the research in progress. Such peer communication and feedback to some extent helped me to enhance trustworthiness. Finally, during the data analysis process, I kept taking reflective notes on my thinking and belief.

With all the above approaches adopted, the validity and reliability of the

study were enhanced and ensured. Thus, trustworthiness of the study was achieved. The next section discusses ethical issues concerning the present study.

### **3.10 Ethical issues**

Researchers need to take into consideration ethics during the whole process of research (Mason, 2002). There are several ethical principles for researchers to abide by, such as informed consent (e.g. Flick, 2014), anonymity and confidentiality (e.g. Cohen et al., 2011), and awareness of consequences (e.g. Kvale and Brinkmann, 2009) and so on. All those principles need to be considered throughout any research, from its onset, in and after the research.

As to the interviews in this study, I gained informed consent of the participants before the interview. A sample participant consent form and a sample letter and participant information sheet are provided in the Appendix A and B respectively. I informed the participants of the research purposes and gave them freedom to accept or refuse before the interviews. Meanwhile, the participants were allowed to withdraw halfway if they did not want to continue with their participation. Moreover, to protect their privacy and confidentiality, all participants were assured that all collected data would be anonymized to protect their personal information.

During the interview process in this study, several ethical issues were carefully addressed. In interviews, the participants would be encouraged to talk about their private lives and freely voice their views. For example, personal information related to the participants' past experiences such as educational history, working experiences, or even personal family background and private life were mentioned during the interviews. In addition, participants may voice out their feelings and views on the policy, leadership, working faculty, university and relationship with colleagues in the place where they are

currently working. If this information was disclosed to other colleagues or the University, the participants may run the risk of jeopardizing their relationship with people around them in future. As the researcher, I had dealt with all these issues with care, protecting the participants' personal information and confidentiality. Furthermore, I strategically elicited the information without harming the participants' feelings and self-esteem during the interviewing process.

After the interviews, the transcribed data were double checked, and the interpretations and analyses were shown to the participants to check whether the interpretations and analysis were correct and whether the proper way had been made to present them before reporting the findings.

The ethical concerns should go to other stakeholders as well. For an exploration into a university, I also consider the possible impact that the finding report may have on the investigated university and departments. In this study, there is some information that is related to J University's political context, features of leadership, strength and weaknesses of working conditions and so on. The findings can include not only positive but also negative evaluations, which may affect the reputation and image of the university. The fieldwork in this study was conducted in a small place with a limited number of universities. Once the findings are reported, there might be possibility for others in that place to recognise the university and even some of the participants according to the descriptions of the findings. Therefore, I have devoted efforts to eliminate individually identifiable information, and findings were skilfully presented to the public in an ethical way.

Finally, in order to verify or clarify the relevant documents that participants had referred to in this fieldwork, I took efforts to gain access to those mentioned policy documents. As to gaining permission to read and analyse the institutional documents, since there is 'little direct interaction with those being researched', the ethical issues tend to be 'overlook[ed]' by researchers (Cohen et al., 2011: 254). However, ethical consideration should

take priority over other matters when it comes to research. For example, it is necessary to get the agreement and consent from the institutions and departments before conducting the study and reporting the findings. Moreover, reporting the findings which are related to the university documents in this study may have impacts on the reputation of teachers, departments or institutions. Hence, it is important to keep the relevant stakeholders anonymized for purpose of protection and carefully present the findings to the public.



## CHAPTER FOUR

### CHARACTERISTICS OF TEACHER PROFESSIONALISM

#### **4.1 Introduction**

This chapter presents the major findings regarding teacher professionalism. Aiming to answer research questions regarding the characteristics of professionalism (e.g. whether it changes overtime and the factors contributing to the formation and possible changes), this chapter is organized into three sections. Firstly, the multifaceted feature of teacher responsibility is presented. Then, teacher autonomy, including discrepancy between teachers' perceived autonomy and their responses to it, is illustrated. Finally, teachers' knowledge construction and its changes are demonstrated.

#### **4.2 Multifaceted Professional Responsibility**

This section presents participants' sense of professional responsibility including components of responsibility and how responsibility is formed. The reason for presenting the notion of responsibility first in this chapter is because participants attached top priority to teacher responsibility which they regarded as the 'most important for being a teacher'. Professional responsibility as teacher and researcher will be illustrated in the following two sections respectively. The perception of professional responsibility as teacher will be illustrated from three aspects, namely 1) responsibility for teaching; 2) responsibility for students; and 3) responsibility for self-development in teaching ability. Afterwards, two aspects regarding Professional responsibility as researchers will be discussed from two aspects, namely 1) responsibility to

engage in necessary research activities for university teacher; and 2) responsibility for self-development in research ability.

#### 4.2.1 Sense of professional responsibility as teacher

Differences and similarities in how participants perceived the multi-components of responsibility for being a teacher are shown in Table 4.2.1.

**Table 4.2.1: Multifaceted responsibility as teacher**

**Notes:**

- +: attach a little importance to the theme/sub-theme by raising the issue
- ++: attach importance to the theme by raising the issue and explaining with detailed examples
- +++: attach strong importance to the theme by raising, explaining with examples and further emphasize in later interviews again
- \: refers to having not raised by participants

Themes Participants	Multifaceted responsibility as teacher				
	Responsibility for teaching		Responsibility for self	Responsibility for students	
	Fulfilling required teaching workload	Teaching extra knowledge to students	Self-development in teaching ability	Students' moral cultivation	Problem-solving in students' life
HUA	++	++	+++	+	\
SHEN	+++	+++	+++	++	+
WU	+++	+++	+++	+	+
HAN	+++	+++	+++	+	\
WEI	+++	+++	+	++	++
ZHU	+++	+++	+++	+	\
YANG	++	+++	+++	+++	++
KONG	+++	+++	++	++	\
SUN	+++	+++	++	+++	+++
QIAN	++	+++	+++	++	+++
CAO	++	+++	+	+++	++
JIANG	+++	+++	++	+++	+++
ZHOU	+++	+++	+	+++	+++
ZHENG	+++	+++	+	+++	+++
FENG	+++	+++	+	+++	+++

As shown in Table 4.2.1, the fifteen participants attached different levels of importance to being a responsible teacher. The majority (twelve) explicitly claimed that responsibility was the most important quality that a teacher should possess. Words like ‘the most important’, ‘top important’ could be found in their statements, as SHEN put,

*SHEN: ...It is not hard for me to think that being responsible should be **the most important thing** for a teacher, no matter how knowledgeable they are and how capable they are in teaching...*

JIANG echoed that professional responsibility was ‘of top importance’ for teachers. He considered it to be a criterion for judging whether a teacher was qualified.

*JIANG: Probably how responsible a teacher is determines how others judge him or her to be a good teacher or not... responsibility is **of top importance** for teachers.*

They emphasized the responsibility as a ‘must’ and the top professional trait in the meaning of being a teacher. This is in tandem with Li (2014:192) who claimed that responsibility was the prerequisite for teachers’ other aspects of work.

Such importance of teacher responsibility was also evidenced in the participants’ interviews about the aspects of teaching, students and self-development.

### ***Responsible for teaching***

#### *Fulfilling university required teaching workload*

As shown in Table 4.2.1, eleven participants reported very strong emphasis, and four with strong emphasis, on the necessity to be responsible for fulfilling assigned teaching workload. Such assigned work referred to the

teaching of what was prescribed in the curriculum, i.e. what to teach, what to teach, and what and how to assess. This can be clearly seen in what the participant HAN claimed,

*HAN: Completing all the work relating to teaching assigned by the department is a must for me as a teacher. I should at least make sure my students get what they are required by the university to learn...teaching the units in textbooks that need to be covered according to the curriculum, correcting and providing feedback on homework, helping students review what will be examined.*

In agreement with HAN, ZHENG put forward that the implementation of university's requirements for teaching was the basic part of her responsibility.

*ZHENG: As an English teacher, my first responsibility is trying best to finish the daily teaching activities, such as delivering classes on time, completing the scheduled teaching plan, dealing with students' homework and questions... Completing everything related to university's requirements for teaching is always a basic thing that I need to fulfil my responsibility for.*

During the teaching, although participants may face difficulties, such as overloaded teaching and large amount of homework to be marked, they still persisted in fulfilling what was required for teaching. This can be revealed in the participant JIANG's remarks,

*JIANG: Sometimes I do want to reduce efforts paid to teaching when, for example, our department requires us to assign at least ten times homework to students, each of which must be corrected and recorded. I find myself dealing with homework everyday ... however, I still do it, because I'd feel guilty facing them in the*

*next day's class if I haven't finished correcting their homework.*

Like JIANG, SUN reported how he endeavoured to fulfil the workload of teaching large classes.

*SUN: It gives me a headache to teach large classes. This semester, I have two large classes, each with more than ninety students. It is hard to make the entire students listen attentively ... But I still have done my best to make them understand what they are required to learn. I have kept repeating myself, clarifying with them and sending materials to each of their QQ emails to ensure they all know what have been taught.*

Regarding the responsibility for fulfilling the assigned teaching workload, it seemed that all the fifteen participants shared more similarities and agreement than differences though slight differences did exist. That was because participants considered the fulfilment of teaching workload as essential and basic part of responsibility for a teacher. This is reflected in ZHENG's remarks quoted below.

*ZHENG: As a teacher, finishing required teaching workload is our own 'benzhi gongzuo' (responsibility or duty). This is something we need to do first. It is like building a house – we cannot start building more storeys before the foundation is laid.*

#### *Teaching extra knowledge to students*

Based on this basic foundation, professional responsibility did not contain solely one aspect but including multiple components and richer meanings. More aspects of responsibility were developed with more diversity. In addition to the responsibility for fulfilling teaching work in spite of

difficulties, participants (fourteen with very strong emphasis and one with strong emphasis) devoted attention to taking responsibility for enriching teaching content and adjusting teaching pedagogy.

This reveals that the participants had understanding of students' different needs and they did not take such different needs for granted. Instead, they paid attention to teaching students according to their aptitude (yincai shijiao). To achieve this, they made alterations to the teaching content and methods to cater for the students' different demands for the purpose of helping them achieve better learning outcomes. This can be seen in what YANG said below.

*YANG: It is not sufficient to teach only what is required in curriculum because that is too limited to cover language linguistic rules and exercises on language use and translation. When I find students in different classes vary in proficiency, I will adjust my teaching pace and ask what they feel interested in learning and make changes accordingly.*

Similarly, QIAN would add teaching content when he realized the required curriculum was not sufficient for students and he would be willing to teach more.

*QIAN: What is required, I have noticed, is far from enough. Exploring language in each unit passage cannot develop students', for example, thinking ability, so I will integrate critical thinking questions and creative writing tasks into my teaching to let them know how to think.*

Teaching extra content and improving teaching design required a teacher to devote extra work and efforts. However, teachers were willing to do so although willingness varied in degree. This reflected that their sense of responsibility for achieving better teaching effect was playing an influencing

role, as KONG said,

*KONG: Although I have to spend extra time preparing different teaching materials for students..., I feel it is what I should do as a teacher. When I find that my students need extra knowledge, I will help them. ...simply repeating what is required is easy but it does not convince me to call myself a teacher.*

Participants reported their willingness to devote efforts to complete teaching workload, even though they had to sacrifice some personal time. This is in line with Lauermann (2013) that responsibility has significant influence on efforts devotion and contains personal cost including less family time and dearth of sleep. In addition, the sense of responsibility may be manifested in teachers' self-development.

### ***Responsibility for self-development***

In order to improve and maintain teaching quality and effect, participants noticed that it was vital to develop themselves professionally. The importance of responsibility for self-development is noted by Chatelier, and Rudolph (2018). The self-improvement responsibility was revealed in the very strong emphasis of seven participants, strong emphasis of three participants and little emphasis of five participants on professional development.

The seven who attached very strong emphasis believed self-development to be an element embedded in a teacher's responsibility. The changing educational context such as English educational reform and students' demanding needs required a teacher to keep developing themselves in order to keep pace with the changes. This can be seen from SUN's remarks,

*SUN: Being a teacher is a life-long calling. As the saying goes, 'a boat sailing against the current must forge ahead or it will be*

*driven back'. The society is changing and developing, students are always young generations who are faced with different demands to fit in the changing society. As teachers, we need to develop ourselves in order to be able to teach them.*

Similarly, YANG expressed her anxiety and worries to catch up with the demanding and changing teaching reform.

*YANG: Reform is always ongoing. I have no idea where it will finally go, but I know if we do not keep moving, we will one day be reformed.*

ZHU found herself frustrated when her lack of understanding of the English grammar rules could not satisfy students' learning needs, as she described,

*ZHU: I feel embarrassed when I cannot answer students ask me detailed questions about how a certain grammar rule works. I do not know the exact rules. I often used my sense of language to do grammar exercises when I was student. That makes me feel necessary to improve myself. It is possible that a teacher cannot answer students' questions sometimes but the teacher must find out the answers later.*

The frustration did not make her reduce the efforts she devoted to teaching. Instead, her sense of responsibility pushed her forward and triggered more efforts to improve her subject knowledge. ZHU continued,

*ZHU: ... after becoming a teacher I feel I cannot let my students go without a satisfied answer because teaching them properly is my responsibility. There is a voice from my heart telling me I*



*have to improve myself and help students to learn. I must tell them the answers in the next class.*

Since participants acknowledged the necessity of professional development, they shared different approaches to how they realized it. There were two major ways of professional development. The first one was learning with the help of university support. SHEN shared the benefits he had received from attending the teaching enhancement programs provided by the university. This is in line with Day and Sachs (2004: 3) who proposed that teachers' professional development is 'at the heart of raising and maintaining standards of teaching'.

*SHEN: I always take active part in the summer teacher training program offered by the department aiming to improve teachers' teaching pedagogy. Through listening to lectures and sometimes observing other university's model lessons, I find I have been inspired.*

However, such opportunities were reported to be limited and not as useful as teachers expected them to be, as WEI noted,

*WEI: There are always more teachers who want to be trained than there are opportunities available to them.... such training lasts for just a few days and cannot give much help.*

The insufficient university supports were also mentioned by other researchers who found university had not done enough for in-service teacher training (Alison and Carey, 2007) and had provided the 'irregular and random' support (Xu, 2014:255).

Given the limitations, participants tried more through self-learning, looking for ways of improving themselves, as ZHOU shared,

*ZHOU: As a teacher, I used to work hard on self-development when I was young. I remember when I noticed my oral English was not good enough, I took the advantage of living close to the foreign teacher at that time. I always went to help him do cooking and meanwhile practice spoken my English.*

WU shared her self-learning as well,

*WU: I always learn through modelling online courses, observing how others teach, reflecting on their advantages and comparing them with my own teaching. Such learning is convenient and accessible at any time.*

As shown in Table 4.2.1, the less experienced teachers tended to lay more emphasis on their professional development compared with the more experienced teachers. For example, five of the participants including HUA, SHEN, WU, ZHU and YANG had worked fewer than fourteen years as teachers and three of the participants including KONG, SUN and JIANG had fifteen to twenty two years of working experience. The five less experienced ones gave more weighting than the other more experienced three on this issue. Although there were exceptions, for example, WEI with eight years attached little emphasis while QIAN with nineteen years' experience attached very strong emphasis on developing themselves, it appeared to be true that for the majority (thirteen) of participants, years of experience could help distinguish teachers according to the importance they attached to professional development.

However, I do not wish to claim that the strength of responsibility for self-development for the fifteen participants remained stable (either weak or strong) throughout the teaching career. In fact, Table 4.2.1 recorded the emphasis participants attached to each theme at the point of time when they

were interviewed. Although the changes across their teaching career were not put into the record of this Table, changes were indeed recalled by the participants orally. Three major changes were identified.

The first one was that the changes mainly happened when participants approached the age of retirement. Three teachers who were nearing the age of sixty (which was the official retiring age for female teachers with associate professorship in China) shared such change.

As teachers accumulated more working experiences, they pinpointed that there appeared to be a decreasing tendency in their efforts devoted to self-development, especially when they were approaching retirement. Therefore, years of working experiences distinguished among them in terms of how much they perceived the importance of self-improvement to be. However, to be more accurate, it was not solely the years of experience itself that had influence on teachers. Further, it was the sense of satisfaction with relatively stable teaching ability and confirmed status in the workplace gained through years of experience that led to the decrease in their passion for further self-development. This is evidenced in what FENG, a participant with twenty nine years of experience, noted below.

*FENG: I paid a lot of attention to improve my teaching ability when I was young... but as I am about to retire, I have gradually focused more on maintaining my responsibility for completing given workload rather than improving myself because after years of experience, I have established my position in the department, receiving satisfying respects from colleagues and students. I just want to maintain the current situation.*

The decreasing tendency in professional responsibility for self-development happened after teachers reached a relatively stable state in

dealing with teaching affairs, especially when they were approaching their retirement.

This decreasing tendency in self-development was also noticed in ZHOU's teaching career. As the closure of her working career was approaching, the efforts she put in self-development tended to diminish. She stated,

*ZHOU:...Honestly, I gradually became less active in self-learning after the first ten to fifteen years of teaching when I noticed I had 'zhanwen jiaogen' (gained a firm foothold in the department) and the leaders and colleagues' impressions of me had been stabilized. I obtained a sense of security and stability during the fifteen years. Gradually, approaching retirement, I feel reluctant to pursue better self. Young teachers are quick learners, and the future of education relies on them. I feel it is time for them to work harder as I did before.*

The participants in the present study showed dwindling responsibility for professional development when participants reached stability after their work had been done and recognized.

The second change in professional responsibility was captured in CAO and WEI who were still far from retirement. They manifested drop in responsibility for self-development due to their health problems. This can be seen from what WEI said,

*WEI: When the doctor told me that I had problems with my kidney, I decided not to work too hard because it is a disease that requires more rest. So I spend limited energy meeting with students and in teaching. That reduced my efforts in improving myself.*

The third change was found to be during the early phase, i.e. two to three years after the participants became teachers. The participants shared that their sense of responsibility for being a teacher was relatively weak and vague when they just entered the teaching profession. WU, a teacher with five years of teaching experience, shared her uncertainty at the initial stage of teaching and improvement after two years:

*WU: I remember when I just became a teacher in this university, I was happy because I got a good job which enjoyed high social status and decent salary....I also knew there was a lot for me to do to be a good teacher, but at the beginning I admit I was not very clear of what to do and how to do for my students and for my teaching.... It was about two years later that I began to make sense of teaching...*

This relatively vague understanding of what a teacher should be responsible for was also noted by teachers with more teaching experience, such as ZHOU (with twenty six years of experience) who recalled her perception at the beginning of her teaching career and the later changes that took place after approximately two to three years.

*ZHOU: I remember that at the very beginning of being a teacher, I did not like the job very much because I had wanted to be a tourist guide. So I did not prepare myself for what I should do. ... However, I did know that teacher is a title which carried a lot of responsibilities. As time went by, I gradually began to like the profession because students rewarded me a lot in two or three years' time. Then my passion grew and gradually I came to know what I needed to do for being a good teacher.*

The foregoing evidence shows that the changes in understanding of

being a teacher can happen at the initial two to three years of the teaching career. The accumulated teaching experience can help participants develop the responsibility for improving themselves to be a more qualified teacher.

Thus, it may be better to understand responsibility as a changing rather than a static construct. This confirms with literature on responsibility change. For example, the transition from weak and vague to strong and clear understanding of the teaching profession after two to three years of working as a teacher is in line with Ruohotie-Lyhty (2013) who found that teachers had similar experiences in their first years of work in making sense of the working context and nature.

### ***Responsibility for students***

As shown in Table 4.2.1, the second category of responsibility is the one for students. The responsibility for cultivating students' morality and helping them solve problems in life are analysed in detail in this section.

#### ***Responsible for students' moral cultivation***

Seven participants demonstrated a very strong sense of responsibility for students' morality cultivation. This can be verified in the remarks of the participant YANG who reported strong emphasis on responsibility for 'yuren' (moral cultivation).

*YANG: I feel I have a strong sense of responsibility for 'yuren' (cultivating students' character). I even feel it is more important than 'jiaoshu' (imparting subject knowledge)... It is such a responsibility that pushes me to take efforts to influence and tell students how to develop good moral character at their age.*

The basic approach for participants to enacting the moral cultivation was realized through embedding teaching morality into daily English classes. The

first way was that teachers attempted to influence students by setting up examples personally to demonstrate what morality meant. Years of experience helped classify the participants. It was found that participants with more years of working experience could to a larger extent use personal examples to influence students than less experienced ones. The less experienced teachers tended to use more of others' examples to illustrate morality. ZHOU, a participant with twenty six years working experience, shared,

*ZHOU: I think the role model set by students' teachers could be more influential for students when students see their teachers demonstrate how to behave as a good person. They would be impressed and try to imitate good morality in the similar way.*

Similarly, ZHENG, with twenty seven years of working experience, shared her personal experience with students how she did to show filial obedience to her parents.

*ZHENG: I myself lost my mother when I was a little kid. My stepmother was good to me, my brothers and sisters. I always travel back home to look after her, showing my concern for her health and talking to her. I let students know my personal experience so that they can be more deeply touched and follow similar way of doing good deeds.*

However, this kind of efforts did not exist when they were at the initial stage of working career. Although they could not exactly pinpoint which year it was when they started influencing students by setting up personal examples, they mentioned that it was in the process of accumulating life experiences that they gradually found they had more personal stories to share with their students.

The use of personal examples to influence students in moral education

was rarely raised by participants with less working experience. That is because they were relatively less experienced in both work and life than those who were elder in age and had longer years of work. SHEN, who had three years of teaching experience, noted that,

*SHEN: I always use examples to show my students the importance of being a morally good and well-behaved person. But the examples are more from what I hear of or what I see or read about others. I myself am not mature enough and less experienced, so I prefer borrowing from others who have demonstrated good morality.*

Their efforts in attempting to influence students is in line with Wang (2012) who also found that teachers tended to set up good examples to influence their students. In addition to the embedded moral education in classroom teaching, the participants also demonstrated responsibility for solving students' problems when they were in difficulties.

#### *Responsible for problem-solving in students' lives*

In addition to cultivating students' good morality, thirteen of the participants expressed their responsibility for problem-solving in students' lives. As presented in Table 4.2.1, six participants reported very strong emphasis on it with three 'pluses' and three reported strong emphasis with two 'pluses', two reported a little emphasis with one 'plus' and four did not touch on the topic. Six participants were marked by very strong emphasis because they reported voluntary concern for students' lives while the other three marked strong emphasis gave students support when students turned to them for help. That means they differed in ways of enacting such responsibility. Moreover, among the six who gave very strong emphasis, four of them had more than twenty five years of working experience. The ones who reported strong and a little emphasis had less than twenty years of working experience.



The four who did not mention the topic had less than fifteen years of working experience. Thus, it appears that the more experienced teachers had more concerns about this topic.

The difference in ways of enacting the responsibility for helping solve students' problems in life can be demonstrated in participants' statements. WEI, who had eight years of working experience, said,

*WEI: I am willing to help my students out in any problems they encounter in life. That is part of my responsibility. But I only offer help when they ask me for help and I do not interfere in their life much.*

Unlike her, FENG, with twenty nine years of working experience, was ready to offer help voluntarily and automatically. Without students' requests, she still attempted to help when she noticed students may need help through her observations. FENG noted,

*FENG: I feel it is my responsibility to take care of my students not only in their studies but also in their daily life. I would observe my students in and outside of class to see whether they are in good condition. Once I feel someone may be in the low mood, I will actively ask them to see whether they need my help or not. I remember for many times, I lent students money, took them to the hospital, comforted them when they broke up with their boyfriends and so on. I like offering help voluntarily.*

As regards why the three less experienced teachers did not offer help to students voluntarily, they explained that 'being individually independent' had become a feature in the changing social context. From the perspective of respecting individual students' sense of independence, those teachers believed

it was necessary to give more private space to students so that they did not voluntarily interfere in students' personal life unless they were asked to. They tended to view the relationship between them and students as that between friends. This is evidenced in what the participant YANG said:

*YANG: I think if students do not ask for help from me, it means either they do not have problems or they do not want others to know as they want to solve the problems by themselves. Sometimes, I observe them but not ask them directly. In this case, I respect their feelings. Not offering help voluntarily does not mean that I am not responsible for them, but that I express my concerns differently.*

However, this did not mean that the other six more experienced teachers who offered help voluntarily did not respect students' independence, but that they tended to view the relationship between teacher and students not only as relationship between friends but also as relationship between elder and younger generations. Thus, they automatically shared their concerns and kindness on the younger generation. ZHOU said,

*ZHOU: They (students) are like my children. I am not only their teacher but also sometimes the mother of them. It is very natural that mother cares about children whether they have problems or not.*

Such responsibility for helping students' problem-solving in daily life was also a changing process. It was in the process that teachers were more engaged within the profession and that their concerns for students grew. As CAO shared:

*CAO: The concern about students' lives did not start from the day I*

*became their teacher, but was gradually developed when I became more familiar with them and came to like them. Positive emotions were gradually felt by us. The more I like them, the more I want to care about them.*

Based on the above illustration, it is necessary to analyse why and how such responsibility was nurtured and developed. The key influences are presented in following section.

#### **4.2.2 Factors influencing professional responsibility as teacher**

Among factors influencing professional responsibility, social cultural factor was found to be a contextual and crucial one shaping teachers' views about the teaching profession. In addition, individual teachers' differences in their personal backgrounds also contributed to the formation of responsibility. Moreover, the nature and focus of the department were also influential. This section illustrates these influences respectively.

##### ***Influence from traditional cultural views about teaching***

As to what influencing factors contributed to the formation of sense of responsibility among participants, the first commonality in teachers' views turned to be that the Chinese traditional cultural beliefs about teachers and the teaching profession played an important role. Participants shared that teachers' responsibility is understood in the Chinese culture as driven from internal motive to fulfil obligations regarding teaching and considered it as something embedded and internalized within a teacher's heart. The participant ZHENG said,

*ZHENG: Teaching is a special profession, the nature of which is being responsible and devoted. Being a teacher is meant to be responsible in our culture and expected by both students*

*and society. Responsibility is the most important part of being a teacher.*

Similarly, the participant SHEN also noted,

*SHEN: When I entered the teaching profession and became a teacher, I felt my responsibility for teaching and students started to be activated. This is what we have been inherited from the traditional norm, i.e. a teacher is seen to be equal to someone who should be responsible for both students' academic achievements (jiaoshu) and character cultivation (yuren). Everything related to teaching and students are within my responsibility.*

Therefore, the Chinese cultural tradition regarding teaching and being a teacher provides a contextual background for the participants to understand the meaning of the profession and the role they perform. The traditional views about being a teacher reflect a cultural facet of professional responsibility. In other words, responsibility reveals its cultural embedded feature. Indubitably, culture plays a significant role in all other contexts. Being different from other traditional culture, the Chinese cultural influence can indeed help explain the formation of teachers' professional responsibility in this study. Therefore, it is necessary to place the understanding of responsibility in the specific cultural context rather than viewing it as a globally applicable concept in any context. The Chinese culture influence was recorded by other Chinese researchers such as Liu (2011:40) who claimed that being responsible was embedded in teaching profession in the Chinese history. In addition, embedding moral education in teachers' responsibility was also documented by Gao (2008) and Ping et al. (2004) who observed that Chinese education has a tradition of cultivating students' morality.

Given the social cultural influence on the responsibility as a teacher, there are other factors shaping the sense of responsibility. The next section explains the influences of personal family background.

### ***Influence from significant others***

#### ***Family's influence***

Three out of the fifteen participants were from teacher family. A teacher family means having family members who are teachers. They claimed the impact from examples set up by family members of understanding what being a teacher means. The participant ZHENG, whose father was a teacher, stated the influence from her father as a role model:

*ZHENG: My father is a teacher. Although he teaches middle school students, how he treats his work has impressed me a lot. He spent much time dealing with his teaching when he had to take care of us kids alone because my mother passed away early. He arranged his students to have dinner in our house and helped them finish homework. That is how responsibility was nurtured in my heart as a teacher.*

The participant CAO, also from teacher family, shared that:

*CAO: I remember at our time (when I was a child and student), my parents, who were also teachers, always emphasized the importance of being a good person and they also used their own examples to influence children students. That influenced me to consider it as an important part of education.*

In addition to the three participants who shared how their understanding of responsibility was attributable to the fact that they had grown up in the teacher families, the other twelve participants, who did not come from similar

family backgrounds, also pointed out the influences from someone significant for them. The influences were from their previous teachers. Their teachers as their role models helped cultivate their understanding of teacher responsibility.

#### *Former teachers' influence*

In addition to the traditional influence and influence from family background over the teaching profession, the influence from the participants' previous teachers could be neglected. As the participant ZHU said:

*ZHU: My teacher had great positive influence on me regarding responsibility. He is a very responsible teacher, always trying his hardest to help me. During my MA study, he was always there when I was in trouble... even when he was sick or not based in China; he kept giving feedback on my dissertation and helped me publish... I was determined in my heart to be a teacher like him.*

However, the participants did not always have positive experiences in the previous educational courses. WU shared her negative experiences and the resultant influences.

*WU: I remembered I had a teacher who taught us literature... you would find him an irresponsible teacher if I tell you he only read the textbook to us and even ended classes earlier when he found nothing to teach. I almost couldn't hear him clearly because his voice was too low... such experience, oh god, I think I would definitely not do so if I were him....*

From the above evidence, teachers' individual experience in personal history, either in terms of family background or educational experience, tended

to shape their sense of responsibility as a teacher. Although participants were from the same Chinese cultural context, the interplay between cultural and personal factors was revealed.

#### 4.2.3 Professional responsibility in research domain

Two categories of responsibility in research activities was shown in Table 4.2.3, i.e. responsibility to engage research as necessary for university teacher and the responsibility for self-development of research ability.

**Table 4.2.3: Multifaceted responsibility as researcher**

**Notes:**

- +: attach a little importance to the theme/sub-theme by raising the issue
- ++: attach importance to the theme by raising the issue and explaining with detailed examples
- +++: attach strong importance to the theme by raising, explaining with examples and further emphasize in later interviews again
- X: refers to ‘have no importance’ attached to the theme after being asked
- \: refers to having not raised by participants

Themes Participants	Responsibility as researcher	
	Responsibility to engage research as necessary for university teacher	Responsibility for self-development of research ability
HUA	++	++
SHEN	++	+++
YANG	+++	++
SUN	+++	+++
WU	+++	+++
JIANG	+++	+++
WU	\	+
HAN	X	X
ZHU	\	\
KONG	\	\
WEI	\	X
CAO	\	X
ZHOU	\	X
ZHENG	X	X
FENG	X	X

As shown in Table 4.2.3, in the column of ‘responsibility in research activities’, nine participants either ‘attach no importance’ or ‘having not raised’ the issue. Although they did not completely deny the responsibility for doing research as a university teacher, they did not incorporate responsibility into what they should do in their work.

Among the nine participants, five of them considered producing research outcome, which was recognized by university, as something they ‘have to do’ but not ‘should do’. The participant KONG said,

*KONG: Our university assigns research work to every teacher according to its policy. For me, I do not want to do it if it is not required ... I see teaching as the most important thing for me. I am forced to think about research because I have to follow the policy which is related to the annual performance appraisal and promotion criteria.*

The relation between research outcomes and teacher appraisal has its policy origin. China has a national system for teacher promotion and evaluation. Research outcome is tied to teacher promotion which is further tied to pay and salary (see for example Ministry of Human Resource and Social Security, 2015).

Similarly, the participant HAN shared her views toward research activities:

*HAN: I should say that if the university did not push us to do research, I would not have taken it into account. Of course, I also consider my teaching work as the core, currently. As a teacher, teaching is the main thing I do not think research should be assigned to everyone.*

The other four participants totally expressed their rejection of doing



research. They even took the policy requirements for granted although they understood the possible consequences of violating the policy. FENG argued:

*FENG: I really do not like research. I am against it. For me, teaching is what I should do. Although research is in the policy list, I still ignore it. If they really want to cut my salary, just let it be.*

Compared with the nine participants who were against research to different extent, there were six participants who held different views. These six participants reported that their motivation in doing research was not purely for meeting the university policy requirements. They started to nurture and develop responsibility for research together with responsibility for teaching. They showed willingness and motive in research activities, albeit to varying degrees. SUN, one of these six participants, commented:

*SUN: I believe, as a university teacher, researcher is another role we need to gradually play. That is a growing trend for university teachers. However, currently, I still see myself more as a teacher who should firstly implement my responsibility in teaching. But, I also do research when I'm busy with teaching. I am not leaving it aside.*

A deeper exploration of the causes for such differences in participants' attitudes towards professional responsibility between the six and nine teachers was carried out. Firstly, it seems that the working context where the participants were based was influential in shaping their sense of responsibility. The department of the participants was an English department which was positioned as teaching-oriented department by the university. WU explained how the nature of the department shaped teachers' thinking over research.

*WU: The department leaders told us that the major work for us was teaching. Although we are in a university which encourages more research activities, our obligations are different from others because we shoulder the responsibility for teaching English to all the students in the university. Being a teacher, teaching is the top priority.*

This was further evidenced by what WEI said:

*WEI: In our department are all teachers who majored in English which is a social science subject. Being social science teachers in a science-oriented university, we suffer from disadvantages. The policy has been made to suit science teachers, so support mainly goes to science teachers....however, research on the English subject is different from that on the science subjects. But we do not have any specific policy implemented by the university to benefit us.*

Therefore, the focus and nature of the institution and department played a significant role in shaping participants' emphases on research. However, in the current research literature, although there have been studies discussing the institutional factors such as the influence the management style and leadership have on teachers' perceptions and practices (e.g. Hökkä and Vähäsantanen, , 2014), there has less research on the influence from the nature of university and its department.

Apart from the marginalized status of the English language course in this university, the insufficient university support for participants' research ability development was another factor barricading the formation of responsibility for research. ZHU commented on this:

*ZHU: Funding imbalance is an example. Large amount of money goes to science - millions of RMB is quite common. But for our subjects, even ten thousand RMB is hard to expect. This has discouraged us to do research.*

In addition to the factors regarding the working context, individual teachers also had their own reasons. As shared by the nine participants who felt reluctant to do or simply rejected research. They shared that their lack of confidence in research ability was a personal factor that prevented them from doing research. For example, HAN said that,

*HAN: I do not want to do research partially because I am really not good at it. I even do not know how to start.*

Acknowledging the insufficient ability to conduct research, these participants complained that their ability was not improved partially due to the insufficient support from the university for their professional development. This was clearly voiced by KONG:

*KONG: Our university, one the one hand, pushes us to do research, expecting more research outcomes from us. On the other hand, they do not provide us much opportunity to learn how to do research.*

This was echoed by CAO that:

*CAO: Several seminars and meetings have indeed been organized by the university, but that's it. Moreover, after attending those seminars which gave information in quite a general way, I did not learn much.*

For the other six participants who did research in a more willing manner,

they demonstrated more confidence in their research ability and more efforts in self-learning to improve themselves. JIANG shared:

*JIANG: I want to be more capable in doing research, although I think I am better than some others in our department.... the university, I think, cannot satisfy my needs. There are not many effective opportunities... Then, I have to find opportunities by myself. I won't stand still. I know if I don't make efforts, no one is going to help me.*

Similarly, the efforts in research ability development can be found in QIAN's words:

*QIAN: I have been learning and doing research for more than ten years. You cannot imagine how many books I have bought and how hard I have read others' works. I remember many years ago, when I found my salary was not enough for me to purchase books, I borrowed money from others.*

Analysing their willingness and efforts to develop research ability, it was still the same six teachers who demonstrated stronger devotion in improving themselves. The other nine were weak in this kind of efforts.

Further, the weak sense of responsibility for research among the nine participants was relatively stable from the moment they started working in the university till present. Although the policy requirements for research were increasingly stringent, their responsibility did not grow but remained to be weak. However, among the six participants, the sense of responsibility did not appear to be strong when they firstly realised the importance of research demand. Rather, they managed to develop their research responsibility gradually through accumulating research experience. JIANG shared how his research ability was developed:

*JIANG: I used to be relatively unclear about how to take responsibility for research. I only knew it is important for teachers working in university to do research. As time passed by, I observed how others did research and made sense of it. Then I became clearer about what I wanted to do. I feel there are a lot I can do on the journey of research.*

Exploring where the six participants' confidence of doing research was derived, it seemed that learning experience during the Master's studies had been beneficial since all the six who had confidence in and responsibility for research had MA degree. However, among the other nine participants, there were also MA degree holders who did not show interest and confidence in research. Thus, further analysis revealed that it was how much they actually learned from the MA programme that influenced their attitudes toward and confidence in research. For example, both HAN who had little desire for research and HUA who had strong desire for research expressed different effects the MA programme had upon their attitudes toward and confidence in research:

*HAN: ...I did not learn carefully with heart in the research-related courses...I do not want to be busily engaged in research as one of my teachers did.*

*HUA: ... I do admire and adore my supervisor who could do research well. I felt the experience in attending his research work interesting.*

With different sense of responsibility for research, participants differed in research engagement although they worked in a same context with same support from the university and same opportunities for self-development. The six participants with research desire demonstrated more efforts in self-learning

than the other nine. Both the passion for and behaviour of pursuing more improvement opportunities were the manifestations of responsibility as researcher. The absence of such responsibility explained why the other nine did not take much action in research ability development.

To conclude, responsibility was found to be a multi-dimensional concept to which participants had attached importance and priority. It seemed that teacher responsibility was embedded in all participants' heart and was stronger than the researcher responsibility. Meanwhile, there appeared to be no clear linkage between the responsibility as teacher and as researcher. On the basis of relatively strong responsibility as teacher among all the fifteen participants, six of them developed research responsibility while the other nine did not. But the absence of research responsibility tended to have little influence on the strength of teacher responsibility. Referring back to Table 4.2.1, the nine participants who had not strong responsibility for research also demonstrated strong responsibility for teaching. No matter how strong or weak the research responsibility was, they attached priority to teacher responsibility. Taking the six who internalized both teaching and research into their responsibility system as an example, they developed teacher and researcher responsibility separately. The changes and fluctuations in teaching responsibility did not influence research responsibility much and vice versa. As YANG said that,

*YANG: Doing research and teaching are basically two separate things for me. For example, I have researched 'tea-leaf picking opera', but unless I share with students about the findings, I cannot see how it connects with my teaching. My view is teaching is always the first thing to do. It should not be influenced by any other things including research. After teaching work, research comes to my concern.*

Therefore, through unpacking responsibility into specific dimensions, the

perception and enactment of responsibility was found to be complex. It is not appropriate to treat responsibility as a whole nor simply state whether it is weak or strong. In order to gain understanding of the nuances of responsibility, it is necessary to clarify which specific component of responsibility is focused on. It is necessary to acknowledge that teachers may share more similarities in some components of responsibility (for example responsibility for fulfilling teaching workload) but more differences in other components (for example responsibility to engage in research activities).

Based on the above evidence, I would like to put forward that the complexity of responsibility can be understood as participants' inner willingness and motive to endure hardship and devotion to the fulfilment of obligations when they perform a particular role. Responsibility is subject to the intertwining of factors from personal, institutional and cultural levels. It does not remain unchanged across the participants' whole professional careers but can fluctuate at different period of time or in the course of significant events. For university teachers, teacher responsibility is a key component, but researcher responsibility is another aspect which deserves more attention although it does not link to teacher's responsibility significantly and explicitly in this study. The nature of professional responsibility is complex in its components, dimensions, fluctuations and influencing factors. It calls for our attention to understand it in detail rather than merely as a simple and static notion.

#### **4.3 Discrepancy between Perceptions of and Responses to Professional Autonomy**

When participants reported how they enacted responsibility in teaching and research activities, they also shared their perceptions of professional autonomy and how that perception influenced and being influenced by the sense of responsibility. The findings suggest that how teachers perceived

autonomy did not fully determine how they applied the perceived autonomy in real practice. Responsibility seemed to play an interfering role. In order to address the gap between perception of and responses towards autonomy given by university, the following section compares how participants perceived autonomy and responded to the given autonomy. The illustration analyses the discrepancy in teaching and research domain respectively. Table 4.3 shows an overview of how participants gave weight to the autonomy they perceived to enjoy in teaching and research work.

**Table 4.3: Perceived degree of autonomy given by workplace**

**Notes:**

- + : attach a little positive importance to the theme/sub-theme by raising the issue
- ++ : attach positive importance to the theme by raising the issue and explaining with detailed examples
- +++ : attach strong positive importance to the theme by raising, explaining with examples and further emphasize in later interviews again
- : attach a little negative importance to the theme/sub-theme by raising the issue
- : attach negative importance to the theme by raising the issue and explaining with detailed examples
- : attach strong negative importance to the theme by raising, explaining with examples and further emphasize in later interviews again



Themes  Participants	Perceived autonomy in teaching			Perceived autonomy in research	
	Autonomy in deciding teaching content	Autonomy in deciding teaching pedagogy	Autonomy in class management	Autonomy in deciding research direction	Autonomy in research process
HUA	-	+	--	-	--
SHEN	--	++	---	--	---
YANG	--	++	---	---	-
SUN	---	++	---	-	--
QIAN	---	+++	---	--	--
JIANG	--	+++	--	--	-
WU	-	++	--	---	---
HAN	-	+++	---	---	---
ZHU	-	+++	---	---	-
KONG	---	+	---	---	---
WEI	--	+	---	--	---
CAO	-	+	--	--	---
ZHOU	--	++	---	---	--
ZHENG	-	+++	--	---	-
FENG	--	++	---	---	-

The above table mainly presents how much autonomy teachers considered that they were given by their university to enjoy in both teaching and research work. The following section explains their perception in detail and what caused such perceptions of autonomy. The explanation begins in the teaching domain.

#### 4.3.1 Participants' perceptions autonomy in teaching domain

From the teaching perspective, as shown in Table 4.3, the choices of teaching content and the right to determine classroom management approaches appear to be negative and limited. In other words, all participants perceived there were more restrictions imposed than freedom given by the

university to choose what to teach and how to manage students. In addition to the limitations, participants also positively shared that they enjoyed autonomy in determining the way of teaching.

It was found that individual teacher differences did not influence much in classifying patterns, but the university policy context played a major role in determining the degree of perceived autonomy. The following section presents in detail each aspect of participants' perceived autonomy in teaching under the policy influence.

### ***Limited autonomy in the choice of teaching content***

All fifteen participants claimed that the degree of autonomy in choosing what to teach in classroom was limited. Three reported very strong emphasis and six had strong emphasis on it. SHEN noted that,

*SHEN: I feel the curriculum is fixed, which requires teachers to teach only the knowledge in the unified textbook (for example, explaining meaning of passages and explaining relevant grammar rules appeared in the passage). It becomes more and more fixed when requirements start to prescribe the exact teaching content for each class (for example, first three paragraphs plus exercise one in today's class).*

As an implementer of the curriculum, SHEN found it was designed in a prescribed manner to regulate teachers' choice in teaching content. The prescribed curriculum restricted teachers to teach what should and need to be covered in their classes. Meanwhile, curriculum design appeared to be increasingly fixed because it not only prescribed the range of teaching content but also what teachers needed to cover in each single class daily. Such increasingly fixed curriculum was considered as restriction by participants such as KONG:

*KONG: ... the fixed curriculum was like a frame restricting my choice of what to teach. It is contradictory in the sense that if I teach according to the requirements, I feel hard to add what I am interested in teaching (like I want to spend two classes purely in English presentation skills). On the other hand, if I teach according to my preferences, I feel the required content in the curriculum cannot be finished, which directly influences students' final examination scores because the required content will be tested.*

Participants like YANG expressed her frustration in possessing limited space to flexibly adjust the curriculum. She felt restricted and hard to teach what she wanted to because she had to follow the curriculum tightly and strictly.

*YANG: I found the curriculum has become more and more fixed these years. Now it starts to require us to follow a fixed teaching steps (for example, the unified teaching courseware shows that Unit One must be taught first; within Unit One, explanation of words are designed to teach first before the structure analysis). There is also suggested time spent for each step of the teaching. When everything is fixed, I find nowhere to add in what I want to teach.*

When the curriculum also regulated the teaching steps and time allocated for each single unit, it restricted teachers' right to make decisions by themselves. FENG made this clear by saying that:

*FENG: It (curriculum) is really becoming increasingly strict and detailed. Even the teaching steps and sequences reset into a fixed manner. That makes me feel hard to alter and rearrange*

*the steps of teaching.*

Similarly, WEI expressed her perception of the restrictions brought by the fixed curriculum:

*WEI: I feel I have much more interesting content to teach to my students, rather than the language knowledge prescribed in the curriculum. For example, I could spend two hours specifically to share comparisons between western and Chinese culture. However, I find it hard to realize that because there is little time left after I finish the required content in the curriculum.*

The perception of how much autonomy was given to teachers by the university was directly influenced by the policy regarding teaching. There existed the curriculum and syllabus of College English teaching in the English Department. Such curriculum was issued at the beginning of every semester and would clearly state what teachers were required to cover in each class, each week and the whole academic year. This was considered as a teaching ‘Bible’ guiding teacher to teach. However, the making of such curriculum was not determined by the front-line teachers’ views but the leaders’ wishes in the department. The grass-root teachers, as the implementers of the curriculum, were required by leaders to strictly abide by the prescribed and documented requirements. This was clearly described by KONG:

*KONG: When every semester begins, we will receive an email telling us to follow a curriculum stating what to teach and how to assess. For example, usually we need to cover four reading and four listening units in one semester, assign at least ten times of homework and mark them, help students with online learning*

*and check after-class reading comprehension exercises.*

The findings that the prescribed curriculum precluded teachers from making use of autonomy in teaching resonate with Nguyen, Walkiushaw and Phan (2017). They found that in Vietnam's Tertiary institution teachers were bound to the prescribed course objectives, teaching resources due to top-down policy.

### ***Limited autonomy in class management***

In addition to the limited professional autonomy perceived in the teaching content options, classroom management is another aspect which limited autonomy of all participants, albeit with varying degrees. Class management refers to how teachers manage students during teaching in class time, including students' attendance, behaviour, students' concentration and class discipline. The participant QIAN commented that

*QIAN: It is too rigid that the university requires us to manage students.*

*I think it is ridiculous to ask us to control the percentage of students attending class, forbidding students from using mobile phones, sleeping, and talking to each other... Worse still, students are not allowed to lower down their heads. I feel the rules are like managing kids rather than university students.*

Similarly, HAN shared her thoughts over such student managing policy:

*HAN: It is not possible for me to control students and teach at the same time. It's not necessary either. Students are already adults. Learning is their individual thing, and how can teachers force them to learn? We always have more than sixty students in one class. How can I control all of them at the same time?*

Participants had to follow the class managing policy because they were

evaluated by superintendents who examined and took record of teachers' performance in class. Participants would receive negative feedback if their students were caught violating such rules. WU's description provides a clear picture of this.

*WU: There are always supervisors, passing by my classroom observing from outside of the classroom what's going on in the class. They carry notebooks, writing down how many students have attended your class, how many students are not looking at the blackboard, ... and how many students are playing mobile phones. The teacher's name is recorded at the same time.*

Both restrictions on teaching content options and managing classroom were considered non-static across one's teaching career. The professional autonomy teachers could enjoy tended to present a decreasing trajectory. Participants who were approaching retirement recalled that they had experienced and witnessed such decreasing changes in the past thirty years. ZHOU, who had twenty six years of working experience, recalled that:

*ZHOU: Teachers were facing increasing restrictions. Compared with the situations in about twenty five years ago, at that time, although we only had one textbook, we were totally free to decide what else to add in, how to teach, how to discipline students. ... We were even free to change class time and location. But now, all these are forbidden.*

ZHENG with twenty seven years' working experience echoed that:

*ZHENG: There was virtually no policy on managing teachers and teaching activities twenty years ago, even ten years ago. For*

*example, when Deng was the head of teaching affairs' office, the management of teachers was much looser. Teachers still had freedom in deciding how to manage students. We did not have to use buddy bag 'shouna dai' to collect students' mobile phones before class. We did not have to count the percentage of student attendance, and we did not have to collect Leave Letters from students for record.*

Such decreasing professional autonomy was associated with the increasing rigid and detailed policy on teachers and teaching affairs. Such policy was directly linked to the evaluation of teacher performance. Meanwhile, the managing style of the leaders who formulated such policy also contributes to this. As KONG commented below:

*KONG: It is the leaders in the university who want to manage teachers in a fixed and rigid way that the policy has been formulated and put into practice. When it starts to work, it is hard for teachers to violate or make changes. Unfortunately, we're having more and more rigid leaders and policies.*

In addition, SUN added that:

*SUN: The managing policy is linked to teachers' evaluation policy which is vital for teachers to follow. Otherwise, there will be serious consequences for violations such as sitting in class teaching, having less than eighty percent of students attending classes and playing videos in classes exceeding twenty minutes. Violators will be labelled under 'having made mistakes in teaching' ('jiaoxue chachu') and his name will be made public in the monthly teaching report. The consequence is not only loss of face or reputation, but also*

*salary reduction.*

Therefore, the policy and leadership in the university built up a context for participants to work in. In the investigated English Department, the leaders developed policies on teaching. The policies covered what to teach, the teaching schedule for each semester and how to manage students.

Such policies directly influenced teachers in their teaching practice and further influenced how teachers were evaluated. Only when teachers followed the policies tightly, their performance could be considered as qualified by the leaders of the department and the university. Hence, both the policy itself and the relevant teacher appraisal system shaped how teachers perceived the degree of right they were given by the university. That is to say, in terms of autonomy, the university policy played the major determining role in shaping how much professional space teachers believed they could have in teaching. The professional space was noted by Benson (2010: 270) as ‘space for teacher autonomy’. Apparently, the autonomy teachers perceived they could have in teaching was limited in their working context. The threatened teacher autonomy resonates with that in others’ research such as Erss, Kalmy and Autio (2016).

The situation, however, was not that there only existed restrictions on the enactment of professionalism among participants, but that participants still enjoyed, to a varying extent, the right in determining specific teaching methods. This was evident in ZHENG’s comments:

*ZHENG: I feel freer in my class using the way I like to teach. Although there are a lot of restrictions, the forty five minutes for each class time still provides a space where we can develop our advantages and preferences. For example, I am good at making funny jokes. So I can add some jokes to my classes and make my teaching more humorous and engaging. Other*



*colleagues' teaching may be serious. No policy tells me to do so and no one prevents me from doing so.*

Participants claimed that they could enjoy teaching in the way they liked because there lacked policy regulating the exact way of teaching. Thus, they considered this as the benefits and advantage as a result of lacking such policies. Otherwise, they may encounter restrictions in 'how to teach' as well. KONG commented:

*KONG: The current curriculum does not say in detail how teachers are expected to teach. It only says the class is expected to be active generally. This is good and gives room for teachers to be creative in teaching.*

The degree of autonomy teachers can have is also found in previous research which indicates that autonomy is mainly influenced by the external control from the university which impinges on ground-level teachers (La Ganza, 2008).

However, participants' statements about what they did to respond to the limited autonomy came as a surprise, because it seemed that the limited autonomy did not greatly influence how teachers took actions in teaching. For example, although the given autonomy was perceived by participants more as restrictions in the teaching domain and participants even complained about the rigidity of the policies, they shared that they had their own ways to strategically get round the rigid rules to minimize the influences brought by the limited autonomy. Take another example. Regarding the prescribed curriculum, instead of following it tightly in daily teaching, they either revised the curriculum or enriched their teaching content by expediting the teaching of the required content prescribed in the curriculum for the purpose of better fitting students' needs. The participant JIANG provided a clear illustration:

*JIANG: I indeed feel the restriction in the fixed curriculum. ... But when I am required to teach the linguistic knowledge in the textbook in a fixed way, I can still make use of what I have been asked to teach and explain and expand the textbook in detail and in depth. So just explore deeper beyond what you are required to teach. For example, in the unified courseware ... there is a key piece of grammar to teach, I would link it to all I know about ... grammar and put it together to share with students comprehensively and thoroughly.*

Take a further example. ZHOU, who attached very strong emphasis to the limited autonomy in choosing what to teach, shared her strategy of making alterations. Instead of sticking to the prescribed curriculum, she strategically adjusted the teaching content to better fit her students.

*ZHOU: I would strategically make changes without violating the teaching content and steps. For example, I am good at grammar. When I find the fixed curriculum has particular grammar rules as key components, I would make good use of it and link it to all my knowledge in explaining it in detail. Thus, I can integrate my deeper understanding into the class rather than simply rehearsing the assigned courseware and reading it to the class.*

Regarding the restrictions on class management, participants also demonstrated that they were willing to think of their own ways to cope with the university rules. For example, participant WU claimed that she did not check attendance unless she felt there was a large number of absent students. She did not restrict herself by the student management policy. Although there were risks of being recorded by the university teaching superintendent, she

either took the risk for granted or strategically following it.

Her efforts in reducing the negative impact from the rigid policy exemplified the discrepancy between limited autonomy and the response towards it. The positive responses in coping with the limitations could be revealed.

Therefore, there appeared to be a discrepancy between how teachers perceived the autonomy and the way they actually enacted it. Clearly, participants perceived the autonomy in choosing the teaching content and the way to manage students to be limited and restricted. However, they did not fully abide by such limitations. Rather, they strove for alternative ways to broaden the professional space to be strategically utilized in teaching.

Both the use of given professional autonomy and the strategic responses to restrictions were found to be under the influence of teacher responsibility for teaching and students. In other words, teachers' choices of actions were driven by the responsibility for teaching quality maintenance and improvements. Based on this premise, participants were willing to work hard to avoid the negative effects brought by the restrictions and to create more space to enact teaching. This differs from what previous research has revealed. For example, Bracci (2009:29) claims that responsibility is 'effective only if autonomy to take decisions and solving problems are given'. The present findings highlight another possibility that responsibility can push teachers to maintain efforts in spite of limited autonomy. Such discrepancy was found to be at work in research domain as well.

#### **4.3.2 Limited autonomy in research activities**

As shown in Table 4.3, two emerging themes were identified, i.e. decreasing autonomy in both choosing the research directions and conducting the research process. It revealed that participants were all dissatisfied with the autonomy they could enjoy in the research activities

with the mark of ‘-’ indicating such dissatisfaction.

The pattern becomes clearer when participants are organized into two groups. One group consist of six participants who, as discussed in the previous section, were internally willing to do research with responsibility. The other group include those nine participants who did not possess researcher’s responsibility. Among the nine, four did research for meeting policy requirements solely and the rest five were those who either gave up doing research due to health problems or showed no interest in or little concern about policy requirements.

### ***Limited autonomy in what to research***

Among the fifteen participants, eight indicated very strong emphasis on the negative influence brought by the decreasing autonomy in deciding research direction and five indicated strong emphasis. KONG, who was one of the nine without researcher responsibility and attached very strong emphasis, complained that,

*KONG: I feel our university and even the government have preferences for research directions that prescribe what they want us to do. In order to encourage teachers to do research according to their preferences, they put forward a list of projects before teachers can start to apply for research fund. Then, they have the power to decide where the fund goes to. That means the research topics in areas other than the ones listed may be difficult to get approved and funded.*

WU expressed very strong emphasis in her perception that the autonomy in ‘what to research’ was restricted by government’s expectations:

*WU: It is the government that plays with their power in guiding and directing the research directions of participants through*

*controlling the possibility of getting research projects and the distribution of fund.*

When asked why they cared about satisfying the government's appetite for research directions, ZHU replied that,

*ZHU: I do research simply for getting promoted and meeting the evaluation policy of our university. So in order to secure the fund for a research project, I feel it is easier if you follow the research preference list issued by the provincial government, such as researching something related to the hot topics like 'One Road One Belt', 'Hakka Culture' etc. Anyway, the purpose for doing that is to make your research proposal easier to be approved. Just do what they want you to.*

In agreement with ZHU, the government's restriction on research topics was felt by HAN as well.

*HAN: It seems to be OK to research whatever you are interested in or good at. But actually, it is better to read the list of projects approved in the last few years and the recommended directions by the government to make sense of what the government really likes you to do in order to get research project proposals approved more easily.*

Participants gradually noticed such hidden rules which were not written apparently on the policy documents after learning of or witnessing the successful research achievements of others. That was how the choice of what to research may be influenced by what the government wanted them to research. KONG commented on this:

*KONG: The funding mainly goes to what the funders want you to do.*

*For example, topics regarding the current Chinese hot issues and the style of leadership in current China and its application in higher education or topics which can link to our university's scientific foci are easier to get approved.*

Although all participants had noticed the restriction on what to research, participants with and without responsibility as researchers responded differently. These nine participants who had weaker sense of responsibility for doing research willingly tended to conform to the governments' research preferences tightly for the purpose of getting expected research outcomes. They considered it as a short cut. This was evident in what ZHU commented below.

*ZHU: I'd better go for the popular issues and find my research topic from there, because it may increase the possibility of getting it (research project) approved. For example, 'dalei zhaosheng' which is the current reform on university students' recruitment approach. The reform advocates that students will not have any specific major until the second academic year. This approach differs from traditional ones. This is a hot topic at the moment.*

It can be seen that the participants who did not have research responsibility tended to do research for the sake of doing it, particularly for the purpose of meeting policy needs. This explains why they chose to follow the policy preferences. The moderate engagement in the context of limited autonomy regarding research is in line with other research such as Bartels (2003) and Lo (2005). More specifically, Chinese researchers Liu (2011) and Xia (2002) found Chinese university English teachers' research engagement was weak and mainly for meeting policy demands.

However, different from the nine participants, the other six who

demonstrated relatively stronger researchers' responsibility revealed their own research interest before they knew the government's preferences. They presented different responses towards the contradiction when their interest did not match government's preferences. They claimed their persistence in sticking to their own research directions although they were also aware of the government's preferences. SHEN commented:

*SHEN: The government has its preferences for research directions that indeed limit our choices. My research interest lies in lexicology which belongs to the linguistic field and not very relevant to the government's preference list. It is harder to attract the government's interest. But I don't want to care much about that because I have confidence in what I want to research. I believe research work with good quality can one day have the chance to get recognized no matter which area it belongs to.*

These six participants claimed their insistence in what they originally interested in researching or strategically combined what they wanted to research with the government's preferences rather than fully following the trend set by the government. This was because they tended to view research work as something more valuable and meaningful than simply for the sake of getting research results. It was their own inner willingness that drove them to do research so that they cared less about the possible research outcomes they may gain. As YANG said:

*YANG: Researching the Chinese classic literature or drama is my interest. It is the process of understanding it and making more people know it that makes me happy.... it is not necessary to have any significant outcomes when I feel happy doing what I like.*

### ***Limited autonomy in doing research***

Six participants had given very strong emphasis on perceiving being restricted to engaging in research activities. Another four had attached strong emphasis and the rest five indicated slight emphasis.

Participants noted that, in order to enable a piece of research to be done, it was necessary to have sufficient time, resources and support from the university. WEI and CAO argued that,

*WEI: To do research well, I think at least we need to have time and energy to do it. Sufficient time should be devoted to research and one's attention must be fully concentrated on it.*

*CAO: ...It is difficult for us teachers to do research successfully with individual efforts. ... We need support from our department. If the university could give more support that would be better... for example, we need at least more channels to access other researchers' works both from china and abroad. We need money to do that.*

However, they mentioned that there were limitations and restrictions in all these aspects. For example, HAN commented on the time allowances in conducting research:

*HAN: The University requires us to have research achievements, which is clearly stated in the promotion and evaluation policy. However, on the other hand, they expect us to complete more and more teaching workload. I am not a superwoman, so how can I have time for research after I finish all the teaching workload?*

WEI also expressed views about the available resources that they



could use.

*WEI: In our university, it is said, we have a library and the book collections and e-books are developing. However, compared with overseas universities and other key universities in China, it is far from enough.*

ZHU added that:

*ZHU: We have no access to internet services such as Google and You-tube which I imagine may have useful resources.*

In addition to constraints of time and resources, funding was another issue. As CAO observed:

*CAO: Funding support of our university is always going to the science subjects. Have you heard in last year's report of our university president that they (Science subject researchers) were granted millions and millions of RMB but we were granted only several ten thousands?*

Such limitations thus kept the nine participants from engaging in research. As KONG noted that:

*KONG: I really do not have extra time except for finishing my teaching workload. You know, my twin babies are still so young. I do not have anyone else helping me look after them. After changing more than twenty nannies, my wife and I have to take care of them by ourselves. I cannot find more time for research.*

Besides the above constraints of time, resources and supports, there are

studies (e.g. Ebbutt, 2002; Borg and Liu, 2013) revealing other important institutional factors such as institutional management(e.g. Ebbutt, 2002) , time allowance, work pressures (Cooke and Arakaki, 1999) which impact on the level of research engagement of teachers. Although it was easy to view these factors as excuses for disengagement from research, the researchers did suggest that these resources be built into institutional system to encourage research initiatives.

The other six participants, although acknowledged such limitations which restricted professional space for research, provided more positive responses to the limitations. YANG, SUN and QIAN argued that,

*YANG: ...Time is limited for me to do research because I spend most of my energy in teaching. But when you feel interested in doing something, you will find time to do it. I feel like doing research, so I will try to make use of my spare time in a more efficient way to do some research. In the second half of the last year, I always worked till two to three o'clock in the early morning writing my paper.*

*SUN: I think I have gained confidence in how to do research through these years' experience in it. For example, I have become more familiar with the corpus software for analysing texts and have been able to write quickly. Although time is still limited, the more I feel I am experienced in research, the more efficiently I can use the limited time, which actually saves time.*

*QIAN: I sought help to install some software so that my computer could access overseas websites without being blocked. After several attempts, I finally got one stable App (application). I am paying money out of my pocket monthly, but I think it*

*worthwhile to have access to many resources which are helpful for my research.*

Therefore, a discrepancy appeared between the perceived limited time, resources and support in doing research and the responses towards such limitations. To be accurate, the discrepancy was found to mainly exist among the six participants who possessed passion, inner willingness and responsibility for conducting research. The professional autonomy given by the university functioned as a context and how participants responded to the context reflected their enactment of professionalism. It seemed that whether participants were willing to get involved in research activities and their purposes of doing research distinguished one group of participants from the other in their way of enacting professionalism in a context with the same given autonomy. In other words, the presence or absence of responsibility distinguished the two groups (six versus nine participants).

To put it another way, the responsibility participants had for research helped them respond to the same autonomous context in different ways. It is with the responsibility for research that the six participants would be able to sustain their own research interest. They did research for wanting to do it and for the pleasure of doing it. Therefore, even when the autonomy was insufficient for them to undertake research activities, they still worked hard to remove constraints in order to carry out their research work smoothly. This differs from the view of Beijaard et al. (2005:351) that ‘autonomy is regarded as a prerequisite for teachers to devote efforts in professional growth’. Participants in this study demonstrated commitment in self-development even when autonomy was not sufficient. A more detailed discussion on the relationship between teachers’ responsibility and way of doing will be presented in the discussion chapter.

## 4.4 Changes in Professional Knowledge

While participants exploited perceived given autonomy in different ways, they presented different manifestations in the constructions and enactment of professional knowledge. This section identifies the major characteristics of knowledge structure as teacher and researcher respectively. Factors contributing to shaping such characteristics and the changes are discussed. Table 4.4.1 illustrates the key changes of professional knowledge enactment in the teaching domain while Table 4.4.2 demonstrates the characteristics in the research domain. The explanations start in teaching domain.

### 4.4.1 Changes in enacting professional knowledge in teaching

The detected changes in how teachers enacted their knowledge in relation to what they taught and how they taught are shown in Table 4.4.1. The subsequent sections explain the changes in detail.

**Table 4.4.1: Changes in enacting professional knowledge in teaching**

**Notes:**

- +: attach a little importance to the theme/sub-theme by raising the issue
- ++: attach importance to the theme by raising the issue and explaining with detailed examples
- +++: attach strong importance to the theme by raising, explaining with examples and further emphasize in later interviews again
- \: refers to having not raised by participants

Themes    Participants	Changes in enacting professional knowledge in teaching				
	Changes in Teaching content			Changes in Teaching Pedagogy	
	Change from teaching language knowledge to			Change from 'teacher-oriented to 'student-oriented teaching	Change from 'traditional to technology-assisted teaching
	Add speaking and listening practice	Add cultural knowledge	Integrate teaching morality		
HUA	++	\	\	++	++
SHEN	++	++	++	++	++
HAN	+++	++	\	+++	+++
WU	+++	++	+	+++	+++
WEI	++	+++	++	++	+++
ZHU	+++	+	+	+++	+++
YANG	++	++	+++	++	+++
KONG	++	++	+++	++	++
SUN	++	++	++	++	++
QIAN	++	+++	++	++	+++
CAO	+	+	+++	+	+
JIANG	+	+++	+++	+	++
ZHOU	+	++	+++	+	+
ZHENG	+++	+	+++	+	+
FENG	+	\	+++	+	+

As shown in Table 4.4.1, all fifteen participants experienced a shift in the focus on what they taught in English class. The participants varied in the strength they attached to the changes they had undergone. The changes mainly took place in their original focus on teaching English linguistic knowledge to their students. Such linguistic knowledge was considered to be inclusive of linguistic features of the English language such as vocabulary building patterns, meaning, sentence grammar and rules, and skills in producing accurate English passages. It seemed that this content had been covered by all the participants and served as a starting point for later possible changes. This was further explained in the remarks of HAN and WEI:

*HAN: When I just started teaching, I spent most of the time talking about the materials I had prepared in relation to language points, i.e. key words and phrases and difficult sentence explanation to students.*

*WEI: I remember my teaching in earlier times. What I delivered in class mainly focussed on the explanation of the pronunciation of words, meaning of words, how these words differed from other synonyms, and also grammar rules for making sentences correctly.*

As HAN and WEI said above, the teaching of English linguistic knowledge had been the primary teaching content in the participants' early working phases no matter which stage they were in when they were interviewed. They all started their teaching career with a focus on English knowledge initially.

Regarding the reason why they experienced such a starting point, it was found that the participants' prior learning experiences as students influenced their choice of teaching content. The insufficient experiences as novice teachers when they just became members of the profession led them to teach linguistic knowledge which was less challenging.

Participants with relatively longer working experience recalled that when they were students, learning English almost equalled to memorizing new vocabulary and grammar. They spent most of their time reciting vocabulary and grammar rules. Thus, expanding the vocabulary and making English sentences in a grammatically accurate way were considered to be the most important task that English learners should fulfil. FENG, who had twenty nine years of working experience, explained:

*FENG: The textbook was the only material that we could learn English from. The design of textbook centred on the linguistic*

*knowledge... the English class hours were also limited. Teachers made full use of their time talking about and explaining the textbook in detail.*

Although teachers with less working experience tended to have more diverse learning materials, they still considered the linguistic knowledge to be central to them. As SHEN recalled:

*SHEN: As a student in university...I made lots of efforts to accumulate more vocabulary and memorize grammar rules. Although there were other materials to learn linguistics, practice oral spoken ability and listening skills, the learning of English language itself was still the most basic thing.*

However, this did not remain unchanged throughout their teaching career. It was not long after working as a teacher (two to three years) that they noticed they had started to think over the necessity of enriching teaching content in class. QIANMMIN shared that:

*WEI: Although mastering linguistic knowledge was a major task for me as a student ... we did have many other materials to learn as well such as literature, oral English. That influenced my thinking of what and how to teach. Maybe it could be linguistic knowledge centred plus something else.*

Exploring in more detail, one would find that the participants aimed to expand and enrich teaching content. Different participants demonstrated different focuses. For example, four participants tended to focus on the development of listening and speaking ability of students with very strong emphasis, hence they added materials such as listening practices and oral activities. WU argued that:

*WU: our students have learned a lot English grammar and vocabulary. However, they cannot properly use them in communication. ... Once it dawned on me that compared with our students, students from other countries such as India can express much better... I regard developing students' listening and speaking ability as being even more important than the knowledge itself.*

As claimed by the participants, English reform required them to improve students' listening and speaking ability more. Other participants were enthusiastic in integrating into their teaching not only speaking and listening, but also cultural knowledge of western countries. For example, QIAN said that:

*QIAN: Speaking of our students, did you find they lack the knowledge of cultures? Maybe because we are a Science and Technology University, students focus too much on science... I do feel the necessity to share with them cultural knowledge of the west countries.*

Seven participants placed very strong emphasis on the importance of integrating the explanation of sense of morality and typical moral examples to influence their students in class. As CAO and FENG noted:

*CAO: I could feel myself undergoing a change in what I should teach to my students. At the beginning, I felt linguistic knowledge was the most important thing and it seemed that all my efforts were made to help students memorize vocabulary, grammar and have good marks. However, gradually, as time went by and as my living experiences accumulated, I did feel that moral education of students*



*became something important or even more important for me as a teacher. Maybe that is because I have experienced more in life and have developed my own thinking of the meaning of life, established attitudes towards difficulties, etc. All these things I feel necessary to pass on to my students to help them be good people who know how to get along with others in a kind way, and know how to face challenges and difficulties in life.*

*FENG: I think through being a role model myself and setting up a good example for my students, they can be influenced by me to behave or think likewise. For example, the way I treated the student (who I mentioned earlier is an orphan and gradually accepted me by what I did for him and the care and love I devoted to him) had an influence on him as well. He used to be an indifferent person. He did not care about others and did not want to make friends with others. I think he had learned from what I did and changed his behaviour. Gradually, he became warm and kind to others. For example, when he found I got a cold or had a sore throat, he would immediately buy medicine for me and sent me messages to ask about my health condition every three days until I totally recovered.*

The integration of moral education into teaching was in line with Section 4.1 which presented teachers' responsibility for cultivating moral quality of students. The integration of morality into class manifested their enactment of such responsibility.

The reason why participants made such changes in teaching content selection rather than remaining focused on teaching only the linguistic

knowledge throughout their teaching career was explored in this study. It was found that the participants were inspired by the inner motive as a teacher to help students benefit more from their teaching. Therefore, they were willing to seek more possibilities for increasing the diversity of teaching content and attempt to explore more teaching areas. Driven by such willingness and motive, they were more willing to make efforts to adapt to English reform, self-development and meeting students' needs. JIANG shared:

*JIANG: I understand life would be easier if we only taught language points in the textbook and asked students to do exercises. But I find it not enough for a university teacher. There should be more than that. The job market now requires students not only to have a CET 4 Certificate, but also really be able to use English as a communicative tool. So as their teacher, I should practice their oral English more in my class, being aware of the demand of the market.*

Teacher KONG added:

*KONG: Our English teaching is experiencing an ongoing reform. Have you seen that 'preparing students with comprehensive ability in English' is very important? When I realized the aim of the reform, as a teacher, I started to think that I should integrate all aspects of English teaching into my class. We cannot merely focus on teaching English reading and writing to students, producing 'deaf and dumb English learners'.*

The responsibility of them for teaching and helping students motivated participants to keep updating their way of knowledge enactment in their teaching practices. In addition to the changes in the teaching content, the methods they adopted to teach their chosen content did not remain static as

well. The changes commenced with the ‘teacher-centred’ approach (TCA). TCA basically means that teachers act as the main speaker to deliver lectures while students are mainly listeners receiving information and taking notes of what they believe to be useful. ZHOU recalled her teacher-centred teaching experience:

*ZHOU: I used to teach by talking all the time in class, trying hard to tell my students whatever I knew, the more the better, and also worked hard to finish the content in the textbook. Giving them examples and explaining to them the key to exercises.... The whole class was like a lecture given by myself...*

Such approach had been predominant at the outset of the teaching career for all participants, regardless of the number of years of their teaching experience. HUA, who had three years of teaching experience, noted:

*HUA: In the first year of my teaching career, most of the time, I was the only speaker in class delivering what I prepared... It was because I thought if I couldn't teach well in the traditional way, then I couldn't lay the foundation for the shift to teaching in a more diverse way. ... That lasted for one to two years and then I started to change.*

For HUA, although she had been in the teaching profession for only three years, she started to make changes from the second to the third year of her career. However, for the mid- to late-career teachers, such an approach dominated for a longer time until the student-centred approach (SCA) was introduced through the educational reform. KONG and FENG recalled that

*KONG: Teachers as the main ones talking in the class has lasted for a long time. That used to be the main form of teaching, in*

*which we had a lot to teach. For example, language points took a long time to explain while students were busy taking notes...when the educational reform kicked in, I saw the necessity to shift to student-centred teaching.*

*FENG: It was after I adopted the teacher-centred approach for many years and when the English teaching reform started to be introduced that I realized that I need to make change in teaching. One key component of the reform was shifting from teacher-centred to student-centred teaching, allowing students to play the major role in class.*

The Student-Centred Approach (SCA) means that teachers invite students to be the major participants in class, encouraging them to take part in class activities, raising and answering questions, thinking over and expressing what has been taught by teachers. ZHU shared that

*ZHU: I have tried my best to design activities and get my students participate in the class. Through their own participation, I help them learn, pay attention, think and find out the problems... classroom discussion, role plays or even opera and drama display are all integrated into my classroom.*

Specific approaches were shared in detail by participants to demonstrate how they did to enact SCA. Such as HAN shared that:

*HAN: I designed more class activities, e.g. presentations, group discussions, teamwork, etc. for students to complete and present in class. For example, I once asked students to form small groups of four or five to discuss the topic of 'how you feel your college life should be' which was also a topic of a lesson. I asked students to*

*start thinking and working in groups two weeks before presenting the outcomes in class. That helped students work together, talk and discuss together. On the day of presentation, I was surprised because they did a good job. Some used short videos to present their feelings and plans for college life in English; some did role play in English. I think the new method is better than the old by which it was only me talking all the time about grammar. Students now have got a chance to use English no matter how well they can manage the language.*

However, four participants (i.e. CAO, JIANG, ZHOU and FENG) had experienced relatively longer time of teaching with TCA before the reform was carried out. Thus, it was reasonable for them to shift from TCA to SCA with relatively more difficulty compared with others because they had insisted in using TCA for years before SCA was accepted by them.

ZHENG, with similarly long experience in teaching TCA and who reported very strong emphasis on the shift to SCA, was an exception. As she shared, it was her extrinsic personality that enabled her to make the change significantly.

*ZHENG: I am a quite outgoing person. I feel I can make use of my personality to teach students in a highly communicative way. Although in the past I was not told to do so, now I can do more to encourage them to take part in class and make them talk.*

In comparison, other eleven participants who were still in their earlier phase of career (especially the three with less than six years' experience) laid more emphasis on the change from TCA to SCA. That was because they had shifted to the SCA not long after they started teaching and SCA kept playing a significant role in their teaching till now. HUA noted that

*HUA: I used to teach students by giving them lectures mainly and I didn't think much about how to engage them in my teaching. At least, talking by myself and delivering knowledge were nothing wrong.... but soon, about one or two years later, I started to get them involved. I remember how some of my previous teachers managed to engage me in class and try to imitate and practice teaching like them. Gradually, I can do it as well.*

However, no matter how much emphasis participants had attached to such changes, they were found again to be driven by their beliefs as teachers to keep updating their pedagogical skills to meet the changing requirements for English language education. They kept repeating the words 'we are teachers' and 'that is what we should do as a teacher'. This was evident in what participants like JIANG said:

*JIANG: ...Sometimes I really feel tired over too much teaching workload and annoyed by other issues. But anyway, I am a teacher. I cannot let my students down because they have done nothing wrong.*

This inner willingness and obligation were clearly reflected in the remarks of the five experienced teachers, namely CAO, JIANG, ZHOU, ZHENG and FENG (all with more than twenty one years of working experience) when they shared how they overcame challenges in an attempt to adopt new teaching approach. FENG shared the challenges she encountered in the implementation of SCA in class:

*FENG: There is an age gap between me and students. It is difficult to make them feel willing to communicate with a teacher of their mothers' age and feel relaxed without being affected by the generation gap. ... We do not share common interest*

*in topics nor sometimes views towards certain issues. This prevents them from expressing themselves willingly and freely and being the centre of the class.*

The challenges did not prevent participants from applying SCA. When they found age gap to be a factor hampering their communication with students, their responsibility as teachers pushed them to actively find solutions. For example, the participant ZHENG said:

*ZHENG: I know that I am like their mother rather than friend. But in order to narrow the generation gap between me and my students, I tried to be active in class. I would make jokes with them, showing all my talents, singing and dancing. I made full use of my extrovert personality to make them like me and like joining me in the classroom activities. The effect was not bad when they found I was sincere to be friends with them, learning and teaching together.*

This did not mean it was easy for less experienced teachers to make such a change because they had encountered challenges as well, albeit of different types. But the similarity was that they also looked for solutions and ways of improvement with efforts. This was evident in SUN and HUA's professional accounts:

*SUN: I did feel frustrated when students' responses didn't meet my expectations... especially when students could not be inspired to open their mouths to speak... then I went back home looking for more interesting ways to engage students in my next class. For example, I once asked students to bring their favourite things to class and to describe in English. It was better than asking students to talk without anything in hand. The best*

*talkers were awarded with some books I bought.*

*HUA: I tried different ways to encourage students to talk, e.g. by giving them rewards. However, some students who were very shy would just sit there. Then, I would focus on these silent students, talking to them individually to involve them in the activities.*

Therefore, in spite of difficulties, participants were willing to work out different approaches to solve problems because they believed that was what they should do as teachers. The title of ‘teacher’ tended to ignite their passion, and give them power and energy, as the participant HAN said:

*HAN: I think it is normal to meet difficult students who may cause problems for teachers. Anyway, it is what I should do and I am happy to find ways of improvement.... that is what a teacher should do.*

One more change driven by teachers’ internal motives to benefit students was the change in using technology-assisted teaching approach. Examining the different weighting given to this theme by participants, one can find that this is similar to the change in teaching pedagogy. Four more experienced participants demonstrated fewer radical changes in this aspect than those less experienced participants did. ZHENG, with twenty seven years of working experience, pointed out that

*ZHENG: I had been using the traditional way of teaching for a long time. ... When technology was recommended, I integrated it into the class teaching, trying to take advantage it for my teaching. But I did not feel it yielded a very big difference. I still use the traditional way as well.*



The more experienced teachers spent a relatively longer time teaching without the aid of technology before computer-assisted teaching was widely adopted. The teaching without help from technology was called 'traditional' teaching by the participants. It was until the arrival of the technological age that they were pushed to use advanced technology to facilitate their teaching. The examples were the use of computer media, the Internet and Microsoft Office in teaching, as FENG described:

*FENG: We used to have nothing related to technology. Gradually, technology had developed and kept playing more and more important roles in people's life and work. Then I started to learn the new thing and use it in my teaching, mainly because time was saved if words were already input in the PPT slides and materials were ready to be presented.*

The less experienced and younger teachers got used to the new technology sooner than more experienced and elder teachers. So, the less experienced and younger teachers demonstrated a relatively higher degree of acceptance and quicker adaptation to the application of technology in class. In their daily class teaching, their efforts were not focused on how to get familiar with the technology, but more on being creative with the technology use. HAN, with five years of teaching experience, shared that

*HAN: Some teachers say my PPT slides are good. Maybe that is because I spent time revising and retouching the ones given by the department. I added a lot of interesting pictures, videos and listening materials for students to watch in classroom. In this way, their attention was attracted...*

However, the more experienced teachers encountered difficulty in using the new technology skilfully, as CAO commented:

*CAO: Yeah, I know high technology is very useful, but I sometimes just cannot remember how to use it properly... forgetting where to click or where to open a manual.*

But these difficulties did not prevent experienced teachers from using the technology which could improve the teaching effects and be welcome among their students. What they did was trying to find a balance between the traditional and technology-assisted teaching. On the one hand, they sought help from the younger and less experienced teachers to assist them in coping with the technical problems to ensure the smoothness of teaching. JIANG commented:

*JIANG: Sometimes I cannot keep abreast of the development of high-tech, but I do want to know more... I will always ask young teachers or my apprentice to teach me how to use software correctly, for example.*

On the other hand, in order to mitigate the weakness in using technology and sustain the teaching quality, they tended to strategically use the combination of traditional and technology-assisted teaching. ZHOU exemplified that:

*ZHOU: I appreciate young teachers who can make good use of technology in the classroom. But, I think the traditional 'blackboard and chalk' teaching approach should not be totally rid of. Especially when students are too distracted by the videos or pictures in the computer, it is time to write something on the backboard and get their concentration back on track... Since I am good at traditional teaching, I integrate it with new tech-assisted teaching.*

The efforts made to either more creatively apply the technology or to learn to use it properly in class to maximize its advantages demonstrated that the teachers' fulfilment of what they believed to be inherent in the role of a teacher. Different from what they believed and did in the teaching domain, participants presented more diverse attributes in the research domain.

#### **4.4.2 Understanding and enacting professional knowledge in research**

Participants demonstrated difference in understanding of research and the way they engaged in research activities. The following Table 4.4.2 presented the emphasis participants placed on each of the themes and sub-themes.

**Table 4.4.2: Understanding and enacting professional knowledge  
in research**

**Notes:**

- +: attach a little importance to the theme/sub-theme by raising the issue
- ++: attach importance to the theme by raising the issue and explaining with detailed examples
- +++: attach strong importance to the theme by raising, explaining with examples and further emphasize in later interviews again
- +/+++: attach a little importance to the theme by raising, or strong importance by raising, explaining with examples and further emphasize in later interviews again, but the manifestations for the importance differ
- \: refers to having not raised by participants

Themes Theme Participants	Understanding and enacting professional knowledge in research					
	Understanding of research		Means of doing research			
	Research is 'process focused'	Research is 'outcome focused'	Ensure academic quality		Use interpersonal relation	Joining others' research work
			Academic writing	Research Methods		
HUA	++	\	++	++	\	\
SHEN	+++	\	++	+++	+	<u>+++</u>
YANG	+++	\	+++	\	+	<u>±</u>
SUN	++	\	++	+++	\	<u>+++</u>
QIAN	+++	\	+++	+++	\	<u>+++</u>
JIANG	++	\	++	++	\	\
WU	+	+	+	\	++	+++
HAN	\	+++	\	\	+++	+++
ZHU	+	+++	++	\	+++	++
KONG	\	+++	+	\	+++	+++
WEI	\	++	+	+	+++	++
CAO	\	+++	\	\	++	\
ZHOU	\	+++	\	\	++	\
ZHENG	\	+++	\	\	+++	++
FENG	\	+++	\	\	+++	\

Unlike the teaching domain where years of experience distinguished participants in terms of how significant they viewed the knowledge construction, in the research domain, the six participants who presented sense of responsibility for research (illustrated in Section 4.1) were found to have different understanding of research from the other nine participants who had not developed research responsibility. The following section analyses such differences in detail through comparison of the two groups (six versus nine).

### ***Process-oriented versus outcome-oriented understanding of research***

The nine participants who had presented weak responsibility for research tended to have an outcome-oriented understanding of research. Such

understanding was mainly characterized as believing that the value of research lied in producing outcomes which could bring economic benefits for researchers and the university. In other words, they saw the outcome as a core of research and the financial benefits of the research outcomes indicated the value of that research. Hence, the outcome of research became a criterion of evaluating the meaning of research. KONG observed that

*KONG: ... What the university says and the leaders think can tell us about the preferred direction of research. Clearly in our university, it is how much economic profits it may bring to the university and how influential your achievements can be in the whole country that become the evaluation criteria for what is good research.*

As to how such understanding was formed, the type of research which was propagated by the leaders in the university had made significant contribution. The research which was appreciated and preferred by the university was the ones of scientific nature. It did not mean that participants had grasped a clear understanding of scientific nature of research, but that the leaders' preference influenced participants' perception of what good research should be. Leaders awarded and praised science researchers, appreciating the financial income their research may generate and the reputation it could earn for the university. WEI and ZHENG commented:

*WEI: We are working in a science and technology university. In all sorts of meetings, we hear the university leaders propagate and encourage research in the scientific fields which can bring profits and reputation to the university.*

*ZHENG: According to the scientific researchers in our university, the invention of a patent can be sold for millions of RMB. And*

*you can see the profits brought by the research for both the researchers and the university.*

Although participants may not know clearly about the research process of those appreciated research, they mainly focused on the outcomes of research which were praised by the university. This phenomenon was understandable because participants were staff members in a science-oriented university. The science researchers' achievements, the leaders' preferences and support (both in terms of policy and finance) could influence participants' perception of what research was and the value of doing it. This was shown in what KONG and WU observed:

*KONG: As far as I know, financial support and rewards from our university for good research always go to researchers in the fields of science and technology (such as metallurgy and mineral engineering). Why? That is because they are valuable in the way that they can bring more money and reputation to the university.*

*WU: Our university obviously provides more support for science researchers who can earn money for the university. You can find this from the funding university gives to support their research. The university is willing to support them financially because they (science researchers) can make more money later.*

Working in this kind of context, ZHENG totally rejected research and shared her views as quoted below.

*ZHENG: I do not see any meaning of doing research on our English subject. ...All the linguistic rules have been studied*

*thoroughly, how can we as non-native speakers find any new areas to research? Writing papers of thousands of words is like 'making a fuss about an imaginary illness' (wubing shenyin).*

In comparison with the above nine participants' understanding of research and its value, the other six participants also had awareness of the nature of the university and the preferred types of research though their understanding of research tended to be less influenced by the university context. It was found that their efforts in learning how to research and the experience of doing research enabled them to add and develop their own views of the value of the social science research. SHEN, QIAN and YANG commented that

*SHEN: I have some experience in doing research. I know my research cannot provide any results like theirs (science ones) that can sell to earn a large amount of money immediately. But it is the way I do it that makes it valuable....I am working in the field of lexicography. I think it's very important to develop a well-structured and reader-friendly way to present clearly the pattern of vocabulary in the dictionary. ... The process of doing it is crucial although time-consuming. Maybe finally I can make some money from compiling a new dictionary.*

*QIAN: You cannot imagine how difficult I am in reading large amount of literature on both Chinese and Western contexts. Selecting useful texts, coding, categorizing and identifying patterns are difficult. It is easy to make claims, but it is not easy to make claims with solid evidence. The process is hard but fundamental. ... The process itself makes the research exciting.*

*YANG: Take my recent research on 'Gannan (a place) tea-leaf picking opera' for instance. I feel it is the process of looking for some opera records which are about to disappear in words but still live in the oral form that makes my research interesting. ... Maybe it can never earn profits for me, but I am still happy to do it as it allows the art form to be available to future generations.*

These participants presented more nuanced insights into the meaning and value of research. Their previous learning experiences, previous teachers' influences, in-service training and learning contributed to shaping their perception. They recalled that

*HUA: The courses I took in MA study helped me understand research. ...The methodology classes made me realize that the suitable method I select to do research and the process of using the method are crucial. It is the process of how you do it that matters more than the results.*

*SHEN: My supervisor did research in a careful and rigorous manner. He could spend a long time constructing and reconstructing a more appropriate explanation of one word in a clear way. I gradually became interested in doing this like my supervisor.*

*YANG: Attending conferences is really helpful to broaden my horizons through listening to others tell how they do research.*

*SUN: During the period that I took part-time MA study in J Normal University, I learned systematically to improve my research abilities. For example, I generated more thinking towards my research direction through reading books and brainstorming*



*with other learners and experts. I have also gained more detailed understanding of qualitative study, especially discourse analysis... and making use of corpus software.*

In addition to the part-time MA study, QIAN's experience as a visiting scholar in University of Cambridge in the UK and JIANG's short training experience in Shanghai Normal University in China were also influential for them. They commented that:

*QIAN: The one-year visiting scholar experience in Cambridge was really impressive... to see how researchers did research in UK. Systematic design of research, critical thinking and persistent pursuit of deep investigation impressed me. This is very different from many Chinese researchers who do research by fits and starts, focusing on doing research for the purpose of doing it, publishing it and getting results rather than working in a steady way.*

*JIANG: I learned a lot during my one-year stay in Shanghai Normal University, working under a professor who is an expert in cross-cultural studies. ...sometimes it is hard to describe in words, but the way to think and carry out research has graduated from a careless to a more careful level. I have found more interest in research and am even thinking of doing a PhD there.*

The learning experiences from no matter when and where helped these six participants gain more updated understanding of research and enabled them to present different views from those of the other nine participants. On the one hand, the six participants did not deny that the financial achievements and reputation brought by research could make the research valuable and

meaningful. On the other hand, they added new insights into and broadened understanding of other possible values of social science research. Based on their understanding, participants demonstrated different ways of doing research.

### ***Means of doing research***

Among the above six participants, their ways of doing research were featured in the efforts they made to improve the academic presentation of their research work. The following are the explanations of two prevailing features identified regarding how they endeavoured to enhance their academic quality.

Firstly, improving research methodology was shared by five participants (two with strong and three with very strong emphasis). As remarked by participants, the design of methods determined how and what they could achieve from their research. QIAN commented that

*QIAN: Research methodology is what I lack and what prevents me from doing research. But I believe it to be very important. Many Chinese scholars mix up methodology and specific methods. Many of them use the term 'methodology' to refer to literature or inductive methodology. Since these are approaches rather than methodology, how can they say their research findings are persuasive?*

Hence, enriching knowledge of methodology was considered to be important and they worked for the improvement in this aspect, as JIANG recalled:

*JIANG: I did not learn much during my MA programme which was part-time. When I noticed its importance in research, I always looked for opportunities to learn by myself, such as attending meetings and training sessions. That is why*

*colleagues said I was always away.*

Secondly, the six participants also emphasized the importance of paying special attention to the academic writing quality. They were aware that social sciences research mainly presents researchers' thoughts and understanding of the relevant areas. It was through the quality writing that their thoughts and findings could be read by others. SUN supported that

*SUN: In order to get your research proposal approved, you know the first important thing based on my experience is how it is structured and written. Your proposal reflects how well your thinking is structured and how good your writing is. So sometimes, I present it in diagrams, which is a shortcut to help them read it in a clear manner, and that also shows your thinking.*

However, as the other nine participants had not recognized the value of research as these six participants, they showed reluctance in doing research because of their lack of confidence and shortage of ability to produce research outcomes as they expected. One of them, WEI, explained that:

*WEI: ... I do not want to do research or I should say I dare not and do not know how to do research, because I really have little knowledge about that and do not know how to approach the big issue.*

Although feeling reluctant, four of them still did research. They were found to be driven by the purpose of meeting policy requirements. In order to pass the evaluation policy or get promoted, they chose to find some 'shortcuts' to meet the requirements for research such as publishing papers and securing research grants. Those shortcuts featured their way of doing research in a

special manner. Such shortcuts were identified as having two characteristics. Firstly, they were achieved through making use of the personal networks or connections to get expected research outcomes. ZHU commented that

*ZHU: It is very important, I mean the connections, how familiar you are with the people who can decide the approval of a research proposal, for example, can play an important role in the possibility of getting it approved. It does not mean all teachers will use connections, and not all of us have done that indeed. But if you want to get research done, it could be a quick and effective way.*

Secondly, collaborating with other researchers and sharing benefits from each other's research outcomes was the another common form of research they adopted. This was evident in what KONG recalled below.

*KONG: Within the last two years, I have not done much research, but I have passed the appraisal of my research performance... The way is that \*\* (name) and \*\* (name) both agreed to put my name in their project team... That significantly helped me pass my appraisal though in fact I did nothing.*

Collaborating with fellow researchers was also found to be a feature among the six participants with responsibility and motivation for research. Their mark ('+++') meant that they demonstrated different meanings in how they collaborated with other researchers. JIANG commented that

*JIANG: Research should be teamwork rather than an individual endeavour. It is better to have someone who is in similar research direction, brainstorm with you, discusses with you and writes together with you.*

Participants' responses revealed that they viewed the teamwork as a way of sharing ideas and promoting cooperation in doing research. The discussion and negotiation between team members could facilitate generation of new ideas and more fruitful research outcomes. That was fundamentally different from simply using others' research outcomes without contributing much effort. However, the six participants also claimed that there was little possibility of forming research collaborative groups in the workplace because it was hard to find sufficient number of colleagues who liked doing research or who had common research interest.

Both these two shortcuts to gaining expected research achievements were surprisingly found to be not taken among five participants (five out of the nine participants who did not have research responsibility) who shared that they took the policy requirements for granted. It was due to health problem or impending retirement that these participants cared little about the penalty, i.e. salary cut, if they failed to meet the policy requirements. This was clearly seen in what ZHOU and FENG commented.

*ZHOU: After all, I am going to retire. The completion of research, just leave it to the young teachers. I do not mind the salary cut. If they really cut it, just let them do. It's not too much money for me. No one at my age will do research.*

*FENG: I think I do not want to touch research which is a hard and almost impossible thing for me. I do not have good health. What matters more for me is keeping healthy and living longer.*

Although the participants were in the same work condition, under the same policy and leadership, they responded to the same condition in different ways. That was because the personal factors, such as age, health and research interest were found to be influential. All these factors interplayed together to have impact on participants' strength or willingness to engage in research

activities. Further, their motives for doing research (voluntarily or involuntarily) influenced their sense of responsibility for doing research. Their sense of responsibility determined how much effort they would contribute to research and the means they adopted to achieve research outcomes.

Taking into account both the research and teaching domains, perhaps we could reinforce the argument that whether participants considered their work (either teaching or research) as part of their responsibility played an important role in impacting their understanding and enactment of professional knowledge. That is to say, the sense of professional responsibility could have profound impact on participants' thinking and behaviours.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### **INSTITUTIONAL FACTORS CONTRIBUTING TO THE SHAPING OF TEACHER PROFESSIONALISM**

It is suggested in the findings that the institutional factors play a significant role in shaping participants' perception of professionalism. Firstly, the institutional culture is closely linked to the scientific nature of the university and the English language teachers' status within the science-dominated working environment. Secondly, the university's transition from teaching focused to research and teaching focused significantly influences the contractual requirements imposed upon teachers and the design of university teaching and research policy. As a consequence, the policy change influences how teachers see themselves and behave.

This chapter explores the nature and forms of the impact and consists of three sections. The first section focuses on the culture of the university. The second section focuses on how and why the university made the transition. These two sections provide the institutional background for the teaching and policy design and change. Based on the first two sections, the third specifically seeks to illustrate how policies have influenced teachers' sense of professionalism.

#### **5.1 The Culture of the University**

This section highlights the main features of the university culture, including the scientific nature of the university and English teachers' status in the university.

### 5.1.1 Scientific nature of the university

The university specializes in science and technology. This is revealed by the established majors in this university which are mainly science-oriented.

*KONG: Science majors are dominating in our university, such as Mining, Chemistry, Engineering and so on. Social sciences subjects are only occupying a very small proportion... (They are) English, Politics and Law.*

The English language course serves as the basic course for all of the science students. In addition to the dominant proportion of the science majors within the university, the three ‘Wangpai’ (Trump Card) majors deemed by the participants are all science ones, as JIANG stated:

*JIANG: Our ‘Wangpai’ (Trump Card) majors are Mining, Metallurgy and Material Chemistry. When people talk about our university, they will mention these three... No one will mention English major.*

Furthermore, when this study was carried out, the incumbent university leaders were the ones who had scientific education background:

*SUN: Our university leaders majored in the field of science.... It is understandable that they will naturally focus more on science subjects, for example, the need of the science teachers and the importance of scientific major development.*

In sum, with the university leaders being with science background, the three key science majors that represent the university and the dominating proportion of other science majors evidenced the scientific nature of the studied university.



### 5.1.2 Relatively low status of English language teachers within the university

In this university, English teachers and English language subjects are in a relatively low status. This is manifested in the fact that English teachers possess insufficient right of speech in participating in policy-making. For example, one of the participants, YANG, commented on the university leaders:

*YANG: The leaders are from the field of science and engineering. They literally understand science subjects better and are more willing to listen to science teachers... Their policy making is also based on science perspectives.*

In addition, the social science majors have a much shorter history than that of science majors. Thus, less attention has been paid to the English language teachers by university leaders. As a consequence, their right of speech was limited. ZHENG illustrated:

*ZHENG: We (English teachers) are not that important as the science teachers, nor is our department. In the leaders' eyes, we are making much less contribution to the building of our university's reputation.*

To be more specific, their insufficient right of speech was reflected in having little power to influence policy making, as HAN observed:

*HAN: We often receive official emails asking for our opinions about certain policy making. For example, only eighty percent of the English teachers' actual teaching hours are recognized. I cannot remember how many times my colleagues and I have expressed to the department leader our objection to the policy. No one would*

*listen. The policy has remained the same for years.*

The university's shifting focus from teaching to teaching-and-research also had impact on some of the participants. This will be discussed in the next section.

## **5.2 Transition from a Teaching-focused to Teaching-and-Research-focused University**

The university has undergone a transition from focusing solely on teaching to both teaching and research. This transition, at the same time, has changed the contractual requirements upon the staff accordingly. The contractual requirements are considered to be increasingly demanding in relation to teachers' research outcomes. This means teachers are not only required to teach but also to research. But such requirements did not exist in teachers' employment contracts about twenty years ago. FENG recalled:

*FENG: I never encountered any tasks related to research, and I never thought of that. For me when I began my career here about thirty years ago, teaching was the only concern.*

Under such work context at that time, teachers were under the management of university policies and contractual requirements which were solely relevant to teaching performance and teaching achievements, as ZHOU recalled:

*ZHOU: My work twenty years ago were all about teaching and students. Preparing teaching materials, teaching in class and caring about my students after class were almost the whole of my work.*

In the teaching-oriented era, on the one hand, the university neither requires nor encourages teachers to get involved in research activities, on the

other hand, teachers did not have awareness of research yet at that time, as CAO shared:

*CAO: I never thought of research before the university told me to do. It was until research was taken into consideration in university policy that I realized it was another new era.*

As CAO pointed out, situation changed when research became a growing concern for the university leaders since 2000. The university leaders imposed requirements for research on teachers because the research output became a criterion for the Chinese Ministry of Education to assess the university quality, as SHEN commented:

*SHEN: One of the criteria set by the educational governors to rank universities is related to the university research output such as the number of published articles in high-tier journals. So, many universities, including ours, push teachers to do research in order to get a higher ranking.*

Thus, in order to achieve the MOE's expectation which places emphasis on increasing university research output and elevating university teachers' research ability, university leaders started to put more emphasis on research. The changing focus then triggered and guided the policy changes. In order to stimulate teachers to produce more research output, university leaders clearly designed a minimum amount of research participation as a basic contractual requirement for teachers to fulfil. Compared with the original policies, the updated ones had significant influence on teachers' professionalism and identity. The next section will illustrate the influence in detail.

### 5.3 Influence of University Teaching and Research Policies on Teachers

The impact of the university teaching and research policy on teachers will be presented from the perspectives of policy of teacher evaluation, teacher promotion as well as supporting and awarding mechanism. The participants' perceptions of these policies are shown in Table 5.3.

**Table 5.3: Participants' perception on the university teaching and research policy**

**Notes:**

- +: attach a little importance to the theme/sub-theme by raising the issue
- ++: attach importance to the theme by raising the issue and explaining with detailed examples
- +++: attach strong importance to the theme by raising, explaining with examples and further emphasize in later interviews again
- \: refers to having not been raised by participants

<b>Theme</b> <b>Participants</b>	<b>Evaluation and Promotion weights more on research output</b>	<b>Tension between policy demand and university supports</b>	<b>Awarding favours science subjects more</b>
HUA	++	+	\
SHEN	++	+	+
YANG	++	+	++
SUN	+++	+	++
QIAN	+++	+++	+
JIANG	++	++	\
WU	++	+	+
HAN	++	+++	++
ZHU	+++	++	+
KONG	+++	+++	++
WEI	++	+	\
CAO	++	+	+
ZHOU	++	+++	++
ZHENG	++	++	+++
FENG	++	+	+

Participants expressed their views on the teaching and research policy. Especially, their perception of evaluation and promotion policy, awarding policy and tension between policy demand and support were revealed. The following section explains these and explores the influence that university policy had on participants and participants' responses to it.

### **5.3.1 Influence of evaluation and promotion policies**

The investigated university's teacher evaluation policy examined the teachers' performance annually. The policies had undergone changes from measuring teaching performance only to measuring both teaching and research activities, as ZHOU recalled:

*ZHOU: There used to be totally nothing related to research in university policy twenty years ago. At that time, even for evaluating teaching performance, I remember there were also few detailed criteria to measure how good a teacher was. The only general rules were issued such as 'loving the educational cause, fulfilling the given teaching workload, caring about students...' and so on. There were no specific rules like today to measure the amount of workload and how the work should be carried out.*

This policy was exactly in line with the university's shifting focus from teaching to teaching and research. In the process of policy change, participants illustrated how the evaluation policy placed growing emphasis on measuring teachers' research output and at the same time imposed pressure on teachers. In this regard, one of the participants, WEI, exemplified:

*WEI: It became more challenging for teachers to meet the basic passing criteria of the evaluation policy. Initially, it just required us to participate in research activities such as being a member of a*

*research project. Later, it became more specific concerning the requirement for the number of publications. For example, for teachers with lecturer title [according to the 'Working performance evaluation method of J University', issue number 68, 2017 edition], you have to publish two articles in ordinary journals which is easier or one in core periodical. Numbers are much annoying.*

More university documentary evidence such as 'Professional position and its evaluation and appointment of J University' (issue number 71, 2017 edition) revealed the growing emphasis attached to research. This inevitably influenced how participants saw themselves and made sense of whom they were required to be. Apparently, teachers were expected to fulfil not only the role of teacher but also, more importantly, researcher according to the policy.

However, as reported by the participants, although the university now paid more attention to research, the English department was still positioned as a teaching-centred department within the university. In this context, English teachers expected the university to adopt a different evaluation policy which should weigh more on teaching performance for them, as ZHU commented:

*ZHU: You can read our department instruction from our university website. It states that this is a teaching-centred department with research as a supplement. Carrying out the teaching of English courses for the students of all non-English majors is our main work. Accordingly, the evaluation of us, I think, should focus more on teaching as well. At least, less attention should be paid to research than to teaching.*

Such expectations were not satisfied by the leaders. Teachers in the English department were evaluated in the same way as science teachers in terms of research output. It is not that the participants did not try to change, but that they were not able to due to little right of speech given to them. This

resulted in their frustrations over the changing policy. Such frustration aroused the feeling of being neglected and isolated to some extent, as YANG pointed out:

*YANG: We English teachers have almost no right of speech. University leaders focus on the science teachers and our department is minor and cannot compare with the science departments. We are less important than science teachers. It is not that we did not try to voice our opinions, but that no one finally listened to us.*

The policy on promotion had similar characteristics to evaluation policy. The criteria for promotion are set according to teachers' performance and achievements in both teaching and research. Teaching served as a basic 'menkan' (threshold) if one wanted to get promoted. Without satisfying the basic requirements for teaching, a teacher's other qualifications would not count, as KONG argued:

*KONG: Look at our policy on promotion. Teaching performance is like a sine qua non because everyone is required to fulfil required amount of workload without making any serious 'jiaoxue chacao' (teaching mistakes). So, it is a minimum 'menkan' (threshold).*

After the minimum requirement was met, the policy on promotion also laid more emphasis on the measurement of research output, as WEI added:

*WEI: The most important factor in helping ourselves stand out is the research performance. That really helps teachers to be prominent. The more research achievements you have, the more likely that you will get promoted.*

It was evident that the university did not neglect the importance of teaching because policy makers had issued minimum expectations for

teaching as basic requirements in both evaluation and promotion policies. However, policy makers still differentiated between the English language subject and the science subjects. Evidence could be found in one piece of teaching workload calculation policy. According to the policy, twenty percent was deducted from the total amount of English teachers' workload. Participants considered this deduction as 'bias', as HAN commented:

*HAN: Our final computed teaching workload is not the actual total number of class hours that we have taught. It has been a long time bias that university only recognizes eighty percent of our total amount of teaching hours. That is to say another twenty percent of teaching has been done in vain.*

For other courses, especially those related to science, policy makers not only did not deduct any class hours but also gave them additional credits, as JIANG observed:

*JIANG: The 'twenty percent off' principle does not apply to science subjects. Moreover, for some of the science courses, university recognizes their teaching workload by multiplying their actual teaching hours by one point two. That means their workload is not only fully recognized, but also with twenty percent more added to it.*

Given this type of workload calculation policy, in order to satisfy the required amount of teaching workload, English teachers had no option but to teach more classes than science teachers did. Thus, their time spent on teaching was more than that of science teachers.

Meanwhile, in the daily teaching practice, university leaders also designed teacher management policy to regulate teachers' classroom teaching. A teaching supervising committee was established to observe, record and



report teachers' performance regularly. Superintendents working in this committee would randomly visit teachers' classes without notifying teachers in advance. They would check teachers' behaviour according to university regulations. One of the participants, HUA, shared:

*HUA: Our university has plenty of regulations on teachers. For example, regulations require teachers to keep standing all the time during teaching, to use microphones in class to guarantee all students can hear, to use both PPT slides projected to the screen as well as to write on the traditional blackboard. Moreover, teachers are not allowed to hold the textbook all the time and read from it.*

The right in making decisions in classroom teaching was limited. This had a negative effect on teachers' passion for teaching. More detailed teachers' responses towards policy will be illustrated in Section 5.4.

In addition to satisfying the policy requirements for teaching, more regulatory items relating to research were designed for teachers to follow in order to gain more credits in both evaluation and promotion.

*SHEN: It is not too difficult to meet the teaching requirements as long as you are not caught by the superintendent due to any mistakes. But it is your research performance that can finally help you stand out. The more research output one produces, the greater possibility there will be for him or her to get promoted.*

In other words, it was research output that counted more. Under this changing policy, the participants were facing challenges to re-establish the balance between teaching and research. For example, more time and energy needed to be devoted to research. In order to satisfy the university expectations, the teachers of English were in need of support from the university to develop their ability. The next section demonstrates the

supporting mechanism of the university.

### **5.3.2 The influence of supporting mechanism on teachers**

In order to encourage teachers' research engagement, the university had indeed provided support in various aspects. For instance, the university had provided funding support, creating learning opportunities and establishing awarding mechanism for those who were engaged in research or had the potential for research. However, participants claimed that such support was too insufficient to match the increasingly demanding policy on research activities, especially for English language teachers.

#### ***Limited funding support for English teachers***

Although the university provided financial support to encourage teachers to do research, the strength of support given to natural science and social science subjects were significantly unequal, as shown in SHEN's words:

*SHEN: The fund provided by the university for science subjects is millions of or at least hundreds of thousands of RMB. ... But for us (English teachers), it provides just thousands of or at most tens of thousands of RMB. They are not of the same magnitude.*

Similarly, ZHENG noted that:

*ZHENG: I understand that doing natural science studies may be more costly than doing social science research. For example, they need to upgrade their equipment. But our university is more generous and more willing to support science teachers. For us teachers of English, it is hard for our fund applications to get approved even for a small amount.*

The limited fund became a barrier to carrying out social science studies,

as expressed by KONG in his comment:

*KONG: Doing research is hard for me. When the university cannot reimburse most of the cost, I feel more reluctant to do it. We do not need huge experimental laboratories, but we still need money to buy materials, conduct investigation. ... Publishing a paper is already too expensive at the moment for me to afford. If I do research, I have to bear the cost by myself.*

The insufficient funding support given by the university negatively influenced the motivation to do research, especially when teachers found the provided fund could not cover their research cost.

In addition, the opportunities provided by the university to develop teachers' research ability were also insufficient. This will be the main topic of the following section.

### ***Insufficient learning opportunities***

The university has given teachers opportunities to develop their research ability through offering training sessions on campus or sending teachers to training opportunities off campus. However, much similar to the funding support, these learning opportunities were primarily reserved for science teachers. For example, as shared by WEI, the training sessions organized for Teachers of English were of questionable relevance:

*WEI: We have many training sessions to attend. These sessions are organized for the purpose of improving our research ability. But I cannot understand most of them because the sessions are offered by experts in science majors. Sometimes I totally cannot understand what they say.*

Given the majority of the training seminars were more relevant to the

science teachers, the participants did not seem to benefit much from the opportunities although they were required to participate. This is evident in what HAN recalled:

*HAN: I have taken part in those research meetings only because I have to sign for attendance. If I am absent, my name will be recorded. But, I do not feel interested in them especially when they are focused on science subjects. I am just thinking, 'OK, they are excellent, but I cannot do what they do'. I will leave when there is a chance to go.*

Apparently, such on-campus training or learning opportunities could not generate English teachers' research motivation and interest. Moreover, the fact that the science subjects dominated the training sessions was likely to make participants more firmly believe that science research is the most popular and welcome in their university.

#### ***Fewer attractive awards for encouraging social science teachers***

In addition to the insufficient support in terms of finance and in-service training, the awards given to teachers were also not attractive enough for them to be willing to conduct research. The awards given to social science teachers who had undertaken projects or produced publications were claimed to be fewer than those for science teachers, as YANG explained:

*YANG: We can only get awards when we have our papers published in journals which can be found in the journal lists recognized by the university, or publish books or secure national projects. But the possibility for us (English teachers) to get them is remote. But for science teachers, they have more alternatives. For example, they can be awarded when they have patent, win provincial or national Science and Technology Progress Prize, or build up industry-university-research cooperation for the university.*

*These are almost impossible for us to do.*

Limited paths to get awarded by the university again reduced the participants' motivation for carrying out social science research.

One more factor barricading the social science research is the insufficient support for establishing research teams. For science teachers, the university encourages and supports them to build up research teams by selecting team leaders, recruiting researchers with similar research background, and equipping them with advanced facilities. This can be clearly seen from QIAN's utterance:

*QIAN: There are many research teams in the science departments which focus on specific projects. People in the teams really work and cooperate with one another. Fund and facilities are provided by our university. Our university even spends large amount of money to recruit a whole team from other universities to strengthen our weak areas.*

However, for the participants, there indeed existed several established teams in the English department. For example, there are teams researching English literature, cross-cultural studies, translation and interpretation. But as the participants shared, there were few regular research activities, for example, HAN said:

*HAN: I have heard that we have several teams focusing on research into, for example, literature and linguistics. I have not participated in any of them because I am not interested. I also know the teams are actually 'kongke' (empty shell). They are not much helpful in generating research output.*

Hence, the so-called teams which were set up for the purpose of

enhancing research ability did not actually function.

The foregoing has illustrated the characteristics of the university policy requirements and support constituting the institutional environment of the studied university. The environment has significant impact on how teachers develop their sense of identity as researcher and researcher's responsibility. The interviews showed that six out of fifteen participants had met the university leaders' expectations for acting as a researcher. Accordingly, the range of what they were responsible for expanded from teaching to research.

This study has further explored why the six participants could get involved in research much more actively than the other nine participants. Based on the analyses of the six participants who were active researchers, the present researcher found that it was not the policy itself that motivated them, nor the supporting system that attracted them, but their original research interest and pre-acquired research ability that had enabled them to stand out of the fifteen participants. Different from the other nine participants, they were willing to fulfil the role as researchers and to enact the responsibility as a researcher. In this regard, QIAN reported:

*QIAN: Doing research is something of interest to me. I have persisted in doing it for more than ten years. When I found I could read one book for ten times, I noticed that I had the potential and could enjoy doing research. Although the policy in our university does not favour social science researchers, I still do it just for the sake of my own interest and persistence.*

Hence, the efforts devoted to self-learning in both previous educational contexts and the current professional environment paid off. The pre-acquired research ability and interest laid helpful foundation for dealing with the challenges brought by policy changes.

When such original inner interest was absent or not yet prepared as in the

cases of the other nine participants, they felt reluctant to perform the role of researcher. Two sub-groups among the nine participants were identified in this regard. The first sub-group comprised four out of the nine reluctant participants who felt left behind facing the policy change. If they were not able to produce required research output, they may have slim chances of promotion or even be faced with failure in evaluation. Thus, they passively engaged themselves in research in order to meet the policy demands. From this perspective, the policy on promotion and evaluation became the major factor in encouraging them to take part in research, as the participant, WU, noted:

*WU: As a young teacher working in the university, I have to make progress in my career. I cannot stop trying to get promotion and stay at my current professional rank all the way till retirement. How to get promoted? I have to follow the policy. Although I do not like research, I still have to do it just because I need it.*

The second sub-group consisted of the other five participants who selected the option of ignoring the policy demand and had no desire for promotion due to poor health condition. Aware of the difficulty in conducting research, they saw only a faint hope of producing expected output. Thus, they chose to live a relaxing life and took research lightly, as CAO shared:

*CAO: I am poor in research ability... Health is another important concern for me. If I worked hard in research, I might still not be able to get anywhere. And the resultant stress may worsen my health condition. I think it is better for me not to be bothered about research.*

That explains how the institutional environment influences teachers to make and re-make sense of who they are and their responsibility for shaping and maintaining a particular identity. More specifically, they are making

decisions over their identity as a teacher or beyond being a teacher and channelling their energy and efforts into both teaching and research. The next section illustrates participants' responses to the challenges in the changing context.

#### **5.4 Teachers' Responses to the Influence of Institutional Policy**

In order to illustrate participants' responses to the university policy, patterns were identified in their responses to their 'passion for doing' as well as responses to their 'doing' respectively. These are shown in Table 5.4.

**Table 5.4: Participants' responses to university policy**

**Notes:**

- +: attach a little positive importance to the theme/sub-theme by raising the issue
- ++: attach positive importance to the theme by raising the issue and explaining with detailed examples
- +++: attach strong positive importance to the theme by raising, explaining with examples and further emphasize in later interviews again
- \: refers to having not been raised by participants



Themes   Participants	Response to policy regarding teaching		Response to policy regarding research			
	Response in passion for doing	Response in doing	Response in passion for doing	Response in doing		
	Temporarily drop in passion	Maintenance of effort-making in teaching	Passion reduction	Maintenance of effort-making in research	Passive engagement in research	Rejection in research
HUA	+	++	+	+++	\	\
SHEN	++	+++	++	+++	\	\
YANG	++	+++	+	+++	\	\
SUN	++	+++	+	+++	\	\
QIAN	++	+++	++	+++	\	\
JIANG	+	+++	++	+++	\	\
WU	++	++	++	\	+	\
HAN	++	+++	++	\	+++	\
ZHU	+	+++	+	\	++	\
KONG	++	++	+++	\	++	\
WEI	+	++	++	\	\	+++
CAO	+	++	++	\	\	+++
ZHOU	+	+++	++	\	\	+++
ZHENG	++	+++	+++	\	\	+++
FENG	+	+++	+	\	\	+++

#### 5.4.1 Responses to policy influence in the teaching domain

As shown in Table 5.4, all fifteen participants have experienced different degrees of reduction in their passion for teaching under the regulation of university policy on teaching. QIAN and SUN's comments provided clear evidence in this regard:

*QIAN: We are teaching under all sorts of rules and regulations... Teachers are clearly requested to keep an eye on whether any student is sleeping or playing mobile games in class. Meanwhile, university superintendents keep an eye on teachers, checking how*

*successfully they manage their classes. I feel we are boxed in by the conventions...I am less keen on teaching as before when these rules were non-existent.*

*SUN: ... The rule for calculation of our teaching workload is that twenty percent of the work done is not taken into account. If so, why are we still teaching so hard? If twenty percent of our work is not recognized, does it mean I can take twenty percent of efforts and passion off my teaching?*

Teachers such as QIAN and SUN expressed their critical feedback on the university's teaching policy. The negative effect of the policy on their passion for teaching and willingness to teach was revealed in their statements.

However, when participants continued to share how they actually acted in teaching, it appeared that there was an inconsistency between the drop in their passion and the maintenance of their efforts. The drop in their passion turned out to be temporary and their efforts devoted to teaching were not weakened. That is to say, in spite of the rigid policy on measuring teacher performance, the participants still demonstrated strong responsibility as teachers because they continued to exert themselves in teaching, as evidenced in FENG's comment:

*FENG: Although I am complaining about the rigid and unreasonable teacher management policy, as long as I enter the classroom, I cheer myself up. I will not impose my dissatisfaction on my students who are innocent. Being always kind to the students is what a teacher should do.*

HAN also displayed her strong responsibility for the students despite her dissatisfaction with the university policy:

*HAN: I think it is not fair to take the anger out on students. Although the university requires leaders to manage teachers in a rigid way, students are not the ones who have made the policy. They like me and my teaching. They come to attend my classes happily with expectations. I need to be responsible for imparting to them the best of my knowledge.*

This was found to be closely linked to the understanding of being a teacher in Chinese culture. Being a teacher in the Chinese tradition means being responsible for what and whom they teach in whatever circumstances, either prosperity or adversity. This echoes with Section 4.2.2 which considered the traditional culture as an influence on the formation of professional responsibility.

In addition, although participants (English teachers) had lower status within the university than science teachers, they still enjoyed relatively high reputation in the wider society. It is the relatively high status of university teachers in the Chinese society that made them continue working in the teaching position, as ZHU noted:

*ZHU: No matter how unfairly the university has treated us, the society still respects us. 'Zunshi zhongjiao' (respecting teachers and teaching) is always what has been propagated in our country. I think we should be responsible for teaching to deserve the reputation.*

More examples of the sociocultural influence on teachers can be found in Section 4.2.2. The cultural views on teaching mitigated teachers' feelings about the 'unfairness' they received in the university. The deeply rooted cultural understanding of teaching facilitated the elevation of their responsibility as teachers. The next section illustrates the teachers' responses in the research domain.

#### 5.4.2 Responses to policy influence in the research domain

Firstly, similar to their responses in the teaching domain, the participants also reported the drop in passion for research under the impact of research policy, as WU shared:

*WU: My research ability is still to be enhanced. ... Before I gain confidence, the university imposes many expectations on our research output. The more it requires, the more nervous I am, and the less I feel like doing it. It seems to be a hopeless and annoying task.*

When it comes to how participants reacted to the research activities, the participants demonstrated mainly three types of responses. Among the fifteen participants, there were six participants who were actively and continuously devoted to research. The other nine participants either chose to take part in research activities in a reluctant manner (four participants) or simply refused to be engaged in research (five participants).

For the six participants with sustained efforts devoted to research, it was their own interest in research that kept them engaged in research activities despite the negative influence from the university policy, as YANG commented:

*YANG: ... As to doing research in our university, I suggest that we do not think too much about the policy. Otherwise, you will feel you are always under pressure and start disliking it. Relax and just go ahead with what you like to explore and continue doing it. Never think of what you may gain from it. It is a kind of self-interest and individual journey. Maybe you could get surprising results.*

The demanding research policy did not effectively inspire all participants to increase their research engagement level. The research policy tended to have greater negative impact on the other nine participants' research engagement and their professional identity as researchers.

Although the university leaders had clearly stated in the policies that teachers were expected to get involved in research, the limited research experience the nine participants' had gained from their prior working career did not help them to initiate a positive start, nor make a leap, in the research progress. KONG, one of the four participants who passively engaged in research, stated:

*KONG: I am much less experienced in research than in teaching.*

*Research is something that I lack and which gives me headache.*

*Compared with research, teaching is easier for me.*

The insufficient support to benefit teachers' professional development aggravated the negative influence on teachers. Nine participants who displayed little willingness to do research exemplified the negative impact on the teachers.

Although the five out of the nine participants who almost totally gave up research had their own reasons for their choices of action (such as health concerns for WEI and CAO), the demanding policy and unfavourable research environment did play an important part.

After analyzing the participants' responses in teaching and research domains respectively and gleaning the evidence from the analyses, it is also helpful to examine the characteristics of how each participant responds to both teaching and research policies. Six participants whose research interest transcended the negative influence from research policy demonstrated both strong teacher and researcher identities. This was manifested in their active involvement in research and efforts taken to perfect themselves in teaching

and research. The other nine participants who failed to overcome the negative impact from the university's research policy. Compared with their lack of research engagement, the efforts they devoted to improving their teaching performance appeared to be much more adequate. Based on these evidences, it may be said that the participants' responses to teaching and research policies work at separate levels. To be more specific, teachers' negative responses to the research policy did not spread to invade their passion and efforts at work in the teaching domain. Meanwhile, the resilience the participants displayed in overcoming the negative side of the teaching policy was not found to help reduce the negative influence from the research policy. In the final analysis, the participants' responses to teaching and research policies did not influence each other but worked on different planes.

The next chapter will illustrate in more detail the characteristics of participants' sense-making of identity and the way they construct their professionalism as teachers and researchers.

## CHAPTER SIX

### **CHARACTERISTICS OF PROFESSIONAL IDENTITY**

The data about participants' professional identity (i.e. who they believed themselves to be) kept emerging in the field study when participants shared their perceptions about teaching and research. As demonstrated in the previous chapters, participants presented relatively more similarities in the teaching domain and more diversity in the research domain. This section, which focuses on the perceptions of professional identity, helps better understand the underlying rationale for how and why participants enacted teaching and research in their particular ways. Participants distinguished themselves by attaching different meanings to the roles they were fulfilling. In this chapter, the illustration of professional identity is uncovered by analysing teachers' values attached to the teaching profession, the way teachers exercised agency in practice and their beliefs about self-efficacy as a teacher and researcher.

#### **6.1 Sense of Teacher Values**

Table 6.1 displays the weight participants gave to different themes in making sense of teacher values. The table groups participants by their different choices of who they thought they were.

**Table 6.1: Sense of teacher value (understanding of being teacher and researcher)**

**Notes:**

- +: attach a little importance to the theme/sub-theme by raising the issue
- ++: attach importance to the theme by raising the issue and explaining with detailed examples
- +++: attach strong importance to the theme by raising, explaining with examples and further emphasize in later interviews again
- X: refers to ‘have no importance’ attached to the theme after being asked
- \: refers to having not raised by participants

Themes  Participants	Sense of value (understanding of being teacher and researcher)			
	Teaching is more than a job earning living	Research ability as part of quality teachers pursue	Research is for meeting policy requirement	Research should not be assigned to all teachers
HUA	++	++	+	X
SHEN	+++	+++	+	X
YANG	+++	+++	\	X
SUN	+++	+++	+	X
QIAN	+++	+++	\	X
JIANG	+++	+++	\	X
WU	+++	+	+++	\
HAN	++	\	+++	++
ZHU	+++	\	+++	\
KONG	+++	+	+++	\
WEI	++	\	\	+++
CAO	++	\	\	+++
ZHOU	+++	\	\	+++
ZHENG	+++	\	\	+++
FENG	+++	\	\	+++



This section illustrates how the different professional identity holders understood the meaning of being a teacher and researcher, and how professional identity influenced the way they behaved and how they perceived their ability to perform the roles of teacher and/or researcher.

As Table 6.1 shows, all fifteen participants held strong teacher identity although they slightly differed in the weight they attached to the value of the teaching profession. This echoes with the previous chapter which presented evidence of positive efforts in teaching from these fifteen participants. Based on their professional identity as teachers, they demonstrated their understanding of teaching as ‘a lifelong profession rather than a job simply for earning a living’ which requires devotion and responsibility for the purpose of benefiting students to the maximum. JIANG’s comment is an illustration in this regard:

*JIANG: Teaching is a type of work different from others because we are cultivating people, young people most of the time. It requires our carefulness and sometimes we should also sacrifice our interest if students require us to.*

YANG added that:

*YANG: Being a teacher brings you pride, because students and their parents will depend on you and listen to what you say. So as a teacher, I really cannot fall short of their expectations. There is an invisible inner force that pushes me to work hard without any complaints. The process is full of happiness.*

This reflected the value participants possessed for the profession and being a member of it. Such belief showed participants’ emphasis on the moral facet of the profession. As Bullough (2011: 27) proposes ‘teaching is essentially and fundamentally a moral enterprise’. Participants whose choice

of positioning themselves as teachers and their confirmation of that choice enabled them to understand the teaching profession to be more than a job but to involve moral responsibility for and devotion to students.

The connection between identity, value and responsibility applied to the research domain as well. Take the participant WU as an example. At the initial stage of her teaching career, she chose to be a university teacher because she viewed university teaching as a high-status job with decent salary and reputation. With this sense of value in mind, she recalled that her responsibility at that time was relatively vague and not strong enough:

*WU: I decided to find a job in a university because it is a commonly recognized good job with high respect from society. It is always stable, so I felt satisfied with the job. I did not think about what responsibility I needed to take and how to be a teacher at the beginning.*

As time went by, the experience accumulated in teaching and learning from fellow colleagues gradually helped deepen her understanding of the profession. Her statements revealed that she developed her identity as a teacher more firmly with updated value attached to teaching and stronger responsibility. This became clearer as WU continued to share her experience:

*WU: After teaching for two to three years, I gradually learned from more experienced colleagues that being a university teacher is more than having a high-respected job. Every day I hear students call me teacher. If I really deserve to be called a teacher, I have to do more than finishing daily routine teaching work to earn salary. It is more about responsibility for students throughout the career.*

WU was one of the participants who shared her experience in advancing

the understanding of teacher values. Further, she confirmed and strengthened professional identity as a teacher. That showed how the sense of value and professional identity were related. The professional identity held by participants could be manifested in the meaning attached to the value of that identity. The participants did not simply view being a teacher as a job but as a profession that required a sense of responsibility which translated as conducting teaching with inner willingness, motivation and persistence in the face of challenges. The sense of value (i.e. teaching is more than a job for one to earn bread and butter) held by participants was an important demonstration of sense of responsibility as a teacher.

This also applied to the research domain. Regarding the professional identity as researcher, when participants perceived themselves as researchers (for example six participants in Table 6.1), they could internally accept and perform the role of researcher and shouldered their responsibility for what a researcher should do. This was illustrated in what QIAN pointed out that:

*QIAN: As a university teacher in the current era, it is not enough to just know how to teach, we also need to admit that research practice can make a person wiser, think differently. ... it is right for the university to have asked us to be researchers. Not only should we develop our students' thinking, but we also need to do research to develop ours.*

Not only were they willing to perform the role of researchers, but they also considered the research activities as part and parcel of their work as university teachers. Such work required devotion of time and efforts to keep improving, as YANG stated:

*YANG: I am willing to be a researcher apart from being a teacher. I believe it is not just a title, but something that needs my efforts to really do it and acquire the essential ability to do it.*

Similarly, SUN commented that the research ability was considered to be essential for someone working as a university teacher:

*SUN: Working in the university, I am not only a teacher, but also a researcher. This is not because the new policy requires me to be a researcher, but because I myself hope to be one. ... So I have incorporated the research practice into my teaching. ... Usually after class, I will go to the office to work on my research project.*

These six participants' willingness and devotion in research engagement accorded with the teaching domain. Their perceptions of teaching and research shared similar properties such as 'being willing to do', 'necessary part of daily work' and 'keeping spending efforts' in doing and perfecting the work. This entailed a sense of value placed on being a researcher, i.e. it is not something imposed from outside, but something coming from deep inside. Such value was found to be embedded among participants who held the inner acceptance and confirmation of professional identity as teacher and/or researcher.

However, compared with these six participants, another four participants appeared to be torn between researcher and non-researcher because they did not call themselves researchers though they did conduct research to some extent. I propose to use the term 'passive researcher' in order to capture this contradictory situation these four participants were faced with. WU described her own experience as a passive researcher:

*WU: I really do not like research, as I have said, but working under such a tough policy demand, I have no option to decide what I want to do or not. I just want to be a teacher perfecting myself in teaching, but I have to force myself to know something about research.*

Although participants such as WU did engage in research work, they rejected from their inner heart getting involved in research. They were forced to do it due to the policy requirement, as HAN pointed out:

*HAN: I do not like doing research at all. If I can choose, I will not do it any longer. ... I do research not because I admire those who are experts in research, but because I have to keep my position and salary.*

These four participants, who were not intrinsically motivated and hence lacked inner willingness to play the researchers' role, viewed a research task as something they have to accomplish rather than something they willingly take on and complete. This phenomenon is in line with Barkhuizen (2009) who found teachers struggle in research activities to cope with policy requirements. They were less willing to accept or internalize the role of researcher as part of their professional identity, as evidenced in what ZHU said:

*ZHU: Doing research is simply a task for me that I have to complete in order to prevent my salary from being cut and ensure that my record in the annual evaluation be a 'pass'. Otherwise, I would not touch it.*

The rest of the participants (i.e. the other five) not only rejected the idea of doing research, but also took the policy requirements for granted. Being aware of the risk of salary reduction, they still almost gave up research. This situation was touched on in Section 4.4.2 which illustrated participants' way of doing research. CAO talked about the reason why she rejected doing research:

*CAO: I do not want to add more workload to my current teaching duty,*

*especially research. Being a teacher is enough for me. I am not in good health condition and soon I will have to do a detailed check-up because last medical check did not show good results.*

The choice of being a non-researcher was not because they did not know the negative consequence it may bring if they violated the policy but because they were more concerned about their health conditions which exceeded their worry about penalty.

On the other hand, three participants who were about to retire seemed to care less about their salary cut when they realized the drop in salary did not matter much because they had established a solid financial foundation for their families as demonstrated in Section 4.3. They would soon receive retirement pension given to them according to another criterion which has nothing to do with research achievements.

As shown above, participants demonstrated relatively similar choice in considering them as teacher and enacted the role of teacher in a responsible way. With regard to their professional identity as researchers, three major categories were identified. The underlying rationale for distinguishing them lies in whether they internally accept to be researcher and conduct research with efforts and passions or not. It seemed that professional identity reflected their sense-making of a particular role in terms of who they were and what they were obliged to do. Once participants were firmly positioned to accept a particular role wholeheartedly, they would be able to engage in it with passion, voluntariness and activeness.

Such willingness and passion to conduct either teaching or research can be further demonstrated in participants' actions. The next section illustrates the way participants exercised their agency.

## **6.2 Forms of Agency Exercise as Teacher and/or Researcher**

How participants exercised agency differently was categorized, as shown

in Table 6.2.

**Table 6.2: Form of professional agency**

**Notes:**

+: attach a little importance to the theme/sub-theme by raising the issue

++: attach importance to the theme by raising the issue and explaining with detailed examples

+++: attach strong importance to the theme by raising, explaining with examples and further emphasize in later interviews again

\: refers to having not raised by participants

Themes  Participants	Forms of professional agency					
	Agency in dealing with limit autonomy			Agency of professional development in face of challenges		
	Active agency in responding to limited autonomy in teaching	Active agency in responding to limited research autonomy	Passive agency in dealing with limited autonomy in research	Active agency in teaching ability development	Active agency in research ability development	Passive agency in research ability development
HUA	++	+++	\	++	++	\
SHEN	+++	++	\	+++	+++	\
YANG	+++	+++	\	++	++	\
SUN	+++	+++	\	+++	+++	\
QIAN	+++	+++	\	+++	+++	\
JIANG	+++	+++	\	++	++	\
WU	+++	\	+	+++	\	+
HAN	+++	\	+++	+++	\	+++
ZHU	+++	\	++	+++	\	++
KONG	++	\	++	++	\	+
WEI	++	\	+++	+	\	+++
CAO	++	\	+++	+	\	+++
ZHOU	+++	\	+++	+	\	+++
ZHENG	+++	\	+++	+	\	+++
FENG	+++	\	+++	+	\	+++

Duff (2012: 415) asserts that ‘agency enables people to perform ... identity and take concrete actions in pursuit of their goals’. Participants demonstrated their professional identity through exercising agency in positive or negative manners. The first feature of exercising agency concerns how participants respond to limitations and restrictions in work. Since this has been discussed in Section 4.2 on the discrepancy between participants’ perceived autonomy and their actual responses to such limited given autonomy, this section mainly focuses on the second feature of exercising agency of different professional identity holders, i.e. the forms of agency in professional development in face of challenges.

With respect to how participants responded when meeting challenges in teaching, it was found that all participants tended to exercise the agency of developing self-ability actively, as ZHENG shared her experience:

*ZHENG: When I feel I lack the ability to teach, I feel nervous and anxious. ... My responsibility as a teacher pricks my conscience and there is a voice in my mind telling me I cannot remain unchanged. So I would spend time learning from other teachers, reading books, learning online to revise my teaching method.*

Similarly, the participant HAN could not tolerate receiving any negative feedback from students which threatened her self-efficacy in teaching. In such case, her strong sense of responsibility as a teacher empowered her passion for teaching to meet students’ demands and maintain the teaching quality, as she said:

*HAN: The most unpleasant thing is hearing students say they do not learn much in my class. When hearing that, I feel very sad. The sadness would turn into strong desire for improvement. Otherwise, I may fail to live up to their trust in me. Then I*



*would try my best to look for alternative teaching methods and test which ones can help them learn.*

From these teachers' experience, their anxiety caused by the gap between teachers' and students' expectations resulted in relatively weaker efficacy among teachers. Responsibility here inspired them to take actions of self-learning to improve teaching their ability and teaching effects.

The exercise of active agency to keep improving teaching ability even when participants were in frustrations manifested their intention to enact responsibility for self-development as teacher. As shown in Section 4.2, the challenges and frustrations may temporarily negatively influence responsibility and cause responsibility fluctuation. The challenges included too much workload or negative feedback from colleagues. Under such challenging circumstances, responsibility triggered participants' passion and willingness to the teaching ability development. In this regard, SUN voiced out:

*SUN: It is really annoying when I find myself overwhelmed by too much teaching. For example, I once had five big classes in one semester and had other trifles in office to deal with. I really want to work less hard in teaching and make less effort in improving.*

Drop in responsibility was found to be temporary when participant noticed they were slacking off on their work. Realizing this, they would continue with more commitment, as SUN recalled:

*SUN: After working less hard in teaching for some time, I found myself feel guilty about not teaching my students as hard as I could. That violated my original attitude towards teaching, so I began to pay more attention to teaching again and think of ways for improvement in the midst of my heavy workload.*

Different from what they did in the teaching domain, two opposite ways of agency were exercised by participants when they encountered challenges in the research domain. To illustrate this, the portraits of two participants (one considered herself to be a researcher and performed as active agent while the other refused to be a researcher and performed as passive agent) are presented in the following two sections. Through the comparisons between the two who are representatives of researcher identity holders and non-researcher identity holders, the complexity of how they acted in research in different ways can be revealed.

### **6.2.1 Portrait of YANG: Active agent in research activities**

YANG started to develop professional interest in research since she was a MA student. Such interest motivated her to continue researching after she became a university teacher. She presented strong agency in making use of the given space in research activities. She said, 'It's good that the research process is not monitored by anyone. That autonomy allows me to design research procedures and methods by my own wishes. I can try the ways which I feel curious about and do research in a creative way as long as I can finally complete it.' Such passion also triggered her willingness to continue research in spite of difficulties and restrictions, for example, funding limits and time pressure. She explained, 'Although there were too much teaching workload which resulted in a little energy left for research, I would still squeeze in some time for research after teaching.' After years of research experience, she was still not very satisfied with her research ability and always looked for chances such as training or self-learning for self-improvement. For example, she said, 'I still keep in touch with my MA supervisor and when I encounter bottleneck, I would call him for advice.... Learning always happens after graduation.' Such continuous learning efforts were helpful on her way to develop research ability.

### **6.2.2 Portrait of CAO: Passive agent in research activities**

In comparison with YANG who was an active researcher, the participant CAO presented a different picture in her working career as a non-researcher.

CAO, who did not have any professional interest in research, confessed that she had no idea what she wanted and whether she could do research. Although there was a list provided by the university presenting the most wanted research topics to be financially supported, she still considered herself an outsider by saying that ‘I cannot find any of these topics motivating to me, so I decide to stop bothering myself.’ Even when she was once invited by others to do research together, she also declined. When she felt reluctant to engage in research, her response to the restrictions in research process became negative accordingly. Compared with YANG, time pressure, funding limit and policy deficiency became not only barriers to research but also reasons for her to distance herself from research activities. She said, ‘I have teaching to handle, housework to do, children to take care of. How can I do research, especially when there is not sufficient funding support?’ Without experience in actively engaging in research, CAO found her self-efficacy in research was low all the time. ‘I do not have any confidence in research, to be honest. I really do not know how to do it and cannot do it well’, she admitted. However, without any actions taken to improve such low ability in research, as she noticed, she chose to do nothing for improvement because she did not care about her ability in research as she added, ‘I do not want to improve my research ability, I guess, because I think teaching is my biggest concern and responsibility and I do not want to make my life difficult adding research to my work.’ When she found herself in the less healthy condition, she completely rejected doing research, saying ‘I need to take more rest and I will not do any more research because that will directly make me tired and I have to think more about my health’.

Based on the above comparisons and illustrations, it is clear that the six

participants' (represented by YANG) professional interest in research stimulated their passion for carrying out research even when they encountered challenges. In these participants' mind, they were not only teachers but also researchers. Meanwhile, research had become part and parcel of their responsibility as university staff members. Driven by such responsibility as researchers, their agency was sustained and advanced. The more they exercised agency in a positive way, the more they saw themselves as researchers and fulfilled their responsibility for research in a fuller manner. Even when they were in a less supportive situation, they still endeavoured to perform their roles as researchers. Researchers such as Hong (2012), Peters and Pearce (2012) found that participants took a negative form of agency when they received less support from the institution. The findings of the present study, however, suggest that, with strong responsibility of and identity as researcher, it is possible that participants exercise positive agency of making self-effort in a less supportive context.

On the other hand, the other nine participants (represented by GAOAO) did not possess research interest and ability. Rex and Schiller (2009: 21) argue that 'people do not want to participate in conditions when they feel devalued and powerless'. Indeed, these nine participants who had little motive for and confidence in research confirmed this claim. Four out of the nine participants still passively performed as researchers when the policy required them to do so. But such enactment of identity as researchers was not driven by their own intrinsic motives. I am not claiming that these nine participants completely rejected research activities, but that research was considered to be a less important part of responsibility than teaching for them. This was not only influenced by these participants' lack of interest in research, but also shaped by the institutional nature of the English department which emphasized on teaching and students (as discussed in Chapter five on the contextual factors influencing how teachers did research). Therefore, different identity holders respond differently when encountering challenges. It tended to be that the

strength of identity, responsibility and the degree of efforts devoted to overcoming challenges are positively associated. Meanwhile, in the process of enacting the identity of teacher or researcher in different ways, the participants demonstrated different self-efficacy beliefs about ones' ability to fulfil the role of teacher and/or researcher. The exploration of the sense of self-efficacy may help understand ones' sense of identity more deeply. This will be the focus of the next section.

### **6.3 Sense of Self-efficacy as Teacher and/or Researcher**

It is revealed in Table 6.3 that participants held different professional identity presented different degree of self-efficacy belief about a particular identity.

**Table 6.3 Sense of self-efficacy as teacher and researcher**

**Notes:**

- + : attach a little positive importance to the theme/sub-theme by raising the issue
- ++ : attach positive importance to the theme by raising the issue and explaining with detailed examples
- +++ : attach strong positive importance to the theme by raising, explaining with examples and further emphasize in later interviews again
- : attach a little negative importance to the theme/sub-theme by raising the issue
- : attach negative importance to the theme by raising the issue and explaining with detailed examples
- : attach strong negative importance to the theme by raising, explaining with examples and further emphasize in later interviews again

Themes Participants	Sense of self-efficacy as teacher and researcher	
	Sense of self-efficacy as teacher	Sense of self-efficacy as researcher
HUA	++	++
SHEN	+++	++
YANG	+++	+++
SUN	+++	+++
QIAN	+++	+++
JIANG	+++	++
WU	+++	--
HAN	+++	---
ZHU	+++	-
KONG	++	--
WEI	++	---
CAO	++	---
ZHOU	+++	---
ZHENG	+++	---
FENG	+++	---

As shown in Table 6.3, a pattern clearly emerges which shows that the ones who intrinsically held a particular identity tended to have more positive self-efficacy in fulfilling such identity compared to those who formed no or weak particular identity.

In the teaching domain, all fifteen participants demonstrated relatively positive and strong efficacy in conducting teaching. Such efficacy belief could be interpreted from the participants' remarks, such as those of ZHENG and ZHOU:

*ZHENG: I have years of teaching experience which I feel, generally speaking, teaching is not a problem for me. Although sometimes I feel depressed when students are not actively responsive in my class, there is no problem for me at all to guarantee that the class goes on smoothly.*

*ZHOU: As to teaching, generally speaking, I feel I am capable and have confidence in my teaching ability. For example, at the time when I started teaching at the university, students I taught were so poor in English. I felt what I had learned in my undergraduate studies was more than enough to teach them....*

Others' feedback played an important role in influencing participants' self-efficacy belief, as YANG noted:

*YANG: My students gave me positive responses in class, looking at me, nodding while listening, showing excitement and making positive comments on my class. You know, when my students give me active responses or good feedback, I feel a sense of achievement and am satisfied with my ability in teaching. That bolsters my confidence.*

Similarly, HAN recalled:

*HAN: I cared most about my students' comments on my teaching, whether they felt they had learned or not, or whether they felt satisfied or not. ... all those greatly influence my confidence in teaching and how qualified I am as a teacher.*

Students' feedback was teachers' top concern and had great influence on how efficacious they perceived they were as teachers. That was connected with their strong sense of responsibility for students. This was evidenced in the remarks of ZHU:

*ZHU: I think it is because students are the ones I feel most responsible for. I pay great attention to them and their comments. It is an easy logic that the comments from the*

*ones who you care about matter most.*

It was clear that helping students learn was always the major part of participants' perceived responsibility. Thus, whether their teaching performance could gain students' satisfaction and suit students' needs were among teachers' primary concerns. As a result, students' feedback had significant impact on whether teachers believed in their capacity to teach.

This provided evidence supporting that teacher responsibility and students' feedback have considerable influence on teachers' sense of efficacy. Driven by their sense of responsibility, teachers took actions to improve teaching pedagogy to better meet students' demands and further enhance their self-efficacy in teaching when they received positive recognition from students. The participant YANG argued in this regard:

*YANG: Students' responses influence how I evaluate my teaching effect and performance. Their positive responses encourage me to continue working hard, adopting useful teaching strategies and revising less satisfied ones to achieve better effects.*

In addition to influence from students' feedback, WU demonstrated that the recognition from experts and peer colleagues could also influence the development of self-efficacy, as can be seen from her own experience:

*WU: I remember that the provincial teaching context was really competitive. However, the experience of attending it, gaining rewards and receiving recognition from experts in our province greatly helped me enhance my confidence in my teaching ability. I felt I was qualified to teach and was able to do it well. After that experience, I feel I am more confident about teaching.*



That participants paid attention to the recognition from leaders and experts manifested the enactment of teacher responsibility from another perspective. As teachers evidenced that it was due to their responsibility for ensuring teaching quality and self-improvement of teaching ability that they paid attention to how their teaching ability and performance were evaluated by others. Others' feedback gave them insights into whether their performance needed to be improved or not, as evidenced by the participants SHEN and ZHU reflecting on their experiences:

*SHEN: As to why I care about colleagues and leaders' feedback on my teaching, I think it is because I consider teaching as the most important thing for me as a teacher. It is my responsibility and duty to do it well. I cannot tolerate any negative feedback from them. Anyway, they are also teachers who know about teaching. If there are any bad comments from them, that means I still need to improve. So their feedback can be a mirror helping me know what I need to improve.*

*ZHU: When I heard negative comments on my teaching, either from students or colleagues, I suddenly felt that they affected my confidence and I doubted whether I had taught in the right way and whether I was really good or bad at teaching?*

However, confidence in the ability to teach indeed experienced negative fluctuations when participants received negative feedback from the others, as CAO recalled:

*CAO: ... When I gradually had new students who wanted to learn more, I suddenly felt I was not able to answer all their questions and I did not have enough ability to teach them. I worried about what method I could use to engage them more in*

*my class. I started to feel less confident in my teaching ability...*

The negative feedback on their teaching ability, however, did not prevent the participants from moving forward and improving. This was in keeping with the above analysed active form of agency in face of challenges.

However, the nine participants who chose to be non-researchers or passive-researchers tended to develop their sense of self-efficacy less strongly. Strong sense of self-efficacy was only found among the six active researchers. WEI, as a non-researcher, expressed her lack of confidence in research ability:

*WEI: Honestly, I have not received any training or experience in research during the working process, hence when it comes to research, I do not have much idea how to do it...*

In contrast, QIAN believed much firmly in the research ability he had:

*QIAN: I think I have confidence in research although teaching comes first. I still believe I can call myself a researcher now. I think I am one of the very few teachers who are real researchers.*

Regarding how research ability was acquired and how positive self-efficacy in research activities was developed, learning (including self-learning) and university supported training helped participants to some extent, as JIANG recalled:

*JIANG: Before working in this university, I had totally no interest in and awareness of what research is. After many years, I still was not much into research when doing research became a part of policy requirement.... However, it was due to multiple opportunities to attend conferences and to communicate with researchers from other universities that I gradually became*

*motivated and my confidence in research started to increase.*

However, the positive sense of self-efficacy in research did not remain stable all the time. Fluctuations in research self-efficacy belief were captured, as shown in YANG's account of her experience:

*YANG: When I experienced failure in getting research projects for multiple times, my confidence in my research ability was dented. I felt insecure and I wanted to do it well .... I will try hard to improve it in order to restore my confidence to its former state.*

Again, it was the inner desire and responsibility as a researcher that triggered the motivation in exercising agency of working harder to seek for improvement when self-efficacy dropped. In this regard, the participant SHEN commented:

*SHEN: Indeed, after I feel interested in research, I want to do research. I think research should also be considered as a part of our responsibility as a university teacher .... We should consider research as important as teaching. I cannot stop improving my teaching ability, and then I also should not stop making progress when I encounter difficulties and frustrations in research.*

As Woolfolk et al. (2006: 727) claim that 'the outcome of exercised agency to achieve intended goals becomes the basis for further efficacy judgments'. Thus, in the process of professional development, the outcome of professional growth could provide a positive basis for enhancing the sense of efficacy in believing they could do better.

However, on the contrary, due to the absence of professional identity as

researcher and the lack of researcher responsibility, the other nine participants had little motivation in exercising their agency to improve their research ability when they encountered challenges, as the participant KONG explained:

*KONG: I really do not want to do research although I have been forced to. Even when I am forcing myself to meet the policy requirements, I still feel my heart is against it, let alone having any responsibility for doing it well. That is why I do not care about any possible comments from others on my research ability... When I receive negative comments saying I am lazy in research or not capable of it, I still don't have motivation to change the situation... Just let it be. Anyway, I am a teacher and teaching is the most important thing.*

The negative self-efficacy of participants further weakened their internalization and confirmation of professional identity as researcher. That means the more diffident participants felt in research, the less willing they tended to be to engage in research activities. That explained why they felt reluctant to perform as researchers. This is clear in HAN's comment:

*HAN: I really do not want to do research. In order to meet the policy demand, I once tried to apply for funding for a project. Years had passed, but I still did not get it. That made me feel I am not a capable person to do research. So I have decided to leave it at that. I feel even more reluctant to develop research ability.*

Indeed, it is likely that participants could encounter negative events which may temporarily threaten self-efficacy. Their positive responses to the negative events helped them overcome the difficulties and mitigate the

negative influence. With the help of such a positive way of exercising agency, their professional identity was further strengthened. On the contrary, with a negative way of exercising agency, professional identity would be weakened accordingly. This is not, however, to say that the choice of identity could exactly predict the sense of efficacy, but that to some extent the professional identity could indicate the perceived self-efficacy. Further, Dellinger et al (2008:752) stated that efficacy 'is crucial to human agency or our ability to act'. Teachers' sense of self-efficacy may trigger different types of agency accordingly. Then, how teachers do could in turn influence the development of the professional identity.

Thus, as demonstrated above, a cycle appeared to be formed which comprised identity, its influence on agency exercising, the formation of self-efficacy and the further development of identity. Within the process, it was the teachers' underlying willingness to enact responsibility of a particular identity play a crucial role in responding to positive and negative experiences. Such responses could in turn influence the development of the professional identity and responsibility.

To sum up, professional identity, especially when teachers shared about their understanding of responsibility, kept emerging in the fieldwork. More importantly, teachers shared how they viewed the work they were practicing, understand the role they were performing, and enact the responsibility of the identity. These helped understand responsibility and professionalism in a deeper manner. A more detailed discussion on responsibility, professionalism and how professional identity is connected with them will be presented in Chapter Seven.

## CHAPTER SEVEN

### DISCUSSION

#### 7.1 Introduction

Based on the findings of this study, the teachers' sense of professional responsibility could be defined as fulfilling obligations which one believes he/she should do with internal willingness. This sense of professional responsibility leads teachers and/or researchers to keep endeavouring in spite of challenges. Responsibility is prone to factors such as social culture, institutional environment and personal biography. It could fluctuate but remains relatively stable in nature. This chapter mainly focuses on discussion of the nature of professional responsibility and its connection to professionalism and identity.

#### 7.2 Nature of Professional Responsibility

##### 7.2.1 Responsibility as internal obligation

Responsibility is 'a sense of internal obligation and commitment to produce or prevent designated outcomes or that these outcomes should have been produced or prevented' (Lauermann and Karabenick, 2001: 127). The results from this study have supported the argument in the literature that 'internal obligation' is indeed a distinctive nature of responsibility. The internal obligation means that the fulfilment of the obligations for teacher's and researcher's roles is derived from the inner willingness and motive. Such inner motive inspires teachers to voluntarily accept work-related obligations as something they ought to/ should do rather than something they have to do due to external pushes (Fischman, Dibara and Gardner, 2006). Evidences from

this study show that the participants who possess strong responsibility in teaching enact three facets of responsibility i.e. responsibility for students, responsibility for teaching and responsibility for self-development. Such responsibility was successfully enacted with willingness from their inner heart without rejection, reluctance and feeling of resistance. This stood in contrast to the other nine participants' rejection of taking responsibility for their research activities. Although there existed the participants with reluctance who still participated in research activities, their participation was not driven by inner willingness and motives. Rather, it was the external forces, i.e. the policy demand and salary maintenance that made their research practice happen. Thus, responsibility differs from the concept of accountability because it implies the prerequisite in taking obligations to be driven by the inner forces and motives.

This study contributes to research on teacher professionalism by illustrating how teachers' inner motives of responsibility influence their choice of actions. Given the existence of external pushes and requirements, inner motives can trigger the willingness to not only actively engage in both teaching and research activities in favourable situations but also in the face of difficulties. The presence and absence of internal responsibility can directly influence how participants deal with the challenges and frustrations they encounter. This is revealed from the evidence that the participants who held strong sense of responsibility in teaching were still able to actively and positively enact the obligation of self-development even when they had received negative feedback from students and experts. However, in comparison, the absence of responsibility for research resulted in participants' reluctance to improve their research ability when they found it rather hard to generate expected research output. The fact that they chose to withdraw when they encountered the bottleneck in research was associated with the weak responsibility.

The different responses to challenges and setbacks manifest the power of

responsibility. It was the power of internal motives which could trigger teachers' positive responses when in difficult situations. It was with the responsibility that the motives to overcome difficulties and endeavour to self-improve were brought into practice. This study has not only accorded with previous research literature with regard to the nature of internalized obligation, but also taken one step further through the comparison between the presence and absence of responsibility, demonstrating the power of responsibility which can initiate different options of taking actions and achieving outcomes.

### **7.2.2 Responsibility as part of teacher value**

There exists well-documented literature which shows the values of teacher such as the English code of conduct and practice for registered teachers (GTCE, 2009: 7), i.e. 'taking the responsibility for maintaining the quality of their teaching practice, helping young people to become confident and successful learners', which is also part of the core values. Similarly, Sockett (2006) asserted a number of dispositions which was related to the core value of teacher professionalism, such as persistence, trustworthiness, fairness, and responsiveness and so on. Likewise, Hansen (2001: 59) added the 'integrity of purpose, responsibility and seriousness' to the moral value and quality of teacher professionalism. The research literature primarily discussed the educational value which teachers were passing on to their students. However, in this context, the intended teacher value refers to the 'values...in judging the worth of actions and products which affect the life- energy and welfare of others and oneself' (Ormell, 1980: 78-79). Specifically, the values refer to the 'things which one has to work at, to strive for, [and] to expend effort in living up to' (Ormell, 1980: 73). This type of value can function in facilitating people to work for better quality and effect. Teacher responsibility which manifests what teachers consider they should strive for and take efforts



to achieve it exactly fits into the meaning of value.

### **7.3 Factors Influencing Professional Responsibility**

#### **7.3.1 Professional responsibility and sociocultural influence**

Professional responsibility has been evidenced in this study to be deeply rooted in teachers' heart. The participants in this study claimed the formation of sense of responsibility for teaching and students commenced on the day when they became a member of the teaching profession. Why responsibility became a driving force for them to respond to either opportunities or challenges is associated with Chinese culture. This finding is in tandem with the existing research which describes China as a country with a long tradition of respecting teachers and emphasizing teaching (*zunshi zhongjiao*) (Liu, 2011: 40). It is demonstrated by researchers (e.g. Sun, 2015: 1) with the Confucian thought that a teacher needs to be judged from the perspective of moral quality, within which responsibility is a core manifestation. The sense of responsibility is embedded in the meaning of being teachers (Li and Bian, 1985: 67). Hence, choosing to be a teacher means choosing to enact the responsibility for teaching and students (Wang, 2012: 85). Therefore, the sense of responsibility is deeply rooted in the Chinese Confucian culture and the expectations of the society. Recently, Xi Jinping, President of The People's Republic of China (P. R. China), raised the issue of focusing on teaching and continuously developing teachers' responsibility and moral quality in The 19<sup>th</sup> National Congress of the Communist Party of China in 2017. This is indeed a timely governmental gesture to elevate teachers' professional responsibility to new heights.

This study does not attempt to argue that only teachers in the Chinese context have strong sense of responsibility. Teachers from other eastern countries as well as western contexts also appear to possess strong sense of responsibility. Rather, I am suggesting that the context (i.e. Chinese culture)

indeed substantially contributes to shaping teachers' sense of responsibility in this study. It is the cultural background and origin that make responsibility a core element of Chinese teachers' professionalism where Chinese culture plays important role in shaping its nature. It is the role of responsibility that has played in constructing professionalism that has reflected the context-specific feature of professionalism in terms of what responsibility is (see the discussion in 7.2.1).

In addition, teachers' sense of responsibility includes a facet of educating students' morality. This facet echoes what is termed as moral education, which is a fusion of morality (daode) and education (jiaoyu). Moral education does not refer to a specific course but to educating students through issues concerning being a moral person. It may be integrated into daily classroom teaching of different subjects and outside class as well. This concurs with, for instance, researcher Misco (2011) who studied how teachers conducted students' moral education in Beijing, China. The findings of this study have also suggested that such choice in teaching be related to the deeply rooted Chinese cultural influence. This is in line with Gao (2008) and Ping et al. (2004) who reviewed the historical context and long tradition of emphasizing the education of students' moral qualities in China. The emphasis on calculating individuals' moral qualities is a typical characteristic of Chinese education. The moral education tradition has its context-specific historical background. The Chinese government used to view moral education as 'ideological and political education' (Lee and Ho, 2005: 414) and elements of moral education could be found in 'almost every page' of textbooks (Zhao, 2004: 33). Working in such a context where moral education has been an important focus and responsibility of teachers, the university EFL teachers would automatically integrate moral education into their language teaching although they may not have a textbook particularly prescribed for moral education.

The form of moral education has always appeared in both 'formal classes'

and ‘extra classroom experiences’ (Misco, 2011: 470). The teachers participating in this study have demonstrated how they integrated moral education into the classroom settings and set up personal examples of attempting to influence students after class. Although there existed various ways to implement the moral education in practice, all the efforts aimed to achieve the same purpose of developing students into morally healthy people.

In short, the integration of moral education into English language teaching has entailed the cultural influence of the specific context where the participants are situated. The understanding of moral education and the approaches teachers have adopted to enact it reflect the cultural facet of teacher professionalism.

Although moral education has been documented in the existing research, the majority of them are related to school context. Meanwhile, moral education and its integration in classroom teaching have been relatively less evidenced in the western literature. This study enriches the understanding of how a particular social culture and context influences what teachers believe they should be responsible for and the way they construct professionalism.

### **7.3.2 Professional responsibility and institutional nature**

Day et al. (2006) pinpointed that the local condition under which teachers were working (e.g. workload, career structure) and the support from workplace, leadership, teachers’ workload and given professional space (Skaalvik and Skaalvik, 2009; 2011) were relevant to the development of teachers’ professional responsibility. This study has not only echoed their argument, but also, more importantly, highlighted more on the influences brought by the nature of the participants who have worked in the institution of this study. The nature of the department where the participants in this study are from is that it is an English department and is of service nature which means it serves to teach English course for the whole university’s students.

Furthermore, the English course is seen as a common basic course (gonggong jichu ke) which means it is a compulsory common course learned by students of all majors. It appears that the nature of the department has led the institution leaders to position the department as one that is ‘teaching-oriented’, rather than ‘research-oriented’ or ‘teaching and research-oriented’. The departmental policy has been apparently emphasizing the importance of teaching and being a teacher. More specifically, the leaders have guided the participants to view students’ cultivation and teaching quality as one of the dominating parts of responsibility as a member in this department. This undoubtedly has played a role in shaping the participants’ identity, i.e. positioning themselves as or (more as) a teacher and accordingly the responsibility mainly has lied in enacting the professional identity as a teacher.

The second layer of the influence attributable to the nature of the department has been related to the nature of the English language subject and its status in the university. To explain this, it is necessary to take a brief review of the nature of the university in question. It is a science and technology university within which scientific subjects are dominating. Compared with science subjects, English, as a social science subject, is positioned as a marginalized subject in this science-oriented university. In addition, as pointed out earlier, the English subject is set up as a common basic course which has further downgraded its status compared with other science and technology courses of a particular major. As evidenced by the participants, students have been holding a view that professional courses related to their majors would be more useful for their subject development. That explains the phenomenon which shows that some students read science and technology books in English classes.

Moreover, the ‘teaching-oriented’ nature of the department has also been manifested in the university’s imbalanced distribution between support for research on English subjects and research on natural sciences. Evidence shows that the majority of funds and supporting policy have favoured the science

subjects rather than subjects related to English. This has guided the participating teachers to pay less attention to the research activities. Inevitably, the responsibility for research has been far less developed than the responsibility for teaching. That also explains why the participants have poured the bulk of their energy into the development and enactment of responsibility as teachers.

Although existing research has documented influences of institutional level factors on teachers, less attention has been paid to the group of teachers who teach English in a science-oriented higher education institution, and to the influence from the nature of English department and English subject. The results from this study have revealed the influences of both the nature of a high education institution and the nature of the teacher's subject and therefore have enriched the understanding of the formation of responsibility from this perspective.

Apart from the institutional influence on the formation of responsibility, factors related to individual teachers' personal experiences and background were also found to be influential in this study. This forms the topic of the next section.

### **7.3.3 Professional responsibility and personal biography**

Teachers' sense of responsibility has been evidenced above to be associated with personal influences from family background and previous educational experience. This section mainly discusses how these factors influence the formation and perception of sense of responsibility.

#### ***Teacher responsibility and influence from family background***

The studies undertaken by previous researchers noted that personal biography, including family background, had crucial influence on teachers' understanding of teaching. This study accords with the existing research but more specifically has evidenced the family upbringing experiences cannot be

underestimated, particularly for those who were born in teacher families. A teacher family background refers to the upbringing in the family which consists of family members among whom there is a teacher or there are two or more teachers. The influence from such a type of family means that the family members who are teachers exemplify how they understand what being a teacher means and what responsibility is. Participants who come from such a kind of family have observed and witnessed how their family members behaved as teachers. Therefore, modelling the enactment of responsibility in the teaching profession sow the seeds in participants' hearts and shaped their understanding of responsibility. Later in participants' teaching career, they would implement in similar ways. The family members' dedication and devotion to students without seeking rewards from students deeply influenced the participants when they were still kids. Later when they grow up, they would be able to transfer those experiences into their own practices and belief systems and treat their own students in a similar responsible manner.

The family members' influence on teacher responsibility is found in three participants who come from teacher family background. For others who do not come from such family background, they share other factors such as similar educational experience. The following section focuses on this topic.

### ***Responsibility and influence from educational experience***

This study further reveals that how and what teachers have experienced in the process of their education may indeed influence how they make sense of the teaching profession and how they act as teachers. To clarify, such influence here refers to the role model set by the participants' own teachers during the days when they were students. Specifically, in this study, seven teachers' claimed that their former teachers had influence on how they understood what being a teacher meant. It was through experiencing and observing how their own former teachers had treated and behaved towards teaching and students that the participants' understanding of responsibility was

nurtured. The participants, as recipients of their teachers' behaviour, evaluated and commented on their teachers. Their comments facilitated the formation of the sense of teacher responsibility.

Moreover, this study has taken one more step further toward understanding the previous teachers' influence from two aspects. First, the participants who have experienced warmth, concern and careful support from former teachers considered their teachers as positive models who exemplified strong sense of responsibility. Such positive examples include maintaining students' mental health, helping students with their academic achievements and working long hours for teaching preparation and so on. The positive examples set by model teachers (no matter in which stage of education, secondary or tertiary education) can facilitate the participants to develop responsibility in a positive way. That is to say, the participating teachers would imitate their own model teachers to apply responsibility to their students in a similar fashion.

Second, comparing with the positive modelling, the negative modelling could lead to different influence. Two of the participating teachers had witnessed and experienced irresponsible teachers who paid less attention to students' growth and academic progress. That led these two participating teachers to deeply reflect on what being a teacher meant. For those participants, the unpleasant and negative experience brought by their former teachers made them realise the importance of responsibility as a teacher. As the victims, they understand that the absence of and/or weak responsibility can harm students in various ways. Such reflection triggered the participants to redefine the meaning of being a teacher after they became a member in the teaching profession, which kept what they had suffered from becoming a source of suffering for their students.

Therefore, both the participants' two types of experiences with previous teachers, either positive or negative, have influence on how these teachers view the importance of responsibility and shape their sense of it. Although it may not necessarily always be the case that teachers can turn negative

elements in their experience into a positive reflection that stimulates the growth of responsibility, this study has evidently supported the existence of such a possibility.

Both the above-discussed influences from family background and educational background have illustrated how personal level factors can play a role in shaping teachers' sense of responsibility. However, personal influences do not appear to be the only factor in shaping responsibility. It is through the interaction and negotiation of the social-cultural, institutional and personal influences that teacher responsibility is formed and developed. Although the participants in this study possess a relatively strong responsibility as teachers, the sense of responsibility seems to be fluctuating in various situations. This will be discussed in detail in the next section.

#### **7.4 The Fluctuation of Professional Responsibility**

Teachers' understanding of teaching and devotion to teaching have been reported to be fluctuating. For example, Day and Gu (2007: 434) have claimed that school teachers with fewer than three years of teaching experience may either keep enjoying teaching or gradually lose interest in it due to the influence of 'level of support and recognition of their work' by the workplace. This study partially confirms that professional responsibility in university teachers may not stay unchanged overtime. This section will discuss responsibility as teachers and responsibility as researchers respectively.

The participants in this study demonstrated a relatively strong and stable sense of responsibility for teaching. The study does not intend to argue that strong responsibility is applicable to or can be generalized to all teachers in the Chinese higher educational context in general or in the investigated university in particular, but seeks to illustrate that it has been the case among the fifteen investigated participants. The participants demonstrated the relatively strong teacher identity and held a strong sense of responsibility to



enact such identity. More importantly, it is how and why such strong sense of responsibility was formed that facilitates a more nuanced understanding of professionalism.

Although responsibility is indeed found to be a relatively stable element of professionalism, the participants appear to have experienced fluctuations in responsibility in their teaching career. The findings reveal that at the beginning of entering the teaching profession the participants' sense of responsibility was relatively weak, for example, they simply viewed being a teacher as a 'high social status and relaxing job'. It was in the process of enacting the role as a teacher that the understanding of being a teacher was gradually developed, confirmed and strengthened and the meaning attached to responsibility started to be enriched. After reaching a certain level, the sense of responsibility did not remain static. The fluctuation occurred when the participating teachers encountered challenges and dissatisfaction with their work such as increasing workload and less satisfied salary. However, such fluctuation was temporary because the 'inner motive' mitigated the dissatisfaction with the external restrictions and helped restore the sense of responsibility. In other words, although responsibility might drop to some extent due to external restrictions, it was again the power of responsibility that helped the participating teachers overcome such restrictions and continue to fulfil their obligations as teachers in a responsible way.

The other fluctuation was captured among the participants who were approaching the age of retirement. Responsibility, especially with respect to developing and maintaining teaching capability professionally was diluted since they saw little necessity for them to further improve. However, that does not mean their responsibility was decreasing completely. Their responsibility was weakened in the aspect of self-development, but still worked in the aspects of teaching and student management.

Such fluctuation was also found in the responsibility as a researcher. Take the six participants who were categorized as active researchers. Their sense of

responsibility increased when they found themselves more capable of research and identified themselves as researchers.

In sum, as seen from this study, responsibility both teachers and researchers have experienced fluctuations which can be associated with multiple external and internal factors such as retirement, workload, salary and ability. However, in spite of such fluctuations, responsibility appears to be a relatively stable element of professionalism. The understanding of responsibility helps gain more insights into professionalism. The next section discusses more on the connection between responsibility and professionalism.

## **7.5 Connecting Professional Responsibility to Teacher Professionalism**

Teacher responsibility has been identified and evidenced as a core element of teacher professionalism in this study, as discussed above. It was found to have two characteristics: First, it was given great emphasis among the participants; second, it remained to be a relatively stable element although it could fluctuate across a teacher's career.

Less research has been done to explore the nature of responsibility in relation to other dimensions of professionalism. The discussions below seek to illustrate that responsibility is a core element of teacher professionalism through examining how it has driven the participating teachers to enact the other two elements of professionalism, namely how the perceived autonomy is applied in practice and how the teachers enact professional knowledge.

### **7.5.1 Connecting professional responsibility with autonomy**

In regard to the connection between responsibility and professional autonomy, the existing research notes that 'responsibility can be effective only if autonomy to take decisions and solve problems is given' (Bracci, 2009: 297). Sheldon et al. (2018: 65) emphasize that it is the autonomy that first influences responsibility and 'not from this possibility to autonomy'. It seems

that responsibility is something needed when teachers are given autonomy because responsibility facilitates the application of autonomy in a rational manner. It indicates that the establishment of responsibility would be accompanying the given autonomy.

However, the findings of this study reveal that the teachers' sense of responsibility was not formed on the basis of given autonomy. Instead, responsibility for teaching and students grew in participants' heart when they got engaged in their teaching career. Moreover, the autonomy provided by the university regarding teaching could to some extent influence teacher responsibility. There also existed other possibilities in which given autonomy was not the most determining factor. Evidence from this study shows teachers' persistence to teach in a responsible way with limit autonomy. The strength of responsibility is not much influenced by the degree of autonomy but by the Chinese culture in which being a teacher is meant to be responsible for students and effect of teaching in whatever situations (Liu, 2011). That again manifests the specific cultural feature of responsibility in the investigated participants. Driven by the cultural force, teachers in this Chinese context regard responsibility as top-priority which is least influenced by external factors, including given autonomy even when autonomy was threatening.

The study has evidenced that the degree of autonomy given to teachers little influences the strength of responsibility and that responsibility in turn changes how teachers take intentional actions to utilize the perceived given autonomy in practice. This has enriched our understanding of this issue. All the fifteen participants in this study, although differing in educational and working experience claimed that no matter how much professional space was given to them, they would try their utmost to make fuller use of the autonomous space to enact teaching, although the exiting research claims that the 'management culture of the institution...narrowed teachers professional agency' (Vähäsantanen, 2015: 7). In this study, it was the sense of responsibility that gave rise to the efforts of exercising agency positively.

Even when restrictions occurred, how the participants responded to the restrictions and limitations in teaching positively also reflected the impact from responsibility. Driven by responsibility, the participants did not give up their hard- work in the limited professional space. Rather, they endeavoured to make full use of the limited professional autonomy strategically for the purpose of benefiting students to the greatest extent. Responsibility, in relation to autonomy, served as a driving force to influence how teachers applied the limited autonomy to practice, maximizing its usage and making possible modifications and alterations.

This pattern also applied to the research domain in this study. The limited influence of teachers' perceived autonomy on responsibility can be further illustrated through a comparison between the participants with and without research responsibility.

The participants, being exposed to the same degree of autonomy in research in the same working place, presented a contradictory distribution of researchers' responsibility, i.e. six with responsibility versus nine without. As evidenced in the findings, there was a lack of tradition of incorporating research into the university teachers' job scope. In other words, the responsibility as a researcher was originally a blank part for the participants. The responsibility as a researcher gradually became a growing duty required by the university policy makers so that the participants had to add it to the normal working space. Both the awareness of the necessity of integrating research into the responsibility for a university teacher and of the ability to possibly carry out research and produce expected outcome, determined to a larger extent how much responsibility for research could be added in the participants' responsibility mechanism. The six participants with the responsibility for research were not only willing to make full use of the autonomy given by the university, but also would find alternative ways to achieve their aims of research when they were faced with constraints. In comparison, the other nine participants who had little or relatively weak

responsibility for research, even being given right to autonomously making decisions over research activities, still showed reluctance to use it, let alone when they were faced with restrictions. Thus, it may be said that autonomy cannot directly influence how teachers exercise agency, although under the externally imposed pressure, teachers may be forced to ‘surrender’ autonomy and be ‘frustrated’ due to the lack of it (Olivant, 2015: 126). It was through the mediation of responsibility that different forms of agency could be generated. The absence or presence of responsibility and its degree of strength may lead to various possibilities of how the participating teachers would respond to the perceived autonomy and restrictions. Furthermore, the findings seem to indicate that the more firmly responsibility grew in the participants’ heart, the more likely it was to generate actions in positive forms, no matter the teachers were satisfied with the perceived autonomy or not.

Therefore, responsibility is the core element in professionalism, inspiring teachers to perform, behave and indicating perception of who they should be. The given autonomy provides a contextual base where the participants are positioned. It is responsibility that facilitates or guides the teachers to make sense of the context and initiate intended actions accordingly.

However, it is necessary to clarify that it does not mean that the perceived given autonomy, i.e. how much professional space a teacher can have in relation to research, has no influence on the formation of responsibility. I would argue that, different from the exiting research, there are other factors which play a more distinctive role in shaping responsibility.

As discussed above, this study has provided a different perspective in understanding how professional autonomy and responsibility can be connected. Responsibility does not seem to be much influenced by the given autonomy. Although the participating teachers claimed that they perceived a decrease of given professional space in teaching, such limited autonomy did not influence their responsibility development fully. Instead, responsibility was more determined by the traditional paradigm which empowered the

teachers to be responsible for teaching and for their students. Not only was responsibility being influenced to a great extent by the perceived autonomy, it also influence in turn how teachers made use of the perceived autonomy. This strengthens the argument that responsibility was not only connected with professionalism, but more importantly, it acted as a core element in professionalism. In this cultural and context-specific situation, this study has provided another perspective from which professionalism can be interpreted with more nuanced meaning.

### **7.5.2 Connecting professional responsibility with professional knowledge**

The role of responsibility as a core element in professionalism not only can be demonstrated in its relation with autonomy, but also can further be reflected in its impact on how teacher knowledge application and development is subject to the driving force of responsibility.

The exiting research indicates that the enactment of professional knowledge is associated with professional responsibility. For instance, Ottenbreit-Leftwich et al. (2010) claimed that the usage of technology in classroom teaching was driven by the responsibility for promoting student learning. This study has provided a more detailed examination in this regard.

Firstly, it has been identified that developing teachers' professional knowledge is considered as an important part of responsibility for the teacher in this study. Tracing it back to the Chinese culture regarding teaching profession, being a teacher requires a knowledge basis. Although unlike Shulman (1986, 1987) who unpacked knowledge into specific categories, Chinese culture context has not stated exactly what aspects of knowledge is necessary. Rather, it provides a general guide for teachers to develop their awareness of the knowledge construction. This understanding has been common among people in the whole Chinese society, be they teachers or non-teachers. Teachers have been empowered with responsibility to develop

knowledge whenever possible. Such belief about responsibility is relatively easy to be accepted or admitted by would-be teachers and newly recruited teachers because they have already adopted such beliefs before they enter the teaching profession. Furthermore, the sense of responsibility accompanies teachers throughout their career.

In this study, the enactment of responsibility has been manifested through the evidence that the teachers were willingly to make changes in teaching pedagogy for the purpose of achieving better teaching quality and benefiting their students. The implementation of changes appeared to be driven by responsibility. Otherwise, teachers would not have been able to implement the changes.

To sum up, responsibility drives the enactment of the other two elements in professionalism. First, it plays a leading role in influencing how teachers apply the perceived autonomy in practice. Second, it facilitates application of professional knowledge to meeting students' needs and educational demands. Therefore, responsibility no doubt functions as a driving force and a core element within the realm of professionalism.

## **7.6 Connecting Teacher Professionalism and Professional Identity**

This section aims to link one of the key findings regarding professional identity with teacher professionalism. In order to illustrate this, this section will discuss the characteristics of professional identity first. Then how it linked to professional responsibility will be unpacked.

### **7.6.1 Characteristics of professional identity**

Before linking professional identity to teacher professionalism, it is necessary to take a closer look at professional identity and its features. This serves as a basis to understand what it means and how it connects to professionalism.

Both teacher identity and researcher identity (active, passive, and non-researcher) have been identified in the findings of this study. As regards the multi-dimensional identity, this study is in line with the exiting research. University teachers are engaged with workload in various aspects. In addition to teaching, research becomes another important facet of teachers' accountability. In other words, teachers are expected to fulfil the responsibility for multiple roles such as being a teacher and a researcher concurrently. However, the relationships among the multiple dimensions of teachers' professional identity (Mishler, 1999: 8) remain unresolved (Beijaard et al., 2004). Therefore, who teachers positioned themselves to be and how they maintained balance among different choices of positioning were explored further in this study. Evidence in this regard entailed tensions in the nature of professional identity among the participating teachers.

This section focuses on illustrating the tensions from two main aspects. Firstly, a contradictory relationship between being a teacher and a researcher among the nine participants is presented. Then it moves to discuss the tensions between the nine passive/non- researchers and the other six active researchers.

***Tension: Being a teacher and researcher simultaneously?***

To clarify first, the tension between professional identity as teacher and researcher is mainly based on the evidence of the nine participants who firmly positioned themselves as teachers but were unwilling to act as researchers (although some called themselves passive researchers). They either gave up doing research totally (e.g. the participants ZHENG and FENG) or were forced to do it for the sake of merely meeting policy requirements (e.g. the participants WU and ZHU). This accords with previous studies which reported the existence of teachers in China who took being a researcher as an adverse choice. Borg (2007) and Gao et al. (2011) found that their participants presented moderate level of research engagement. Meeting promotion policy and review requirements were important factors causing them to choose to do



research externally. The different attitudes towards and the degree of acceptance of being a teacher and researcher demonstrated a tension existing in the participants' sense of professional identity.

***Tension: Nine passive/non-researchers versus six active researchers***

The findings also reveal the existence of the other six participants who have relatively more active attitude towards doing research and engaging in more research activities, compared with the aforementioned nine participants. These six participants reported that doing research was not solely for the external policy demands but also due to the reason that they intrinsically identified themselves as researchers and were driven by the responsibility as researcher. Tracing back to these six participants who showed more willingness to be researchers and stronger sense of responsibility as researchers and more positive self-efficacy in research ability, we can find that their professional identity as researchers was apparently more firmly established than the other nine participants. The existence of the contradiction between the six participants' views on research and those of the other nine's is in line with the views of Xu (2014) who reported a 'mixed attitude' among Chinese university teachers which meant part of teachers doing research with intrinsic motivation while others with only external drives. As revealed in the participants' responses, their understanding of research was either derived from the influence of their previous teachers or from in-service learning programmes. The stronger identity as a researcher facilitates the six participants to enact the responsibilities in research activities

**7.6.2 Connecting professional identity and responsibility**

It is noted in existing research that professional identity is at the core of teachers' decision making and meaning making (Berger and Van, 2019:163). Professional identity is a set of attributes and values that distinguish the teaching professional from others (Sachs, 2001: 154). Similarly, Rus et al.

(2012) includes value as a component of teachers' professional identity. Such value can be embodied in what being teacher means and what a teacher is obliged to do. In a similar vein, Flores and Day's (2006: 220) research echoes that it is through 'making sense and (re)interpretation of one's own values and experiences' that one's professional identity is shaped. Thus, professional identity is linked to the values and the understanding and enactment of such values. The teaching profession is 'driven by values and ethical motives' (Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2011: 1031). Therefore, making sense of ones' value regarding the teaching profession, such as the motivation for being a teacher, the meaning of teaching and obligation of teachers, is helpful to understand ones' sense of identity.

Referring back to teacher responsibility (as discussed in section 7.1.1), as Berger and Van (2019:166) put that teacher responsibility helps understand their choice and meaning of a particular professional identity. Meanwhile, responsibility enriches the understanding of teacher values through adding sense of responsibility into teachers' value system.

Thus, both identity and responsibility are linked since they both reflect teacher value. This study has demonstrated their connection. As evidenced in the interviews with the participants, data regarding identity emerged frequently and intensively when participants expressed their understanding of responsibility. Thus, the identity became a helpful perspective to understand teachers' sense of responsibility. Participants' illustration of responsibility for a particular identity revealed their sense of value in the professional life.

### **7.6.3 Connecting professional identity and professionalism**

There exists a large body of literature which integrates professional identity into the study of professionalism. However, there is a lack of an explicit exploration of the connections between the two. The exploration of connection between identity and professionalism is based on the linkage

between identity and responsibility, as discussed in 7.6.2.

As identified earlier, there exist three categories of identity holders, i.e. teacher identity, teacher and active researcher identity, and teacher and passive/non-researcher identity holders. In this study, the participants gave different weight to the identity they decided to hold, and they demonstrated a strong sense of responsibility for the identity they held and a weak sense of responsibility for the identity they rejected. This shows that the strength of identity tends to be associated positively with the strength of responsibility.

Indeed, as the participants evidenced that their decision on whom they wanted themselves to be and who they were performing determined how they understood the role they were playing. Such identity grew internally in their heart and responsibility with an inner motive to fulfil obligations of a particular role was established simultaneously. In other words, responsibility with inner motive and sense of identity were nurtured internally in their heart at the same time. Teachers' identity and responsibility for a particular identity serve as the driving force of teachers' way of acting.

For example, driven by the teacher responsibility, participants took actions to enact what they believed they should do out of their internal willingness rather than mechanically or unwillingly abide by the rules as a result of external policy imposition. Therefore, the firmly established identity as a teacher enabled the participants to absorb their understanding of what being a teacher meant into their value system. Meanwhile, such a sense of value was manifested in their responsible behaviours and attitude towards teaching and treating students. Evidence could be noted in participants' sustained efforts when facing unfavourable teaching policy.

This positive association can be illustrated by looking at why participants who held a 'teacher-first' principle in making sense of their professional identity attached importance to the teacher responsibility and the willing contribution in teaching. Similarly, the relation between responsibility and identity also explains why the six participants who admitted to be researchers

demonstrated positive and strong responsibility and willing endeavors for research while the other nine who were passive/non-researchers presented weak responsibility and little engagement in research practice. Thus, identity could function to indicate the sense of responsibility and how they construct professionalism in actions. Moreover, professional identity is an abstract concept and it is difficult to understand it without explaining its meaning. With the help of examining the responsible behaviours of a particular identity holder, the meaning of identity can be more clearly explained.

The participants in this study have illustrated different forms of enactment of professionalism which underlies different strength and emphasis of responsibility. Evidence from this study indicates that the participants who exercised as active agents in the face of difficulties presented strong sense of responsibility as teachers. The importance of responsibility has been discussed in previous sections, i.e. that with the help of strong sense of responsibility as teachers, the participants cannot tolerate themselves not making any improvements in face of frustration. While the frustration might temporarily threaten their self-efficacy, the teachers exercised positive agency in terms of working harder for better performance. This illustrates powerfully how participants with strong teacher identity could deal with challenges positively with a strong sense of responsibility. Thus, identity, responsibility and professionalism enactment are connected reciprocally.

The reciprocal relation works in the research domain as well, the other nine participants presented different attitudes and responses. When they experienced tough situations such as failures or challenges, the nine participants did not demonstrate willingness to seek for changes as they did in teaching. Rather, they chose the option of giving up or passively doing research for policy's sake. Such behaviours (i.e. escaping from difficulties) demonstrated the negative way in professionalism construction. In this sense, compared with being a teacher, the nine participants demonstrated relatively weaker professional identity as researchers or 'passive researchers', in their

own words. The form of doing research passively was mainly under the influence of others rather than being led by themselves internally. That shows their unwillingness to take the accountability. This accords with Borg (2007) and Xu (2014) who found that teachers were not only reluctant to engage in research but also less willing to seek for self-development. Thus, weak researcher identity holders with weak research responsibility demonstrated negativeness in their enactment of professionalism and professional development.

This study has clearly showed that professional identity and responsibility give us an intriguing window into the way how teachers understand the teaching profession. These two elements were often mentioned at the same time when participants shared their work experiences. For example, when participants were asked about the sense of responsibility, they always responded by talking about the sense of identity.

Through making sense of being a teacher and/or researcher, the participants attached different importance to the teacher and/or researcher responsibility which further impacted on teachers' way of doing. Hence, the exploration of identity adds knowledge to the reciprocal relationship between professional identity and professional responsibility. Professional identity and responsibility both serve as integral part of professionalism.

Therefore, to understand how and why professionalism is enacted in a particular way, professional identity is crucially important element to be taken into consideration. This can help explain how professional identity, responsibility, and the enactment of professionalism interact with one another.

## CHAPTER EIGHT

### CONCLUSION

#### 8.1. Summary of Findings

In this section, the findings on the characteristics of teacher professionalism among Chinese college English teachers are summarized. The summary is presented in the following three sub-sections in order to facilitate revisiting of the three research questions of this study. As stated in Chapter One, these three research questions are as follows:

- 1) What are the characteristics of teacher professionalism among participating teachers?
- 2) What are the key factors that contribute to shape their teacher professionalism?
- 3) Are there any changes in teacher professionalism throughout participants' professional career? If so, what are the changes and what are the causes?

##### 8.1.1 Characteristics of professionalism

The key characteristics of the three dimensions of professionalism, i.e. professional responsibility, professional autonomy and professional knowledge were identified. With regard to professional responsibility, it was found to be a multi-dimensional concept. The responsibility was mainly manifested in the responsibility for teaching, students and self-development in teaching ability with different degree and strength among all fifteen participants. Although it seemed that all fifteen participants possessed relatively strong sense of teacher responsibility, they demonstrated variations in their approaches in enacting the components and sub-components of

responsibility. Meanwhile, responsibility for engaging in research as a necessary part of work for university teachers and self-improvement of research ability was applicable for six participants. The six participants attached different weight to each component of their researcher responsibility. The other nine participants revealed weak or little responsibility for research activities. They were also different from the six participants in terms of their ways of implementing responsibility in practice. Based on the evidence, responsibility was found to lie in the fulfilment of obligation in a self-driven/motivated manner. This was a key element in defining responsibility. Participants demonstrated such willingness in words of 'I should do' as a teacher or researcher rather than 'I have to do'.

In addition to the characteristics of responsibility, the dimension of autonomy also revealed its feature. A discrepancy between perceived autonomy and the actual enactment of autonomy was identified. That means, on the one hand, with the perceived given autonomy, participants may not necessarily make full use of the given autonomy when they were positively allowed to make decisions over work. For example, working under the same context where autonomy regarding research was to the same extent given, nine participants were unwilling to make use of it because they either took a passive part in research or totally rejected it. On the other hand, such discrepancies were also revealed when participants may not necessarily be fully restricted by limited autonomy. For example, participants were able to make strategic use of the limited professional space under the prescribed curriculum. They enriched their teaching context through incorporating extra teaching materials whenever possible. However, such discrepancy was not identified to be isolated from other dimensions of professionalism. It helped participants to go further to make sense of the underlying rationale that caused such discrepancy in perception and practice. It was the driving force of professional responsibility that made that happen. It was the presence or absence of responsibility that enabled the participants' different responses to

given autonomy so that participants differed in choosing to make fuller use of or ignore the given autonomy.

With regard to the professional knowledge, the characteristics of how teachers selected teaching content and teaching pedagogy were specifically illustrated in the teaching domain. In the research domain, the understanding of research and the approaches to doing research were evidenced. Meanwhile, changes in professional knowledge implementation were captured. This can help answer the third research question regarding professionalism changes. The prescribed curriculum and extra teaching materials in class constituted the teaching content. Traditional teacher-centred, updated student-centred teaching approaches and technology-assisted teaching demonstrated the features of teaching pedagogy. Meanwhile, the integration of moral education into classroom demonstrated the enactment of responsibility for students' moral cultivation. Moreover, the endeavour and efforts paid to enact professional knowledge and the changes were found to be driven by the sense of responsibility for self-improvement as teacher and/or researcher. Thus, as revealed in the findings, although elements of professionalism were presented individually, the responsibility functioned as a threshold to link the other two elements. It served as the underlying force driving participants to enact professionalism.

### **8.1.2 Key factors that influence teacher professionalism**

Multiple factors were found to be influencing professionalism. As to autonomy, institutional policy context tended to be a major factor shaping the autonomy given to participants. Institutional policies influenced the prescribed curriculum, students managing principles, teacher evaluation standard, promotion requirements and supports given to teachers' professional development. These policies to some extent reflected leaders' leading style and wills.



With the given autonomy, individual teachers' own knowledge base for the subjects they were teaching, their ability to teach and their previous educational experience all combined to influence how participants enacted their knowledge. However, both the ways to apply autonomy and to enact knowledge in practice were influenced by the important factor, i.e. strength of the responsibility.

With respect to responsibility, multi-level factors were identified. Chinese culture functioned to provide a social background to understanding teachers and teaching profession which was meant to be responsible in tradition. However, the sense of responsibility varied across individuals although they all possessed it. Each participant's personal biography such as family background and previous learning experience distinguished them from others. Meanwhile, working context of the institution was identified as another significant factor in shaping responsibility. The nature of the university, the nature of the English department and its status in the university influenced the development of responsibility. Thus, the factors which influenced teacher professionalism and its three dimensions were categorized into three types. Firstly, personal factors which contributed to shaping teacher professionalism before and during their teaching career. The cultural understanding of being responsible for teaching and students was embedded in participants' teacher professionalism. In addition, institutional environment was embodied in the university teaching and research policies. They significantly influenced how teachers developed their sense of responsibility and the way of fulfilling a particular identity.

### **8.1.3 Changes captured of teacher professionalism**

Changes were found to exist throughout participants working career. For professional responsibility, it seemed to be a relatively stable component of professionalism, but there still existed some changes. Firstly, teachers tended

to experience changes from a relatively weak and vague responsibility at the first two to three years of working experience to reach a relatively clear and strong level. It was found that teachers at the very early stage of working career experienced a relatively uncertain and not-yet-firmly confirmed professional identity as a teacher. In the subsequent years that spanned almost as long as twenty years, responsibility might reach and sustain a relatively stable period. But when it approached the time of retirement, teachers' responsibility tended to drop in strength, but the drop did not necessary appear in all aspects of responsibility. The major drop mainly took place in responsibility for self-development.

The relatively stable responsibility in twenty years of working duration also did not remain static all the time but experienced fluctuations as well. Significant factors such as others' comments and feedback on their teaching performance, assigned workload, degree of satisfaction with working condition, leadership all played important roles in the fluctuations. But in the research domain, no radical changes were identified in the responsibility as a researcher. Only six participants experienced a gradual process of strengthening research responsibility through accumulating more research experience and developed stronger research ability. The other nine participants remained weak in terms of responsibility as researcher and their moderate engagement in research was purely due to external pushes.

## **8.2 Contributions to Knowledge**

This study mainly contributes to a more nuanced understanding of teacher professionalism from three aspects as elaborated in following sections.

### **8.2.1 Nuanced understanding of responsibility and identity**

Teachers' professional responsibility is defined as 'the fulfilment of obligation driven by internal motive'. The inner-formed motive is identified as

the key feature of professional responsibility in this study. It is the internal willingness to fulfil obligation that distinguishes responsibility from other concepts such as accountability. Thus, it is inaccurate to use responsibility and other concepts such as duty, accountability or obligation interchangeably because responsibility has its own meaning and focus.

With responsibility, teachers conduct work with motivation and passion and make efforts to do more and better rather than to do due to external pushes. Responsibility is a complex concept which can be unpacked into multidimensional components in the teaching and research domain respectively. Thus, it is inappropriate to view responsibility as a simple and whole concept. Such inner-driven motive to fulfil obligations of a particular role is, in its nature, part of the value teachers live up for which allow them to do what they believe they 'should do'. The fulfilment of obligation can still be executed in spite of facing hardships and difficulties. It is again the inner-driven motive that enables teachers to endure hardships and make self-sacrifice to achieve better under whatever circumstances.

Thus, responsibility cannot be simply viewed as the completion of duties and accountability assigned in workplace. It has also been inappropriately defined as 'inner obligation', as shown in literature review. But more specifically, it is the 'inner motive' to fulfil obligation rather than inner obligation itself. Meanwhile, devotion and self-sacrifice when facing hardships and challenges are added to enrich its meaning. Therefore, the endurance of hardships and the devotion and efforts teachers make in the profession are further revealed in how responsibility drives teachers to deal with the limited given autonomy and enact professional knowledge.

Not only is the meaning of professionalism enriched because one of its essential element, i.e. meaning of responsibility is enriched, this study also adopts the perspective of how responsibility interrelates and influences other elements to further illustrate that responsibility is at the core of professionalism.

As the discussion chapter (Chapter 7) has noted, the perceived degree of autonomy participants could enjoy did not exactly match the way they engaged in such autonomy. Participants' response by fully making use of limited autonomy in teaching and by making efforts to look for more possible spaces to enact teaching better were under the driving force of teacher responsibility. Such positive actions in responding to limited autonomy manifest the power of inner-formed motive to fulfil obligation as teachers even when being faced with restrictions and limitations. Thus, autonomy and responsibility are related.

In the similar vein, how teachers enact their knowledge of the subject they teach and the pedagogy of teaching are also related to responsibility. The way of teaching does not remain unchanged as it is driven by the responsibility for improving teaching quality and benefiting students better. Indeed, all the teachers demonstrate changes which happen in different aspects. Teachers of different working experience and professional ability find themselves meeting different toughness and problems in teaching. However, it is again the responsibility that helps them to mitigate the dissatisfaction with difficulties so that they are able to sustain their efforts. The presence of responsibility enables participants to deal with both limited autonomy and challenges in teaching in a positive way. The negative responses to difficulties due to the absent or weak responsibility were found in the research domain. The nine participants without responsibility could not motivate themselves to do research internally. They either gave up or did research for the sake of doing it. Accordingly, the ways they did research were through finding shortcuts to get research outcome rather than making efforts to hone their research skills to be more academically qualified. Unlike those nine participants, the other six were able to work more in order to pursue higher research quality.

The driving force of responsibility influencing the other two elements of professionalism provides new insights into the examination of the relationship among the three dimensions of professionalism. Responsibility's leading role

is clearly revealed in the professionalism of the Chinese teachers.

Meanwhile, professional identity was found to be closely linked to professional responsibility. When participants were sharing their sense of responsibility, their understanding of identity kept emerging frequently and intensively. Responsibility and identity did not exist in isolation but accompanied each other at the same time. For example, when participants firmly held a particular identity as teachers or researchers, their strong sense of responsibility to perform that identity accompanied. The investigation of the strong sense of responsibility in teaching or research work indicated their strong identity as teacher or researcher. The reciprocal relation between responsibility and identity was revealed. Thus, the knowledge about identity facilitates the understanding of responsibility in an in-depth manner. Responsibility, at the same time, enriched the interpretation of identity enactment in reality. On the one hand, the strong sense of responsibility enriched understanding of a positive sense of identity. The relatively strong responsibility in teaching and identity as teacher accompanied all fifteen participants. Although their experience fluctuated as the result of institutional, social and personal factors, their identity remained solid and responsibility remained strong. On the other hand, the weak sense of reprehensibility helped interpret a negative sense of identity. For instance, for the nine participants whose researcher identity was negative, their weaker sense of responsibility could be revealed in teachers' behaviour and thinking. Thus, no matter how certain factors function to shape working experience fluctuation, the positive/negative identity and strong/weak sense of responsibility are always associated. The reciprocal association between responsibility and identity enriches knowledge which has to date not been explicitly and widely reported in the current research literature.

### **8.2.2 Extended understanding on the fluctuation of professionalism**

As the core element of professionalism, responsibility still fluctuates across a teacher's working career though it is identified to be a relatively stable element. As evidenced in the findings, teachers' responsibility for teaching appears to be relatively weak and vague at the initial stage of their teaching career. It is after two to three years that the understanding of responsibility is enriched and grows. It stays relatively stable through the next twenty years. Factors like degree of satisfaction with working conditions, salary and workload, and status in the university lead in varying degrees to responsibility fluctuation and persistence of devotion. For different individuals, these factors differ in their impact on them. Some may have greater impact than others. Hence, teachers differ in the degree of fluctuations and the aspects that fluctuate. Moreover, the decrease of responsibility could recover with the help of their will in enduring hardship. When participants reach their late working stage, especially when they approach retirement, their sense of responsibility for drops mainly in the aspect of self-development.

Therefore, to understand the change of responsibility, it may be more appropriate to view it as a dynamic process rather than simply stating whether or not it is changing. It is necessary to tell when, how and why changes happen. It is also necessary to specify what specific aspects of responsibility may experience fluctuations rather than taking responsibility as a general concept. Meanwhile, for the relatively long and stable duration, the less radical fluctuations are also needed to be noticed. The complexity of change, fluctuation and factors that influence responsibility contribute to a better understanding of the nature of professionalism.

### **8.2.3 Expanding knowledge of factors influencing professionalism**

Multiple factors contributable to shaping professionalism are identified. The social factors do play a crucial role in shaping participants' responsibility,

especially in the teaching domain. Participants believe that teachers are the ‘candles’, ‘diligent gardeners’ and ‘engineer of the soul’ (Chen, 2001; Tang and Li, 2012). This traditional view on teacher equips participants with an intrinsic belief that being a teacher is meant to be responsible for teaching and students. The absence of research element in this traditional view results in the absence of responsibility for research in teachers’ perception of the teaching profession. Thus, social factor tends to be less influential in participants’ thinking about research. Instead, their own experience and ability have more influence on their development of research responsibility. Therefore, the social factor does not completely and solely determine participants’ responsibility. Instead, other factors at participants’ personal level are at work. For example, in the teaching domain, personal factors such as years of experience distinguish the weight participants give to different components of responsibility. More experienced teachers tend to place more emphasis on students’ moral cultivation than the less experienced teachers do. Years of experience also distinguish the degree of adapting student-centred teaching pedagogy and technology-assisted teaching. Less experienced teachers tend to more readily accept and apply them in class. Educational background also influences teachers’ level of confidence in their teaching ability. However, in the research domain, it is not the MA degree the participants hold that can influence their belief about their research ability, but how much they have really learnt either through their MA studies or other forms of learning from which they develop their confidence in research ability and acquire relevant knowledge.

Another important influencing factor shaping teacher professionalism is the institutional environment. The institution influences its teachers through imposing policy requirements upon them. Teachers’ response to policy demands shape their sense of identity and professionalism. In the studied university, it is through taking into account both the Chinese government’s expectations for university research performance and the studied university’s

scientific nature that the policy was designed to focus more on research and favor science subjects.

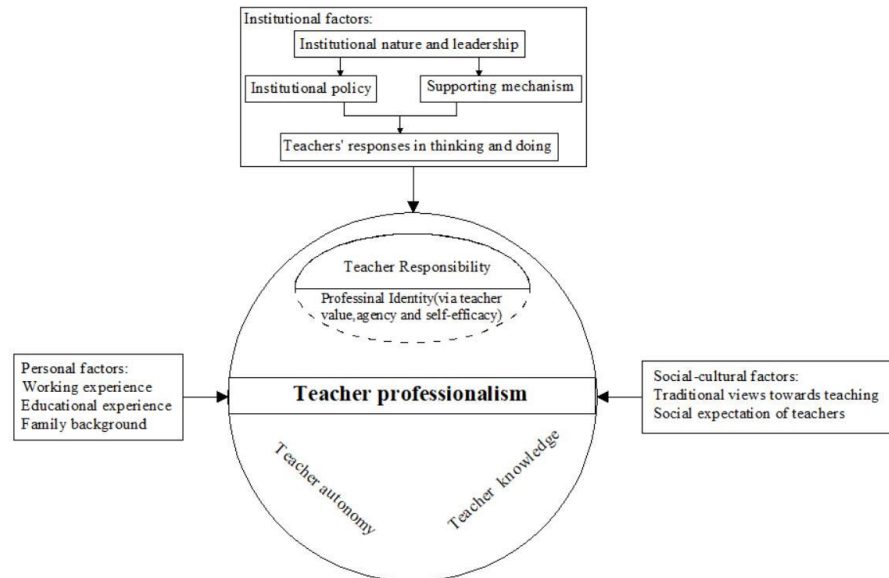
Working in this policy context, English language teachers often encounter two tensions: 1) tension between the demands of policy and the insufficient support for teacher development, especially in the research domain; 2) tension between the distribution of the resources for science teachers and that for social-science teachers. The distribution is considered to be unbalanced because it favors science teachers more. Both tensions have negative impact on the development of professional identity and professionalism.

When it comes to teachers' response to policy, other factors need to be taken into consideration. These include 1) the embedded Chinese traditional moral responsibility in the teaching profession and the positive social status of teachers in Chinese society which compensate for the university policy's negative influence. For example, in this study, the joint force of social cultural factors and institutional factors helped participants sustain a relatively strong identity as teacher and remain in the workplace. 2) Historically, as the university did not have a tradition that emphasized research, negative influence brought by demanding policies could not be minimized for the nine teachers who therefore became de-motivated to be researchers. Self-interest in research was found to inspire the other six teachers to make efforts to do research under the less favorable policy environment.

Having conducted the empirical study and revisited the tentative framework in Figure 1, an updated conceptual framework is proposed in Figure 2. Compared with the tentative framework in Figure 1, the updated framework demonstrates in an improved and detailed manner the understanding of teacher professionalism and its relation to influencing factors.



**Figure 2: An updated conceptual framework of teacher professionalism and influencing factors**



In this updated framework, with the big pie indicating teacher professionalism, teacher professional responsibility is placed within an inner solid semi-circle to highlight that it is the core component of professionalism. This differs from the Figure 1 where three dimensions share equal weight. Meanwhile, in the updated figure, identity is put in a dashed inner semi-circle which situates next to responsibility. This is to show its close association with responsibility. During the fieldwork, when participants were asked to share about responsibility, they always replied their perception of identity simultaneously. Thus, the study reveals that identity and responsibility are like two sides of a coin and cannot be separated. No matter how the sense of identity is shaped by the combined influence of different factors, the nature of identity, either positive or negative, indicate the strength of responsibility. Reciprocally, responsibility serves to explain how a particular identity is enacted as well. That is to say, responsibility is an expression of a particular identity. And identity is an indication of the strength of responsibility. They combine to serve as the important integral aspect of professionalism.

Unpacking the influencing power of different types of factors, one may

see different categories of factors related to personal, institutional and social cultural respects. Within each category, specific elements are enriched and listed in the updated framework (see Figure 2) based on the findings of this study. For example, the personal factors include personal working experience, educational experience and family background. As to institutional factors, apart from policy and leadership, the nature of university and department is highlighted as an important one, as supported by the data showing that this was a crucially important factor that influenced participants' sense of identity and responsibility.

With respect to sociocultural factors, traditional views on the teaching profession play a significant role. In the Chinese context, teacher professionalism is a culturally embedded issue. This necessitates the understanding of the concept of professionalism from a cultural perspective.

Thus, this study contributes to a more enriched and nuanced understanding of teacher professionalism. Figure 2 presents an updated framework to unpack the characteristics of teacher professionalism and its influencing factors in the Chinese context.

### **8.3 Implications of the Study**

This study has implications for education practitioners including both front-line college English teachers and the institution.

#### **8.3.1 Implications for front-line university teachers**

As to the implication for front line a teacher, this study helps them deepen the understanding of the importance of professional responsibility and to strengthen their beliefs about the necessity of sustaining and developing the responsibility in teaching. The findings may enable teachers to gain an overarching view of the developing trajectory of professional responsibility and to become aware of the factors that cause the sustainment or fluctuation of

responsibility. This study also reminds teachers to respect individual variations and make advance preparations for dealing with the fluctuations with a purpose of maintaining and developing the strength of responsibility. Finally, this study raises university teachers' awareness of the necessity to integrate responsibility as a researcher into their sense of responsibility. More emphasis on how to understand and enact the role of researcher are suggested.

### **8.3.2 Implication for the institution**

This study also sheds light on the institution. It brings to the policy makers' attention to that due to this university's scientific nature English language teachers are currently marginalized in the university and that the attention given to science and social science subjects is significantly unbalanced. It can thus raise the university leaders' awareness of the importance of identifying the different needs between science and social science teachers.

The study helps the leaders gain a more comprehensive understanding of current teachers' sense of responsibility and the factors that shape it. Specifically, the factors at the institutional factors can facilitate the leaders to pay more attention to and revisit the policies and support they provide to College English teachers (Day, 2017: 68). This study seeks to encourage their action to expand the professional space for teachers to engage in both teaching and research activities. For example, the study suggests that policy makers produce more supportive policy for English language teachers and researchers based on the features of the subjects. Meanwhile, it also suggests that English language teachers be provided with more professional learning opportunities to enhance both their teaching and research ability.

### **8.3.3 Suggestions for further research**

While this study has added knowledge to the understanding of teacher

professionalism and its factors through a carefully designed qualitative investigation and has drawn some implications for teachers and leaders, there still exist some limitations. It is necessary to acknowledge these limitations in order to help researchers in the relevant field to circumvent these issues in their future research.

Firstly, this study was carried out in only one Chinese higher educational institution, and this university has its own features which may differ from those of other types of university or even similar type of university in different locations. Thus, the findings of this study, though being meaningful, may not be representative of teacher professionalism in other higher educational institutions. Therefore, more studies need to be conducted in more universities addressing similar issues in the future.

Secondly, there were only a limited number of teachers who participated in this study, i.e. fifteen teachers took part in the formal interview. The relatively small sample size may not represent all other teachers in the investigated university. Thus, larger sample size needs to be used in future studies in order to obtain a more holistic and comprehensive picture of teacher professionalism.

Thirdly, the data were mainly collected through three rounds of interviews. Although the three rounds of interviews allowed the present researcher multiple opportunities to engage with participants and the in-depth data collected from the participants helped understand their professional lives in detail, the data all consisted of participants' own words, i.e. what they said they perceived and did in practice, which may or may not be exactly identical to their real behaviours in reality. Thus, future studies with more diverse research instruments are suggested if necessary and practicable.

It is hoped that the present study may provide a solid foundation for future studies in the relevant field.

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## **APPENDICES**

### **Appendix A: Participant Consent Form**

**Project title:** An investigation on teachers' perception of professionalism and the influencing factors in a Chinese higher educational institution

**Researcher's name:** Jia LI

**Supervisor's name:** Professor Qing Gu and Professor Christopher Day

- I have read the Participant Information Sheet and the nature and purpose of the research project has been explained to me. I understand the purpose of the research project and my involvement in it. I consent to participate.
- I understand the data will be used purely for the researcher's PhD study and academic publication purposes. And I consent to give the researcher the right to use the interview data for her research.
- I understand that I will be given the chance to check and verify the accuracy of interpretation of my meaning and intent in the interview transcripts and I may withdraw from the research project at any time and that this will not affect my status now or in the future.
- I understand that while information gained during the study may be published, I will not be identified and my personal information will remain confidential.
- I understand that I will be audio-taped during the interview.

- I understand that data will be stored safely. The electronic copy will be kept in an exclusive hard disk of personal computer with passwords protected and the hard copy will be kept in a personal cabinet with locks. I also understand that the data will be kept for seven years after the researcher's PhD study. And at that time, the researcher will make sure the data is completely deleted and there will not be any information of participants being revealed. No one other than me, the researcher and her supervisors and examiners will have access to any of the information.
- I understand that I may contact the researcher or her supervisors if I require further information about the research, and that I may contact the Research Ethics Coordinator of the School of Education, University of Nottingham, if I wish to make a complaint related to my involvement in the research.

**Signed** .....

(Research participant)

**Print Name** .....

**Date** .....

**Contact details:**

**Researcher:**

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## **Appendix B: Invitation Letter and Participant Information Sheet**

Dear Sir/Madam:

I am doing an investigation on the English language teachers' perception of professionalism in a Chinese higher education institution. It is known that higher education has been attached more and more importance in China after the restoration of the College Entrance Exam policy in 1977. Since teachers are important actors in implementing daily education and cultivation of learners, this study aims at exploring teachers' perception of professionalism and professional identity in Chinese higher education. Thus, I would like to sincerely invite you to participate in this study because your participation will provide valuable insights into this study and contribute to the understanding of teacher professionalism.

This study is purely for my PhD research and academic publication purposes. Information gathered will be treated with strict confidence and will only be reported in anonymous form. If you are interested in participating in this study, and after having confirmed this through your written consent, you will be invited to participate in three face-to-face interviews which will last approximately one and a half hour each. These interviews will be audio recorded and transcribed. Both the electronic and hard copies of the interview data will be kept safely. The electronic copy will be kept in an exclusive hard disk of personal computer with passwords protected and the hard copy will be kept in a personal cabinet with locks. No one other than you, me and my supervisors and examiners will have access to any of the information. According to the fifth principle of the Data Protection Act 1998, personal data held for research purposes may be kept indefinitely after the research is completed as long as it does not cause any damages to any participants. And according to the University of Nottingham Code of Research Conduct and Research Ethics, data should be kept intact for at least seven years from the date of any publication which is based upon them. Hence, in this study, the



data will be kept for seven years after completing my PhD study and the data will be deleted then. At that time I will make sure the data is completely deleted and there will not be any information of participants being revealed. Meanwhile, you will be given the chance to check and verify the accuracy of interpretation of your meaning and intent in the interview transcripts after interview. You also have the right to withdraw from this study at any time if you want to.

Since this study aims to investigate teachers' perception of professionalism and the factors influencing the perception formation, the findings will benefit teachers to better position themselves and better balance the influencing factors. At the same time, this study may also draw implications for administrative managers to facilitate policies which could better help teachers enhance teacher professionalism and professional development. In the three rounds of interviews, the first round will be conducted to investigate your current sense of professionalism. The second round will be conducted to investigate the sense of professionalism you experienced when you just started working in J University. The third round will focus on identifying the changes in your sense of professionalism from the day you started working till now and verifying some questions that are not clear in the previous interviews with you.

I look forward to working with you. Thank you very much for your cooperation. You can contact me for any further information about the study. Attached herewith is a consent form explaining your right as a participant. Please read and provide your signature to indicate your willingness of participation in this research (a copy of the consent form will be given to you).

Best wishes,

Sincerely,

Jia LI

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## **Appendix C: An Example of First Round Semi-structured Interview Protocol**

**Purpose:** To explore teacher professionalism at the current stage of participants' working life

### **Questions regarding teaching domain**

Opening questions:

1. Why do you choose to be a teacher?
2. What is your understanding towards teaching and being a teacher?

### ***Knowledge base that participants possess***

General questions:

3. What do you think a teacher needs to know for teaching?
4. How much do you know?

If participants are unable to provide much information, more specific questions will be asked to prompt:

5. What do you know about the subject you are teaching? How do you acquire it?
6. In what way do you teach? Why do you teach in such way?
7. What do you know about the curriculum? How do you acquire it?
8. What do you know about your students and their needs? How do you know?
9. What do you know about the educational context? How do you know?

### ***Autonomy that teachers perceive***

General questions:

10. In what aspect do you think you are given the right to make decision over your teaching activities?

More specific questions used as prompts:

11. Do you have the right in deciding what to teach in your class? Is the right

sufficient or insufficient?

12. Do you have the right in deciding how to teach? Is the right sufficient or insufficient?

13. How about the right to decide how to evaluate students?

14. Are there any other aspects for which you have the right to make free decisions in teaching?

15. Who decide the degree of right that a teacher can make decision over teaching?

16. What do you do with the given rights?

***Responsibility that participants have***

General questions:

17. In what aspects do you feel you are responsible for regarding teaching?

More specific questions used as prompts:

18. Who do you think you need to be responsible for?

19. What responsibility do you think you need to take for them?

20. To what extent do you think you need to take such responsibilities?

21. How was such responsibility formed?

***Interaction among elements of professionalism***

22. How do you think what you have talked about can influence each other (i.e. knowledge regarding being a teacher, degree of rights to make decision and your responsibility)?

**Questions regarding research domain**

***Knowledge base of participants***

23. Do you do research?

24. If yes, why do you research? If no, why not?

25. What do you know about research and doing research? How did you gain such understanding?

26. In what way do you do research? Why do you do research in that way?

***Autonomy that participants perceive***

27. Do you have the right to make decisions over what you want to research? Do you think the right is sufficient or insufficient?

28. Do you have the right to make decisions over how you do research? Do you think the right is sufficient or insufficient?

29. Are there any other aspects for which you can decide regarding research activities?

30. What or who determined the degree you could make decisions over your research activities?

***Responsibility that participants have***

31. In what aspects do you think you are responsible regarding research?

32. To what extent do you feel you need to take such responsibility?

33. How was such responsibility formed?

***Interaction among elements of professionalism***

34. How do you think what you have talked about can influence each other (i.e. knowledge regarding being a teacher, degree of rights to make decision and your responsibility)?

## **Appendix D: An Example of Second Round Semi-structured Interview Protocol**

**Purpose:** To explore teacher professionalism at the beginning stage of participants' working life

### **Questions regarding teaching domain**

Opening questions:

Could you please recall your professional experience when you just started working in this university?

1. Why did you choose to be a teacher?
2. What was your understanding of teaching and being a teacher?

### ***Knowledge base that participants possess***

General questions:

Could you please recall your professional experience when you just started working in this university?

3. What did you think a teacher needs to know about teaching?
4. How much did you know?

If participants cannot provide much information, more specific questions will be asked to prompt:

5. What did you know about the subject you were teaching? How did you acquire the knowledge about it?
6. In what way did you teach? Why did you teach in such a way?
7. What did you know about the curriculum? How did you acquire the knowledge about it?
8. What did you know about your students and their needs? How did you know?
9. What did you know about the educational context? How did you know?

### ***Autonomy that teachers perceive***

General questions:

Could you please recall your professional experience when you just started working in this university?

10. In what aspect did you think you were given the right to make decision over your teaching activities?

More specific questions used as prompts:

11. Did you have the right to decide what to teach in your class? Was the right sufficient or insufficient?

12. Did you have the right to decide how to teach? Was such right sufficient or insufficient?

13. How about the right to decide how to evaluate students?

14. Were there any other aspects that you could have the rights to make free decisions in teaching?

15. Who or who decided the degree of rights that a teacher could make decisions over teaching?

16. What did you do with the given rights?

***Responsibility that participants have***

General questions:

Could you please recall your professional experience when you just started working in this university?

17. In what aspects did you feel you were responsible for regarding teaching?

More specific questions used as prompts:

18. Who did you think you needed to be responsible for?

35. What responsibility did you think you needed to take for them?

36. To what extent did you think you needed to take such responsibilities?

37. How was such responsibility formed?

***Interaction among elements of professionalism***

38. How do you think what you have talked about can influence each other (i.e. knowledge regarding being a teacher, degree of rights to make decisions and your responsibility)?

**Questions regarding research domain**

***Knowledge base of participants***

Could you please recall your professional experience when you just started working in this university?

39. Did you do research?

40. If yes, what did you research? If no, why not?

41. What did you know about research and doing research? How did you gain such understanding?

42. In what way did you do research? Why did you do in that way?

***Autonomy that participants perceive***

Could you please recall your professional experience when you just started working in this university?

43. Did you have the right to make decisions over what you want to research? Did you think the right was sufficient or insufficient?

44. Did you have the right to make decisions over how you did research? Did you think the right was sufficient or insufficient?

45. Were there any other aspects that you could decide regarding research activities?

46. What or who determined the degree you could make decisions over your research activities?

***Responsibility that participants have***

Could you please recall your professional experience when you just started



working in this university?

47. In what aspects did you think you were responsible for regarding research?

48. To what extent did you feel you needed to take such responsibility?

49. How was such responsibility formed?

***Interaction among elements of professionalism***

50. How do you think what you have talked about can influence each other (i.e. knowledge regarding being a teacher, degree of rights to make decisions and your responsibility)?

## **Appendix E: An Example of Third Round Semi-structured Interview Protocol**

**Purpose:** To detect the changes happened in teacher professionalism from the day participants started working till present.

### **Regarding teaching domain**

1. Have your thoughts and understanding of teaching and being a teacher changed over time from the day you started working here till now?
2. If yes, what are the changes? Why have they happened and how have the changes influenced you? If no, why not?

### **Changes regarding knowledge base participants possess**

General questions:

3. Does your knowledge of teaching change overtime?

More specific questions used as prompts:

4. Does your knowledge of the subject you are teaching change overtime?
5. Does your knowledge of the way you are teaching change overtime?
6. Does your knowledge of the curriculum change overtime?
7. Does your knowledge of the students and their needs change overtime?
8. If there are changes, what are they? Why have the changes happened and how have they influenced you?

### **Regarding changes in perceived autonomy**

General questions:

9. Does your perception of the degree of rights in making decisions about your teaching activities change overtime?

More specific questions used as prompts:

10. Does your perception of the degree of rights in making decisions about what to teach change overtime?
11. Does your perception of the degree of rights in making decisions about

how to teach change overtime?

12. Does your perception of the degree of rights in making decisions about how to assess students change overtime?

13. If there are changes, what are they? Why have they happened and how have they influenced you?

### **Regarding changes in responsibility**

General questions:

14. Do you feel the aspects you are responsible for change overtime?

More specific questions used as prompts:

15. Are there any changes appeared in the 'whom' you think you need to be responsible for?

16. Are there any changes appeared in the aspects you think you need to be responsible for?

17. Are there any changes appeared in the degree you think you need to take the responsibility?

18. If there are changes, what are they? Why have they happened and how have they influenced you?

### **Regarding research domain**

General questions:

19. Have your thoughts and understanding of research and doing research changed over time?

20. If yes, what are the changes? Why have they happened and how have they influenced you? If no, why not?

### **Regarding changes in knowledge base**

21. Has your knowledge regarding research changed overtime?

22. Has your understanding of research interests changed overtime?

23. Has your knowledge of how to carry out research?

24. If yes, what are they? Why have they happened and how have they influenced you? If no, why not?

**Detecting changes in perceived autonomy**

25. Does your perception of the degree of rights in making decisions about your research activities change overtime?

26. Does your perception of the degree of rights in making decisions about what to research change overtime?

27. Does your perception of the degree of rights in making decisions about how to research change overtime?

28. If yes, what are they? Why have they happened and how have they influenced you? If no, why not?

**Detecting changes in responsibility**

General question:

29. Does your thinking on what you need to be responsible for research change over time?

More specific questions used as prompts:

30. Does your thinking on whom you need to be responsible for in research domain change over time?

31. Does your thinking on what you need to be responsible for in research domain change over time?

32. Does your thinking on the degree you need to be responsible for in research domain change over time?

33. If yes, what are they? Why have they happened and how have they influenced you? If no, why not?

## Appendix F: A Sample of One Interview Transcript

### Notes:

R: Researcher

H: Participant HAN

Content: First-round interview with Participant HAN focusing on her understanding of teacher professionalism at the present stage of working career

*R: Thank you for participating in my interview today.*

H: That is OK. I am glad to.

*R: I would like to have a talk with you about your working life at present. Please just feel free to share with me about your thinking and doing at present.*

H: Sure, no problem.

*R: Please feel free to have tea and some snacks.*

H: OK, I will.

*R: Well, could you let me know why you chose to be a teacher?*

H: Oh, I did my Master's in a normal university (in China) which is a university preparing students to be teachers. I made up my mind while I was studying there.

*R: OK. Then what do you think a teacher needs to know in order to teach?*

H: There is a lot. Basically, you need to know the subject that you teach. For me, as an English teacher, I need to have knowledge of the English language before I can teach.

*R: How do you comment on your knowledge of the English subject?*

H: I think I have enough knowledge to teach university students. I got my Bachelor's and Master's degrees in the English language major. The environment in the university where I studied was highly conducive to

learning. I was trained in all aspects of language skills, i.e. listening, speaking, reading and writing and passed TEM band eight (the highest band of Chinese national test for English majors). I think all teachers who hold Master's degree have sufficient knowledge of English to teach others. And the more I teach, the more I am familiar with what I need to teach. All the knowledge is consolidated in the teaching process.

*R: Oh, then what do you teach your students in your class?*

H: Now?

*R: Yes. Currently.*

H: Now I focus a lot on speaking ability development of students.

*R: How do you make them develop speaking ability?*

H: I always provide opportunities for my students to practise speaking in class.

*R: Any examples?*

H: For example, I divide each of my class into four groups. One is labelled as 'Music', one 'Speech', one 'Drama', and the fourth one 'Culture'. Each group is required to make an oral presentation which should relate to the theme of the group. They are very interested in engaging in this activity. Some students introduce, for example, the music type they prefer, such as folk music. After introducing the music type, the group sings a song of this kind for their classmates. Similarly, if they choose drama, they edit and perform a drama in English by playing different characters. For the Culture group, they introduce the cultures of different countries. Generally speaking, I designed more class activities, e.g. presentations, group discussions, teamwork, etc. for students to complete and present in class. For example, I once asked students to form small groups of four or five to discuss the topic of 'how you feel your college life should be' which was also a topic of a lesson. I asked students to start thinking and working in groups two weeks before presenting the outcomes in class. That helped students work together, talk and discuss together. On the day of presentation, I was surprised because they did a good job. Some used

short videos to present their feelings and plans for college life in English; some did role play in English. I think the new method is better than the old by which it was only me talking all the time about grammar. Students now have got a chance to use English no matter how well they can manage the language. Students play the major role in class.

*R: How do you think of the effect of such activities?*

H: It is good. At least they are braver to speak out. You can feel that they are more confident, more fluent in expressing themselves. But after trying this for a few times, students seem to get a bit bored and I find that in this group-as-unit activity, some of the students just loaf around. Some of them who are shy or not good at English may often choose to do easy work such as taking video, preparing PPT slides and things like that.

*R: Oh, right, do you do anything to change it?*

H: Of course, I get new ideas. For example, I would request each student to state clearly what he/she has contributed to the group presentation. And they are not always allowed to do the same thing in different rounds of presentations. One more thing, I would assign one more piece of work to them. That is asking students to make comments on others' performance. That means they should not only participate in their own group presentations but also be the examiners for others. This increases their workload and requires more efforts and attention.

*R: Well, I am interested to know how students comment on others' performance? What aspects do they comment on?*

H: I suggest that they comment on aspects such as grammar, pronunciation, tones, voice volume, fluency, way of presenting, body language, the quality of the videos or PPT slides, and so on. They would mark for each other.

*R: Do you also give comments or leave the commenting work totally to students?*

H: I also offer my comments, but normally after they have finished making theirs. My comments complement what theirs have not covered. For example,

some students have pronunciation problems. I pick them up and give suggestions for pronunciation correction. I show them an American female teacher's videos in which she teaches phonetic symbols, how to read sentences aloud, how to pronounce plosives, and the skill of reading texts. I show them the video ten minutes before every class. I have shown them the video for a few times already.

*R: That sounds helpful. You care about students' responses in class.*

H: Right. If we stick to one teaching method, students may feel interested for the first time. But, after using the same method for multiple times, students may get bored. For example, students may at first say that they want to improve their speaking ability. Then I say 'Yes, let us do it'. Later, when they start practicing oral English and find difficulties, they may shy away from English and use Chinese instead. What is worse, when I ask if there is any volunteer, they may lower their heads to avoid volunteering. At this moment, I need to think of new ways to rekindle their passion. It is just the right time for teachers to make alterations, thinking of new ways to motivate students. We cannot keep repeating ourselves.

*R: How do you know your students' feedback?*

H: From observation. You can sense from students' facial expressions. If they are bored, that means either they are sleepy or they are not interested. I also directly ask students in a casual way questions like 'How do you think of the class? Any suggestions? What do you want to learn more about?' and so on. Students' answers provide feedback on what I need to improve.

*R: You are very helpful. In addition to speaking ability improvement, is there anything else that you focus on and teach to students?*

H: Well, vocabulary. I used to focus on this a lot when I just started teaching, but now much less.

*R: Could you share how you teach it now?*

H: Now I try to help students learn the boring new vocabulary in an interesting way, for example, by doing meaning guessing games or using vivid



ways to explain the meanings of vocabulary.

*R: How to make vocabulary learning vivid? I am curious to know.*

H: It is very effective to show students interesting pictures for certain vocabulary. These pictures should contain the meanings of the vocabulary and be interesting at the same time. I find university students like interesting and funny things. They need something interesting to attract their attention. Otherwise, they will not listen to you carefully. I have a student who said to me, 'I want to learn some literary works or novels'. Then I replied, 'OK, there is one passage in our textbook which is the excerpt from The Last Night of O. Henry.' But he replied, 'Oh, no, I do not want to learn it. It is in the textbook. I feel it is not attractive when it is written in a textbook.' That is surprising, isn't it? He further explained by using a metaphor, 'If there is a chocolate which is packed by a brown paper, you will not want to eat it though you know what is inside could be delicious, because you know it is wrapped in a brown paper.' So, you see, it is the way you present that influences whether students can be attracted.

*R: Oh, that is interesting.*

H: Indeed. So, if your explanation is interesting, they will like to learn it, laugh at it and have deeper impression of it.

*R: Any typical examples for that please?*

H: I have found software called 'Vocabulary Gallery'. The words inside the software are categorized into different groups. For example, 'sports' and 'parts of body'. And there are pictures matching the words inside each group, and the pictures are interesting. For example, there is a passage in our textbook about a man who goes back to his hometown doing farm work. He is a free writer. Then when I found there are many new words about farm and crops, I used this software to let students guess the meanings of a large group of words that belong to the crops. Another example, when I explained a word such as 'poisonous' to students, I

attached an example sentence which read 'He has eaten the most poisonous medicine in the world'. Then I matched it with a picture in which the Golden Lion King helps cure Zhang Wuji (a character in one famous Chinese TV opera). Zhang vomited blood immediately. The whole class laughed at it and showed interest in it. I showed this picture to students again in the next class. They immediately shouted out 'poisonous'. See? They have got it! I find that students are less sensitive to words than pictures, especially colourful interesting pictures. Some teachers say my PPT slides are good. Maybe that is because I spent time revising and retouching the ones given by the department. I added a lot of interesting pictures, videos and listening materials for students to watch in classroom. In this way, their attention was attracted.

*R: That sounds great. How do you come up with such interesting ideas for teaching?*

H: I thought of some by myself. After observing students' responses, I gradually notice which is more effective. The other helpful way is to discuss with colleagues. Two heads are always better than one. For example, this semester I have always communicated with my colleague X who teaches the same type of students as mine. I have two to three telephone conversations with her every day or every two days to discuss the teaching methods and analyse how to teach. She shares with me her ideas and I do the same. Sometimes, she designs the listening part and I design the speaking part for one lesson. So the whole lesson consists of both of our ideas. Through discussion, I have improved my teaching methods. The idea of categorizing groups into music speech, culture and drama was developed during our discussions.

*R: Do you have other chances to learn from other colleagues?*

H: Not really. It seems difficult because of the university's class scheduling. That is, we (English teachers) all have classes at the same time slot. During

the first two classes in the mornings, we are not available. So it is hard for us to observe our colleagues' classes or learn something from one another. As most of us are female teachers and mothers, we go back home after class. It is even harder to find same free time slots to discuss work.

*R: If so, do you have other ways to develop your teaching ability?*

H: Let me think. Not many, I think. The university does not provide us many effective opportunities to improve ourselves. Oh, there is one more: attending teaching competitions.

*R: Please share with me about it.*

H: I took part in one teaching competition in our province and got second prize. In our university, I also took part in one and won second prize. Y, my colleague, also took part in it.

*R: How did that help you?*

H: Before the teaching competition, I was extremely anxious. I was thinking that I could not come back without anything (an award). So I talked to Z who is the head of our department and borrowed a lot of books to select a proper topic. Then he asked me to give a public lecture in our department. Oh, gosh, I felt much unprepared and I did not even know clearly what I should teach. All I felt was nervous. After the public lecture, I received feedback from many teachers. One gave me a suggestion for the lead-in activity. Others told me that my design for interviewing students was too time-consuming, so I cut half of it. I also showed my teaching plan to a teacher who was very experienced in the teaching competition. She used to take part in the competition and achieved a satisfactory result. She read it carefully and provided me some good teaching materials. Those materials were all in electronic format and included a number of pictures which suited my topic about people's feelings. I edited the pictures using Adobe Photoshop, converting them from black and white to colour pictures. In this picture, there was a person who went for a physical check-up and the result showed 'cancer'. He felt 'desperation, depression and sadness'. Then he went back home and lay on the bed.

Suddenly he received a phone call saying 'It is just a mistake'. Then he felt happy and relieved. That picture showed the process of feeling changes.

*R: How about your teaching in the competition? Has it had any influence on you?*

H: My teaching for the competition went as expected, but I found many others' performance so strong. After finishing my teaching, I went to observe other candidates' teaching. It was helpful to know that they had different ways of teaching. I have learned through that experience.

*R: Anything impressive that you have learned?*

H: Yes. A teacher who taught listening and speaking inspired me. I found that he was very flexible and daring. For example, he imitated the voice and behaviour of animals when he asked students to guess the English expression for a particular animal. That was very helpful in arousing the interest of students. And that was also helpful in directly making sense of the meanings.

*R: That is good. Could you share with me that in your teaching process, whether you have any right to make decisions over your teaching activities, for example, implementing your thinking in teaching?*

H: Basically, I feel I am free to decide how to teach or in other words the way of teaching in my class. That is also why I like teaching. I have said I always try to update my teaching ways as experience accumulates. The purpose is to try new things in class and check whether they work and which works better. For example, I try group discussion this time and I find debate might be another good way. Then I will try debate in next class. The university administrative managers will have no way to intervene how I teach. Afterall, they are not experts in English. English is a special course. If you do not understand it, then you are not qualified to ask me how to teach it. So I can, yes, I can decide how to implement my thinking in teaching.

*R: Great! Are there any other aspects of teaching in which you are given freedom or restricted?*

H: Oh, there is always a fixed teaching syllabus for you to follow. There are

units and texts that teachers must teach.

*R: Who decides the units and texts that you need to teach?*

H: Definitely your department decides that, including the choice of textbook. But this is more or less OK. I can still add new teaching materials to supplement the textbooks. The most annoying aspect is that we are strictly regulated by the university in how we control our own class, especially control how students behave in class.

*R: Why is that most annoying?*

H: We totally have no freedom in deciding how to manage our students. There are rules stipulating what you need to make your students do or not to do. If students are playing mobile games, sleeping or reading other books, all these will be the teacher's fault. It is not possible for me to control students and teach at the same time. It's not necessary either. Students are already adults. Learning is their individual thing, and how can teachers force them to learn? We always have more than sixty students in one class. How can I control all of them at the same time? If I have to observe what they are doing all the time, my teaching pace will be affected.

*R: Faced with these restrictions, are you influenced?*

H: Of course, negative influence. It makes me feel uncomfortable. It is like treating us teachers as people who have no thoughts. It does not mean that if there are not any rules, we will let students do whatever they want in class. We have our own restrictions. But I have to follow the rules. I am working here, after all.

*R: Have you ever thought of changing it?*

H: Is it possible? No. Of course I want it to be different. We all want. But I am not a leader who can make policy change. We often receive official emails asking for our opinions about certain policy making. For example, only eighty percent of the English teachers' actual teaching hours are recognized. I cannot

remember how many times my colleagues and I have expressed to the department leader our objection to the policy. No one would listen. The policy has remained the same for years. I have received, many times, emails concerning drafts of different policies. Since there is no response from the university, I have gradually been numb and lost interest in offering my suggestions. OK, just leave it. You just make what you want as long as you are happy. I do not care.

*R: Oh, I understand you mean you cannot make policy change. But why is it so difficult?*

H: I do not really know. Because either our voices have not be passed on to the leaders or because the leaders do not want to listen.

*R: So do you just obey it?*

H: Most of us teachers just obey it. And the longer you stay in the university, the more compliant you will become. Let us take another example. The university offers teachers some free rice and oil each year. We suggest the university give us money or gift vouchers so we can buy what we want. As young teachers who do not cook, we cannot consume the rice and oil. As time goes by, no changes have happened. Then we never mention it again. And we are now thinking, ‘OK, that is all right. At least it is better than nothing’.

*R: Yes, I understand. Then does this negatively influence your work?*

H: I just feel annoyed. When reading such a policy, I doubt why we are teaching so hard, for what, for such a rule? But when I actually go into the classroom and see my students, all those negative feelings are just gone. I think it is not fair to take the anger out on students. Although the university requires leaders to manage teachers in a rigid way, students are not the ones who have made the policy. They like me and my teaching. They come to attend my classes happily with expectations. I need to be responsible for imparting to them the best of my knowledge. That is what I as their teacher should do. Otherwise, I may feel I am not doing the right thing.

*R: Oh, so you mean there is something coming from your inner heart that*

*inspires you to do so?*

H: Exactly. My heart tells me I should treat them as usual.

*R: Could you say more about the feelings in your heart?*

H: It seems as though there are two small persons wrangling in my heart. One is rational and the other is irrational. When the quarrel is intensive, the rationale one wins. So reason tells me I need to put aside the negative emotions and do as usual.

*R: That is easy to understand. As you said, you thought you need to be responsible for teaching students well, could you say more about what you think you should do?*

H: Teaching is the core of my work as a teacher. Teaching what I should teach, what students are required to learn is the basis for being their teacher. To be specific, we have been assigned a certain amount of teaching workload to be finished for each semester. For example, now, I teach four classes (cohorts)' students and each class (cohort) requires forty-eight teaching hours in one semester. That is the basic requirement for teaching workload for every teacher unless you have special reasons for reducing the amount of workload. So, completing all the work relating to teaching assigned by the department is a must for me as a teacher. I should at least make sure my students get what they are required by the university to learn...teaching the units in textbooks that need to be covered according to the curriculum, correcting and providing feedback on homework, helping students review what will be examined. That is my responsibility as their teacher.

*R: How about in the teaching process? What do you think are important that you should do?*

H: I think I cannot just simply repeat teaching the same thing in the same way. That is boring for both me and my students. That is why I said just now that I kept looking for more interesting ways to teach. Sometimes, it

is indeed hard to be creative. I have to seek help from the books. Recently, I bought a book named *How to teach listening*. I find there are alternative ways to teach except playing audio record and asking students to listen only. We can, for example, create a table and ask students to fill in blanks when the listening material is difficult. The blanks to be filled are helpful in understanding the speakers' main ideas. Or we can also ask students to predict before listening what they may infer from the questions, what it may be about and what they may hear later. The ability to predict is very important for students. All in all, there are various ways to teach listening rather than asking students to listen only.

*R: That is your efforts to improve your teaching method.*

H: Yes. That is what I should do as a teacher. As an old saying goes, 'Learning never stops as long as we are alive.' As teachers, we can ask no one to do this for us. I need to keep this in mind.

*R: I have seen your efforts to make improvements in helping your students learn, especially their speaking ability development.*

H: Oh, yes. That is important. If students cannot speak English, what is the purpose of learning it? I always ask students what aspects of English they want to improve most. Most students say speaking and listening ability. English is a tool for communication. See, they all know it. Some may say that they want to know more about cultural knowledge, which I also agree. Some, but just a few, may say literature. Their replies strengthened my thinking of adding more speaking activities into my classes, giving them more opportunities to participate in public speeches. These are quite helpful exercises for getting students involved in class. The teacher should not always be the centre of attention who talks primarily. Students should be encouraged to involve themselves more in class activities.

*R: Is there anything else that you think is also part of your responsibility?*

H: Not really. Well, sometimes in speaking activities, for particular topics, I



try to ask students to comment on what are right or wrong. But not too often, it depends on whether the topic can be used for them to make judgment about right or wrong.

*R: Thanks. I am wondering where such responsibility, as you shared, comes from? Have you ever been taught or told by anyone?*

H: No. Nobody directly told me about it. It is just a feeling of what a teacher should do. I think not only me, but other teachers also have this. Otherwise, I don't think we match up with the title of teacher if we are not responsible people.

*R: Why do you think that you do not match up with the title of teacher?*

H: Our tradition says this. Many teachers in the ancient days were excellent examples. Confucius said that teachers should have 'iron shoulders to take responsibilities'. These teachers exemplified what a responsible teacher should be. Their merit has been passed on from generation to generation. I think that is our cultural inheritance.

*R: So, has this always been in your teaching career?*

H: Sure, for example, in this semester, in order to enrich the teaching materials, I have searched the Internet very hard outside class. The search can only be started late at night because my son goes to bed at about ten p.m., I can only start preparing lessons after he falls asleep. Sometimes, when I cannot hold up, I go to sleep at eleven thirty and get up at three thirty or four thirty early in the morning to continue preparing lessons. Extensive materials are found during that period. I think I am really exhausted but I still persist because I think my responsibility tells me that I should keep my classes well prepared. I will feel very guilty if nothing is prepared before entering the classroom. As I said, I do not like this textbook. The textbook really does not have enough to offer, so I feel it quite a dull thing to use it as the sole instructional material. I will be panic if there is not enough prepared and stored in my computer. When I share new things with students, they feel interested. I can feel their positive feedback which makes me feel comforted

and think what I have devoted to has all paid off. Many students comment that when I am in class, I am an energetic teacher full of passion. But they never know that I have to catch up on some sleep after class.

*R: Oh, dear. I do respect that. You still continue to do so when you feel drained of energy.*

H: I just cannot stop it. This semester colleague X helped me a lot. Her shared teaching materials made my work easier than expected. Otherwise, I really cannot imagine I can cope. But still I have to have three cups of coffee a day to keep myself awake. You remind me of the time when I was pregnant years ago. I did not get lazy and worked less hard because of pregnancy.

*R: I understand and really appreciate your efforts. You are like a superwoman in dealing with Children, work and so on. You have managed to handle everything.*

H: I feel it is worthy of my efforts, especially when students can understand my wholehearted devotion. I feel everything is worthy. Once, a monitor of my class said ‘Thank you’ to me in front of the students on behalf of the whole class. He said he also wanted to bow to me because they could feel the efforts I had devoted to teaching them. I suddenly felt emotional. How could I accept such deep gratitude? I was just doing what I should as their teacher. But I was really moved and impressed by what he did. Now, many former students still keep in contact with me. One sent me a postcard last month. One said he used to have little confidence in English learning and after attending my class, he felt he could learn well and finally he passed CET (Chinese College English Test) Band Four. I am happy to hear that.

*R: That is really touching. What you did has paid off. I see that you have plenty to share about your teaching work. Well, how about the aspect of your research?*

H: Can we skip this part? Haha. I feel I have not much to say about it. I have not done any research this year.

*R: Oh, really? All right, if so, could you share why you have not done it?*

H: I do not want to do research partially because I am really not good at it. I even do not know how to start.

*R: How do you understand research? What is it about or what is it for?*

H: I think the value of research should be that it can produce something. For example, there will be a result after doing an experiment in a science subject. That result may be something new or at least something different. If it could be applied as a patent, that would be the best result. That will make a lot of money. Our subject is about humanities, and it is hard to have that much contribution. I have no idea where to start.

*R: Why not try it? Is there anything you are interested in doing?*

H: It is not always true that you can research what you like.

*R: What does this mean?*

H: Our colleagues who successfully got funding for projects told me their experience. It seems to be OK to research whatever you are interested in or good at. But actually, it is better to read the list of projects approved in the last few years and the recommended directions by the government to make sense of what the government really likes you to do in order to get research project proposals approved more easily. It is better to link to the hot topics or policy direction. I am not good at it.

*R: Have you tried anything?*

H: Tried but failed. Now when I receive messages informing me that it is time to apply for research grant for a particular type of project, I also ignore it. I just do not want to read the messages. It is hard to secure provincial-level research projects and even harder to get national-level research projects and grant. I can never imagine it. Oh, by the way, if you want to apply for national-level research projects, you need to have at least associate professorship. I am still a lecturer.

*R: Do you mean lecturers are not qualified to apply for national-level research projects?*

H: Professors are qualified. If you are still a lecturer who wants to apply, you

must attach at least two professors' recommendations and comments on your research ability. That is troublesome. I do not want to bother with it. Just think about this: If I ask for someone's recommendation and the project is not approved, it is a waste of his favour. If I want to apply again next time, I cannot always repeatedly ask the same person for help. But who knows how many times I need before I finally get one approved.

*R: So that is why you do not bother to apply.*

H: Yes. I feel research is just a distant hope for me. The more I feel diffident about it, the more distant it is from me, and the less I want to do it. This is a vicious circle and I am already in it. I feel anxious.

*R: What kind of anxiety?*

H: I feel doing research is lonely, especially when I really do not know how to do it. It is not like teaching – If I come up with a new teaching method, I will try it in my next class, and then students' response can let me know how effective it is. Doing research is lonely because there is no way to immediately test it or see results. I feel there is no way out. But it seems that it is a tendency that teachers have to do research in universities. I should say that if the university did not push us to do research, I would not have taken it into account. Of course, I also consider my teaching work as the core, currently. As a teacher, teaching is the main thing I do not think research should be assigned to everyone. That is only my opinion. Maybe it is wrong. Otherwise, the university would not have asked everyone to do it.

*R: Why do you think research should not be assigned to everyone?*

H: Research can be interesting for teachers who have the time to do it. For me, I cannot afford the time and energy. The university has already assigned me a lot of teaching work. And you know, I still have to train students to give oral presentations. I really don't have any energy left to do it. And at least I think teaching is within the reach of everyone, but research is for those who are interested in it. Although training students to deliver speech is extra work, I am willing to do it, because I like it.

*R: Oh, is it part of your daily teaching?*

H: No, it is extra. I do it in the evenings or at weekends.

*R: OK, could you say a bit about this as well before we continue with the research part?*

H: Sure. I am one of the teachers who train students to develop presentation and speech skills. Every year, there are speech competitions in both our university and our province. We select students from those we teach or the potential ones recommended by other fellow teachers. Then these candidates will attend a speech contest. Four to five will finally be recruited to be further trained, aiming to get awards in provincial or even national university students' speech competitions.

*R: Oh, I got it. You sacrifice your weekend for that. It is actually not part of your daily teaching activity.*

H: Yes. I quite like it and there is a sense of satisfaction in it. I once had a student who was a boy. He was very handsome, like a gentleman. The good side of him was that his pronunciation was very good and his expression was also logical. But the disadvantage was that he had a voice that was too gentle and soft. It seemed that he dared not speak loudly. So I said to him, 'You are a man. You must be brave and speak out loudly and powerfully.' After several training sessions, he finally made it. When he got first prize in the speech competition, I felt very happy and satisfied.

*R: That is wonderful. I can understand clearly that you are interested in doing this extra job, although it takes up your weekends.*

H: Yes.

*R: But as you said, in research, you are not interested and you think time is all occupied with teaching, so you cannot spare the time for it.*

H: Right. Making efforts to teach, I have little energy left for research. It's also because I really do not like research.

*R: Do you mean you 'do not want to do' or 'cannot do'?*

H: Both. I do not want to because I cannot. But the policy requires us to do it.

It is painful.

*R: Could you try your hardest to make yourself 'can'?*

H: May be not. It is not like teaching which I am eager to learn more about and improve more. But for research, I just feel hard to push myself. If there are two options, one is to take part in a teaching competition or attend a training session on teaching, the other is to attend a research seminar, I will definitely choose the one related to teaching which I think is easier and more interesting.

*R: As you said that the policy requires you to do research, then how can you meet the requirements?*

H: I did write two articles before I was promoted to lecturer. It was for the promotion of lecturer that I wrote them. Those two articles were just published in the non-prestigious journals for which it was easy to get your articles accepted. At least that was helpful for my promotion at that time.

*R: How about now?*

H: After that, I stopped doing research. Now I have little motivation because I am not thinking of promotion again at the moment and also because it is harder for me to publish papers in journals of higher tier.

*R: What are the difficult aspects?*

H: Your paper should be decent in quality. That is for sure. Then it comes to social connections. It is better for you to know someone working in publishing press, especially someone who can help you get your papers published. I do not have any. But living in today's society, we need social connections. Although there are extremely excellent papers with very high quality that can be published without relying on social connections, I do not have the ability to produce such a great paper. I heard that to get papers published in, for example, a CSSCI (Chinese Social Science Citation and Index) journal, candidates need to queue up but not everyone in the queue can finally get his/her papers published. It depends on the quality of your paper and the possibility can be even fainter if you do not have any relations. So I dare not

try it.

*R: Oh, but if you do not try it, you may not get any opportunities. Can you always satisfy policy requirements if you do not try it?*

H: In order to pass my appraisal, I have participated in others' projects and co-authored papers. This year, colleague A kindly let me be a member of his research team. He got one project and he is the leader of that team. I have helped him search some materials. Fortunately, for lecturers, the passing criteria for appraisal are not very high. So far as projects are concerned, you do not have to host a project. As long as you are involved in one research project, be it the second or third co-investigator, it can be counted as your research performance.

*R: Oh, I got it. Could you say something about the university policy requirements?*

H: I do not know all about policy. I only care about what is relevant to me. Take the appraisal policy as an example. We are appraised annually. The appraisal criteria for teaching are easier to satisfy. I teach so many classes in a year, after all. The workload can meet the basic criteria. The major headache is research. But it is something that has become increasingly important in the policy. Each professional ranking involves different levels. For example, there are four levels of lecturers, i.e. Lecturer Level 1, 2, 3 and 4, with the highest being Lecturer Level 4. Lecturers of this level can earn slightly higher salary than lecturers of other levels. If you want not only to pass the basic appraisal criteria, but also to get promoted to a higher level, you need to produce more teaching and research output to compete with others. There are more items regarding research than teaching that can give you extra merits. Since research output is harder for teachers to produce, if you can produce high research output, you can easily stand out and be promoted to higher levels.

*R: I got it. So the university encourages everyone to do research? It becomes a must for appraising teachers?*

H: That is the case.

*R: Do you accept this rule?*

H: I do not. I think it is OK for science teachers, but not necessary for us. At least, not for all of us.

*R: Why?*

H: You (the university) cannot expect us to do large amount of teaching and also do research at the same time. How can we have such energy? You see these science teachers who are research-productive. How many classes are they teaching? Much fewer.

*R: Why can they teach fewer classes but you cannot?*

H: It seems that they have experimental classes. These are also counted as teaching workload and their departments can be more flexible and get the university's approval for their demands more easily. I got some information about this from friends who work in science departments. One said he had got approval for going out to do research projects for half a year, with his teaching temporarily taken over by one of his colleagues. Then he passed the appraisal. But as teachers of English subjects, we have never enjoyed such a preferential policy. Our English classes last for the longest time among all subjects in our university. We begin from the first week till the last week of the semester, i.e. sixteenth weeks. And all classes are arranged in an averaged manner. We are not allowed to be away during any of the weeks. If you have any special cases that result in change of class schedule, the university teaching affairs office will strictly check your reasons. The office does not allow teachers to change class hours beyond a certain percentage. It should be less than ten percent, if my memory serves me well.

*R: English class scheduling is really special.*

H: Yes, we always have our students' final examinations at the very end of semester. English is always the last exam. Science teachers can teach, for example, half a semester and start to correct students' examination paper. What is more, our final computed teaching workload is not the actual total number of class hours that we have taught. It has been a long time bias that



university only recognizes eighty percent of our total amount of teaching hours. That is to say another twenty percent of teaching has been done in vain. That is very unfair.

*R: Why so? Why do English teachers seem to be different from science teachers?*

H: We are a minority group. Social science teachers in this science-dominated university are not always given the green light (support) as science teachers are. One more thing, as female English teachers, we do have the maternity leave for about four or five months. But we still have to make up the classes that we miss during the leave after we are back on duty. That is why you can see many new mothers fighting to make up loads of classes in order to get a pass in appraisal.

*R: That is really busy. If the maternity leave is approved by the university, why do you have to make up classes?*

H: Who knows? The leave is approved not only by the university but also by the government. We still have to do it. It is said that our university currently does not have any policy on granting permission for workload reduction so department leaders have no proof of policy that allows us to take leave without having to do our share of work.

*R: But if you really cannot finish the required amount of work, what will happen?*

H: Salary cut. If you do not mind, that is fine. Just let them cut it. Or, there is another option. If you really have little time to teach because of child-care leave, you can produce more research output to compensate. For me, this option is not useful at all – research is much hard for me than teaching. Ultimately I choose to teach more.

*R: How do you think of that? Is there any influence on you?*

H: I feel it is unfair. I am not able to handle teaching and research at the same time either at the point of time when I have just given birth to a child or even when life gets back to normal. The university wants us to do research without

providing us a good environment. As social science teachers in the university, it seems, we are the targets of a hostile attitude from the university. As female social science teachers, we are the targets of an even more hostile attitude. That is double effect.

*R: Oh, dear. Does this influence how you do your work?*

H: For teaching, there is no influence. After all, it is students who I have contact with. But I do feel very unhappy when talking about these policies.

*R: How about research?*

H: I feel more reluctant to do research since I have already a lot of pressure fighting to finish the teaching workload.

*R: How about other teachers?*

H: Most of us are like this according to my observation. Of course, there are exceptions, such as Z. He is wonderful. But that is because he has made a lot of efforts. He is strong as I'm told that he has persisted in doing research for many years without being disturbed. If he could transfer to another university, he may give better performance. Sometimes my colleagues say to me, 'You are so young. You need to do research. This is the growing tendency for university teachers. The policy will become stricter. Do it. Otherwise, you cannot survive in future.' I agree. I just think I have to start, maybe at end of this year, or next year. This year is already full of too much work and I have no time. I myself am already busy in teaching and my husband is now away doing his PhD. I have to take care of my son. I really have little extra time. Hope I could do more next year.

*R: OK. Let me just recall what you have shared earlier. You said 'the way the university manages teachers' teaching performance' is also not very ideal according to your opinion. How do you comment on that?*

H: Well, yes, I'm not happy with that, especially the deduction when calculating our workload. My feeling is not being respected. I'm also thinking of one more policy regarding appraisal. If you give training sessions on students' speech skills, our policy says that your students have to win the first

prize so that your teaching can be counted as added credits when evaluating your teaching performance. I am wondering why the second prize or third prize does not count. Does it mean the teacher who helps students gain second or third prize does not make any efforts? This is very unreasonable.

*R: Are these negative aspects of policy also influencing you as a teacher?*

H: Sure, the feeling is bad. But when I am teaching and communicating with my students, I just bury my bad feelings deep in my mind. Anyway, I am a teacher. I know when I can complain and when I should not. I know how to clearly differentiate what I can or cannot do.

*R: OK, thank you. One last point, you have talked about things like the knowledge regarding being a teacher, the degree of right to make decisions over your work and the responsibility for your work, could you share what the relation is between them please?*

H: OK. Let me focus on teaching because I do not have much to say about research. Since I have not done much research, I have no idea to say anything about responsibility for research or to comment on knowledge.

*R: Alright, please go ahead.*

H: As a teacher, I think responsibility is the foundation for a teacher. It is a feeling inside of my heart that I need to devote time and energy whole heartedly to students. I like teaching because I can communicate with so many young adults and make friends with them. It is also because I can freely impart knowledge to students and express my thinking to them using the way I like. There are indeed some unhappy regulations or unreasonable rules. They make me feel annoyed, but there is the bottom line and a voice inside my heart saying 'You need to be kind to your students no matter what has happened.' I do not allow myself to take teaching and students for granted. I still do what I need to do, like spending time searching instructional materials, improving my teaching ability, creating more interesting and funny teaching methods to benefit my students.

*R: All right. I'm so happy to hear your sharing. Thank you very much. I have learned a lot from you.*