香港浸會大學
HONG KONG BAPTIST UNIVERSITY

HKBU Scholars

DOCTORAL THESIS

Exploring EFL teachers' pedagogical content knowledge for teaching speaking in Chinese universities: a multiple case study

Wang, Lan

Date of Award:
2020

Link to publication

General rights
Copyright and intellectual property rights for the publications made accessible in HKBU Scholars are retained by the authors and/or other copyright owners. In addition to the restrictions prescribed by the Copyright Ordinance of Hong Kong, all users and readers must also observe the following terms of use:

- Users may download and print one copy of any publication from HKBU Scholars for the purpose of private study or research
- Users cannot further distribute the material or use it for any profit-making activity or commercial gain
- To share publications in HKBU Scholars with others, users are welcome to freely distribute the permanent URL assigned to the publication

Download date: 28 Nov, 2022

ABSTRACT

As a concept that represents teacher professionalism and expertise, pedagogical content knowledge (PCK) has received extensive research attention since the mid-1980s. PCK refers to the blending of content and pedagogy into an understanding of how particular aspects of subject matter are organized, adapted, and represented for instruction (Shulman, 1987). Recent studies have shown that PCK impacts instruction quality and student learning (Beyer & Davis, 2012). Nevertheless, in the field of English language teaching (ELT), PCK remains unnoticed by many language teachers (Kind & Chan, 2019). PCK pertaining to speaking instruction is even more underrepresented. Meanwhile, English teaching in mainland China has undergone reforms aimed at promoting students' oral proficiency, but many problems still exist. Most studies have explored teaching methodologies, learning strategies, and the assessment of speaking. However, there is not much research on improving teaching effectiveness from the perspective of teachers' PCK.

This qualitative multiple case study examines teachers' PCK from the perspective of teaching English speaking over a two-year period. Purposeful sampling was employed, and five EFL instructors were the key informants. The instructors worked in different universities in mainland China and taught various levels of speaking courses. The data include classroom observations, teacher interviews, student interviews, reflection journals from the teachers, and various course syllabuses.

The study findings emphasize the contents and features of EFL teachers' PCK in a more systematic way and show that teachers' PCK comprises six components: knowledge of features of curriculum, pedagogy, learners' challenges, language enhancement, course evaluation, and the educational context. Each category contains a variety of subcategories. Two paths are revealed for the development of PCK: one path is for teachers to develop their PCK by studying the relevant literature and then transform that knowledge into students' comprehensible knowledge based on students' understanding; another path is for teachers to transfer or adjust PCK from other courses or people to their own instruction and then develop PCK through evaluation and reflection. The study

also shows that based on three developmental models (the trial-based approach, top-down approach, and inquiry-based approach), the teacher participants advanced in three aspects: spiritual enrichment, renewed teacher roles, and philosophical inquiry. In addition, in this study, PCK is proven to be dynamic, personal, and transformative rather than static, canonical, and integrative.

Theoretically, this study proposes a comprehensive framework of PCK components and development for speaking instructors and underscores the concept of meta-representations. It adds to the literature on EFL teachers' cognition in the Chinese context, thus broadening and enriching the research on EFL teachers' PCK in the educational field. Practically, the study highlights the importance of appropriating the educational context, establishing teacher beliefs and philosophy, and improving teachers' critical literacy as well as their language competency. The findings can also enhance teacher educators' and policy-makers' awareness of specific subject matter and deepen their understanding of speaking instruction.

The findings shed light on how to improve overall EFL speaking pedagogy, empower EFL teachers, and facilitate their professional development within the context of English curriculum reform. Limitations of the study lie in its restricted timeframe, limited resources, and sampling size. Future research directions could be to conduct a longitudinal study with more participants or to develop and quantify PCK measurements.

Keywords: constructivism, pedagogical content knowledge, professional development, reflective practice, teaching speaking

TABLE OF CONTENTS

DECLARATION……i
ABSTRACT……ii
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS……iv
TABLE OF CONTENTS……vi
LIST OF TABLES……xii
LIST OF FIGURES……xiii
LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS……xv

Chapter 1 Introduction……1
1.1 Research background……1
1.2 Statement of the problem……3
1.3 Purposes of the research……5
1.4 Significance of the research……6
1.5 Nature of research……6
1.6 Research questions……7
1.7 Definition of key concepts……7
1.8 An overview of the thesis……10

Chapter 2 Literature Review……11
2.1 Definition of "pedagogical content knowledge" ……11
2.2 Research about PCK in the general education field……14
2.2.1 Components and connotations of PCK……14
2.2.1.1 Static perspectives of PCK……14
2.2.1.2 Dynamic perspectives of PCK……20
2.2.2 Discussion and summary……22
2.3 Research about PCK in the EFL/ESL field……26
2.3.1 The PCK components and connotations in EFL/ESL field……26
2.3.2 Discussion and summary……35
2.4 Research about the development of PCK……37
2.4.1 Model of pedagogical reasoning and action……38
2.4.2 Study of the development of PCK……39
2.4.3 Discussion and summary……41

2.5 Conceptual framework……42
2.5.1 Reflective practice……..……..……44
2.5.2 Constructivism……46
2.6 Chapter summary……48

Chapter 3 Methodology……...49
3.1 Research questions……...49
3.2 Research methods……50
3.3 Selection of participants……...51
3.4 Biographical information of the participants……...54
3.4.1 Five core participants……..55
3.4.2 The other three participants……56
3.5 Instruments and procedures……..57
3.5.1 Interviews……59
3.5.2 Classroom observations……..60
3.5.3 Supplementary documentary data……...60
3.6 Data analysis of the study……61
3.6.1 Three phases of data analysis……..62
3.6.2 Four methods adopted in data analysis……...63
3.6.2.1 Memoing……63
3.6.2.2 Coding……64
3.6.2.3 Thematic analysis……66
3.6.2.4 Interpretation……67
3.6.3 Cross-case analysis……..67
3.7 Validation strategies……68
3.8 Reflection as a researcher……70
3.9 Ethical consideration……71
3.10 Chapter summary……...71

Chapter 4 Research findings from case studies……72
4.1 Darlene's case……72
4.1.1 Features of curriculum: cultivating better language learners and more capable citizens……..72
4.1.2 Content knowledge and instructional strategies……73

4.1.2.1 Teaching speaking based on life-skill topics……74
4.1.2.2 Using hands-on demonstrations……74
4.1.3 Learner challenges and scaffolded teaching of speaking skills……77
4.1.3.1 Giving students sentence starters……77
4.1.3.2 Engaging students in interesting topics……78
4.1.3.3 Integrating communication games into class……80
4.1.4 Course evaluation: making students feel relaxed……..82
4.1.5 Educational context: a hands-off approach……..83
4.1.6 Subject knowledge enhancement: developing by understanding students' needs……84
4.1.7 Summary……...86

4.2 Alex's case……...88
4.2.1 Features of curriculum: cultivating good public speakers and independent thinkers……88
4.2.2 Content knowledge and instructional strategies……89
4.2.2.1 Teaching speaking based on thinking-skill topics……89
4.2.2.2 "I am a public speaker"……89
4.2.2.3 Mind-mapping demonstrations……91
4.2.3 Learner challenges and scaffolded teaching of speaking skills……92
4.2.3.1 Comprehension exercises……93
4.2.3.2 Engaging students in oral presentations.……93
4.2.3.3 Engaging students in the reasoning process……95
4.2.4 Course evaluation: being strict with the students……..98
4.2.5 Educational context: constraining in the political sense……99
4.2.6 Subject knowledge enhancement: developing by holding onto his dreams……...100
4.2.7 Summary……102

4.3 Mr. Xue's case……...103
4.3.1 Features of curriculum: a skill-oriented course……...103
4.3.2 Content knowledge and instructional strategies……..104
4.3.2.1 Using analogies and flowcharts……104
4.3.2.2 Appreciating and analyzing speech videos for understanding speech

principles……..105
4.3.3 Learner challenges and scaffolded teaching of speaking skills……...107
4.3.3.1 Helping students choose topics: learner interest matters……107
4.3.3.2 Practicing speech tasks……108
4.3.3.3 Imitation and recitation……110
4.3.4 Course evaluation: providing only written feedback……..111
4.3.5 Educational context: bureaucratic and stifling……...112
4.3.6 Subject knowledge enhancement: developing through understanding and reflection……113
4.3.7 Summary……115

4.4 Ms. Si's case……..116
4.4.1 Features of curriculum: holistic education……..116
4.4.2 Content knowledge and instructional strategies……..117
4.4.2.1 Individual tutoring……118
4.4.2.2 Using metaphors, analogies and examples……119
4.4.2.3 Using debates……119
4.4.2.4 Appreciating classic speeches for spiritual enrichment……..……120
4.4.3 Learner challenges and scaffolded teaching of speaking skills……...121
4.4.3.1 Inspiring students with arts in choosing speech topics……121
4.4.3.2 Cultivating students' sense of humor……123
4.4.3.3 Providing sufficient opportunities for public speaking……123
4.4.4 Course evaluation: a combination of evaluation methods……..125
4.4.5 Educational context: a community of practice……..……126
4.4.6 Subject knowledge enhancement: developing in reflection and knowledge acquisition……..127
4.4.7 Summary……129

4.5 Ms. Wei's case……...130
4.5.1 Features of curriculum: cultivating thinkers and communicators with a global vision……...131
4.5.2 Content knowledge and instructional strategies……..131
4.5.2.1 Using examples, analogies, and diagrams……132
4.5.2.2 Case analysis……134

4.5.3 Learner challenges and scaffolded teaching of speaking skills……...137
4.5.3.1 Providing more opportunities for students to debate……137
4.5.3.2 Choosing thought-provoking topics for students to debate……137
4.5.3.3 Shaping students' thinking……138
4.5.4 Course evaluation: promoting peer evaluation……...140
4.5.5 Educational context: feeling lonely in the pursuit……...141
4.5.6 Subject knowledge enhancement: developing by "groping the way forward"……142
4.5.7 Summary……144
4.6 Chapter summary……...145

Chapter 5 Discussion……..149
5.1 The components and characteristics of speaking instructors' PCK……...149
5.1.1 Features of curriculum……150
5.1.2 Knowledge of pedagogy……153
5.1.3 Learners' challenges……159
5.1.4 Language enhancement……...163
5.1.5 Course evaluation……..166
5.1.6 Educational context……171
5.1.7 Cross-case comparisons……..172
5.1.8 PCK framework for speaking instruction……181
5.2 The developmental process of PCK……...187
5.3 The professional development of speaking instructors……..194
5.3.1 Spiritual enrichment……195
5.3.2 Renewed teacher roles……197
5.3.2.1 Professional learners……197
5.3.2.2 Course developers……199
5.3.2.3 Reflective researchers……201
5.3.2.4 Transformative intellectuals……201
5.3.3 Philosophical inquiry……..203
5.4 Chapter summary……...206

Chapter 6 Conclusion……209
6.1 The components of speaking instructors' PCK……..209

6.2 The development of PCK……...211
6.3 The professional development of speaking instructors……..213
6.4 Theoretical contribution……..……...214
6.5 Pedagogical implications……...216
6.6 Limitations of the study and expectations for future research……...221

REFERENCES…….223
APPENDICES…….....245
Appendix 1 Interview guidelines…….245
Appendix 2 Informed consent statement……247
Appendix 3 Interview excerpts……249
Appendix 4 Reflection journals……..……262
Appendix 5 Classroom observation notes……264
Appendix 6 Sample effective instructional strategy……267
CURRICULUM VITAE……..269