

Dilemmas in Teacher Development in the Chinese EFL Context*

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Abstract:

In the field of teacher development in China, it is of great priority to promote the re-construction of teachers' beliefs about education in the context of the National Curriculum Reform. As teachers' beliefs are context-dependent, it is important to examine the sociocultural context when investigating teachers' beliefs. The examination of the above context in China reveals that with the gradual promotion of the National English Curriculum Standards (NECS), more and more people have begun to realise the importance of the educational concepts which underpin teachers' practice in the implementation of the NECS. However, Chinese teachers still have to deal with dilemmas in teachers, such as the clashes between two cultures of learning, constraints arising from contextual influences, disconnection between theory and practice, and inadequate professional support. Therefore, professional support for teachers by means of in-depth study of teachers' beliefs can enhance teachers' expertise by understanding teachers' beliefs and how they conceptualise their practice in the classroom context.

Key Words: Teacher beliefs, Teacher development, Chinese EFL context, Dilemma

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1. INTRODUCTION

Educational beliefs in general and teachers' beliefs in particular are not context-free. As suggested by Pajares (1992), researchers must study the context-specific features of beliefs, that is, the connections of beliefs with contextual issues. Moreover, as many researchers suggest, investigation of sociocultural and educational contexts in which classroom teaching is enacted is crucial in understanding local practices and the success of educational endeavour (Harmer, 2003; Hayes, 2009; Hu, 2005). Therefore, any research of educational issues, it is necessary to examine the sociocultural context in which the study is undertaken when investigating any educational beliefs or teachers' beliefs.

In the last three decades, EFL has gained enormous popularity in China, in that the significance of EFL proficiency is recognised as a gateway to socio-economic and educational opportunities. A good command of English can help people enter and graduate from universities, find decent jobs, do business with international connections, obtain various kinds of information from foreign sources, study abroad and so on. In order to achieve the necessary competence, millions of Chinese EFL learners take regular English courses.¹ EFL is a compulsory subject in China from the third grade in primary schools through secondary and high schools to universities, which means at least 11 to 13 years of formal EFL education for Chinese students.² In this case, EFL has been accorded enormous importance from social and educational perspectives. A large amount of theoretical and empirical studies have consequently been conducted to explore effective ways of EFL teaching and learning (e.g. Zhang, 2005; Wu, 2001; Zhang, 2006). The nationwide English curriculum reform in the Nine-year Compulsory Education and high school education launched in 2001 is a national attempt to improve the quality of EFL teaching in China, and has brought about great challenges for Chinese EFL teachers. Therefore, this paper reviews the issues in Chinese ELT contexts and more importantly, the dilemmas Chinese EFL teachers have confronted. I argue for the need to study how Chinese EFL teachers' beliefs work in the context of the EFL curriculum reform, so as to provide teachers with a reference to a personal theory of teaching.

2. SOCIO-ECONOMIC CONTEXTS OF CHINESE EDUCATIONAL REFORM

A country's educational policy can only be properly understood by reference to the web of inherited ideas and values, habits and customs (Alexander, 2000). These social cultural values are not static but dynamic as a result of social-economic change (Holliday, 1994). Therefore, it

¹ There are about 2.3 billion primary, secondary school students in China (Gu, 2004).

² Eleven years of formal EFL education consists of three years' primary EFL education from Grade three, three years' secondary EFL education, three years' high school EFL education, and at least two years' college EFL education. Some non-English majors only have to take two years' EFL course. In some schools, university students can be exempt from EFL course in their second year if they pass the National Band Four Examination for Non-English Majors.

is important to be aware of the social-economic changes that have been taking place in China, which have led to the changes in social values and thus the need for educational reform.

Contemporary Chinese history is a history of dramatic change. Since the late 1970s, China has witnessed the most significant change in the process of modernization which has brought about great changes in all aspects of Chinese society (Adamson, 2004; Cortazzi & Jin, 1996; Jin & Cortazzi, 2002; Lam, 2005)³. Through its aims of promoting advanced scientific know-how and free market economies, of fostering the spirit of the rule of law, and of achieving democracy and human rights, education in China has taken on a strategic importance in preparing a qualified workforce capable of shouldering the responsibility for Chinese modernisation. Traditional educational values which overemphasised authoritative knowledge and memorisation at the expense of cultivating individual creativity, interest in learning and problem-solving capabilities, are challenged. Students' ability to just memorise and apply what is learned is no longer enough for an increasingly competitive world, as the ability to cope with change has become the most important skill for today's students. It is increasingly recognised that quality education, creativity, and individuality are three priorities for education in China. In this case, social-economic development promotes educational reorientation.

As an indispensable tool for modernisation and globalisation, English has, undoubtedly, become the focus of the reform. Chinese government and Ministry of Education (MOE) appeal to ELT at different levels, namely, primary, secondary and tertiary schools, to reform their curricula in order to prepare more people for the challenges in the era of economic globalisation. Chinese ELT in compulsory education has undergone radical development since the launch of the Opening-up Policy in the late 1970s. At that time, English syllabi and textbooks in China were based on the audio-lingual method and the grammar-translation method, which were characterised by an emphasis on sentence pattern drills and literacy texts translation. Although later in the mid-1980s ELT focused more on interesting and informative supplementary readings, structure, grammar and vocabulary were still the focus of teaching. From the early 1990s, quality education and learners' communicative competence were seen by many scholars and educators as a way of rectifying the existing examination-oriented education (PEP, 1993).

By the late 1990s, problems in Chinese ELT had been identified by many researchers who were influenced by the development of Western educational theories (e.g. Wang & Wang, 2000). As Hu (2002: 94) observes, 'numerous Chinese teachers and learners of English do not seem to have gone through any fundamental change in their conception of effective language instruction and in their daily practices'. 'Deaf and dumb English', which was used as a

³ In a review of ELT in China, Scovel (1995) divides the history of ELT after the founding of the People's Republic of China in 1949 into three periods: 1949-1965; 1966-1976; 1975-1995. Similarly, reviews afterwards follow such a division and further divide the years after 1990, regarding this as a different phase of 'English for international stature (Lam, 2005: 84). Relevant to the present study is the third period, when ELT was strongly promoted as the most important foreign language to be taught at all levels of education.

metaphor to describe the phenomenon of EFL learners who could not communicate properly in English after many years' study of EFL, still remains as one of the main problems of EFL learning today (Lam, 2005). Moreover, there were problems relating to putting too much emphasis on language knowledge delivery while ignoring the development of learners' language skills; problems of teacher-centred classroom teaching which nevertheless neglected learners' interest, motivation, individuality and autonomy; and problems of knowledge-oriented assessment. All these issues highlight the need for an urgent reform of ELT in China. Especially since China entered the 21st century, the rapid socio-economic development has further created an escalating demand for English proficiency, and consequently, accelerated the nationwide English curriculum reform and subsequent changes in textbooks and teaching practice (Hu, 2005).

3. CHINESE EDUCATIONAL REFORM IN THE 21ST CENTURY

In response to the socio-economic changes, the National English Curriculum Standards for Nine-Year Compulsory Education and Senior High School Education (the NECS) was launched in 2001 to promote the concept of 'quality education for each and every student' (MOE, 2001: 2). For the first time in Chinese educational history, the NECS has promoted a paradigm shift from a traditional teacher-dominated, knowledge-based transmission mode of teaching to a more learner-centred, experience-based, problem-solving mode of teaching. It proposes six underlying principles for EFL teaching and learning.

- (1) Education should aim to promote quality-oriented education for each and every student;
- (2) Learner-centredness should be advocated and individual differences be respected;
- (3) Competence-based objectives are designed for each level with flexibility and adaptability;
- (4) Task-based approach of teaching, experiential learning and participation are emphasised;
- (5) Formative assessment is advocated;
- (6) Learning resources should be optimised to provide maximal opportunities for learning and using the language. (MOE, 2001, pp. 2-3)

On the basis of these principles, the NECS sets out its main tasks as follows:

The main task is to activate and cultivate students' interest in learning, to build up confidence, to form a good learning habit and effective learning strategies, to develop autonomous learning and cooperative spirit, enable students to master basic English language knowledge and skills of listening, speaking, reading and writing so as to develop overall language competence, to foster students' abilities of observation, memorisation, thinking, imagination and innovation, to help students get to know the world and be

aware of cultural differences between China and Western countries, to broaden the vision, to cultivate patriotic spirit, to form a healthy philosophy of life, and to lay a solid foundation for the students' lifelong learning and development. (MOE, 2001, pp. 1-2)

As illustrated in the underlying principles and main tasks of the NECS, it is evident that China, as a culture which promotes great respect for authority and knowledge, is now undergoing a paradigm shift towards emphasising students' needs and competence. The NECS clearly suggests a change of priority from language knowledge and skills to students' whole person development. That is, in addition to the traditional educational focus of linguistic perspectives of learning, great importance is attached to non-linguistic aspects, such as learners' interests, motivation and individuality. Moreover, learning in schools is a process of learning how to study, which is believed to be beneficial for learners' lifelong learning. As far as cultural issues are concerned, the NECS put forward the concept of 'cultural differences' as against the traditional 'black or white' concepts in relation to foreign cultures. Therefore, the changes brought about by the NECS permeate all aspects of EFL teaching and learning, which requires equivalent shifts in teachers' beliefs and practices.

Curriculum change, however, is a long and slow process, which does not guarantee equivalent changes in teachers' beliefs and practice. The curriculum document only expresses aims and objectives in abstract and general terms, based on theoretical assumptions. Such general principles will have to go through a sequence of transformations before they are translated from a published document into school textbooks, and from teacher beliefs into classroom practice, which is often governed or affected by particular social, cultural, institutional, as well as classroom contexts where teaching takes place. In order to promote teachers' understanding and implementation of the NECS, curriculum designers have taken on the role of interpreting the principles of the NECS (Chen, Wang, & Cheng, 2008) and many researchers have explored the issues brought about by the NECS (e.g. Cheng & Gong, 2005; Dai & Zhang, 2001; Li, 2005; Lu, 2007). The most common issue they raised concerns the change of teachers' beliefs from the traditional knowledge-oriented ELT to competence-oriented ELT, together with which some other issues related to the current Chinese ELT context are discussed below.

4. CHINESE EFL TEACHERS' DILEMMAS IN CONFRONTING CHANGES

A teacher has been portrayed as a 'dilemma manager', 'a broker of contradictory interests', who 'builds a working identity that is constructively ambiguous' (Lampert, 1985: 190). Chinese EFL teachers are no exception, especially when confronting the educational reforms with the requirement of change in beliefs.

4.1 Working with clashes between two cultures of learning

Chinese EFL teachers are facing the task of negotiating the tensions between two cultures of learning: the traditional Chinese cultures of learning and those of the West embodied in some of the concepts of the NECS. According to Cortazzi and Jin (1996), some cultural aspects may

impede development in ELT methodology and intercultural communication in China. As some researchers have discovered, the paradigm shift in the current nationwide English curriculum reform has greatly challenged Chinese EFL teachers' traditional values and habits of thinking (Cheng & Gong, 2005). The images of EFL teaching and learning envisioned by the current curriculum reform are foreign to most Chinese teachers. Traditionally teachers were believed to be knowledge holders, hence favouring teacher-centred, book-based, grammar-translation methods, albeit with an emphasis on deep understanding and repetitive learning. However, the concepts of learner-centredness, experiential learning, and learning through doing in the NECS, are against all these traditional ELT foci. These new concepts clearly demonstrate features of Western cultures of learning, emphasising individuality, and experiential learning (Cortazzi & Jin, 1996). Although they did not approach the issues from a cultural perspective, some researchers have summarised several sets of relationship, comparing traditional and new educational concepts (Cheng & Gong, 2005; Wang & Li, 2007; Zhang, 2007). For example, Zhang (2007) drew teachers' attention to five relationships in understanding the NECS: the relationship between textbooks and teaching resources; between language knowledge and overall competence; between learner-centredness and teacher-centredness; between comprehensive teaching methods and Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT); between focusing less on grammar and optimising grammar teaching. He argued that teachers should adapt to the new principles of the NECS on the basis of their own teaching realities. Similarly, many researchers have suggested the principle of selective adoption of new concepts and critical inheritance of traditional beliefs in implementing the NECS (e.g. Wang & Li, 2007).

Although investigations into teachers' implementation of the NECS reveal that many teachers have gradually accepted the new concepts regarding EFL teaching and learning, the issues of conflicting beliefs still bother Chinese EFL teachers. The clashes between two different cultures of learning are particularly reflected in the teachers' beliefs about how teaching and learning should be carried out and what they expect students to achieve in education. For instance, an investigation into TBLT in Chinese secondary education revealed that many teachers believed that students can learn nothing from noisy tasks (Qian, 2006). Another piece of research indicated that more than half of the teachers in the study believed that the current TBLT is not beneficial for learners' grammar learning (Yang & Hao, 2007).

4.2 Working under constraints arising from contextual factors

It is evident that teachers' implementation of the new concepts has also been influenced by many contextual factors. As many researchers have claimed, the conflicts between teachers' existing beliefs and new beliefs have been exacerbated by external pressures, in particular the high-stakes matriculation English tests (Cheng & Gong, 2005; Li, 2005). For example, some of them have pointed out that teachers regard examinations as the natural enemies of quality education and the new curriculum reform (Cheng, 2007). It is true that China, with the largest population in the world, has inadequate educational resources to allow all capable students to enter tertiary education. Gate-keeping examinations have become the sole selection route and

thus the main concern for all schools, teachers and parents. The strong ‘backwash effects’ of examinations have influenced teaching, both directly and indirectly (Prodromou, 1995: 13). As a result, success in education is often judged by test scores and teaching is often aimed at helping students pass examinations, giving little attention to students’ individual needs and their different learning styles. Accordingly, teachers’ implementation of quality-oriented teaching collides with their examination-oriented teaching, which may lead to fixed teaching content and ossified teaching methods.

Additionally, teachers have to deal with various problems imposed by their teaching contexts, such as large class size, limited instruction time, teachers’ inadequate English language proficiency, a shortage of materials, a rigid top-down school culture, unrealistic demands from educational authorities, a lack of resources to support change and rising parental expectations (Hu, 2002b; Wu, 2001; Zheng & Davison, 2008). Many of the studies on contextual factors, however, treat the context as a backdrop to the research by isolating influencing factors from actual teaching (e.g. Qin & Pang, 2006; Wang, 2003). Most of the analyses on contextual issues are built on assumptions or questionnaire data, which cannot provide insights into how these contextual factors influence teachers’ practice. In other words, the way these contextual factors affect teachers’ beliefs and practice – indeed, whether they exist at all – needs to be explored empirically in teachers’ classrooms.

4.3 Working to bridge the distance between theory and practice

Theory and practice influence and are influenced by each other’s development. As Eraut (1994: 51) insisted,

Not only does an idea get reinterpreted during use, but it may even need to be used before it can acquire any significant meaning for the user. Thus its meaning is likely to have been strongly influenced by previous contexts of use; and the idea will not be transferable to a new context without further intellectual efforts.

In order to promote Chinese EFL teaching and learning, many advanced theories of education developed in foreign countries have been introduced in the new national curriculum, such as Communicative Language Teaching (CLT), TBLT, learner-centredness and so on. These concepts, however, are always criticised by teachers for their lack of practicality. For example, as Wen and Xue (2005) pointed out, although the NECS introduces advanced foreign theories to Chinese EFL teaching and learning, the refusal to acknowledge the local context divorces the theory from practice. They also hesitated to promote students’ autonomous learning by adopting experiential teaching in the context of Chinese traditional receptive learning. And they finally argued for critical acceptance of foreign theories and critical incorporation of traditional concepts in EFL teaching and learning. More concerns about practicality have been raised in relation to TBLT. Common issues have been addressed by many researchers, such as inappropriate levels of difficulty with respect to tasks for students at different linguistic and

cognitive levels, teachers' lack of pedagogical knowledge in conducting TBLT, and the neglect of grammar presentation in carrying out tasks (e.g. Hong, 2008; Yang & Wen, 2007).

Wang (2007) also discussed the gap between the principles and practices of learner-centredness. She argued that as learner-centredness is more of an ideology than a specific set of classroom procedures or techniques, many teachers did not know what exactly they should do in the classroom to realise learner-centredness. Some teachers were found to equate a class which was fun for students with learner-centredness. This may result in their teaching being enjoyable but having a tendency to downplay the language to be learned. In this case, it is important to empower teachers to relate the abstract concepts in the NECS with their classroom practice.

In the 'post-methods' era, more emphasis has been laid on the use of EFL teaching approaches and methods which are flexibly and creatively based on teachers' own judgment, experience and beliefs (Richards & Rodgers, 2001). According to Freeman (2002), studies of teacher cognition have enabled teachers to understand discrepancies between theoretical recommendations based on research and classroom practice, and hence such studies attempt to explain the lack of influence on practice of educational innovation. Moreover, the study of teacher cognition can engage teachers in a form of reflective learning, by making them aware of the psychological bases of their classroom practice, which helps them understand their mental lives, but does not dictate practice to them. In this case, converting theory into practice can be established by 'constructing a private theory' in teaching (Eraut, 1994: 60), and a primary reference point for teachers is their personal beliefs about their EFL teaching. The professional support to empower teachers to link theory with practice is far from adequate in Chinese EFL teacher education; this is discussed below.

4.4 Inadequate professional support

The new curriculum reform has raised many issues for teachers in terms of the tensions between the traditions and the innovations, theory and practice. In order to promote the reform, teacher education should seek to smooth the path of teachers' professional development. Rather than providing teachers with packages of new methods and techniques, teacher education programmes should 'empower teachers with the knowledge, skill, attitude, and autonomy necessary to devise for themselves a systematic, coherent, and relevant alternative to method that is informed by principled pragmatism' (Kumaravadivelu, 1994: 45). However, as many researchers have realised, there is a great lack of professional support for Chinese secondary EFL teachers in a time of change (e.g. Wang & Kang, 2006).

As we can see, the current curriculum reform sets a very high standard for EFL teachers; the suggestions, however, seem to be vague and brief. In one section of the chapter on Implementation Suggestions in the NECS, there is only one small bullet point dealing with the requirements for teachers' professional preparation in this educational innovation.

8. Teachers should constantly reconstruct the knowledge structure in order to meet the requirements of the NECS posed by the social development. Therefore, teachers should:

- 1) Understand the concepts, aims and content of the NECS correctly; apply theories of education, psychology; study rules of language teaching; choose appropriate teaching pedagogy or adjust strategies in teaching according to students' psychological characteristics and actual situation.
- 2) Develop skills of classroom management and organisation and make flexible use of various kinds of teaching techniques and methods.
- 3) Master modern educational technique and apply them in your learning and teaching.
- 4) Enhance both Chinese and foreign cultural training and broaden scope of knowledge.
- 5) Explore effective teaching methods actively and critically according to teaching aims, students' needs and local realities.
- 6) Constantly reflect upon your own teaching practice and try to become a teacher with creative research abilities. (MOE, 2001, p. 31)

The above requirements for the teachers involve a wide range of elements, including learning, changing and implementing in terms of cognitive, affective and behavioural aspects of teachers' professional life. Given such high standards set by the NECS, the issue of teacher education is put on the agenda. Compared with the development of the English curriculum, that of teacher education in China lags behind. With the introduction of the concept of professional development in the late 1990s, Chinese teacher education has been undergoing a transition from teacher training to teachers' professional development. However, language teacher development in China is still in its early stages and professional support for Chinese secondary school EFL teachers is far from sufficient.

Firstly, Chinese EFL teacher development has been seriously hampered by the traditional concept of teacher training. In China, traditional EFL teacher education carries an assumption that the delivery of programmes and activities is key to preparing good teachers. For most Chinese secondary school EFL teachers, the pre-service education usually includes a four-year undergraduate course or a three-year diploma course, provided by a normal university or a teachers' college, focusing on an introduction to the theories of education and psychology, and language teaching pedagogy. In-service EFL teacher education takes a variety of forms in China, including degree and non-degree course.⁴ In relation to my research, I focus on the introduction to in-service non-degree teacher education. With the promotion of the NECS, the in-service non-degree teacher education concerning the new curriculum aims to assist teachers to understand the guiding principles and new requirements specified by the NECS. The most

⁴ The in-service degree course is a 'Make-up Education' for those who do not have a bachelor's degree or a master's degree. The in-service non-degree course is organized both locally and nationally.

common practice takes the form of lectures from experts in education and demonstration lessons given by experienced teachers. These teacher education programmes tend to be theoretical, academic and research-oriented, and are mostly set up to ‘facilitate promotion of the more linguistically and academically competent teachers’ (Sunderland, 1990: 246).

According to Zhang and Li (2003), Chinese EFL teachers trained in this way tend to be passive in that they wait for opportunities to be trained. They want to be told what to do, but do not favour the form of lectures. Their expectations of effective teacher education thus focus on model lesson demonstrations. A survey of a group of rural secondary school EFL teachers revealed that 49.2 per cent of the 126 participant teachers expressed reluctance to participate in teacher training programmes, and 74.8 per cent believed that teacher education in the form of lectures was ineffective (Liu, 2006). The theory-practice gap has always been criticised by school teachers when commenting on these training programmes. Undoubtedly, in taking this top-down knowledge-transmission approach, teacher education neglects ‘a rich, varied, and complex process of learning to teach’ (Freeman, 2002: 12), and more importantly, it ignores teachers’ initiatives in teacher education.

Secondly, in terms of the progress of teacher professional development, Chinese teacher education has begun to attach value to regarding teachers as ‘active agents in analysing their own practice in the light of professional standards, and their own students’ progress in the light of standards for student learning’ (OECD, 2005: 14). For example, a survey of 265 secondary school EFL teachers from more than eight provinces revealed that 31.9 per cent of the participant teachers favoured the form of school visits and demonstration classes, while 18.9 per cent of the teachers preferred group discussions and 11.5 per cent would like to conduct self-reflection on their own teaching (Wang, 2003). Although the statistics indicate that teachers have begun to perceive reflective teaching as an important form of professional development, in reality, 59 per cent of the participant teachers believed that they did not have enough time and energy, or adequate professional support (*ibid.*).

Thirdly, as a domain of research, teachers’ professional development needs to be further defined by conducting more empirical investigations in the Chinese context. On the one hand, most published works are general conceptual discussion papers concentrating on a particular issue, such as the expertise of language teachers (Tsui, 2003) and action research (Chen, 2003; Wang, 2002). Only since 2005 have empirical research articles begun to emerge in major journals. On the other hand, more systematic and scientific research is confined to higher education. For example, the first edited book on language teachers’ professional development published in 2008 was about EFL teachers in higher education (Wu, 2008). Until now, there has been no such work on secondary school EFL teachers’ education. Although there has been an upsurge of research undertaken by school teachers since the initiation of the new curriculum reform, most empirical research conducted by secondary school teachers has lacked a sound theoretical framework and methodological design, which has therefore made a limited contribution to secondary school EFL teachers’ professional development. In this case, it is

important to empower teachers to become more self-critical and reflective as a result of joint endeavours between teachers and expatriate experts.

Facing the paradigm shift initiated by the curriculum reform, Chinese EFL teachers are bewildered at the range of choice of traditional and innovative concepts in EFL teaching and learning. The contextual constraints and the lack of professional support all make the situation worse. There are limitations to the power-coercive approaches to encouraging implementation, which do not lead to long-lasting, self-sustaining innovation. The curriculum change in China poses great challenges for teachers, 'striking at the core of learned skills and beliefs and conceptions of education, and creating doubts about purposes, sense of competence, and self-concept' (Fullan & Stieglbauer, 1991: 45). Since the teaching environment changes in a way that is not always within the control of teachers, instead of reducing the complexities of teaching and learning situations to a few manageable research variables, what we can do is to find out how teachers cope with these complexities by engaging them in articulating and reflecting upon the complexities of EFL teaching and learning. Researchers from both mainstream education and language teaching contexts (e.g. Clark & Yinger, 1979) have drawn attention to the fact that the enactment of the curriculum is grounded in personally developed theories or beliefs about teaching and learning. Therefore, there is a strong need for a bottom-up study, firstly to explore what current beliefs underpin teachers' practice, then to examine how their beliefs influence their practice and, finally, to illuminate how teachers construct their beliefs and practice within specific contexts. In this case, teacher education developed along these lines can further empower teachers in constructing their personal theory when confronting educational changes.

5. CONCLUSION

The discussion of this contextual background suggests that socio-economic transformation brings about educational change. The curriculum reform in the 21st century is initiating an educational paradigm shift. As above mentioned, it is evident that, with the gradual promotion of the NECS, more and more people have begun to realise the importance of the educational concepts which underpin teachers' practice in the implementation of the NECS. However, Chinese teachers still have to deal with constant clashes of different beliefs, which are discussed from the perspectives of cultures of learning, disconnection between theory and practice, contextual influences and professional support.

Educational changes put teachers under immense pressure to reconstruct their knowledge and skill bases and reconceptualise their roles and responsibilities in their professional lives. One method is to provide professional support for teachers by means of in-depth study of teachers' beliefs. In China, however, only a meagre amount of research on language teachers' cognition has appeared in either domestic or international publications. The cultural traditions and the social-economic context in China are very different from those from which the new concepts of the NECS originated. As a consequence, a more in-depth empirical study of teachers' beliefs is

needed, drawing on different theoretical perspectives and research methods. Only in this way can we promote teachers' expertise by understanding teachers' beliefs and how they conceptualise their practice in the classroom context.

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