School of Education

Beginning EFL teachers' beliefs about teaching and learning in the context of secondary schools in China

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Abstract

This study examined the beliefs about English teaching and learning of six Chinese secondary school EFL teachers, whether any changes occurred in their beliefs during the first three years in the profession, and why beginning teachers changed or did not change their beliefs. Data were collected over a period of 10 months using semi-structured interviews, concept mapping, and journal entries. The findings showed how teachers' learning in the workplace influenced change or no change in beliefs, how their schools supported learning, how teachers elected to engage in activities and how these affected the nature of their beliefs. Teachers who made significant changes in beliefs reported high levels of engagement in learning activities and a focus on collaborative activities, whilst teachers who made no evident changes in beliefs exhibited low levels of involvement in activities and an emphasis on individual activities. The difference can be attributed to differences in personal and workplace conditions. Teachers with stronger efficacy beliefs tended to set higher goals for themselves and persisted longer in the face of difficulties and therefore, seemed to be more motivated to engage in professional learning activities than those with weaker efficacy beliefs. Mastery-oriented teachers who focused on learning and increasing their competence appeared to be more willing to participate in professional learning activities than performance-

oriented teachers who feared negative evaluations by others and avoided challenges. Teachers who worked in a culture of collaboration had more opportunities to learn from one another than teachers who worked alone. School leaders played a significant role in shaping a collaborative culture, providing professional development opportunities, and stimulating teachers' engagement in learning activities.

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Chapter 1. Introduction

1.1 Introduction

This thesis sets out to investigate the nature of beginning EFL teachers' beliefs about teaching and learning, whether any changes occur in beliefs over time, and why beginning teachers change or do not change their beliefs. The research takes the form of a case study of six Chinese secondary school EFL teachers' beliefs about EFL teaching and learning during the time of the National Curriculum Reform. Data were collected over a period of ten months using semi-structured interviews, concept mapping, and journal entries.

My elder sister was an EFL teacher. I have always admired her because she was able to teach English in English. I also enjoyed the feeling of staying with children. I wanted to be an EFL teacher in the future and decided to do a BA in ELT at China West Normal University. After the graduation from the university, I went to UK to further my study, but most of my classmates became a secondary school EFL teacher immediately. This study was inspired by my personal interest in understanding what beliefs beginning EFL teachers hold about teaching and learning, how teachers' beliefs influence their classroom practice and whether their beliefs change or not over time. Entering 21st century, China launched a nationwide reform in compulsory education, initiating a

paradigm shift in terms of educational orientation from the emphasis on knowledge transmission to that of the quality of education. Such a shift challenged teachers' traditional beliefs about teaching and learning, which may trigger clashes between teachers' beliefs and practices. This study was also inspired by my interest in exploring teachers' beliefs and practices during the time of the National Curriculum Reform and whether teachers' beliefs changed to a direction consistent with the requirements of the new curriculum. This chapter aims to introduce the background to the study, the aims and contexts of the study, to highlight the significance of the study, and to provide an overview of the structure of the study.

1.2 The context: English curriculum reform in basic education in China

As the research focuses on Chinese secondary school EFL education – exploring the nature of teachers' beliefs about EFL teaching and learning, whether any changes occur in their beliefs and factors that influence teacher belief change – it is necessary to examine the sociocultural context in which the study is undertaken.

In the last three decades, China has seen high-rate economic growth and an explosion in commercial, technological and cultural exchanges with other countries (Hu, 2002a). English proficiency has become increasingly important. On the national level, English is regarded by the government as a necessary tool for helping the nation to further open up,

a valuable resource for realising its modernisation programme, and an important cornerstone of international competition (Hu, 2002a) and on a personal level, a good command of English can help people enter and graduate from universities, find decent jobs and get promotions, do business with international companies, obtain various kinds of information from foreign sources, go abroad for further education and so on (Hu 2002a, Zheng 2011). In order to acquire proper language competence, millions of Chinese EFL learners take regular English courses. EFL is a compulsory subject in China from the third grade in primary schools through secondary and high schools to universities.

Yi (2010) divides English curriculum reform of China's Basic Education since 1978 into four phases, namely restoration (1978-1984), development (1985-1991), adjustment (1992-2000), and the new-round curriculum reform (2001-2008). The Cultural Revolution led to a whole decade of chaos and turbulence in China (1966-1976). It not only disrupted economic and cultural development of the country but also had disastrous effects on EFL education. During this period, all imported foreign books and all broadcasts in foreign language forbidden, all ELT programmes removed from the secondary curriculum, and all universities and colleges closed. Since the Third Plenary Session of the 11th Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party in 1978, along with the policy of reforming and opening up, the English curriculum in basic education

has been given a good opportunity of restoration. This ‘restoration’ period has established the status of English in basic education. To enhance the status of English in the curriculum, the time allocated for English teaching was raised from 656 hours to 960 hours for students who opted for a humanities curriculum and 92 hours for those in the science track (Hu, 2002a). The differences of English education were emphasized and new textbooks were published. However, the new textbooks took a pedagogical approach similar to the textbooks published before the Cultural Revolution – an approach that combined audiolingualism and grammar-translation method - perhaps partly because of lack of contact with the latest EFL education ideas in other parts of the world. Having suffered from the effects of a decade of domestic turmoil, English education was in a poor situation with a shortage of effective teachers and backward teaching philosophies. English teaching overemphasized knowledge transmission and ignored the development of students’ language competence.

In April 1986, Compulsory Education Law of the People’s Republic of China was published by the highest legislative body—the National People’s Congress. The law stipulated that 9-year compulsory education should be basically universalized in all urban and rural areas of all provinces for all ethnic minorities, and illiteracy among young and middle-aged (15-45) should “basically eradicated”. Basic education stepped into a phase of rapid development. Cultivation of students’ ability of using English was

emphasized. The English syllabus became more scientific and open. However, English teaching in this period, which was deeply influenced by behaviourism and audiolingualism, overemphasized mechanical memorization and drill practices, which largely increased students' burden.

In 1993, Chinese Education Reform and Development Outline required elementary and secondary schools to transform from exam-oriented education to quality-oriented education. Exam-oriented education has long been deeply embedded in Chinese culture and society and in China, "formal education revolved around the hierarchical highly centralised series of government examinations which were the stepping stones to official status and power. The content of the examinations determined the content of formal education: the Confucian classics history and literature as well as the skills of essay writing, poetry writing and calligraphy. Rote memorisation and recitation were the standard teaching methods." (Delloiacovo 2009: 241) China's exam-oriented education has been widely criticized and reforms have attempted to promote "quality education", which generally refers to "a more holistic style of education which centres on the whole person" (ibid). English teaching in this phase aims to develop students' competence in language use and efficiently solved the problems of the connections between primary and secondary school. Multiple textbooks were created based on one syllabus. However, due to the strong status of the exam-oriented culture, the curriculum

content was still significantly separated from students' lives and overemphasized the textbook knowledge. English teaching still overemphasized passive reception learning and mechanical practices.

In order to meet 21st century challenges, specifically economic, socio-political and educational needs arising from social changes, the Reform Program for Basic Curriculum (Trial) was published in 2001 and a new round of basic education curriculum reform was launched. The fundamental principle is that education must contribute to the all-round development of each student. The current curriculum reform is based on a redefinition of curriculum objectives:

(1) development of patriotism, collectivism, love of socialism, and preservation of fine national cultural traditions.
(2) development of awareness/sense of socialist democracy [*sic*] and rule of law and abiding by law and social norms.
(3) development of healthy world outlook, life outlook and values.
(4) development of sense of social responsibility and obligation to serve the people.
(5) cultivation of creative spirit [*sic*], capability of practice, scientific and humanistic competencies, and environmental awareness.
(6) development of fundamental knowledge, skills and approaches for learning throughout life.
(7) development of healthy body [*sic*], solid psychological quality, aesthetic appreciation and healthy ways of life.

The senior high school curriculum objectives have also added the following:

(1) development of capacity [*sic*] for independent learning, vocational/occupational awareness, entrepreneurship, career planning.

(2) understanding of oneself and respect for others, learning to communicate and cooperate with others, development of team spirit.
(3) understanding of cultural diversity, and open-mindedness to the outside world.

(Cited in Zhou and Zhu, 2006: 23-24)

The National English Curriculum Standards for Nine-Year Compulsory Education and Senior High School Education (the NECS) was published in 2001, initiating a paradigm shift from a teacher-centred, examination-oriented mode of teaching to a more student-centred, competence-oriented mode of teaching. The NECS proposes six underlying principles for English teaching and learning as follows:

(1) Education should aim to promote quality-education for each and every student.
(2) Learner-centeredness 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 [*sic*] of teaching, experiential learning and participation are emphasized.
(5) Formative assessment is advocated.
(6) Learning resources should be optimized to provide maximal opportunities for learning and using language.

(Cited in Zheng, 2011: 17)

The main tasks of NECS are:

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 a 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.
>
> (Cited in Zheng, 2011: 17)

The six principles and main tasks of the NECS show a paradigm shift from the emphasis on language knowledge to that of students' needs and all-round development. Besides the traditional educational focus of linguistic knowledge, great importance has been placed on students' non-linguistic abilities, such as students' interest, observation, memorisation, thinking, imagination and innovation. Learning is viewed as a process of learning how to study, which is beneficial for the students' lifelong learning and development. The NECS also indicates that students should understand the cultural differences between China and Western countries.

Curriculum reform, however, is a long and slow process. Despite major progress made in the systemic curriculum reform in basic education in China, problems and challenges exist which need policy attention and actions for solution. Zhou and Zhu (2006: 48-49) list several problems:

(1) Rural Areas Demand Greater Relevance of Curriculum Content and Different Strategies in Curriculum Reform Implementation.

(2) The Need for More Diversified Curriculum Resources.

(3) Teachers Need Long-term Capacity Building and Professional Learning to Be Curriculum Implementers and Learning Facilitators.

(4) Prevalent Examination-driven Practices.

1.3 English language teaching in China

This section introduces the background of English language teaching in China. In the last two decades, the English language has become more and more popular in China. Social, economic, and political factors are important forces in the massive expansion of English teaching (Cortazzi and Jin 1996). China has the largest number of learners of English in the world. Chinese people attach great importance to English as achievement in English is crucial to complete middle school, to enter or graduate from university, to study abroad, and to open doors for professional and business success. Traditional Chinese language teaching approach is characterized by a teacher-centred, book-centred, grammar-translation method with an emphasis on memorization. The traditional way of English teaching is significantly influenced by Chinese culture of learning and has been criticized for many years as it focuses too much on linguistic knowledge and fails to develop an adequate level of communicative competence. After learning English for

years, Chinese students still feel difficult to either understand what foreigners say or express themselves in English. In order to improve this situation, a new round national curriculum reform was launched in 2001. In addition to traditional linguistic knowledge, students' interest, autonomy, confidence, cultural awareness and communicative competence are emphasized. However, changes in the curriculum cannot guarantee equivalent changes in teachers' beliefs and practices. A variety of obstacles for implementation of the new principles have been identified, such as Chinese teachers' feeling that they have an duty of preparing students for the exams, teachers' inadequate communicative competence, the lack of teaching facilities, time constraints, an excessive workload, large class sizes, traditional classroom layout, students' grade level, students' ability, and students' expectations on how English should be taught in classrooms

Cortazzi and Jin (1996) indicate that "Chinese approaches to language teaching have a long-standing concern with mastery of knowledge, which is focused on the four centres of the teacher, the textbook, grammar, and vocabulary" (p. 65). In traditional Chinese English classrooms, the teacher is the centre of classroom activities. Most of the interaction in the classroom is from the teacher to the students. Textbooks are viewed as a main source of true knowledge and teachers carefully select language points from the textbooks and spend a majority of time on explaining them. Traditional Chinese

language teaching approach puts great emphasis on students' knowledge on grammar and vocabulary and little attention is paid to students' communicative competence. The traditional ways of teaching and learning English in China are significantly influenced by Chinese culture of learning. According to Jin and Cortazzi (2011: 114), 'Cultures of learning' refers to "implicit values, expectations and interpretations of learning and teaching which frame ideas and pedagogic practices," which are "socially transmitted in family and social contexts and especially in classroom practices and are distinct from personal or individualized ideas." It includes beliefs about the nature and purposes of education, what constitutes a good teacher or student, the roles of the students and teachers and the relationships between them, and about the interpretations and expectations of the classroom interactions, materials and outcomes.

Chinese cultures of learning have been significantly influenced by Confucian thinking. First, with regard to assumptions about education, in China, there is a saying that "everything is low, but education is high (*Wanban jie xiapin, weiyou dushu gao*)". Confucius firmly believes that "education can bring along social recognition and material rewards" and "through education, even a person of obscure origin can achieve upward social mobility" (Hu, 2002b: 97). Therefore, Chinese people attach great importance to education and make every endeavour to achieve success in education. In terms of assumptions about teaching and the role of the teacher, the traditional Chinese

model of teaching is dominated by a teacher-centred, textbook-oriented, and knowledge-transmission method. Teachers carefully select knowledge points from textbooks, analyse, interpret, and explain for students, and then require the students to memorise, repeat and understand. Teaching does not focus on "how teachers and students can create, construct, and apply knowledge in an experiential approach, but on how extant authoritative knowledge can be transmitted and internalised in a most effective and efficient way" (Hu, 2002b: 99). Rao (1996) indicates that there are three obligations of a good teacher. First, teachers, in China, should be the model for people to follow. Teachers are respected and considered as subject-matter authorities. Transmitting knowledge is the second obligation of a teacher. Teachers need to explain the knowledge as clearly as they can to the students. The lecture-method is widely employed. Teachers tell the students what they think the students ought to master and it has been assumed that students learn best if they listen to the teachers and act as the teachers require them to do. Third, a good teacher should teach students the correct ways of learning and investigating.

Instead of a practical process of using knowledge for immediate purposes, learning has been traditionally regarded more as a process of accumulating knowledge and reading books. This is attested to by maxims such as "it is always useful to open a book (*Kai juan you yi*) and "when the time comes to use your knowledge, you will regret how little

you have read (*Shu dao yong shi fang hen shao*).” Written texts, especially classics and authoritative works are viewed as a source of true knowledge. According to Hu (2002b), the learning strategies commonly used in China can be summarised as four Rs and four Ms. First, learning is viewed as a process of reception. Students are expected to receive and accept, with no opinions and thinking, the knowledge transmitted by their teachers and textbooks. In addition, learning is regarded as a process of repetition. Students need to repeatedly study what they do not understand in order to acquire and understand knowledge. Moreover, review is perceived as an important learning strategy. One famous Confucian saying is: "One learns new things by reviewing the old” (*Wen gu er zhi xin*). Rao (1996) indicates that there is a firm belief in Confucian tradition that:

> There is no limit to all things and knowledge. What was learned can be easily forgotten, if not reviewed from time to time. New things grow out from old things. What one has already learned and understood is old knowledge; but when one has a new understanding of what one had already learned, it will become new knowledge to him. (Rao, 1996: 481)

The last R of learning is reproduction. Chinese students “are expected to be able to accurately reproduce the transmitted textual knowledge on demand from the teacher or tests” (Hu, 2002b: 101) and “failing to do so is generally taken as an indication of lack of mastery of required knowledge” (ibid). The four Ms of learning strategies comprise meticulosity, memorisation, mental activeness, and mastery. Meticulosity means “attention to the smallest detail of knowledge and there is no tolerance for ambiguity”

(Hu, 2002b: 101). Similarly, Rao (1996: 462) indicates that in a Chinese EFL classroom, "there is a keen interest in exact understanding of every word, a low tolerance for ambiguity, and a focus on discrete grammar points and specific syntactical constructions." In addition, memorisation is viewed as a powerful learning strategy for Chinese learners. However, in China, "students are not encouraged to engage in mechanical memorisation. Instead, they are encouraged to memorise with understanding; that is, to memorise what is understood and to understand through memorization" (Hu, 2002b: 101). The Confucian tradition emphasizes that learning and thinking cannot be separated in the process of learning (Rao, 1996). As Rao (1996: 481) indicates:

> In the process of learning, one has to use one's mind. In order to gain a thorough understanding of anything being learned, it is necessary to use one's mind to establish logic. Without thinking one can benefit very little even from hard study.

Beliefs about the importance of education and the nature of teaching and learning inevitably exert an impact on beliefs about what constitutes a good student. According to Hu (2002b), first, students are expected to regard learning as a serious undertaking and make continuous effort to study. Second, students are expected to respect and cooperate with the teacher and wholeheartedly embrace the knowledge introduced by the teacher. Any behaviours that try to challenge the teacher's ideas are viewed as rude and disrespectful to the teacher. Third, students should aim to "be useful people to

society, ‘to glorify their ancestry’ (*Guang zong yao zu*), and to bring pride to their family” (Hu, 2002b: 100).

China has made important developments in curriculum policy, syllabus design, and textbook production in the last two decades in secondary English language teaching (Hu, 2002a). Traditional Chinese language teaching approach has been criticized for many years as it fails to develop an adequate level of communicative competence. After studying English for years, students still feel difficult to effectively communicate with foreigners. In order to solve existing problems, a new round of national curriculum reform was launched in 2001, initiating a paradigm shift from a teacher-centred, examination-oriented, and knowledge-transmission mode of teaching to a more student-centred, competence-oriented, and experience-based mode of teaching. Jin and Cortazzi (2006) summarise the new emphases in ELT in China:

> English teaching should be more centred upon the students’ learning processes by paying more attention to their learning experiences and learning strategies. A collaborative spirit should be developed, emphasizing more active participation and English learning should enhance students’ practical ability to use the language in real contexts. Cognitively, English learning should cultivate critical and evaluative thinking. Affectively, students should develop their motivation, interest, confidence, feeling and attitudes through learning English. Culturally, English learning should include developing cultural knowledge and understanding and skills in intercultural communication. (p. 14-15)

It is evident that China is now undergoing a paradigm shift from an emphasis on authority and knowledge towards an emphasis on students’ participation, needs, and

competence. The new curriculum reform suggests a change of priority from language knowledge to students' overall development. In addition to traditional linguistic knowledge, great importance has been put on cultivation of students' interest, confidence, good learning habits and effective learning strategies, cooperative spirits, cultural awareness and communicative competence. In addition, Hu (2002a) indicates the recent syllabus developments in China:

> First, less ideological demand has been imposed on ELT. Blatant political messages have been phased out. Instead, more pragmatic considerations – development of cognitive skills and pedagogical appropriateness – have gained prominence. Second, there has been a growing interest in updating theoretical assumptions about language teaching and learning. Efforts have been stepped up to introduce new educational philosophies, approaches and methods into the classroom.

The new textbooks are developed on the basis of more up-to-date language teaching and learning principles. Rather than entirely promoting a communicative language approach (CLT), the textbook writers have employed a mixed approach, attempting to integrate some CLT principles with existing practices (Hu, 2002a). Hu (2002a: 39) describes that:

> Along with a general focus on communication, the four skills of listening, speaking, reading, and writing all receive attention; use of the mother tongue is permitted; and there also are elements of audio-lingualism in the drills used.

However, there have been a variety of obstacles for the implementation of the new principles in the curriculum reform. First, Chinese teachers personally feel that they should be responsible for students' future. Students' achievement in exams determines

their future and English exams, in China, focus on testing language knowledge. Therefore, Chinese teachers focus more on transmitting language knowledge and enhancing students' scores in exams. Anderson (1993) also argues that "perhaps the greatest drawback in using the communicative approach is the fact that Chinese English teachers have as their primary responsibility the duty of preparing their students for the English section of the national examination" (p. 472).

The second obstacle concerns the inadequate teacher training. In China, few teachers have opportunities to study in an English-speaking country. English teachers do not have sufficient communicative English skills and feel it is difficult to teach English in a communicative way. Anderson (1993) confirms that "many Chinese English teachers are not equipped to teach English communicatively, few foreign teachers are available, and the traditional, non-communicative methodology prevails" (p. 473). Chinese teachers generally express two complaints about current teacher training. First, teachers indicate that teacher training is still conducted in a traditional way which it is meant to replace, with teachers listening to theory-based lectures, lacking sufficient training for the practical application of the new approaches and teachers as the main body of training are not integrated in the discussion and investigation of the new approach. Second, teacher training courses are reported to train all the teachers in the same way, ignoring teachers' individual differences. It is noteworthy that teachers are different in

that they have different needs, interests, experiences, teaching abilities, and teaching realities, which should all be a consideration in the design of the content and form of teacher training. The teacher training courses ought to train the teachers on the basis of their personal characteristics.

The third drawback is related to the lack of sufficient educational resources. Educational resources in China are insufficient to meet the increasing demand. Educational funding in China is very low. It is beyond the ability of schools especially the schools in backward areas to fund an expensive new curriculum requiring new resources such as space, building, faculties, equipment, computing facilities and so on. The developed and less developed areas differ a lot in teaching facilities and instructional equipment. Unlike the schools in urban areas which were provided with the latest teaching facilities, the schools in rural areas are often inadequately equipped and lack financial funds to obtain the up-to-date teaching facilities that aid the new principles in the curriculum reform, such as language labs, multi-media classrooms, televisions, and computers. In the classroom, the teacher and textbooks are the major sources of knowledge and chopsticks and blackboard are the main instruments to facilitate teaching. In such circumstances, the teachers who work in rural regions have no choice but to teach English in a traditional teacher-centred way. As Hu (2003) indicates,

> In contrast to the optimistic picture of urban and coastal schools, schools in the inland rural areas tend to be inadequately equipped. Quite a large number of these schools even have financial difficulties in repairing dangerously dilapidated school buildings, let alone up-to-date teaching facilities and equipment. Consequently, unlike many schools in the economically advantaged areas, a great majority of the schools in the remote rural areas lack the 'hardware' to support educational reform and innovations whose success often depends on the availability of good teaching facilities and extensive use of instructional technologies. Teaching in these schools usually takes the form of 'chalk and talk'. (p. 303-304)

The drawbacks of the new curriculum textbooks have also been identified as a factor that hinders teachers' implementation of the new curriculum, such as too much content to be covered, lack of cohesion, and the impracticality of the design of the Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) (Zheng, 2011). The public examination system is conceived as the most powerful obstacle for the new curriculum reform. Chinese English teachers indicate that it is very hard to implement the new curriculum reform under the current examination system as examination success determines students' future paths and thus, can determine the expectations of the parents, the reputation of the schools and its teachers. In order to successfully implement the new curriculum, reforming current examination system is absolutely a priority. Obstacles may include the following: time constraints, an excessive workload, large class sizes, and traditional classroom layout, students' grade level, students' ability, and students' expectations students' expectations on how English should be taught in classrooms (e.g., Anderson, 1993, Crookes and Arakaki, 1999, Zheng, 2011). Crookes and Arakaki (1999) indicate

that the negative impacts of overwork upon the quality of teaching. Anderson (1993) questions whether a communicative approach is feasible for China as the class sizes in Chinese middle schools are usually quite large (50-70) students. Doğruer, Meneviş et al. (2010) found that interviewed teachers preferred to adopt individual activities and whole class activities as the physical conditions of the classes were not suitable for group work activities and the classes were too crowded (35-40 students in each class). Many researchers have indicated that a majority of Chinese students expect teachers to teach English in a traditional way and had no interest in communicative activities, such as pair and group work, role plays and investigation projects (e.g., Anderson 1993, Rao 2002, Xu 2012, Kirkebæk, Du et al. 2013). In students' minds, the teacher should be the centre of the classroom and focus on explaining vocabulary and grammar points and they only need to listen to the teacher or take notes. For example, in his study on students' perceptions of communicative activities and non-communicative activities, Rao (2002) finds that students like non-communicative activities more than communicative ones. He states that:

> Although CLT was gradually introduced into the Chinese EFL classroom from the early 1980s, it still has not become a dominant method in most EFL classrooms. Most students felt, on the other hand, that such traditional classroom activities as audiolingual drill, workbook type drill and practice were still effective ways to facilitate their English learning. (Rao, 2002: 91).

The researcher gives the following comment as a typical example:

> We are Chinese students learning English in China. Though we do need, to a certain degree, communicative activities to help us improve our communicative competence in the classroom, we should not discontinue the use of our traditional classroom activities. Of course, it is not all the non-communicative activities that we should keep, but those which have proved to be very efficient for our English learning nowadays. (Liang Qian, 11 October 1999) (Rao, 2002: 91)

1.4 Background to the study

Teacher cognition research is concerned with exploring what teachers think, believe, and know, the study of which can be dated back to 30 years ago. A group of experts in the conference organized by the National Institute of Education in the United States in 1975 argued that:

> It is obvious that what teachers do is directed in no small measure by what they think…To the extent that observed or intended teaching behaviour is "thoughtless", it makes no use of the human teacher's most unique attributes. In so doing, it becomes mechanical and might well be done by a machine. If, however, teaching is done and, in all likelihood, will continue to be done by human teachers, the question of relationships between thought and action becomes crucial.
>
> (Cited in Borg, 2006: 7)

This report marked the start of a tradition of research into teachers' mental lives. Since then teaching began to be seen as thoughtful behaviours and teachers were no longer being viewed as mechanical implements of external descriptions, but rather as active agents who thought and made decisions based on their teaching experience and the knowledge about teaching and learning.

In the past thirty years, the study of teachers' beliefs has been a major area of enquiry in language teaching. One strand of these studies has centred on the relationship between teachers' beliefs and practices. However, the relationship between teachers' beliefs and classroom practices was still an inclusive issue (Zheng 2009). Some researchers argued that teachers' beliefs guided their actions (Clark and Peterson 1986, Johnson 1992, Pajares 1992, Kagan 1992b, Calderhead 1996, Karavas-Doukas 1996, Knudson 1998). Yet some researchers found teachers' beliefs were not always reflected in their practices (Fang 1996, Karavas-Doukas 1996, Crookes and Arakaki 1999, Ertmer, et al., 2000, Ertmer 2005, Feryok 2008, Alger 2009, Phipps and Borg 2009). Some researchers aimed to look at the changes in teachers' beliefs. Most of them focused on investigating the impact of teacher education programmes on beliefs (Tillema 1998, Cabaroğlu and Roberts 2000, Mattheoudakis 2007, Farrell 2009, Busch 2010, Wong 2010, Yaman 2010). The longitude study on how exactly teachers changed their beliefs was limited.

The research on teachers' beliefs in China starts late (Zhu 2011). In the CNKI (China National Knowledge Infrastructure) database, there are 659 articles with such key words as 'teacher beliefs,' which included 141 doctoral and master's dissertations. The earliest research on teachers' beliefs in China appeared in 2001. However, among these articles, more than half are general conceptual discussions of teacher beliefs (eg., Li, 2009, Ma 2012). Although researchers have begun to acknowledge the significance of teachers'

beliefs in understanding teachers' practices and professional development, more empirical investigations of teachers' beliefs are needed to define this research area in the Chinese context.

In research on beginning teachers, much attention has been put on investigating the difficulties and challenges of beginning teachers in their first years and seeking the effective ways of supporting and assisting the new teachers (e.g., Veenman 1984, Weinstein 1988, Cole and Knowles 1993, Rust 1994, Schmidt and Knowles 1995, Fantilli and McDougall 2009, Shoffner 2011). The difficulties and problems included: classroom and discipline management, relationships with students, a lack of knowledge in subject matter/curriculum, and a lack of effective teaching strategies (e.g., Fenwick, 2011, Orland-Barak and Maskit, 2011, Rust, 1994, Shoffner, 2011, Weinstein, 1988, McCann et al., 2005, Caspersen and Raaen, 2013, Hobson and Ashby, 2012, Nasser-Abu Alhija and Fresko, 2010). However, very little research has been conducted on the nature of beginning teachers' beliefs about teaching and learning, whether any changes occurred in their beliefs over time and related influencing factors.

1.5 Aims of the study

In the past thirty years there has been a surge of interest in the study of teachers' beliefs – what teachers think, know and believe (Borg 2006). Research has indicated that

teachers' beliefs have a 'filtering effect' on all aspects of teachers' thoughts, judgments and decisions (Clark and Peterson, 1986: 283; Pajares, 1992). We cannot properly understand teachers and their teaching behaviours without understanding the beliefs that affect what they do. Pajares (1992: 325) indicated that "belief change during adulthood is a very rare phenomenon, the most common cause being a conversion from one authority to another or a gestalt shift." This study sets out to investigate the beliefs about teaching and learning of six Chinese secondary EFL teachers through semi-structured interviews, concept mapping, and journal entries. First, the current investigation wants to contribute to existing knowledge about the key features of teachers' beliefs, which can help define the concept of 'teachers' beliefs,' for example, the components of teachers' beliefs, how different elements interact within a teacher' belief system, whether teachers' beliefs can be changed or not, and the extent to which teachers' beliefs influence their practices. Second, this study aims to make a valuable contribution to our understandings about how teachers' beliefs form prior to teaching and how actually beginning teachers change their beliefs in their day to day teaching during their three years of teaching. Third, this study wants to add evidence to the relationships between belief change and practice change: whether belief change guarantees changes in beliefs? If not, why not?

The study was guided by the following two research questions:

1. What beliefs do Chinese beginning secondary EFL teachers hold with regard to EFL teaching and learning?

2. Are there any changes in Chinese beginning secondary EFL teachers' beliefs over time?

2.1 If there are, what are they? What are the contributing factors to these changes?

2.2 If there are not, why not?

1.6 Significance of the study

Recognising the importance of teachers' beliefs in understanding teaching, many studies have been conducted to investigate teachers' belief systems. My research has evolved from a review of the research trends in teacher beliefs in EFL education and my interest in promoting Chinese EFL teaching. Despite the fact that the topic of teacher 'belief' has been widely examined, my research displays several original and innovative features when compared with prior studies in the field.

First of all, there have been many studies on teacher beliefs in the educational research literature. The majority of those studies have been conducted in developed countries such as America and England and a few in China. This study explores the nature of beginning EFL teachers' beliefs about teaching and learning, whether any changes have

occurred in beliefs over time, and why beginning teachers change or do not change their beliefs. The research takes the form of a case study of six secondary school EFL teachers' beliefs about EFL teaching and learning in Sichuan province. No study concerned with changes in secondary English language teachers' beliefs about teaching and learning has been carried out in China's undeveloped western area (Sichuan). Thus, the uniqueness of the contexts in which the research has been carried out contributes to the significance of the study.

Second, the majority of the studies on teachers' belief change have related to the quality of the programmes offered to pre-service or in-service teachers. The current investigation looks at beginning teachers' beliefs during the three years, making a valuable contribution to our understandings about how actually beginning teachers changed their beliefs in their day to day teaching during their three years of teaching. The role played by teacher learning (engagement in professional learning activities), personal factors (self-efficacy beliefs and goal orientations) and extrinsic factors such as school culture and leadership in teacher belief change are all discussed in this study.

Third, the findings of this research contribute to our understandings about the nature of teachers' beliefs. For a start, the evidence in this study showed that teachers' beliefs about teaching and learning comprise their beliefs about the nature of subject (EFL), about learning (the best way of learning EFL and other factors that influence students'

learning), about teaching (the teaching objectives, teaching processes, and teaching approaches), about teachers (the characteristics of the effective teachers and the roles of the teachers) and about students (the role of the students). These different elements interact with each other and combine together, forming a complex system of teachers' beliefs. Second, the research revealed teachers' beliefs of the nature of EFL, teaching EFL, learning EFL, and the roles of teachers and learners are interrelated, which is in line with the results from previous studies (e.g., Tsai and Tsai 2002, Watersadams 2007). For example, if a teacher conceived English as a tool for communication, s/he may favour a student-centred, communicative way of teaching. English can be learned best through interacting and communicating with others. Students' active involvement was emphasized. If a teacher viewed English as a tool for passing the exams, she may favour the traditional teacher-centred, exam-oriented way of teaching and conceive memorizing language knowledge as the best way of learning English. Third, this study demonstrates that beginning teachers' beliefs are not inflexible and stable, but dynamic and open to change, similar to the findings derived from previous studies (e.g., Richards, Gallo et al. 2001, Clarke and Hollingsworth 2002, Guskey 2002, Mohamed 2006, Cimer, Çakır et al. 2010, Borg 2011). Beginning teachers in this study held 'traditional' beliefs which stressed EFL as a tool for passing exams, emphasized the value of traditional knowledge-transmission approach, conceived memorization as the best way to learn

EFL, and stressed the teacher's authority and learners' passive role when they first entered the profession. Their initial conceptions of EFL teaching and learning were found to be mainly originated from their past language learning experiences, particularly in secondary schools. Former studies also identify teachers' past learning experiences or 'apprenticeship of observation' Lortie (1975) as a significant influence on teachers' beliefs (e.g., Peacock 2001, Erkmen 2014). During the first three years, four of the six teachers changed to beliefs which emphasize EFL as a tool of communication, stressed the effectiveness of communicative student-centred approach, viewed communication and interaction as the best way to learn English, and emphasized students' active role in learning.

Fourth, the findings in the present study contribute to our understanding about why beginning teachers change or do not change their beliefs over time during the first three years in the profession. The majority of the studies on teachers' belief change focus on exploring the influence of pre-service and in-service training programmes on teachers' beliefs. In the present study, the roles played by teacher learning, school culture, leadership, and teacher individual characteristics in teacher belief change were all considered. The current research showed that ways in which teachers learn at the workplace have a strong influence on the outcome of their learning (e.g., change or no change in beliefs), and how schools support learning and how teachers elect to engage

in activities affect how they learn at the workplace. Teacher learning in this study is conceptualized as engagement in professional learning activities. Teachers appear to experience four major categories of professional learning activities: getting new ideas from others, reflecting, experimenting, and experiencing a discrepancy. Teachers differ a lot in the nature and extent of participation in these activities and therefore, achieve different learning outcomes. Four beginning teachers who made dramatic changes in their beliefs reported high levels of engagement in professional learning activities and a focus on collaborative activities, whilst the two teachers who made no evident changes in their beliefs exhibited lower levels of participation in learning activities and a focus on individual activities. Variations in personal and workplace conditions are responsible for the difference. Teachers with higher levels of efficacy beliefs tend to set higher goal for themselves and persist longer in the face of difficulties and therefore, appear to be more motivated to participate in professional learning activities than those with lower levels of efficacy beliefs. Mastery-oriented teachers who focus on learning and increasing their competence seem to be more willing to participate in professional learning activities than performance-oriented teachers who feared negative evaluations by others and avoid challenges. Teachers who worked in a professional culture of collaboration appear to have more opportunities to learn with and from one another than those who worked alone. School leaders play a significant role in shaping a

collaborative culture, providing appropriate CPD opportunities and stimulating teachers to engage in learning activities. Darling-Hammond and Richardson (2009) indicated that professional learning communities were of critical importance to effective teachers' professional development as "in ongoing opportunities for collegial work, teachers learn about, try out, and reflect on new practices in their specific context, sharing their individual knowledge and expertise" (p. 48). In addition, Hudson, Hudson et al. (2013) claimed that a professional learning community "has the potential to encourage and support teacher development by promoting collaborative problem setting and problem solving activities that target improved student learning outcomes" (p. 1298). Flores (2004) indicated that "along with issues of personal motivation, willingness and commitment to learning, extrinsic factors such as school culture, working conditions and leadership emerged as mediating influences on teachers' learning in the workplace" (p. 305).

Lastly, the findings in this study shed some light on existing knowledge about the association between teachers' belief change and practice change. This research showed that teachers' belief change cannot guarantee their practice change. Four beginning teachers articulated although they shifted to beliefs which emphasized students' needs and language competence and active participation over time, they taught in a hybrid way which included both the features of the student-centred, communicative approach

and the traditional teacher-centred approach. Three levels of contextual factors were found to constrain teachers' abilities to fully implement their beliefs into practice, including micro-context of classrooms (e.g., students' grade level, students' ability and students' expectations, time constraints, the lack of teaching resources, excessive workload, large class sizes and traditional classroom layout), exo-context of schools (e.g., the assessment on teacher effectiveness and contract employment practices), and macro-context of society (e.g., examination policy). Prior studies also demonstrate that the relationships between teachers' beliefs and practices are complex and non-linear (e.g., Karaağaç and Threlfall 2004, Hu 2005)

1.7 Overview of the study

This dissertation consists of eight chapters. Chapter 1 has introduced the background to the study, the Chinese ELT context, and the aim and significance of the study. Chapter 2 reviews the literature on teacher beliefs. It discusses the definition of the concept of teachers' beliefs, teachers' beliefs about teaching and learning, influences on (re)construction of teachers' beliefs, relationships between teachers' beliefs and practices and the experiences of beginning teachers during the first three years of teaching. Chapter 3 presents the research methodology. It introduces the research questions, the epistemological stances of the research, theoretical perspectives, the case study strategy, as well as the validity, reliability and ethical issues of the research.

Chapter 4-6 presents the data from three perspectives. Chapter 4 examines the changes that occurred in beginning teachers' beliefs about teaching and learning during the first three years of teaching. Chapter 5 explores influences on teachers' belief change. Chapter 6 illustrates the extent to which teachers perceived that influenced their practices. Based on the former three chapters on research findings, Chapter 7 presents a detailed discussion on how beginning teachers learn and change during the first three years in the profession. The final chapter develops a model explaining the major contributions of this study, discusses the implications and limitations of the research and also suggests future research in the field of teacher beliefs.

Chapter 2. Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

This chapter reviews the literature in the domain of teachers' beliefs. In Section 2.2 I examine the definition of teachers' beliefs. Section 2.3 explores factors that shape teachers' beliefs prior to entering the profession. Section 2.4 examines the different dimensions of teachers' beliefs. In section 2.5 I look at changes in teachers' beliefs. The relationships between teachers' beliefs and practices are examined in section 2.6. In section 2.7 I look at beginning teachers' teaching experiences.

2.2 Definitions of the concept of teachers' beliefs in the literature

Although many attempts have been made to define the concept of beliefs, there is no single overall definition of the term. According to Pajares (1992), "it will not be possible for researchers to come to grips with teachers' beliefs, however, without first deciding what they wish belief to mean and how this meaning will differ from that of similar constructs" (p. 308). Thus, it is important for me to clarify my own understanding of the definition of beliefs at the outset of the study.

The first problem relates to this concept is terminology confusion. A variety of terms have been used to describe this concept, such as 'cognition' used by Borg (2003),

‘implicit theories’ by Clark and Peterson (1986), ‘images’ by Calderhead and Robson (1991), ‘maxims’ by Richards (1996), ‘personal theories’ by Sendan and Roberts (1998), ‘conception’ by Gonzalez Thompson (1984), and ‘BAK’ by Woods (1996). Pajares (1992) indicates that beliefs “travel in disguise and often under alias.” The aliases include:

> attitudes, values, judgments, axioms, opinions, ideology, perceptions, conceptions, conceptual systems, preconceptions, dispositions, implicit theories, explicit theories, personal theories, internal mental processes, action strategies, rules of practice, practical principles, perspectives, repertories of understanding, and social strategy. (Pajares, 1992: 309)

Thus throughout this study I will use the term *beliefs inclusively to refer to a teacher’s opinions, thinking, and understandings about EFL teaching and learning.*

The greatest confusion with the term revolves around the distinction between beliefs and knowledge (Pajares 1992). In the literature, knowledge and beliefs are either taken as being intrinsically different from each other or they are used as generally overlapping constructs without distinguishing between what the teacher knows and what s/he believes. According to Richardson (1996: 104), “in the traditional philosophical literature, knowledge depends on a truth condition that suggests that a proposition is agreed on as being true by a community of people” while “beliefs do not require a truth condition.” Calderhead (1996) states that beliefs refer to “suppositions, commitments

and ideologies" and knowledge is described as "factual propositions and the understanding that inform skilful action" (p. 715). Nespor (1987) distinguishes beliefs from knowledge in four aspects, including existential presumption, alternativity, affective and evaluative aspects, and episodic storage. He also argues that beliefs are far more influential than knowledge in determining how teachers act in the classroom. Existential presumptions refer to a teacher's incontrovertible or deeply held assumptions about the existence or non-existence of an entity (Nespor, 1987), which are probably derived from an intense experience or a succession of events (Pajares, 1992). Nespor (1987) uses two concrete examples to explain this feature. Two teachers in his study held different views on the factors attributed to students' failure in mathematics learning. One teacher believed that students who failed to learn mathematics were simply lazy. Thus, he believed that forcing the students to do more drills or practice was an effective way to motivate students to learn. The other teacher, on the other hand, stressed the function of "maturity" in mathematics learning and believed that forcing the students to do more work would not enable them to learn.

Alternativity – teachers often hold ideal views on teaching and learning, which are significantly different from the reality (Nespor, 1987). Nespor (1987) exemplifies this feature by referring to one teacher who had the belief that a friendly and fun learning atmosphere should be created in her classroom. However, in the real situations, her

ideal teaching objective had never been achieved. Nespor (1987) indicates that “beliefs serve as means of defining goals and tasks, whereas knowledge systems come into play where goals and the paths to their attainment are well-defined” (p.319).

Moreover, Nespor (1987) states that beliefs rely heavily on affective and evaluative components, which consist of feelings, moods, and subjective evaluations. He also points out that the affective and evaluative components can determine the energy that teachers will expend on an activity and how they will expend it (Nespor, 1987). For example, three teachers in his study held a view that they should not focus on teaching the facts and details of history because the students would not remember them as time went on. Therefore, these teachers designed some other teaching objectives, which they thought would have a more lasting effect on students.

Nespor (1987: 320) also argues that beliefs are stored as episodes originated from “personal experiences or from cultural or institutional sources of knowledge transmission.” For example, in Nespor’s study, Ms. Skylark recalled her negative learning experiences as a student and did not want her students to undergo the same experience. Her belief system (memories of the negative learning experiences) appeared to exert a more powerful impact on her classroom teaching than her knowledge system.

Some researchers, on the other hand, believe that the concepts of beliefs and knowledge are inseparable and intertwined (Clandinin and Connelly 1987, Grossman, Wilson et al. 1989, Woods 1996, Verloop, Driel et al. 2001). For example, Clandinin and Connelly (1987) indicate that it is difficult to pinpoint where knowledge ended and beliefs began. Grossman et al. (1989: 31) conclude that "while we are trying to separate teachers' knowledge and beliefs about subject matter for the purpose of clarity. We recognize that the distinction is blurry at best." Verloop et al. (2001: 446) indicate that "in the mind of the teacher, components of knowledge, beliefs, conceptions, and intuitions are inextricably intertwined." Woods (1996), in his study of eight ESL teachers teaching at university level in Canada, suggests that it is difficult to differentiate between beliefs and knowledge:

> In many cases it cannot be clearly determined whether the interpretations of the events are based on what the teacher knows, what the teacher believes, or what the teacher believes s/he knows. (Woods, 1996: 194)

As a result, he integrates teachers' beliefs, assumptions and knowledge into one and proposes an inclusive term: BAK (beliefs, assumptions and knowledge). Borg (2006: 33-4) further concludes that "aiming to separate knowledge, belief and related concepts is not a particularly fruitful exercise given that in the mind of the teachers these constructs are not held or perceived distinctively."

Some researchers conceptualize beliefs as a type of knowledge. For example, Nisbett and Ross (1980) identify two components of generic knowledge, including a cognitive component that is conceptually organized and a belief component that involves evaluation and judgment. Clark and Peterson (1986: 258) define beliefs as "the rich store of knowledge that teachers have that affects their planning and their interactive thoughts and decisions." Kagan (1992a: 65) also labels belief as a "particularly provocative form of personal knowledge." Some researchers view knowledge as a component of belief. For instance, Rokeach (1968) states that all beliefs comprise three components: a cognitive component (a person's knowledge), an affective component (a person's judgments, moods, evaluation, and emotion) and a behavioural component (activated when action is necessary).

Because of the difficulty in distinguishing beliefs from knowledge, most researchers seem to avoid differentiating between knowledge and beliefs by either using the terms interchangeably or by only referring to knowledge or beliefs (Murphy and Mason 2006, Woolfolk Hoy, Davis et al. 2006). Thus throughout this research I will not attempt to distinguish between beliefs and knowledge but will use the term *beliefs* as *an inclusive term to embrace the complexity of teachers' mental lives*.

In addition to individual beliefs, belief systems also hold distinguishing attributes (Rokeach 1968, Green 1971, Thompson 1984, Nespor 1987). There is considerable agreement that a belief system consists of sub-structures of individual beliefs and not all beliefs within a belief system are equally important. Within a belief system some beliefs seem to be more central than others. The more central a belief, the more difficult or resistant it is to change (Rokeach 1968, Green 1971, Pajares 1992, Richardson 2003). Green (1971) defines the idea of centrality in terms of psychological strength and describes more strongly held beliefs as more central, and the less strongly held as peripheral. However, according to Rokeach (1968: 5), centrality is defined in terms of connectedness and "the more a given belief is functionally connected or in communication with other beliefs, the more implications and consequences it has for other beliefs and, therefore, the more central the belief." In line with this understanding, Pajares (1992) also suggests that the definition of centrality relies heavily on its connectedness. The more its connectedness, the more central the belief is. Five types of beliefs are described in Rokeach's (1968: 6-12) work, including type A, B, C, D, and E. Type A and B beliefs are more central whereas Type C, D, and E are more peripheral. Type A concerns the beliefs that are psychologically incontrovertible and directly derived from a person's encounter with the object of belief. They are a person's "basic truth" regarding "physical reality, social reality, and the nature of the self" (p.6). Type B

beliefs include those that also come from a person's direct encounter with the object of belief but are not necessarily shared by others. Type C beliefs are a person's beliefs about the authority, which refers to a person's beliefs on which authority to trust or distrust, to look to or not to look to. Type D beliefs are those beliefs came from type C or from an authority. "Believing in the credibility of a particular authority implies an acceptance of others' beliefs perceived to emanate from such authority." (Rokeach, 1968: 10) Lastly, Type E refers to inconsequential beliefs, which concerns a person's matter of taste.

In addition, within a belief system, a person may hold some inconsistent or incompatible beliefs (Green 1971, Thompson 1984, Bryan 2003, Richardson 2003). This may be explained by Green's (1971: 48) arguments that "beliefs are held in clusters, more or less in isolation from other clusters and protected from any relationship with other sets of beliefs." Incompatible or inconsistent beliefs may be held in different clusters, thus preventing cross-fertilization among beliefs and making it possible to hold conflicting belief sets. The inconsistency may remain as long as the beliefs are not set side by side and examined for consistency.

Based on the definitions of beliefs in existing literature, a definition of teachers' beliefs used in this study is that *a teacher's beliefs are an integrated whole of opinions, values and assumptions that the teacher feels to be true, and which serve as a guide to action.*

2.3 Factors that shape teachers' beliefs prior to entering the profession

Research on teachers' beliefs has suggested that prospective teachers hold certain beliefs about teaching and learning prior to entering the teaching profession, which can date back a long time (e.g., Calderhead and Robson, 1991; Pajares, 1992; Johnson, 1994; Woods, 1996). Such beliefs are primarily derived from teachers' personal experiences as learners – what Lortie (1975) called the 'apprenticeship of observation' and pre-service teacher education programmes. In terms of teachers' prior learning experiences, there is considerable agreement that teachers' personal experiences as learners are a key influence on their beliefs (Borg 2003, Borg 2006). As Nespor (1987) argues, teachers learn a lot from the significant episodes or events derived from their experiences as students. Ambrose (2004) further emphasizes the emotional components of these experiences and argues that these emotion-packed experiences are a key influence on teachers' beliefs. For instance, in his study, some student teachers provided detailed accounts of crying while learning multiplication tables and related their belief that they did not have the abilities in learning mathematics to these painful experiences.

Through the period of apprenticeship of observation, teachers have established their beliefs and understandings about the best way of teaching and learning and the kind of teacher they want to be in the future. This would not be different in the field of foreign language teaching. Future foreign language teachers also develop images about their favourite or least favourite teachers and teaching styles during schooling (Johnson 1994, Bailey, Bergthold et al. 1996, Numrich 1996). For example, Johnson (1994) shed a light on illuminating the power of apprenticeship of observation. He studied four pre-service ESL teachers' beliefs about second language teachers and teaching. The four pre-service ESL teachers who attended this study were Master's students in an Arts programme in Teaching English as a Second language (TESL) in the USA. These teachers had no prior teaching experiences. Writing journals, observations, interviews, post observation interviews, conceptual memos, and teachers' stimulus recall comments were used to identify these teachers' beliefs. The author reported that both positive and negative images derived from student teachers' previous learning experience appeared to strongly affect their beliefs about roles of second language teachers and second language teaching. The beliefs of ESL pre-service teachers in this study came from four different categories: (a) images of their formal language learning experience, (b) images of their informal language learning experiences, (c) images of themselves as teachers, and (d) images of the teacher preparation programme. The findings in this study

indicated that images accumulated from prior learning experiences had a powerful impact on student teachers' understandings about themselves as teachers and their conceptions of their own teaching methods.

In addition, Bailey et al. (1996) propose that language teachers tend to internalize their observed behaviours, which strongly influence the way they teach. The project was to investigate the influence the previous language learning experiences had on prospective teachers' teaching philosophies and their instructional practices through language learning autobiographies and journal entries of seven MA candidates in training and a teacher educator in the USA. Several factors relevant to successful language learning experiences had been identified in this study: (a) teachers' characteristics/personalities; (b) teachers' clear expectations of their students; (c) mutual respect between teachers and students; (d) students' motivation and aptitude; and (e) positive and harmonious learning environment. The pre-service teachers who participated in this study strongly realized that apprenticeship of observation had a profound effect on the establishment of their teaching philosophies and teaching practices.

In the study of Numrich (1996), teachers' decisions on particular instructional strategies were found to be significantly affected by their positive or negative experiences of these strategies as learners. This study aimed to investigate student teachers' beliefs regarding

language learning and teaching through working with twenty-six teachers who were attending a Master's degree programme in TESOL in the USA. The findings of this study showed that teachers adopted or avoided specific teaching methods largely based on their positive or negative learning experiences. For example, because teachers had negative experiences of error correction, they tended to avoid this instructional strategy. Numrich (1996) concludes:

> Error correction was most often cited as a technique that had been used by their language teachers and that had inhibited them from speaking. In some cases it had even turned them off to language learning because they had felt so humiliated and uncomfortable being corrected. Because of negative experiences of being corrected, several teachers chose not to interrupt their students' flow of speech in the classroom to correct errors. (p.139)

Teacher education appears to be another significant source for pre-service teachers' beliefs. Although Kagan (1992b) claims that there is no significant relationship between teachers' beliefs and teacher education programmes, in many cases researchers acknowledge that teacher education courses do have an impact upon teachers' beliefs (Freeman 1993, Doyle 1997, Joram and Gabriele 1998, Cabaroğlu and Roberts 2000, Mattheoudakis 2007). For example, Doyle (1997) explored the impact of teacher education programmes on student teachers' beliefs. He suggests that teacher education programmes greatly influence pre-service teachers' beliefs. This study showed that student teachers initially considered the process of language learning and teaching as

passive acts of transmitting information to students. After the education programme, student teachers' beliefs shifted towards a view that language learning and teaching was an active process and teachers should serve as facilitators. The following factors leading to the changes were identified: increased professional experiences and student teachers' capability of reflecting and analysing their experiences. Doyle concludes that the length of the education programme and the amount of practical teaching experience are considered as two significant factors which assist student teachers in developing their belief systems.

Another example is Mattheoudakis's (2007) study which aimed to explore prospective EFL teachers' beliefs regarding teaching and learning and track the possible changes in their beliefs during a three-year teacher education programme at the Aristotle University of Thessaloniki (A.U.T.) in Greece. Two instruments were used: (1) the Beliefs About Language Learning Inventory (BALLI) (Horwitz 1985) and (2) a short questionnaire used to identify the student teachers' background. The findings showed that the majority of pre-service teachers' beliefs did actually change, while only a few beliefs remained unchanged. To be specific, teachers' conceptions of language learning aptitude, the difficulty of language learning and the role of the teacher appeared to remain relatively stable during the teacher education course. The researcher concludes that "such changes may be due to the fact several courses, both compulsory and elective

ones (e.g., *Theories of language acquisition, The classroom: principles and practice, Vocabulary teaching and acquisition, Language classrooms observed, Teaching the pronunciation of English*) expose students to recent research findings and theories regarding the teaching and learning of vocabulary, grammar and pronunciation; what is more, these courses placed special emphasis on addressing student teachers' traditional beliefs and helping them to overcome their grammar-based language learning experiences" (p. 1281). The effects of teacher education programmes upon teachers' beliefs will be discussed in more detail in section 2.5.

A general picture to emerge here is that teachers' prior learning experiences as students, or "apprenticeship of observation" (Lortie, 1975) and teacher education programmes tend to be two significant factors that shape teachers' beliefs prior to entering the teaching profession. In the next section, I will discuss different aspects of teachers' beliefs.

2.4 Different areas of teachers' beliefs

Teachers hold beliefs about everything around them, such as beliefs about art, about politics, about culture, and so on. When researchers talk about teachers' beliefs, they seldom refer to the teachers' broader, general belief system, but to teachers' educational beliefs (Pajares, 1992). Pajares (1992) recommends that it is important and necessary

for the researchers to differentiate teachers' educational beliefs from their broader, general belief systems. In this study, I only focus on EFL teachers' educational beliefs.

A number of researchers put efforts into revealing the types of beliefs that the teachers hold (Shulman 1987, Calderhead 1996, Woolfolk Hoy, Davis et al. 2006). For instance, according to Calderhead (1996), teachers have beliefs with regard to the following areas:

- Beliefs about learners and learning: teachers' beliefs about how their students learn are likely to affect how they teach and their relationships with students.
- Beliefs about teaching: teachers' beliefs about purposes of teaching. Is it about transmitting knowledge? Or is teaching a process of facilitating students' learning? Or is teaching a process of building social relationships?
- Beliefs about subject: how teachers view the subject.
- Beliefs about learning to teach: how teachers view their own professional development.
- Beliefs about self and the teaching role: teachers' beliefs about their role as a teacher and how these beliefs affect their behaviours in the classroom.

(Adapted from Calderhead, 1996)

In addition, Shulman (1987: 8) identifies seven categories of teacher knowledge, including content knowledge, general pedagogical knowledge, curriculum knowledge,

pedagogical content knowledge, knowledge of learners and their characteristics, knowledge of educational contexts, and knowledge of educational ends, purposes, and values, and their philosophical and historical grounds.

Furthermore, Woolfolk Hoy, Davis et al. (2006) put forth an ecological model of teachers' knowledge and beliefs. This model suggests that a teacher holds knowledge and beliefs about childhood, adolescence, and the meaning of diversity (influenced by the context of cultural norms and values), about standards and policy reform, accountability systems and high-stakes testing, and assessment practices (the educational policy context), about classrooms, students, and content (the immediate contexts), and about self: their identity as teachers and their sense of efficacy for teaching.

On the basis of the categorization of teachers' beliefs in existing literature, in the present study, I conceptualize that EFL teachers' beliefs regarding EFL teaching and learning consist of the following five main areas, including beliefs about EFL, about EFL learning, about EFL teaching, about EFL learners, and about EFL teachers.

2.4.1 Beliefs about subject matter: EFL

As far as teachers' beliefs about EFL are concerned, it is necessary to consider the theory of language. According to Richards and Rodgers (2001), there are three different

theoretical views of the nature of language, which serve as the basis for current approaches and methods in language teaching. The first and the most traditional of the three is the structural view which regards the language as a system of structurally related elements for the coding of meaning. These elements include the phonological units, grammatical units, grammatical operations, and lexical items. The goal of language acquisition is to master the elements of this system. The Audio lingual method draws on a structural view of language. The second view of language can be called the functional view which regards language as a vehicle for the expression of functional meaning. This functional view on language is embodied in the principles of the Communicative Language Teaching. The third view of language is the interactional view, conceiving language as a tool to create and maintain interpersonal social relations. Task-Based Language Teaching embodies this particular view of language.

2.4.2 Beliefs about learning and learners

With regard to language learning, BALLI has been widely adopted to measure both teachers' and students' perceptions and understandings about second or foreign language learning (Horwitz 1985, Peacock 2001, Mattheoudakis 2007, Busch 2010, Wong 2010). The BALLI assesses learners' and teachers' beliefs regarding five aspects of language learning: (1) difficulty of language learning, (2) foreign language aptitude, (3) the nature of language learning, (4) learning and communication strategies, and (5)

motivation and expectations. Participants were asked to complete 32 items on a 5-point rating scale. Nikitina and Furuoka (2006) indicate that “Horwitz’s instrument can be considered to be a suitable tool for conducting research on language learning beliefs in different socio-linguistic settings” (p. 217). Kuntz (1996) questions and criticizes the validity of BALLI. He concludes that:

> Three conditions limited the Horwitz studies. First, her analysis created themes from the opinions of teachers rather than from opinions of students. Moreover, she neglected to form themes based upon statistical analyses such as principal components, factor analysis, cluster analysis, communality estimates, or correlations. In addition, her measurements comprised only descriptive statistics. Consequently, she was not able to test hypotheses by inferential statistics concerning the significance of selected variables on the beliefs of students. Second, the BALLI did not provide data concerning all current issues of foreign language learning. Finally, Horwitz sampled only students affiliated with CTL programs at the University of Texas-Austin. These students probably included a large bilingual or "false beginner" population, especially for the Spanish sample. (Kuntz, 1996: 9-10)

On close examination, there appears to be a number of limitations in this instrument. First of all, BALLI is initially designed to measure learners’ beliefs concerning language learning and the themes present a belief structure that students may hold, which prompts me to question whether this instrument is suitable to assess teachers’ beliefs regarding language learning. Second, BALLI is designed from a psychological perspective, which emphasizes what people think in the head but does not attempt to take social circumstances into account. Third, BALLI provides no insights to the

reasons why these beliefs are held. Thus, unlike other researchers, in this study, I will not aim to utilize BALLI as a means to investigate teachers' beliefs about EFL learning. Instead, I will employ semi-structured interviews, conceptual maps and journal entries to get more in-depth insights in teachers' beliefs and possible changes in their beliefs over time, which will be discussed in detail in chapter three.

Some researchers related the learning theories to the exploration of teachers' beliefs concerning learning. The first example is Levin and Nevo's (2009) study of investigating teachers' views of learning and teaching, which was carried out in a single elementary school in a city in central Israel. Open questions were adopted to investigate teachers' conceptualization of "learning", "teachers", and "students", reflective questions were used to examine changes in teachers' beliefs under the influence of new curriculum and metaphors were employed to approach teachers' views on learning and teaching. At the beginning of the research, teachers' beliefs indicated a more behaviourist view on learning. They described that "learning is a formal process of knowledge accumulation"; or "a process in which teachers transmit concepts and values to their students"; or "a process in which the student receives information and internalizes it as is" (Levin and Nevo, 2009: 451). These beliefs regarded the learning process as a passive, formal and routine process. However, at the end of the study, teachers expressed a more constructivist perspective on learning. They viewed learning

as “opening your mind to see things in different ways”; “a thinking process”; “a personal meaning-making process that develops the intellect”; or “a process that starts with curiosity and motivation and end up with questioning a diversity of issues” (ibid). Another example is Zheng’s (2011) project of studying EFL teachers’ complex belief system. Zheng’s project involved case studies of six experienced Chinese secondary EFL teachers. As Zheng (2011) suggested, teachers’ beliefs about EFL learning represented a combination of impacts from the behaviourist, cognitive, and social-constructivist perspectives of learning. In terms of learning process, teachers mainly held six views as follows: “EFL learning is a process of habit formation, which requires repetition”; “a process of knowledge accumulation, which requires recitation”; “a process that proceeds from the simple to the difficult”; “a process in which listening and speaking skills form the bases of reading and writing”; “a process of skills development, which develops with language knowledge”; and “EFL learners can learn the language through communication” (Zheng, 2011: 142). She stated that the first two categories indicated an impact of the behaviourist-based view. The second two items showed an emphasis on the cognitive perspective. The last two items expressed a more socio-constructivist perspective of language learning.

According to Brown (2007), three dominant theories of language learning are behaviourist, cognitive and social constructivist approaches. Firstly, the behaviourist

approach has identified three important components in learning: a stimulus, which serves to elicit behaviour; a response, triggered by a stimulus; and reinforcement that serves to define response as appropriate/inappropriate and encourages the repetition/rejection (Brown, 2007). A behaviourist considers effective language behaviour to be the production of correct responses to stimuli. If a specific response is reinforced, then it will become a habit or not occur again. The behaviourist approach considers language learning as a process of mechanical habit formation. It is the psychological basis of the Auto lingual method. Secondly, cognitivists attach great importance to learners' construction of their own conceptualizations of the reality (Brown, 2007). For instance, "Learners must individually discover and transform complex information if they are to make it their own, a more active role for students in their own learning than is typical in many classrooms" (Slavin, 2003: 257-258). As Piaget claims, "Learning is a developmental process that involves change, self-generation, and construction, each building on prior learning experiences" (cited in Brown, 2007: 12). It puts more emphasis on the inner functions of human beings. Thirdly, social constructivists believe that learning is not a relatively solitary act and place great emphasis on the importance of social interaction and cooperative learning. Vygotsky (1978) holds a view that "children's thinking and meaning-making is socially constructed and emerges out of their social interactions with their environment" (cited

in Brown, 2007: 13). Vygotsky (1978) talks of a zone of proximal development (ZPD), which is the difference between what a child can learn individually and what a child can learn with the help of more capable peers or adults.

Referring to learners' role in learning, teachers who hold different perspectives on theories of learning may view learners accordingly. From a behavioural perspective, learners are often viewed as passive acceptors and play a reactive role by responding to stimuli, and have little control on learning. In a cognitive view, learners are regarded as active participants in an internal learning process and as different individuals whose different cognitive and affective traits may lead to different degrees of success in learning. The teacher who holds a cognitive view on learning is more likely to take the cognitive (including intelligence, language aptitude, language learning strategies and learning styles), affective (including motivation, willingness to communicate, anxiety and attitudes) features of different learners into account. From a socio-constructive perspective, learners are seen as social members of social networks. Social context is probably to affect their thinking. As Levin and Nevo (2009) claimed, teachers who held a behaviourist view on learning tended to regard students as passive recipients of information. Metaphorically, students were described as "a sponge soaking everything up and producing things that are relevant", "a head or an antenna receiving information from the environment from five senses", and "a plant that gets all the conditions it

requires for growth, but when it is neglected and does not receive the right appropriate treatments it dies" (Levin and Nevo, 2009: 14). Teachers who held a constructivist perspective on learning described a learner as "a research scientist whose mind is in turmoil, who reasons, hypothesizes, meet problems, or re-organizes his or her own knowledge" (ibid., p.15).

2.4.3 Beliefs about teaching

Teachers' beliefs about teaching include their beliefs about the teaching objectives, teaching process and teaching approaches. With regard to the goal of language teaching, as Brown (2007) argues, some teachers may teach a foreign language for communicative purposes. Some of them, on the other hand, would like to teach for the purpose of fulfilling a foreign language requirement or passing the exams.

Referring to the teaching process, the literature contains two broad orientations. Some teachers may hold a teacher-centred perspective, viewing teaching as a process of transmitting knowledge. The role of the teacher is to control students' learning and the students act as passive knowledge recipients. On the other hand, some teachers may possess a student-centred view on teaching, regarding teaching process as facilitating students' learning. The role of the teacher shifts towards helping students learn and the

students are active participants in learning (Kember 1997, Kember and Kwan 2000, Levin and Nevo 2009).

As far as teachers' beliefs about teaching approaches are concerned, it is important to consider the traditional Chinese language teaching approach and the communicative language teaching approach. According to Hu (2002b: 93), the traditional approach to ELT in China is "a combination of the grammar-translation method and audiolingualism, which is characterized by systematic and detailed study of grammar, extensive use of cross-linguistic comparison and translation, memorization of structural patterns and vocabulary, painstaking efforts to form good verbal habits, an emphasis on written language, and a preference for literary classics." Likewise, Rao (1996: 482-483) identifies some features of Chinese English teaching methods, which can be listed as the following: (1) intensive reading is emphasized and viewed as a basis for language learning; (2) memorization and rote learning is used as a basic learning strategy; (3) linguistic details are emphasized and little attention is paid to communicative skills; (4) translation is viewed as both a teaching and learning technique; and (5) the teacher is the authority of the subject and the students learn passively.

Traditional Chinese education is significantly influenced by Confucian thinking (Rao 1996, Hu 2002b). For example, Rao (1996) indicates that Confucian thinking addresses

the following questions: (1) the meaning of learning: Confucius view learning as the process of accumulation of knowledge and the reading of books; (2) the correct ways of learning: in the process of learning one has to use one's mind; (3) obligations of a good teacher: being the model for people to follow, transmitting knowledge, showing the students correct ways to investigate and study (Rao, 1996: 460-461).

The communicative language teaching approach is characterized by the following: (1) concentration on communicative proficiency rather than on mere mastery of structures; (2) an emphasis is placed on student initiative and interaction rather than simply on teacher-centred direction; (3) a variety of communicative activities (e.g. games, role plays, and problem-solving tasks) are used in order to provide students with opportunities to practice their communicative skills; (4) in the process of doing these activities, students' native language is avoided. Error correction is infrequent or absent (Richards and Rodgers 2001, Hu 2010, Ozsevik 2010). The literature has shown that there are many difficulties and challenges in implementing CLT in classrooms (Li 1998, Sato and Kleinsasser 1999, Wu and Fang 2002, Liu 2005, Hu 2010). For example, Li (1998: 687) investigated teachers' conceptions of the use of a communicative approach in Korea and indicated that the following four categories of difficulties were reported by Korean teachers: (1) difficulties resulted from teachers (related to poor spoken English, lack of proper training in a communicative language teaching approach,

misunderstandings of the principles of CLT, and little time for material development); (2) difficulties resulted from students (related to low levels of English proficiency, lack of motivation in enhancing communicative skills, resistance to participating in classroom activities); (3) difficulties resulted from the educational system (related to large class sizes, grammar-focused examinations, lack of funds, limited support); and (4) difficulties resulting from CLT itself (related to CLT's inadequate explanations of EFL teaching and lack of effective instruments for assessing learning outcomes).

To conclude, there are many obstacles for implementing the new principles in the curriculum reform in China. First, Chinese teachers feel that they are personally responsible for students' future and tend to focus on explaining language knowledge in order to help students achieve success in exams. Second, Chinese teachers are not properly trained and many teachers do not have abilities to teach English in a communicative way. Other obstacles may consist of the following: time constraints, an excessive workload, large class sizes, and traditional classroom layout, students' grade level, students' ability, and students' expectations students' expectations on how English should be taught in classrooms.

Former studies have identified that students and teachers often held mismatched beliefs regarding language learning (Peacock 1998, Brown 2009, Ganjabi 2011). For example,

Peacock (1998) conducted a study aiming to investigate the differences between the students' and teachers' conceptions of effective EFL activities, why the differences occurred, whether they affected learning, and how they can be eliminated. Data were collected through questionnaires and interviews from 158 EFL students and 30 EFL teachers in a Hong Kong University. A considerable discrepancy between the students' and teachers' beliefs regarding the useful activities for EFL was found. The learners ranked error correction and grammar exercises much higher, and group and pair work much lower. The researcher explained that "the Chinese learners in this study may have acquired the idea, in their secondary school EFL classrooms, that rote learning and an emphasis on grammar were good strategies for learning" (p. 243). He also argued that not only Chinese learners hold these beliefs. In addition, most teachers believed that the mismatched beliefs had negative influence on language learning. Peacock (1998: 245) suggested that "EFL teachers should make course objectives clear to learners, as well as - ideally - the objectives of (if not the rationale behind) any activity with which their learners may be unfamiliar. The aim of this would be to reduce learner misunderstanding, dissatisfaction, and opposition."

In addition, the study of Brown (2009) aimed to identify and compare the teachers' and students' conceptions of effective teaching behaviours. The participants in this study consisted of 49 teachers and 1600 of their students. The findings showed that teachers

"appeared to value communicative approaches to L2 pedagogy, where information exchange takes precedence over discrete-point grammar practice. The teachers also felt strongly that "grammar practice needed to be embedded in real-world contexts" (p. 53). In contrast, their students "prefer to have formal grammar instruction take precedence over communicative exchanges in the L2 classroom" (ibid). Brown (2009) suggested that "teachers might engage their students in brief discussions about L2 acquisition by first explaining the rationale behind certain activities. After informing students that group and pair work will be used frequently in the classroom, the teacher might help students understand the importance of input, output, and negotiation of meaning, being certain to do so by adapting the discussion and terminology to the students' level of understanding" (p. 55).

Moreover, the main objective of the study of Ganjabi (2011) was to provide a detailed and comprehensive comparison between teachers' and students' beliefs on the issues in L2 teaching. The participants consisted of 120 Iranian EFL students and 16 EFL teachers. Data were collected by a 24-item Likert scale questionnaire. The findings showed that Iranian teachers placed great value on the communicative activities whereas the students put strong emphasis on grammatical items. In addition, the teachers thought the errors should not be corrected immediately the students made

errors whereas the students held opposite beliefs and expect the teachers to correct the errors as soon as they emerge.

2.4.4 Beliefs about teachers

Teachers' conceptions of themselves include their beliefs about their roles as teachers and about effective teacher characteristics.

Teachers' roles

Researchers have emphasized different aspects of teaching roles: are expert in their subject, a facilitator of learning, a motivator and source of inspiration, upholder of moral standards, and deliverer of a prescribed curriculum (Calderhead and Shorrock, 1997: 1). Teachers' teaching roles often overlap and change during the lesson according to different tasks (Richards and Lockhart 1994). Richards and Lockhart (1994) state that teachers' beliefs about their roles in classroom teaching influence how they respond to: classroom management and organization; teacher control; curriculum, content and planning; instructional strategies; motivational techniques and assessment philosophy. How the teachers conceptualize their role inevitably affects how they behave in the classrooms. Many researchers have put efforts into exploring and investigating the teachers' conceptions of their roles (e.g., De Guerrero and Villamil 2000, Saban, Kocbeker et al. 2007, Seferoğlu, Korkmazgil et al. 2009). For example, Saban,

Kocbeker et al. (2007) examined the metaphors that prospective Turkish teachers used to describe the concept of "teacher." The student teachers were asked to produce a simile beginning "A teacher is like…because…" by focusing on only one metaphor to reveal their conceptualization of teaching and learning. The data were collected from 1142 teacher-education students registered in three different study programs of the Faculty of Education of the Selcuk University in Turkey. 10 conceptual categories were identified:

- Teacher as knowledge provider (student as passive recipients of knowledge): sun, candle, tree, light, flower, computer.
- Teacher as moulder/craftsperson (student as raw material): sculptor, painter, constructor, baker.
- Teacher as curer/repairer (student as defective individual): doctor, mechanic, medicine
- Teacher as superior authoritative figure (student as absolute compliant): shepherd, ship captain, locomotive, brain
- Teacher as change agent (student as object of change): fashion designer, scriptwriter
- Teacher as counselor (student as significant other): parent, friend, psychologist, companion

- Teacher as nurturer/cultivator (student as developing organism): gardener, farmer, soil, chameleon
- Teacher as facilitator/scaffolder (student as constructor of knowledge): compass, lighthouse, north star, flashlight, traffic signs, taxi driver, road map, torch, bridge, ladder
- Teacher as entertainer (student as conscious observant): actor/actress, stand-up comedian
- Teacher as cooperative/democratic leader (student as active participant in a community of practice): tour guide, coach, conductor

(Saban et al. 2007: 128-132)

Among the ten categories, four categories (including teacher as curer/repairer, as superior authoritative figure, as change agent, and as entertainer) were not very popular. The researchers explained the reason why the pre-service teachers favoured these images of teachers less:

> At present many teachers in the Turkish education system tend to spend quite an amount of time and effort to control, cure, or otherwise change their students' minds and behaviours. It could equally imply that most prospective teachers in this study tended to detach themselves from the controlling, repairing, and/or transforming aspects of teaching. Also, most participants' rejection of the notion of teaching as entertaining suggests that having fun and joy while learning does not fit at all with these prospective teachers' professional thinking. (p. 134)

In addition, Seferoğlu, Korkmazgil et al. (2009) aimed to investigate the beliefs of pre-service and in-service teachers about 'teachers.' Data were collected from three groups: 58 junior year students studying in the pre-service English teacher education programme at the Middle East Technical University in Ankara, Turkey, 92 senior year students studying in the same pre-service programme, and 70 in-service teachers working in different situations throughout Turkey. A metaphor elicitation method was adopted in this study. Participants were required to complete the prompt "A teacher is…" using a metaphor or simile. The researchers concluded that:

> The in-service teachers who participated in this showed-as the pre-service teachers did-a general tendency towards democratic/participatory teacher (68.56%) in their metaphors for teachers. The first three sub-categories with the highest percentages belong to this category: teacher as guide, teacher as facilitator, and teacher as resource person, respectively. Compared to the results supplied by the pre-service teachers, the percentage of the metaphors used for teacher as facilitator is remarkably higher (20%) in this group. (p. 331)

The percentage of the metaphors used for teacher as facilitators was much higher within in-service teachers than prospective teachers, which may be due to the fact that the in-service teachers became more learner-centred as they accumulated more experiences and tested their theoretical knowledge in practice.

In the domain of language teaching, De Guerrero and Villamil (2000) explored teachers' beliefs about their roles as ESL teachers through analysing the metaphors they produced.

The data were obtained at a workshop named “Teachers’ beliefs about the Teaching of ESL: What their Metaphors Say.” Participating teachers were required to complete in writing the stem “An ESL teacher is like…” Twenty-two teachers (six males, sixteen females), all with some experience as ESL teachers in Puerto Rico, handed in their worksheets. Nine dominant categories emerged from the data:

- Cooperative leader: coach, little leagues coach, trail guide, movie/theatre director, instrument of God, symphony director
- Provider of knowledge: moon, wire in a thick wall, television set, sun, missile, tree full of apples
- Challenger/agent of change: snag in the river, window to the world, bullfighter, lion tamer, gateway to the future, shooting star
- Nurturer: bee, busy bee, Mother Nature, gardener
- Innovator: explorer, convertible car
- Provider of tools: tool carrier
- Artist: potter
- Repairer: mechanic of the mind
- Gym instructor: person starting an aerobics class

(De Guerrero and Villamil, 2000: 344)

The researchers highlighted three important findings based on their analysis of the metaphors the teachers used to describe themselves. First, despite their novel appearance, the teachers still held a series of traditional teaching roles, such as leader, provider of knowledge, agent of change, and nurturer. Second, some metaphors (e.g. movie/theatre director, snag in the river, and lion tamer) suggested that teachers' personal experiences exerted a profound effect upon their conceptions of the ESL teacher. Third, the findings of this study confirmed the notion that ESL teaching was a complex profession evidenced by the teachers' multiple metaphorical conceptions. The researchers indicated that "whereas most participants identified themselves primarily with one role, possibly the one they felt most comfortable with, in actual practice most ESL teachers may display multiple roles on a contingent basis; that is, teachers may vary in their roles depending on the specific circumstances that arise in the instructional setting" (p. 348).

Characteristics of effective teachers

A number of studies have explored the nature of teacher effectiveness (e.g., Miron 1983, Brown and Atkins 1993, Brosh 1996, Patrick and Smart 1998, Pozo-Muñoz, Rebolloso-Pacheco et al. 2000, Minor, Onwuegbuzie et al. 2002, Walls, Nardi et al. 2002, Koutsoulis 2003, Murphy, Delli et al. 2004, Park and Lee 2006, Arnon and Reichel

2007, Walker 2008, Stronge, Ward et al. 2011). For example, Patrick and Smart (1998) revealed that teacher effectiveness was multi-dimensional in nature, comprising three critical factors: respect for students, ability to challenge students (setting high but realistic goals for students), organization and presentation skills, whereas Brown and Atkins (1993) identified the three factors of teacher effectiveness as (1) caring, (2) systematic and (3) stimulating. In addition, Minor, Onwuegbuzie et al. (2002) investigated the pre-service teachers' conceptions of the characteristics of the effective teachers and suggested seven themes (in order of endorsement level): (1) student-centred (55.2%), (2) effective classroom and behaviour management (33.6%), (3) competent instructor (33.6%), (4) ethical (29.9%), (5) enthusiastic about teaching (23.9%), (6) knowledgeable about subject (19.4%), and (7) professional (15.7%). Moreover, Brosh (1996) aimed to identify both language teachers' and students' beliefs in relation to the characteristics of effective teachers. Participants consisted of 200 foreign language teachers and 406 ninth grade high school students. The data were collected through a questionnaire and interviews. The desirable characteristics of the effective language teacher emerged from this study included: (1) having sound knowledge of the target language; (2) having an ability to organize, explain, and clarify, as well as to arouse and sustain interest and motivation among students; (3) be fair to students by showing neither favoritism nor prejudice; and (4) being available to students.

Furthermore, Park and Lee (2006) explored the perceptions of169 teachers and 339 students in relation to the characteristics of the effective teachers in high school in Korea. A self-report questionnaire comprising three categories, including English proficiency, pedagogical knowledge, and socio-affective skills, was used. The findings showed that teachers ranked English proficiency the highest whereas the students attached great importance to pedagogical knowledge. The researcher explained that "teachers' higher endorsement of English proficiency over pedagogical knowledge might be due to their beliefs that good English proficiency made it possible to conduct their lessons confidently without inhibitions and insecurity" and "the students attached more importance to pedagogical knowledge than English proficiency. The students' high attachment to pedagogical knowledge might be because they wanted their teachers to transmit their subject matter knowledge effectively" (p. 241). Koutsoulis (2003) examined the teacher characteristics which the students identified as central for effective teachers. 25 classrooms of 608 students within five high schools in Cyprus participated in this research. Teacher characteristics comprised the following three main categories: (1) human characteristics (such as understanding, love, friendliness, fairness, humanism, and interest for the students); (2) communication skills characteristics (such as effective communication and handling of the relations between the teacher and the students, effective classroom management, and to be in a good mood and behave to the

students in a good way, do not discriminate against students, do not use irony against the students, appreciate students' abilities); and (3) teaching and production characteristics (such as making lessons interesting and enjoyable, being helpful, organized, work-oriented, goal-oriented, and caring for students' learning). Koutsoulis (2003) concluded that it seemed that the students were looking for the superman-teacher:

> It appears that students need love along with work, they need understanding, they need effective communication. Also students want the teachers that are able to control the classroom, while grading for them is a secondary matter. We must admit that students as a group are able to give educators constructive suggestions for the effective teacher. (p. 8-9)

The above studies present a picture of what constitutes an effective teacher, which provides a theoretical base for this research. In general, teacher effectiveness consists of the following three main categories: personal characteristics (e.g., caring, respecting students understanding, love, friendliness, fairness, and humanism), subject matter knowledge (e.g., having sound knowledge of the target language, English proficiency), and instructional skills (e.g., having an ability to organize, explain, and clarify the contents, making lessons interesting and enjoyable) (e.g., Miron 1983, Brown and Atkins 1993, Brosh 1996, Patrick and Smart 1998, Minor, Onwuegbuzie et al. 2002, Walls, Nardi et al. 2002, Murphy, Delli et al. 2004, Arnon and Reichel 2007, Stronge, Ward et al. 2011).

To sum up, I discuss the different areas within teachers' belief systems in this section and will look at changes in teachers' beliefs next section.

2.5 Changes in teachers' beliefs

Existing research on belief change can be categorised into three themes: (1) the effects of pre-service and in-service teacher education programmes upon teachers' beliefs (e.g., Tillema and Knol 1997, Joram and Gabriele 1998, Tillema 1998, Cabaroğlu and Roberts 2000, Tillema 2000, Peacock 2001, Clarke and Hollingsworth 2002, Guskey 2002, Mattheoudakis 2007, Farrell 2009, Busch 2010, Yaman 2010); (2) the association between teachers' workplace learning activities and changes in their beliefs (e.g., Hoekstra, Brekelmans et al. 2009, Meirink, Meijer et al. 2009, Bakkenes, Vermunt et al. 2010, de Vries, Jansen et al. 2013); and (3) the models of conceptual change (e.g., Chaiken 1980, Posner, Strike et al. 1982, Petty and Cacioppo 1986, Chaiken and Maheswaran 1994, Dole and Sinatra 1998, Patrick and Pintrich 2001, Gregoire 2003, Woolfolk Hoy, Davis et al. 2006).

Pre-service and in-service teacher education programmes and teachers' beliefs

The effectiveness of the teacher education programmes is still an inclusive issue in existing literature. Some studies report that teacher education programmes are not very powerful interventions (e.g., Kagan 1992a, Almarza 1996, Tillema and Knol 1997,

Peacock 1998). For example, after conducting a relatively comprehensive review on pre-service teachers' beliefs, Kagan (1992a) concludes that student teachers' beliefs are inflexible and they like to utilize the new information provided in teacher education programmes to consolidate rather than challenge their prior experiences and ideas. As Kagan (1992a) states:

> …personal beliefs and images that pre-service candidates bring to programs of teacher education usually remain inflexible. Candidates tend to use the information provided in coursework to confirm rather than to confront and correct their pre-existing beliefs. Thus, a candidate's personal beliefs and images determine how much knowledge the candidate acquires from a pre-service program and how it is interpreted. (p.154)

Peacock (2001) conducted a longitudinal project to track the changes in trainee teachers' perceptions concerning language learning of 146 trainee ESL teachers over their 3 – year BA TESL programme. The Horwitz's BALLI was used to compare pre-service teachers' to experienced teachers' beliefs about language learning. Three key differences between student teachers' and experienced teachers' beliefs were: (1) studying a foreign language was simply a process of studying vocabulary; (2) studying a foreign language was simply a process of studying grammar; and (3) students who were capable of speaking more than one language were intelligent. Compared with experienced teachers, more first year student teachers agreed with these statements. The beliefs student teachers held were found to be mostly derived from their past language

learning experiences in schools, in particular secondary schools. The author conducted this project based on the assumption that although trainee teachers' beliefs about language learning may be different from experienced teachers' beliefs at the beginning of the teacher education course, they would change their beliefs at the end of the training course. However, Peacock concluded that three central beliefs regarding language learning the student teachers had changed very little over their 3 years study of TESL methodology. The author claimed that "some detrimental beliefs were very slow to change despite instruction over 3 years on the nature of language learning" (p.187).

Another example is Almarza's (1996) ten-month longitudinal study of 4 trainee teachers on a PGCE programme in the UK. The results indicated that although there were some changes in these student teachers' behaviours, changes in their beliefs were limited. Behaviourally, student teachers presented the subject matter in the same way as they had been taught in the education programme. Cognitively, student teachers' acceptance of the promoted approach varied. By the time they had completed the teaching practice, one of the prospective teachers viewed "herself free from the constraints imposed by the context of the classroom and she was back in a position in which she could continue to explore the ideas she had about language prior to the beginning of the course" (p.69). Such a statement implied that despite changes in their classroom practices, changes which had occurred in their beliefs were very limited.

When examining the effectiveness of teacher education programmes, there were a range of factors needed to be taken into account. These factors include: the content of the programme, the length of the programme, the way in which the trainee teachers' beliefs were challenged in the programme, the location of the programme, and the length of student teachers' engagement with practice teaching. For example, as Tillema (2000) claimed, there were two ways to challenge student teachers' beliefs, namely an incremental approach and confrontational approach. An incremental approach "in which the practical experience is used to open up existing beliefs – i.e., through supervision and guidance with facilitators who address the student teachers' own beliefs – may have ultimately a knowledge-generating effect" (p. 578), whereas a confrontation approach "in which the student teacher is confronted with new and different insights or practical restrictions, may either lead to quick adaptation or to a protective shield being drawn around the existing beliefs" (ibid). The incremental approach appeared to exert a more powerful effect upon student teachers' belief change (Tillema, 2000).

The results of the following studies claim that changes in prospective teachers' beliefs do occur during the teacher education programme(e.g., Tillema 1998, Cabaroğlu and Roberts 2000, Mattheoudakis 2007, Farrell 2009, Busch 2010, Wong 2010, Yaman 2010). For example, Tillema (1998) found that changes in student teachers' beliefs did occur as a result of an intervention programme, although not in unidirectional or

intended way and not in the same manner for each student teacher. A model of belief change process was proposed, which contained the following four successive stages: (1) a coherence Check; (2) discrepancy recognition; (3) the need for reconstruction; and (4) searching for solution paths. Busch (2010) examined the impacts of the introductory second language acquisition (SLA) course on the conceptions of 381 prospective teachers enrolled over a three-year period at a state university in California. Significant changes were found in several aspects, comprising the length of acquisition time, difficulty of language acquisition, the role of culture, the role of error correction, the importance of grammar, and the efficacy of audio-lingual learning strategies. The beliefs about language learning inventory [TBALLI] for teachers (from Horwitz 1988) was used in this study. Student teachers attributed their initial beliefs to their language learning experiences in high schools and the changes in their beliefs to the content of the course and experiential activities. Another example is Wong's (2010) study examining prospective teachers' beliefs regarding English learning and the stability of these beliefs across time. Participants consisted of 25 pre-service teachers (11 males, 14 females) enrolled in a Bachelor of Education (TESL) programme. The Horwitz's Beliefs about Language Learning Inventory (BALLI) was used to collect data. The results of BALLI showed that eight of the items slightly altered after 14 months, which lend some support to the view that learner beliefs are situational and dynamic in nature.

Yaman (2010) conducted a longitudinal research aiming to investigate the conceptual change of pre-service teachers during two years. 80 pre-service teachers who were registered in 2007-2008 as 2nd graders participated in this study. Findings showed that changes did occur in student teachers' perceptions of effective language teachers and instructional practices. In addition, Yaman emphasized the value of longitudinal research by claiming that "by conducting a longitudinal study, the longer time frame offered more opportunities for students to re/construct their own beliefs as well to check try-and-see process consistent with the view of constructivist learning principles. Besides, it offered more opportunities for the researcher in terms of observing, registering, and reflecting on the findings as a result of the confrontation with theory-practice-reflection process pre-service teachers have been actively involved in" (p. 232). Mattheoudakis (2007) also conducted a longitudinal study in an attempt to investigate sixty-six student EFL teachers' beliefs concerning language learning and teaching at the Aristotle University of Thessaloniki in Greece. BALLI was used in this research to approach pre-service teachers' beliefs. The author aimed to identify possible changes in their beliefs during a 3-year teacher education course. The results of this research were not congruent with the widespread view that student teachers' beliefs remained stable during the teacher education programme. On the contrary, the vast majority of the student teachers changed their beliefs gradually from year to the next and trainee

teachers altered their beliefs significantly from the first year to the end of the programme in some cases. Such changes may due to the fact that the courses provide the students with recent theories regarding teaching and learning and put strong emphasis on the student teachers' pre-existing beliefs. The above studies have shown that whether student teachers change their beliefs during the teacher education programme heavily relies on the characteristics of the programme, for example, whether the programme acknowledges the significance of teachers' pre-existing beliefs and provides appropriate assistance and support to help teachers elicit their pre-existing beliefs, whether the programme offers opportunities for the teachers to observe, experience, and reflect on the new knowledge, and the length of the course as the teachers have more time to compare their existing beliefs and new information and re/construct their beliefs in a long-term course.

Rather than focus on the changes occurred in the content of teachers' beliefs, the study of Cabaroğlu and Roberts (2000) shed some light on the belief change processes of the student teachers. Twenty-five student teachers attending the 36-week PGCE Secondary course in Modern Foreign Language teaching at the University of Reading participated in this study. The authors concluded that all but one had shown some developments in their beliefs. They identified that the student teachers experienced a range of belief change processes:

- Awareness/realization: realization of a conflict, discrepancy.
- Consolidation/confirmation: feeling more strongly about existing beliefs.
- Re-labelling: re-naming a belief or construct after having learnt, heard or read about the technical term.
- Addition: addition of new beliefs or constructs. This process usually occurs after the teacher accepts that new information is useful in understanding a learning/teaching issue.
- Elaboration/polishing: existing beliefs are reconstructed and related to new information by making minor adjustments.
- Re-ordering: re-arranging the beliefs according to their importance.
- Linking up: making a new connection between two constructs.
- Disagreement: rejecting an existing belief and replacing it with a new one.
- Reversal: denying the existing belief and adopting a new belief that is opposite to the previously held belief.
- Pseudo change: the belief is still important to the teacher, but not applicable in the current context.
- No change: no change occurs in beliefs.

(Adapted from Cabaroğlu and Roberts, 2000)

In their study, two features of the course were found to significantly contribute to the belief developments observed: the early confrontation of pre-existing beliefs and self-regulated learning opportunities.

A number of studies focused on exploring the impacts of professional development programmes on in-service teachers' beliefs (e.g., Luft 2001, Richards, Gallo et al. 2001, Clarke and Hollingsworth 2002, Guskey 2002, Lavonen, Jauhiainen et al. 2004, Ozer 2004, Mohamed 2006, Cimer, Çakır et al. 2010, Borg 2011). For example, Cimer et al. (2010) conducted a study aiming to evaluate the effectiveness of in-service courses delivered by the Ministry of National Education in Turkey in order to inform teachers about the changes in the new curricula of primary and secondary schools. Participants consisted of 20 primary and 18 secondary school teachers with different experiences. Semi-structured interviews were used to capture teachers' views on the INSET courses they attended. The findings showed that the INSET courses were not very effective, mainly in terms of the quality of the instructors, teaching methods employed, time of the courses and support after training. The authors presented several suggestions for effective in-service courses: (1) conducting needs assessments; (2) the course should be delivered through demonstrating how to implement the content in practice and offering participants opportunities to learning by doing; (3) collaboration with universities was important for effective training; and (4) follow-up support after courses was necessary.

In addition, Luft (2001) examined the impact of an 18-month IBDC in-service programme in a south western US city on fourteen secondary science teachers' conceptions and practices in a south western US city. Both structured and semi-structured interviews were used to reveal in-service programme participants' beliefs. In-class observations were used to document participating teachers' instructional practices. The findings showed that the in-service course did have an impact on the participants. However, the effect varied among the six induction and eight experienced teachers. The eight experienced teachers changed more in their practices than their beliefs whereas the six induction teachers demonstrated more changes in their beliefs than their practices. Ultimately, "induction teachers received the support they needed to challenge their beliefs pertaining to reform-based instruction while experienced teachers received instruction that facilitated changes in their use of extended inquiry cycles" (p. 532). Luft (2001) presented three suggestions for in-service programmes. Firstly, the programme should provide the teachers with opportunities to explore their own beliefs and behaviours. Secondly, the programme should contain follow-up opportunities for the participants and programme staff to interact and communicate. Thirdly, programme staff and experienced teachers provided an external stimulus that affected induction teachers' beliefs.

Moreover, Borg (2011) investigated the effect of an intensive eight-week in-service teacher education programme in the UK on the beliefs of six English teachers and concluded that "if impact implies a deep and radical reversal in beliefs, then we would conclude that the Delta did not have a significant impact on the beliefs of the six teachers. However, if we interpret impact more broadly to encompass a range of developmental processes then the impact of the Delta on the teachers' beliefs, though variable, was considerable" (p. 378). Borg (2011: 379) suggests that greater attention should be paid to the following issues in order to enhance the impact of the in-service courses on language teachers' beliefs: the programme should (1) help and assist teachers to examine their beliefs as they may be inexperienced in doing this; (2) help teachers elicit their understandings about the nature of beliefs, such as the distinction between beliefs and instructional practices and distinction between beliefs and theoretical knowledge; (3) ensure that teachers understand the significance of re-examining their beliefs; (4) encourage teachers to view reflection on beliefs as a social learning process and provide teachers with more opportunities to talk about and discuss their beliefs in class; (5) encourage teachers to examine their beliefs on a deeper level and give some examples to demonstrate how this can be achieved; (6) advise teachers to think about how their existing beliefs are affected by their previous educational and professional experiences; (7) investigate teachers' views on reflective writing and think

about whether any other instruments can be used to help teachers articulate their reflections; and (8) provide teachers with not only opportunities to elicit their existing conceptions but also with opportunities to question or challenge those conceptions and think about alternative conceptions.

Guskey (2002) sheds some light on the process of teacher professional development. Guskey indicates that the traditional professional development programmes is often designed to change teachers' understandings, perceptions and beliefs on the basis of the assumption that changes in teachers' beliefs may result in changes in their classroom practices, which may lead to changes in students' learning performance ultimately. By contrast, he believes practice change precedes belief change and suggests a model of teacher change:

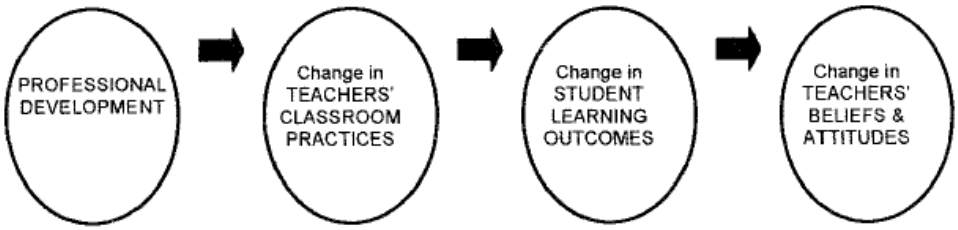


Figure 2-1 Guskey's (2002) model of teacher change

This model suggested that changes in teachers' understandings and beliefs took place after they obtained evidence of positive outcomes in student learning. These positive outcomes came from changes in classroom practices – "a new instructional approach,

the use of new materials or curricula, or simply a modification in teaching procedures or classroom format" (Guskey, 2002: 383). Practices that teachers found useful in improving students' performance were repeated and reinforced, while those that did not work well were given up. Guskey also indicated two reasons why some teachers chose to avoid behaviour changes. Firstly, trying something new required both time and efforts, which may add to teachers' workload. Secondly, change can bring negative feelings, such as anxiety and risk. Teachers may be unwilling to change their behaviours as trying something new meant to risk failure, which may result in teachers' sense of embarrassment and students' dissatisfaction. However, Guskey's model of the teacher change process overly simplified the complexity of teacher change process as they viewed teacher change as "linear" rather than "cyclic" process.

Based on the data from three Australian studies, namely the ARTISM study, the EMIC study, and the negotiation of meaning project, Clarke and Hollingsworth (2002) proposed an interconnected model of teacher professional growth, which contained four change domains including change in external stimuli, change in practice, change in salient outcomes, and change in knowledge, beliefs and attitudes. They also identified enaction and reflection as two important mediating processes which triggered change in another domain when change occurred in one domain. The researchers used the case of Robert, a single high school mathematics teacher participating in the ARTISM

professional development program, to explain the mechanism of their model. Robert was an experienced and successful mathematics teacher and was not willing to modify his teaching practices. Robert persisted in his conventional teaching approach (e.g., chalkboard introduction and explanation to the whole class) even after a second in-service session. About 1 month later, he introduced investigative group work for the first time and witnessed the value of the new approach. From that point onwards, Robert constantly experimented with group work, and investigative projects in the classroom. At the conclusion of the study, Robert felt regret that he had not encountered these new approaches earlier.

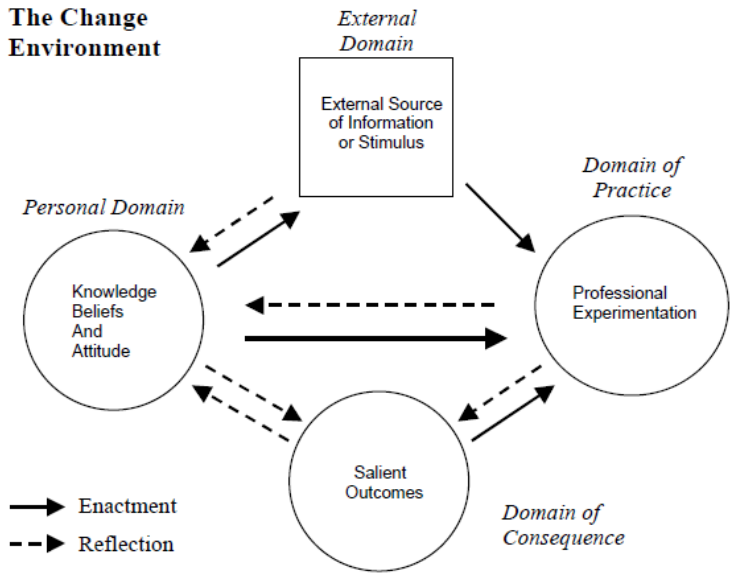


Figure 2-2 Clarke and Hollingsworth's (2002) interconnected model of teacher professional growth

Learning activities at the workplace and teachers' beliefs

Many researchers put efforts into examining the associations between teachers' learning activities in the workplace and changes in their beliefs (e.g., Hoekstra, Brekelmans et al. 2009, Meirink, Meijer et al. 2009, Bakkenes, Vermunt et al. 2010, de Vries, Jansen et al. 2013). For example, Bakkenes and his colleagues explored how teachers learned in the context of a national innovation programme in Dutch secondary education, aiming at encouraging teachers to promote students' active self-regulated learning. A total of ninety six teachers who taught in the upper level of secondary education and had from 3 to 40 years of teaching experiences participated in this study. The researchers defined teacher learning as "an active process in which teachers engage in activities that lead to a change in knowledge and beliefs (cognition) and/or teaching practices (behaviours)" (Bakkenes et al., 2010: 536). They used the word change "in a neutral way. Learning is not necessarily an improvement in terms of educational norms or policy goals" (ibid). Every activity that can result in a change in knowledge, beliefs or practices was viewed as a learning activity. Six categories of learning activities were found, including experimenting, considering one's own practice, getting ideas from others, struggling not to revert to old ways, and avoiding learning (the first two types were mentioned most frequently). Reported learning outcomes contained changes in knowledge and beliefs, emotions, practices and intentions for practice, with changes in beliefs being mentioned

most frequently and changes in practice most rarely. Learning activities were found to be strongly associated with all measures of learning outcomes. In addition, Meirink et al (2009) conducted a study aiming to investigate how participation in particular activities promoted belief change. Participants consisted of thirty-four experienced secondary teachers from five different schools. The finding showed that changes in teachers' student- and subject-oriented beliefs can be divided into two groups: (1) changes that were incongruent with the aims of the educational reform and (2) changes that were congruent with the aims of the educational reform. The teachers who changed their beliefs that congruent with the aims of the educational reforms often reported experimentation with a colleague's teaching methods while the teachers who changed their beliefs in a direction that inconsistent with the goals of recent educational reform reported experimentation with alternative methods because of dissatisfaction with existing methods. Moreover Hoekstra et al (2009) examined the changes in teachers' conceptions and behaviours in relation to students' active and self-regulated learning (ASL) and relationships with learning activities. 32 experienced teachers from 21 different schools in larger and medium sized cities in the Netherlands participated in this study. When teachers' work activities led to a change in behaviour and/or cognition they called these activities learning activities. The researchers concluded that "getting ideas from others involving an action-oriented mental level of activities, and

experimenting involving a meaning-oriented mental level of activities can be related to a change in conceptions congruent with the reform. A combination of relatively much struggling with behaviour and experiences of discrepancies, without much experimenting or interaction with peers, seems to contribute to a change incongruent with the reform" (p. 671). The study of de Vries, Jansen et al. (2013) claimed that the greater teachers' participation in continuing professional development activities, namely updating, reflection and collaboration, the more student-oriented the teachers were.

A number of studies looked at the factors that influence teachers' engagement in learning activities (e.g., Lohman 2000, Kwakman 2003, Ellinger 2005, Lohman 2006, Geijsel, Sleegers et al. 2009, Marsick and Jurasaite‐Harbison 2009, Jurasaite-Harbison and Rex 2010, Thoonen, Sleegers et al. 2011). For example, Lohman (2006) examined the factors that affect teachers' engagement in informal learning activities. She identified three contextual factors that inhibit teachers from participating in informal learning activities, namely lack of time, lack of proximity to colleagues' work areas, and insufficient funds. Seven personal characteristics that enhanced teachers' motivation to engage in informal learning were also found, including initiative, self-efficacy, love of learning, interest in the profession, commitment to professional development, a nurturing personality, and an outgoing personality. Geijsel, Sleegers et al. (2009) claimed that teacher psychological factors (such as self-efficacy and

internalization of school goals into personal goals) significantly affected teachers' engagement in the professional learning activities. Different impacts of leadership and organizational conditions on teachers' psychological factors and the professional learning activities were also found. Jurasaite-Harbison and Rex (2010) found that teachers engaged more productively in informal learning in schools where physical and social environments facilitated professional interaction, administrators put great emphasis on teacher collaboration, teachers viewed informal learning as an important part of their professional development, and institutional history and national policies created a stable and positive environment. In their study examining challenges and supports of novice teachers, Fantilli and McDougall (2009: 823) found collaborative professional relationships and supportive leadership were important in assisting new teachers:

1. Interview data showed that collaborating with more experienced teachers through grade and divisional teams, team teaching and mentor-trainee relationships played a significant role in assisting and supporting new teachers.
2. Participants reported that they benefited greatly by having a school principal who was committed to building a culture of collaboration in the school, was open to challenges and questions, and was at the disposal of beginning teachers during their first years of teaching.

In addition, Hodkinson and Hodkinson (2005) suggested three dimensions that exerted significant influence upon teachers' workplace learning. They comprised: "the dispositions and past experiences of individual teachers; the nature of school and more

particularly, departmental working cultures; and the impact of national and school policy and regulation frameworks and interventions" (p. 117).

Models of conceptual change

A number of researchers have focused on explaining the cognitive mechanism behind conceptual change and suggested a variety of conceptual change models. I mainly reviewed the 'conceptual change model' (Posner, Strike et al. 1982) from science education research, the dual-process models from social psychology research such as 'heuristic-systematic model' (Chaiken 1980, Chaiken, Liberman et al. 1989, Chaiken and Maheswaran 1994) and 'elaboration likelihood model' (Petty and Cacioppo 1986), and the other two alternative models including the 'cognitive reconstruction of knowledge model' (Dole and Sinatra 1998) and the 'cognitive-affective model of conceptual change' (Gregoire 2003).

The Conceptual Change Model (CCM) developed by Posner et al. (1982) is probably the most influential model of conceptual change in the science domain. In CCM, learning was conceived as an outcome of the interaction between existing and new conceptions and the role played by existing conceptions in affecting learners' learning was emphasized. Posner et al. (1982) suggested two processes of belief change: assimilation and accommodation. Learners sometimes may use their existing

conceptions to deal with new experiences and the new message may be assimilated with prior knowledge. This process was called assimilation. Assimilation was not a true form of belief change but a superficial change because previous conceptions may prevent new knowledge from being deeply examined and bias one's understandings. For instance, learners may assimilate the more sophisticated theories (e.g., that an object in motion stays in motion unless another force acts on it) into their existing naive ideas (e.g., that a moving object loses its force over time). They may believe that Newton's theories about motion were just a special case of their existing understandings. Nevertheless, the learners' existing conceptions were often incapable to help them successfully manage new experiences. Therefore, the students needed to change and reconstruct their current beliefs and understandings. This conceptual change process was called accommodation. Accommodation was viewed as a true or more radical belief change. For example, some young children may initially think that earth was flat. Someday, they came across a new idea claiming that the earth was a sphere. Then, children rejected their initial flat earth ideas and began to conceptualize the earth as a sphere. In addition, the researchers put forth four important conditions which facilitated accommodation: initial dissatisfaction with current beliefs, and intelligible, plausible and fruitful new conceptions. The CCM provides a theoretical framework for understanding conceptual change in learners as well as in teachers. However, the CCM

was overly rational and cognitive and failed to consider the impact of the motivational and affective factors on belief change.

Dual process models from social psychology research indicated two routes to attitude change: a central route and a peripheral route. When processing new information through a central route, the individuals tended to deeply and systematically process the message and devote considerable cognitive effort in comprehending and evaluating the message (Chaiken, 1980) whereas if the information was processed through a peripheral route, the individuals tended to exert little effort in judging the validity of the message and relied on heuristics developed based on their previous observations and experiences. The elaboration likelihood model (ELM) (Petty and Cacioppo, 1986), and the heuristic-systematic model (HSM) (Chaiken, 1980, Chaiken and Maheswaran, 1994) were such models. The key construct of the ELM was the concept of elaboration. According to Petty and Cacioppo (1986: 128), elaboration was "the extent to which a person thinks about the issue-relevant arguments contained in a message." The elaboration continuum extends from high to low. Motivation and ability were viewed as two determinants of high elaboration. Petty and Cacioppo identified three main motivational constructs affecting the likelihood of message elaboration: personal relevance, personal responsibility, and need for cognition. Ability is the other key factor contributing to high elaboration. For a message to be processed, the message should be comprehensible

or not difficult to understand. An individual should have sufficient prior knowledge to process the new information. In the ELM, there were two routes: a central route and a peripheral route. Under conditions of high elaboration, people engaged in more thoughtful and effortful processing, which may result in relatively radical change in beliefs. This route was regarded as the central route to persuasion. By contrast, under conditions of low elaboration, people engaged in superficial and quick evaluations and analysis of the message, which may lead to a temporary change in beliefs. This route was called the peripheral route to persuasion. A foundational assumption of the HSM was that both heuristic processing and systematic processing served a truth-seeking end. Second, the HSM assumed that systematic processing demanded greater effort and greater cognitive capacity than did heuristic processing. The final main assumption was the sufficiency principle: “people are economy-minded souls who wish to satisfy their goal-related needs in the most efficient way possible” (Chaiken et al., 1989: 220); therefore, “efficient information processors must strike a balance between minimizing their processing efforts and maximizing their judgmental confidence” (p.221).

Two alternative models were the ‘cognitive reconstruction of knowledge model’ (Dole and Sinatra, 1998) and ‘cognitive-affective model of conceptual change’ (Gregoire, 2003). Dole and Sinatra (1998) proposed an integrated conceptual change model which developed based on the perspectives from cognitive psychology, science education

research, and social psychology. The change process in the CRKM began with the interaction of learner and message characteristics. The quality of existing conceptions and motivation were two key constructs of the characteristics of the learner. In terms of existing conceptions, there were three relevant qualities of a learner's existing conceptions: strength, coherence, and commitment. According to Dole and Sinatra (1998: 118), strength meant "the richness of a learner's existing idea; that is, is it well formed and detailed or sparse and fragmented?" Coherence referred to "conceptual coherence of the individual's existing knowledge. That is, does the existing conception provide an explanation of the phenomenon, idea, or event that fits together all the evidence, leaving no loose ends?" (Dole and Sinatra, 1998: 118) and "individuals' commitment to their ideas can come from a variety of sources, such as sensory experience, social group, membership, or cultural background" (ibid). As far as learners' motivation to change beliefs, Dole and Sinatra viewed dissatisfaction with one's existing conceptions as one of the factors that stimulated a change in beliefs. Other motivators included personal relevance, social context, and the learner's need for cognition. The characteristics of the message comprised the intelligibility and plausibility and added comprehensibility of the message and whether the message was rhetorically compelling. The CRKM emphasized the interaction between the characteristics of learners and message. If they interacted in a positive manner, the

individual was likely to process the information. The information processing existed on a continuum from low cognitive engagement to high cognitive engagement, which was similar to ELM's continuum of elaboration. The term engagement was used to reflect "a cognitive-constructivist view of information processing, strategy use and reflectivity" (ibid. p. 121). Low cognitive engagement may result in assimilation of the new message without enduring or radical change in beliefs or no conceptual change because individuals may process the new message through relatively simple and superficial strategies. Strong conceptual change may be an outcome of high levels of engagement which involved greater depth of processing, more elaborate strategy use, and significant meta-cognitive reflection. In addition, Gregoire's (2003) CAMCC has been regarded as "truly a hot model of conceptual change" (Murphy and Mason, 2006). This model combined the role of automatic evaluations on attitude change with the central insights of dual –process models that 1) cognitive processing mediated attitude change and 2) motivation and ability affected cognitive processing. The main strengths of the CAMCC were that 1) it shed some light the relationship between affect (such as, positive moods, fear) and the process of belief change; 2) it provided useful insights into the mechanisms for assimilation, no conceptual change and accommodation; 3) it takes into account the contextual factors that affect belief change, such as time and knowledge.

To conclude, in this section, I have reviewed existing literature on teacher belief change (i.e. teacher education and beliefs, informal learning activities and teacher beliefs, and models of conceptual change). In the next section I will discuss the associations between teachers' beliefs and instructional practices.

2.6 The relationships between teachers' beliefs and practices

The relationship between teachers' beliefs and classroom practices was an inclusive issue (Zheng 2009). Some researchers argue that teachers' beliefs guide their actions (e.g., Clark and Peterson 1986, Johnson 1992, Pajares 1992, Kagan 1992b, Calderhead 1996, Knudson 1998, Kavanoz 2006). In describing this relationship, Pajares (1992: 307) indicates that "few would argue that beliefs teachers hold influence their perceptions and judgments, which in turn, affect their behaviour in the classroom…" Kagan (1992b: 66) also concludes that "empirical studies have yielded quite consistent findings: A teacher's beliefs tend to be associated with a congruent style of teaching that is often evident across different classes and grade levels." For example, Johnson (1992) conducted a study to investigate the extent to which ESL teachers' theoretical beliefs were aligned with their instructional practices. Participants consisted of 30 ESL teachers from both urban and suburban areas of upstate New York. A Multidimensional TESL Theoretical Orientation Profile, comprising an Ideal Instructional Protocol, a Lesson Plan Analysis Task, and a Beliefs Inventory, was used to capture teachers' theoretical

beliefs. These teachers held three main theoretical orientations, namely skill-based, rule-based, and function-based. Teachers' literacy instruction was found to be very consistent with their theoretical beliefs. The researchers indicated that "teachers teach in accordance with their theoretical beliefs and that differences in theoretical beliefs may result in differences in the nature of literacy instruction" (p. 101). In addition, Kavanoz (2006) investigated English language teachers' beliefs about learner-centeredness and how they implemented learner-centeredness in their classrooms. This study was conducted in one public and one private primary school in Istanbul. Multiple data collection methods were adopted in order to gain a more nuanced understanding about the teachers' conceptions. Teachers in public schools described themselves as 'teller', 'presenter', and 'corrector' in creating learner-centeredness whereas the teachers who worked in private schools described themselves as "guides", "facilitators", "leaders", and "problem solvers". Kavanoz (1996) indicated that the way teachers defined learner-centeredness were compatible with the way they implemented it. Consistently, teachers in public schools tended to present the lesson first and then asked the students to answer questions presented in the hand-outs. The classroom activities were organized as whole class activities directed by the teachers. The students only had opportunities to use English while answering the questions. The teachers in private schools would adopt a variety of activities in the classroom to motivate students' active participation in the

lesson. They tried their best to make the lessons interesting and encourage the learners to discover concepts themselves. In the study of Knudson (1998), ESL student teachers' classroom practices were found to be very consistent with their theoretical beliefs and their beliefs did not alter over the year.

Yet some researchers found teachers' beliefs were not always reflected in their practices (e.g., Fang 1996, Karavas-Doukas 1996, Crookes and Arakaki 1999, Ertmer 2001, Ertmer 2005, Feryok 2008, Alger 2009, Phipps and Borg 2009). For example, the findings from the study of Ertmer (2001) showed that although teachers reported that they held constructivist philosophies, they taught technology in a hybrid approach, at times engaging their students in authentic, project-based work, but at other times requiring them to complete worksheets, practice skills, and learn facts. Contextual constraints were reported as being mainly responsible for these inconsistencies, including curricular expectations, given current classrooms, students and resources. Alger (2009) employed an online survey to investigate changes in teachers' beliefs over the career span. The teachers were asked to select which metaphors of teaching closely matched their own under three stages: first entering the profession, at present, and ideally. The teachers can choose from the following six options, including teaching is guiding, is nurturing, is moulding, is transmitting, is providing tools, and teaching is engaged in community. This research found that 42% teachers' metaphors for ideal

teaching were not consistent with the metaphors for their current practices. The main obstacles consisted of students, curriculum, home and community, lack of resource, and administration. The findings also showed that 63% of teachers altered their perceptions of teaching across time and experienced teachers' beliefs shifted from a teacher-centred view to a student-centred view. Teachers' new understandings of students were mainly an outcome of direct teaching experiences. Karavas-Doukas (1996) found that on the whole, the participating teachers held favourable attitudes towards the communicative approach, however, their classroom practices deviated significantly from the principles of the communicative approach. The authors claimed that the discrepancy may be due to the teachers' lack of understandings of the principles of the communicative approach. Feryok (2008) examined the stated beliefs of a state school EFL teacher in America and her actual practices in the classroom and the contextual factors that affected them. The observation showed that many of her stated beliefs were implemented in the classroom; however, some beliefs appeared to be departed from the practices. Meeting different expectations (such as institutional expectations and student expectations) might contribute to the inconsistency between beliefs and practices. Wu and Fang (2002) indicated that although the participating teachers all held positive attitudes towards the communicative language approach, they spent the majority of class time on text-based exercises. Their ignorance of students' communicative needs, deep-rooted conceptions

of teaching as one-way knowledge transmission, and existing student assessment were mainly responsible for this disparity. Crookes and Arakaki (1999) indicated that difficult working conditions strongly influenced what teachers did in the classroom. This study was concerned with the idea sources and working conditions of a group of ESL teachers in an intensive English program in the western United States. Most of the teachers in this study routinely worked at two or three schools. Their average reported workload was approximately 50 hours per week. Teachers reported that these difficult working conditions significantly affected their pedagogical choices. As one teacher stated, "I will often choose or create an exercise [even though] I know there could be a better one, but I just can't do it within the time that I have" (p.18).

2.7 The first three years: experiences of beginning teachers

The period as a novice teacher is a vulnerable one and the rates of attrition among beginning teachers are high (e.g., Odell and Ferraro 1992, Shen 1997, Ingersoll 2003, Ingersoll and Smith 2004). For example, Ingersoll (2003) found that 14% of all beginning teachers left the profession at the end of their first year. Moreover, 40 to 50 per cent of all new teachers left teaching by the end of five years. Many researchers put efforts into investigating the experiences of beginning teachers in their first years and seeking effective ways of supporting and assisting the new teachers (e.g., Veenman 1984, Weinstein 1988, Moir 1990, Rust 1994, Farrell 2003, McCann, Johannessen et al.

2005, Fantilli and McDougall 2009, Nasser-Abu Alhija and Fresko 2010, Fenwick 2011, Orland-Barak and Maskit 2011, Shoffner 2011, Hobson and Ashby 2012, Caspersen and Raaen 2013). For example, the study of Fantilli and McDougall (2009) aimed to explore the novice teachers' experiences during their first year of teaching. Participants consisted of 86 prospective teachers from graduates (classes 2004–2006) of a two year initial teacher program at an Ontario university. Novice teachers were found to confront a number of challenges upon first entering the profession: district hiring practices, the assignment of difficult and challenging positions, difficulty to meet the needs of exceptional students, insecurity, inexperience and lack of preparation, communication with parents, time management (such as the planning and organizing of daily and long-term schedules), subjectivities inherent to assessment, behaviour management, and anxiety and stress associated with constantly seeking assistance from teacher colleagues due to the absence of a qualified mentor.

In addition, in order to explore the first year experience of beginning teachers, Farrell (2003) conducted a case study of one teacher, Wee Jin (a pseudonym) who enrolled at the National Institute of Education (NIE), Singapore for a 1-year program, the Post-Graduate Diploma in Education (PGDE). This case study showed that the school shouldered great responsibility in making the teacher feel comfortable and welcome within a supportive environment. For Wee Jin, collegial support within the school

context was the most important in his first year in the profession. The researcher suggested that:

> In order to facilitate the new teacher through his/her first year, this paper argues an additional support system ought to be included in the formal school induction process. This could consist of a critical friend, a buddy teacher from the school who volunteers to help guide the new teacher through his/her first year. The teacher himself/herself can also do a lot to make sure he/she has prepared adequately to have as smooth an induction as possible. (Farrell, 2003: 109)

The study of Shoffner (2011) aimed to explore the common concerns among beginning English teachers. Four first-year English teachers participated in this study. Data was collected from the teacher-created reflective writings (such as journal entries, informal essays, and emails) and individual interviews. The findings showed that beginning teachers held four major concerns, consisting of the difficulty of establishing relationships with their fellow teachers, workload/time management, personal autonomy/control, and physical/personal characteristics. Shoffner indicated that besides the suggestions provided by McCann, Johannessen et al. (2005), the development of reflective practice was also an important strategy that helped new teachers manage the major concerns in their first teaching year. McCann et al. (2005: 429) provided the following suggestions for teacher education programmes: (1) pre-service teachers should be given opportunities to develop the problem-solving skills which are important to help them manage the difficulties and challenges they are likely to encounter in the

classroom; (2) keep in touch with the pre-service teachers after they have entered the profession; (3) invite experienced teachers to talk about their own strategies of getting along with students, colleagues, and parents and their strategies of planning and managing teaching; and (4) frequently talk with pre-service teachers about the problems and conflicts they will likely face in the classroom.

Veenman (1984) also shed some light on the obstacles encountered by the first-year teachers and eight major problems included classroom discipline, motivating students, dealing with individual differences, assessing students' work, relationships with parents, organization of class work, insufficient and/or inadequate teaching materials and supplies, and dealing with problems of individual students. Weinstein (1988) explored the expectations of pre-service teachers with regard to their capacity to perform the teaching task. Participants consisted of 118 students (105 females and13 males) enrolled in the elementary teacher education program at the University of Arizona. The findings showed that pre-service teachers held "unrealistic optimism" (p. 38) as they believed the work of teaching would be less problematic for them than for their peers. Prospective teachers were found to hold the greatest unrealistic optimism on the "items having to do with organization and management (e.g., maintaining discipline; establishing and enforcing class rules and procedures; working quietly during seatwork)" (p. 38). These unrealistic expectations may increase the beginning teachers' reality

shock. The researchers identified a number of “the sources of these unrealistic expectations: easy entry to teaching; the need to maintain self-esteem; extrapolation from past child-care experiences; lack of a cohort experience; the emphasis in teacher education on finding one’s own personal teaching style” (p. 39). The study of Rust (1994) investigated the experiences of two first-year teachers. These two teachers were also found to enter teaching with idealistic beliefs. The teachers felt “more or less competent to teach the various areas of the elementary curriculum but largely unaware of those organizational, administrative, and interpersonal forces that are likely to influence their lives in schools” (p. 216). Moir (1990) identified first-year teaching as a great challenge for new teachers and indicated these teachers generally moved through several phases during their first year. The first phase was anticipation. Teachers had idealistic beliefs upon first entering the profession with regard to the role of the teacher and the position. The second phase was survival. New teachers met a number of difficulties and challenges and struggled to keep their heads above water. Disillusion was the third phase new teachers experienced and getting through this period appeared to be the strongest challenge for new teachers. During this phase, new teachers held lower self-esteem and began to question their abilities and professional commitment. The next phase was rejuvenation in which new teacher's attitude toward teaching slowly rose. Finally, new teachers began to reflect their experiences during the year,

highlighting the events which were successful and those which were not (reflection phase). Moir believed that recognizing the phases teachers experienced in their first year can offer the researchers a framework within which they can develop more effective teacher education programmes to help the new teachers have a more comfortable transition period. Nasser-Abu Alhija and Fresko (2010) examined new teachers' satisfaction with their first year of teaching from the perspective of socialization. 243 Israeli beginning teachers participated in this research and data was collected by means of questionnaire. The findings showed that "on the whole, the new teachers were moderately-satisfied to highly-satisfied with their experiences during the first year of teaching" (p. 1595) Support from mentors and school colleagues were found to exert greatest impact on beginning teachers' assimilation. The following two studies shed some light on the experiences of post-induction teachers. For example, Fenwick (2010) conducted a study to examine the factors that constraining or promoting early career teachers' professional learning. Participants consisted of 14 early career secondary teachers who completed their Professional Graduate Diploma in Education (PGDE) in geography at the same Scottish university in 2005–2006. Two major influential factors were identified: the professional relationships within schools, especially at departmental level and continuing professional development (CPD) opportunities. Fenwick noticed that some post-induction teachers missed the formal support in their induction year and

suggested that “schools and LEAs need to consider the differing employment situations and CPD needs of post-induction teachers. Whilst continued formal mentoring is unrealistic, informal mentoring may provide an effective, feasible and sustainable solution.” (p. 339) In addition, the research of Hobson and Ashby (2012) investigated post-induction second-year teachers’ perceptions of the support and opportunities they received for professional development. The findings showed that although most post-induction second-year teachers felt satisfied with the assistance and support received from their professional development, “some did not enjoy the kinds of support they had hoped for, or the supportive school cultures experienced by many of their peers” (p. 188-189). The researchers proposed a term “reality aftershock” (p. 189) which referred to the “negative impact of what some perceived as an abrupt cessation of effective or appropriate support following the completion of their NQT induction” (ibid).

2.8 Summary of trends and gaps in existing research on teachers’ beliefs

This study aims to examine the beliefs about EFL teaching and learning of six Chinese beginning secondary school EFL teachers, if there are any changes in their beliefs over time and what the driving or inhibiting factors to these changes are.

First, former research has shown that a teacher’s belief system is complex and multi-dimensional in nature (e.g., Calderhead, 1996, Zheng, 2011). For example, Calderhead

(1996) indicates teachers hold beliefs in relation to beliefs about learners and learning, about teaching, about subject, about learning to teach, and about self and teaching role. In addition, Woolfolk Hoy, Davis et al. (2006) suggest that a teacher holds beliefs about childhood, adolescence, and the meaning of diversity, about standards and policy reform, accountability systems and high-stakes testing, and assessment practices, about classrooms, students, and content, and about self: their identity as teachers and their sense of efficacy for teaching. However, little effort has been made to investigate the relationships between different components within a belief system, for example, whether a teacher holds incompatible beliefs or not.

Second, existing research on teachers' belief change focuses on the following three themes: first, many studies centre on exploring the influence of teacher education programmes on teachers' beliefs. Some researchers conclude that teachers' beliefs are inflexible and resistant to change (e.g., Kagan 1992a, Almarza 1996, Tillema and Knol 1997, Peacock 1998). For example, Peacock (2001) conducted a longitudinal project to track the changes in trainee teachers' perceptions concerning language learning and found that three central beliefs regarding language learning of? student teachers had changed very little over their 3 years' study of TESL methodology. In contrast, some researchers argue that teachers' beliefs are dynamic and can be changed over time (e.g., Hoekstra, Brekelmans et al. 2009, Meirink, Meijer et al. 2009, Bakkenes, Vermunt et al.

2010, de Vries, Jansen et al. 2013). Some studies have shown that teacher education programmes play a significant role in leading to changes in teachers' beliefs (e.g., Luft 2001, Richards, Gallo et al. 2001, Clarke and Hollingsworth 2002, Guskey 2002, Lavonen, Jauhiainen et al. 2004, Ozer 2004, Mohamed 2006, Cimer, Çakır et al. 2010, Borg 2011). For example, Luft (2001) explored the influence of an 18-month in-service programme in a south western US city on fourteen secondary science teachers' conceptions and practices in a south western US city. The results showed that the in-service course did have an influence on the participants and the eight experienced teachers demonstrated more changes in their practices than their beliefs whereas the six induction teachers changed more in their beliefs than their practices. In addition, in Richards et al's (2001) study, the participating teachers listed in-service training as the most influential factor in shaping their beliefs. These teachers found that the experiences of meeting new teaching ideas and exchanging ideas with their counterparts in the in-service courses were useful and valuable. Second, some researchers indicate a relationship between teachers' belief change and their participation in informal learning activities, (e.g., Hoekstra, Brekelmans et al. 2009, Meirink, Meijer et al. 2009, Bakkenes, Vermunt et al. 2010). For example, in the study of Bakkenes, Vermunt et al. (2010), six categories of learning activities were found, including experimenting, considering one's own practice, getting ideas from others, struggling not to revert to old

ways, and avoiding learning (the first two types were mentioned most frequently). Reported learning outcomes contained changes in knowledge and beliefs, emotions, practices and intentions for practice, with changes in beliefs being mentioned most frequently and changes in practice most rarely. Third, a number of models have been proposed to reveal the underlying mechanism for conceptual change, including the 'conceptual change model' (Posner, Strike et al. 1982) from science education research, the dual-process models from social psychology research such as 'heuristic-systematic model' (Chaiken 1980, Chaiken, Liberman et al. 1989, Chaiken and Maheswaran 1994) and 'elaboration likelihood model' (Petty and Cacioppo 1986), and the other two alternative models including the 'cognitive reconstruction of knowledge model' (Dole and Sinatra 1998) and the 'cognitive-affective model of conceptual change' (Gregoire 2003). However, it is evident that the current research has not paid much attention to the influence of social contexts (e.g., school culture and leadership) on teachers' belief change.

Third, the existing studies have shown that teachers' beliefs are not always reflected in their practices (e.g., Fang 1996, Karavas-Doukas 1996, Crookes and Arakaki 1999, Ertmer 2001, Ertmer 2005, Phipps and Borg 2009). Contexts have been identified as the major reason that constrains teachers' abilities of putting their beliefs into practice (e.g., Karaağaç and Threlfall 2004, Hu 2005). For example, Erkmen (2010: 245) identified

that novice teachers felt it difficult to put their beliefs into practice due to contextual constraints, including "student expectation, the influence of the proficiency exam which was going to be held at the end of the year, and the syllabus." However, research focusing on unpacking the associations between teachers' belief change and practice change is rare, for example, whether a change in teachers' beliefs can guarantee a change in their practices and vice versa.

To conclude, the existing literature on teachers' beliefs has identified that (1) teachers hold particular beliefs in relation to teaching and learning upon first entering teaching, which are mostly derived from their past learning experiences as students in secondary schools (e.g., Calderhead and Robson, 1991, Erkmen, 2010, Peacock, 2001); (2) teachers' beliefs are complex and multi-dimensional (e.g., Calderhead, 1996, Zheng, 2011); (3) teachers' beliefs are dynamic and influenced by a range of factors, including teacher education and informal learning activities at the workplace (e.g., Clarke and Hollingsworth 2002, Hoekstra, Brekelmans et al. 2009, Meirink, Meijer et al. 2009); and (4) teachers' beliefs may not always be reflected in teachers' classroom practices (e.g., Fang 1996, Karavas-Doukas 1996, Crookes and Arakaki 1999, Ertmer 2001, Ertmer 2005). Contextual constraints, such as students, working conditions and curriculum and so on, may prevent teachers from putting their beliefs into practice (e.g., Borg, 2003, Zheng, 2011). However, the following issues need to be further explored.

First, research on exploring the relationships among different components of a teacher's belief system is rare; for example, are the beliefs the teacher holds consistent and inter-related? Second, little effort has been done to investigate how exactly teachers change their beliefs over time at the workplace. Most studies focus on exploring the impact of teacher education on teachers' beliefs. Although some studies have shown teachers' learning activities have exerted an impact on teachers' belief change, they did not show the role played by school culture, leadership and teacher individual characteristics in teacher learning and belief change. Third, more efforts need to be made to unpack the associations between teachers' belief change and practice change, for example, whether a change in teachers' beliefs can guarantee a change in their practices? If not, why not? Current research attempts to shed some light on the above issues.

This chapter has reviewed existing literature in relation to teachers' beliefs in mainstream education and language education. The next chapter details the research methodology employed for this study.

Chapter 3. Research Design

3.1 Research questions

This study aims to examine Chinese beginning secondary school EFL teachers' beliefs about EFL teaching and learning, if there are any changes in their beliefs over time and what the driving or inhibiting factors to these changes are. I intend to explore the following two research questions:

1. What beliefs do Chinese beginning secondary EFL teachers hold with regard to EFL teaching and learning?

2. Are there any changes in Chinese beginning secondary EFL teachers' beliefs over time?

    2.1 If there are, what are they? What are the contributing factors to these changes?

    2.2 If there are not, why not?

3.2 Ontological and epistemological considerations

Ontology relates to the nature of the reality. A central issue here is the question of whether the social world should be considered as an objective reality that exists external

to individuals, or whether it should be viewed as a reality that is constructed by perceptions and actions of individuals (Cohen, Manion et al. 2007, Bryman 2008, Porta and Keating 2008, Denscombe 2010). The former view holds that the social reality exists independently of any consciousness, whereas the latter view conceives the social world as something that is continually being constructed by individual cognition. In this research, I conceive the social world as a reality that is created by individuals' perceptions and reinforced by their engagement with other people.

According to Hamlyn (1995: 242), epistemology is concerned with "the nature of knowledge, its possibility, scope and general basis" (cited in Crotty, 1998: 8). There appears to be a number of epistemological positions. First of all, the objectivists trust in "meaning, and therefore meaningful reality, exists as such apart from the operation of any consciousness" (Crotty, 1998: 8). From an objectivist point of view, "understandings and values are considered to be objectified in the people we are studying and, if we go about it in the right way, we can discover the objective truth" (ibid). Another epistemology – constructionism - on the contrary, holds the view that "there is no objective truth waiting for us to discover it. Truth, or meaning, comes into existence in and out of our engagement with the realities in our world. There is no meaning without a mind. Meaning is not discovered, but constructed." (Crotty, 1998: 8-9) Constructionism emphasizes that "all knowledge, and therefore all meaningful reality

as such, is contingent upon human practices, being constructed in and out of interaction between human beings and their world, and developed and transmitted within an essentially social context" (ibid., p.42). To conclude, objectivism holds the view that there are objective meaning and truth waiting to be discovered. Constructionists believe that meanings emerge as people engage and interact with the context.

In this research, I adopt constructionism as my epistemological position because constructionism emphasizes that meanings are constructed by people when they interact with the world. Constructionism provides a perspective from which to understand the (re)construction of teachers' beliefs. Teachers' perceptions are not simply imprinted on teachers but are formed through their interaction with others. As a researcher, I rely as much as possible on participating teachers' perceptions of the situation being studied. My intention is to interpret the perceptions and understandings teachers have in relation to teaching and learning. Rather than beginning with a theory, I generate or inductively develop a theory or pattern of meaning.

3.3 Theoretical perspective

Crotty (1998: 3) defines theoretical perspective as "an approach to understanding and explaining society and the human world." It is regarded as "the philosophical stance embedded within the methodology, which provides a context for the research process

and grounds its logic and criteria" (ibid). The theoretical perspectives I adopt in this research are interpretivism and symbolic interactionism which is regarded as one of the intellectual traditions of interpretivism.

3.3.1 Interpretivism

According to Schwandt (1994), "interpretivism was conceived in reaction to the effort to develop a natural science of the social. Its foil was largely logical empiricist methodology and the bid to apply that framework to human inquiry." (p.125) The interpretivist approach "looks for culturally derived and historically situated interpretations of the social life-world" (Crotty, 1998: 67). According to Denscombe (2010), interpretivism regards "knowledge of the social world as something that relies on human capacities to literally 'make sense' of a reality which, of itself, has no inherent properties, no order, no structure and only through interpreting the world do we come to know anything about it" (p.119). In this sense, Interpretivism supports a constructivist view that all knowledge is constructed, not discovered. Interpretivism focuses on "the meaningful nature of people's participation in social and culture life… researchers working within this tradition analyse the meanings people confer upon their own and others' action" (Seale, 1998: 327). From an interpretivist perspective, researchers need to understand the individuals' social world and actions through analysing participants' interpretations of the world around them. This is the case in my

research. In order to make teachers' perceptions, understandings and beliefs explicit, there is a need to enter teachers' inner world, listen to them, ask them questions, interact and communicate with them as much as possible and attempt to analyse and examine teachers' interpretations of their beliefs.

3.3.1.1 Symbolic Interactionism

To be more specific, symbolic interactionism which has been regarded as one of the intellectual heritage of interpretivism further discusses the associations between individuals' subjective meanings and their contexts. In this research, symbolic interactionism provides a theoretical perspective from which to understand how teachers develop, reconstruct and change their beliefs.

Symbolic interactionism originates from the thought of pragmatist philosopher and social psychologist George Herbert Mead, who holds the view that "the way in which our notion of self emerges through an appreciation of how others see us" (Bryman, 2008: 16). However, the general tendency to view symbolic interactionism as an interpretative approach is the product of the writings of Herbert Blumer who is Mead's spokesman and interpreter. Symbolic interactionism believes that "interaction takes place in such a way that the individual is continually interpreting the symbolic meaning of his or her environment (which includes the actions of others) and acts on the basis of this imputed meaning" (ibid., p.7).

Blumer (1969) summarizes three basic premises in relation to symbolic interactionism. The first premise is that "human beings act towards things on the basis of the meanings that these things have for them" (Blumer, 1969: 2). In other words, people's responses to a particular issue tend to be dependent upon their interpretations of that issue. The second assumption is "that the meaning of such things is derived from, and arises out of, the social interaction that one has with one's fellows" (ibid). The third premise is that "these meanings are handled in, and modified through, an interpretive process used by the person in dealing with the things he encounters" (ibid). Methodologically, the implication of symbolic interactionism is that researchers need to take the role of others and see the world from the angle of the participants they study. As Crotty (1998: 8) claims, "symbolic interactionism is all about the basic social interactions whereby we enter into the perceptions, attitudes and values of a community, becoming persons in the process and at its heart is the notion of being able to put ourselves in the place of others." Similarly, Flick (2002: 17) argues:

> When a person defines a situation as real, this situation is real in its consequences, leads directly to the fundamental methodological principle of symbolic interactionism: the researcher has to see the world from the angle of the subjects he or she studies.

Denzin (1978: 99) also points out that "symbolic interactionism directs the investigator to take, to the best of his ability, the standpoint of those studied."

In this research, symbolic interactionism provides a perspective for me to understand how and why teachers change their beliefs over time. First, teachers' decisions on the extent and directions of their belief change depend on how they interpret and understand that situation. Second, the meanings teachers give to that situation are derived from their interaction and socialization with the colleagues and contexts around them. Third, such meanings and understandings about certain situation can be modified, changed, and reconstructed through an interpretive process used by the teachers in dealing with the things they encounter. For example, if a teacher obtains a new concept from the teacher education programme, s/he will first consider whether students can benefit from the implementation of the new concept, whether s/he have the ability to successfully apply in the classroom, and whether school leaders allow them to adopt the new concept and then, decide whether to use the new technique or not. The teacher's experiences of interacting with other colleagues and school leaders in the school significantly influence his/her interpretations on the new concept. The teacher may change and reconstruct his/her interpretations and understandings on this concept in the future through constantly socializing and interacting with the contexts around him/her. Symbolic interactionism requires researchers to discover and interpret individuals' inner views about the contexts they engage with, which suggests a range of methodological

implications for my study. In order to grasp teachers' beliefs, it is necessary to investigate teachers' beliefs in their own positions.

3.4 Research Methodology

3.4.1 The case study strategy

This research involved case studies of six Chinese beginning secondary school EFL teachers. According to Bloor and Wood (2006), case study refers to "a strategy of research that aims to understand social phenomena within a single or small number of naturally occurring settings" (p. 27). In addition, Robson (2011) defines case study as "a well-established research strategy where the focus is on a case (which is interpreted very widely to include the study of an individual person, a group, a setting, an organization, etc.) in its own right and taking its context into account" (p. 135). In their definitions, it is evident that the emphasis is on a specific case (or small number of cases) examined in its own right. The importance of its context or setting has been highlighted. Miles and Huberman (1984) argue that "a case always occurs in a specific social and physical setting: we cannot study individual cases devoid of their context" (p. 27). The size of each case can range from "single individuals, to groups of people, organizations and whole cultures" (Bloor and Wood, 2006: 28). Cases can be selected for their typicality or can be sampled purposively or can be chosen for their accessibility. The case study approach often adopts a range of data collection methods such as "interviews,

observations, documentary methods and audio or video recording" (Bloor and Wood, 2006: 28). Case study includes both strengths and weaknesses. As Bloor and Wood (2006: 29) indicate, "case studies have been advocated as a method on the basis that they can capture the unique characters of people and groups through their ability to generate detailed holistic data, they have the capacity to make surprising discoveries and they produce novel theories." They also argue that the main weakness of case study research is "the problem of generalization to larger populations, a problem that questions the value of studying a single case" (ibid). Cohen et al. (2007: 256) state the strengths of case study research include:

(1) The results are more easily understood by a wide audience (including non-academics) as they are frequently written in everyday, non-professional language
(2) They are immediately intelligible; they speak for themselves
(3) They catch unique features that may otherwise be lost in larger scale data (e.g., surveys); these unique features might hold the key to understanding the situation
(4) They are strong on reality.
(5) They provide insights into other, similar situations and cases, thereby assisting interpretation of other similar cases
(6) They can be undertaken by a single researcher without needing a full research team
(7) They can embrace and build in unanticipated events and uncontrolled variables

The weakness of case study approaches comprised:

(1) The results may not be generalizable except where other readers/researchers see their application
(2) They are not easily open to cross-checking, hence they may be selective, biased, personal and subjective

(3) They are prone to problems of observer bias, despite attempts made to address reflexivity.

(Cited in Cohen et al, 2007: 256)

In this research, I conducted the case studies of six Chinese beginning secondary EFL teachers for the following two reasons. First, a case study has the ability to obtain detailed holistic data and it can embrace and build in unanticipated events and uncontrolled variables and produce novel theories. The purpose of this study was to (1) crystallize teachers' beliefs and (2) identify whether there were any changes in their beliefs and the contributing or inhibiting factors. The employment of the case study strategy allowed me to go deeply into the world around teachers, gain thick descriptions and explanations of my research questions and thus, develop a theory or pattern of how and why teachers' beliefs changed or develop. Second, case studies have been widely employed in research on examining teachers' beliefs (e.g., Gonzalez Thompson 1984, Woods 1996, Bryan 2003, Zheng 2011). For instance, Zheng (2011) conducted a case study of six experienced EFL teachers in China, aiming to identify the complex relationships between teachers' beliefs, practices and the contexts. She believes that only the case study approach can offer her opportunities to examine each of the teacher's beliefs in great detail. In addition, Bryan (2003) investigated the belief system of a prospective elementary teacher (Barbara) about science teaching and learning and found that a teacher's belief system was complex and nested. Barbara's belief system

consisted of three foundational and three dualistic beliefs. Barbara held foundational beliefs contained (1) the value of science and science teaching, (2) the nature of scientific knowledge and goals of science teaching, and (3) control in the science classroom. Her dualistic beliefs contained (1) how children learn science, (2) the students' role in science instruction, and (3) the teacher's role in science instruction. Her dualistic beliefs included two contradictory nests of beliefs. One nest was characterized by didactic, teacher-centred actions, while the other nest of beliefs reflected a more conceptual teaching style.

3.4.2 The participants

This research adopted convenience sampling. According to Bloor and Wood (2006: 154), "convenience sampling involves the selection of cases on the basis of their availability." Similarly, Cohen et al. (2007: 114) claim that "convenience sampling involves choosing the nearest individuals to serve as respondents and continuing that process until the required sample size has been obtained or those who happen to be available and accessible at the time." Convenience sampling may be "the sampling strategy selected for a case study or a series of case studies" (ibid). Researchers adopting a convenience sampling simply chose participants who were easy to access.

Convenience sampling had certain advantages and limitations. The greatest advantage was that researchers were easy to access the participants. For example, in this study, due to the personal relationships between the participating teachers and the researcher, it was easy to interview the teachers and remind them to complete the assigned tasks. However, from this type of sample we cannot generalize the findings as it was unable to represent a wider population. According to Bryman (2008), "the problem of the convenience sampling is that it is impossible to generalize the findings, because we do not know of what population this sample is representative" (p. 183). This limitation of the convenience sampling strategy can be partially compensated by the unique features of the participating teachers. For example, all of the teachers work in different contexts. Xiaoxue, Xiaoqin, Qiumei and Bijuan worked in Chinese public schools while Zhihui and Gaoyuan worked in private schools. Xiaoxue, Zhihui, Gaoyuan, and Qiumei worked in urban areas while Bijuan and Xiaoqin worked in rural areas. Different workplace contexts may have different impacts upon teachers' beliefs and practices.

Participants in this research were the teachers who were available to me. I completed my BA degree in Teaching English. Most of my undergraduate classmates became EFL teachers after graduating from the University. They usually had less than three years teaching experiences. Participants in this study were chosen from my university alumni.

It was easier for me to interview the participating teachers, observe their experiences and remind them to complete assigned tasks on time.

The aim and the procedure of this research were explained to 13 of my undergraduate classmates. Three teachers who were EFL teachers of primary schools and two teachers who were EFL teachers of Universities are excluded as the aim of this project was to investigate secondary EFL teachers. Two teachers were unwilling to join this study due to the heavy workload. At last, six female beginning secondary EFL teachers agreed to participate in this research. All of the teachers were Chinese secondary EFL teachers who had two years working experiences. All of them had completed a BA degree in English Education in an ordinary normal university in the western area of China. Participating teachers' profile can be shown as:

Table 3-1 The profile of participating teachers

Teachers	Sex	School	Degree	Experiences	Grade
Xiaoxue	Female	A (public, urban)	BA in English education	2 years	11
Zhihui	Female	B (private, urban)	BA in English education	2 years	9
Qiumei	Female	C (public, urban)	BA in English education	2 years	12
Bijuan	Female	D (public, rural)	BA in English education	2 years	10
Xiaoqin	Female	E (public, rural)	BA in English education	2 years	10
Gaoyuan	Female	F (private, urban)	BA in English education	2 years	8

3.4.3 Research methods

Crotty (1998) refers to research methods as "the techniques or procedures used to gather and analyse data related to some research question or hypothesis" (p. 3). Teachers' beliefs are not directly measurable and observable, which presents a big challenge for researchers to identify methods of data collection through which these beliefs can be elicited. Literature on teachers' beliefs has shown that a wide range of methods, such as self-report instruments (e.g., questionnaires), verbal commentaries (e.g., interviews), observation and reflective writing (e.g., diaries) are used to crystallize teachers' beliefs and to track possible changes in teachers' beliefs (Borg 2006). Positivist methods such as self-report instruments (e.g., Likert-scale questionnaires, aiming to collect large

amount of data), have been strongly criticized. For instance, Borg (2006) concludes that although self-report instruments are efficient tools for providing large amounts of data, such instruments contain certain limitations:

> It must be noted that in self-report instruments of teachers' beliefs, such as Likert-scale questionnaires, the statements included are defined by the researcher. They, thus, may not cover the full range of beliefs that respondents have or want to talk about; additionally, teachers' responses may not reflect their own beliefs, but those which they have chosen from amongst those identified by the researcher (Borg, 2006: 185).

Kagan (1992a) also argues that:

> Any researcher who uses a short-answer test of teacher beliefs (i.e., an instrument consisting of prefabricated statements) runs the risk of obtaining bogus data, because standardized statements may mask or misrepresent a particular teacher's highly personalized perceptions and definition […] a teacher may not recognize a statement as his or her own belief because of the language in which the statement is couched (p.426).

Similarly, Wong (2010) makes the following comment:

> For such a cognitively and affectively rich construct such as one's belief system, it is difficult to capture the complete picture merely through responses to a set of normative statements. Future researchers might want to employ a contextual approach and use a variety of qualitative data collection methods such as semi-structured interviews and observations to gain more insights into pre-service teachers' beliefs and any change in their beliefs over time (p. 134).

Taking the above comments into account, I carefully chose which methods to adopt in collecting data in this research. In order to avoid obtaining false data and provide a

more holistic picture of teachers' beliefs, I used qualitative methods to elicit teachers' beliefs about EFL learning and teaching and how changes in these beliefs may occur. The tools which were adopted for data collection in this research comprised semi-structured interviews, concept mapping, and journal entries.

3.4.3.1 Semi-structured interviews

The use of the interview in research regards knowledge as generated through human conversations and interactions, which was consistent with my epistemological position that generating data relied on my conversation and interaction with the teachers participating in the research. Cohen, Manion et al. (2007) define an interview as:

> a two-person conversation initiated by the interviewer for the specific purpose of obtaining research-relevant information, and focused by him on content specified by research objectives of systematic description, prediction, or explanation. It is an unusual method in that it involves the gathering of data through direct verbal interaction between individuals (p.351).

This definition of an interview emphasizes the interactions between researchers and participants. The goal of researchers is to gather data through their conversations and interactions with the participants. As it is unlikely to directly measure and observe teachers' beliefs, feelings and understandings, interviewing is an effective strategy which allows me to access teachers' interpretations of their beliefs and obtain in-depth data from the teachers. As Cohen et al. (2007: 349) state, "Interviews enable

participants – be they interviewers or interviewees – to discuss their interpretations of the world in which they live, and to express how they regard situations from their own point of view."

There are various types of interviews: structured interviews, semi-structured interviews and unstructured interviews. This distinction has been made on the basis of the degree of structure of the interview. According to Borg (2006: 189), structured interviews "are characterized by an agenda which is predetermined by the researcher, which is applied in a standardized manner with all respondents, and which allows the researcher to retain tight control over the course of the interview (particularly when the range of possible responses has also been fixed in advance)." In the structured interview, the researchers require all participants to answer the same questions in the same order. All of these questions are well established before the process. There is generally little or no variation in which questions are asked or responded. This kind of interview enables researchers to retain tight control over the process of the interview. As Robson (2011: 280) states, in the semi-structured interview, "the interviewer has an interview guide that serves as a checklist of topics to be covered and a default wording and order for the questions, but the wording and order are often substantially modified based on the flow of the interview, and additional unplanned questions are asked to follow up on what the interviewee says." Semi-structured interviews are directed by a set of general topics or a

series of loosely defined questions. This kind of interview offers researchers and responders a considerable amount of freedom and flexibility and allows researchers to ask further questions relevant to the topics they were interested in. As for unstructured interviews, “the interviewer typically has only a list of topics or issues, often called an interview guide” (Bryman, 2008: 196). In unstructured interviews, researchers developed the conversations based on the general areas they are interested in and conduct the conversations in a very informal way.

A semi-structured interview is more appropriate for my study for the following reasons. For a start, the semi-structured interviews enabled me to generate in-depth data from the teachers about their perceptions and understandings regarding EFL learning and teaching. In my research, in an attempt to make explicit teachers’ perceptions about EFL teaching and learning I need to interview the teachers in-depth and encourage them to talk in an open-ended manner about the loosely defined questions or the issues they think are relevant. As Borg (2006: 190) argues, “in interpretative research, where a smaller number of respondents are interviewed in-depth and where the interaction between researcher and respondent aims to capture some elements of natural conversation, semi-structured interviews are more common.” Second, in the semi-structured interview, researchers tend to be more flexible with the manner in which they encourage the respondents to talk about the relevant topics. Third, semi-structures

interviews allow the interviews to proceed as informal conversations, which enable me to establish a positive relationship with the participants. In the present study, three rounds of face-to-face semi-structured interviews were conducted. The first round interview lasted for about two hours for each teacher, focusing on their beliefs about teaching and learning upon first entering the profession and current (at the beginning of their third teaching year). The second round interviews lasted for one hour for each teacher, focusing on any changes in their beliefs and factors that influence belief change. The third round interviews also lasted for one hour and focused on changes in beliefs and related factors. All of the participants were asked about whether they preferred to be interviewed in English or Chinese. Ten minutes' telephone interviews were often used to supplement the data obtained in the three rounds of face-to-face interviews. Telephone interviews do have some key advantages. As Bloor and Wood (2006) state:

> They can significantly keep research costs down in terms of time and travel expenses. This benefit also encourages researchers to select respondents from a wider geographical area thereby possibly increasing the generalizability of their findings. Telephone interviews are often more suitable for short interviews, perhaps only lasting ten minutes or a quarter f an hour. They may also be a means of encouraging busy professionals to participate the research as they might feel they have more control over terminating a short telephone interview than a face-to-face interview Telephone interviews also have benefits in terms of increases personal safety for the researcher as they circumvent the need for a lone researcher to be interviewing in a respondent's home. (p. 63)

3.4.3.2 Journals

Journal writing has been widely used as a strategy to examine language teachers' beliefs (Johnson, 1994, Numrich, 1996, Woods, 1996). Holly (1989) distinguishes three types of reflective writing - logs, diaries and journals:

> The log is an objective record of information (pages read, attendance, activities, lesson plans); the diary is a personal document in which the author can record log-type information but is primarily a book for expressing the author's thoughts, reactions, ideas, and feelings related to everyday experiences; and the journal is a document that includes both the objective data of the log and the personal interpretations and expressions of experiences of the diary, but which moves beyond these to intentional personal and professional reflection, analysis, planning, and evaluation. (p. 25-6)

In this study, I used *journal* as an inclusive term to cover the different expressions of reflective writing. According to the degree of structure of the journals, there were two forms of journal writing, namely open-ended and assigned journals. The former allows teachers a great deal of freedom to make decisions about what to write about, whereas in the latter teachers are required to focus on specific topics. For instance, in Johnson's (1994) project of investigating pre-service ESL teachers' beliefs about second language teachers and second language teaching, teachers were required to write both open-ended journals and assigned journals.

Researchers need to make decisions about whether asking teachers to write open-ended journals or assigned journals on the basis of the purposes of the journals. Borg (2006:

257) summarizes a number of principles researchers need to consider when using journal writing to examine teachers' beliefs:

1. Are journals an appropriate research strategy to adopt (e.g., whether the responders have the prerequisite skills or not?)

2. Is it necessary to inform the teachers in advance that their journals will be used for research purposes? If teachers are informed in advance, how specifically to introduce the aim and process of the research?

3. Researchers need to decide about the degree of structure to impose on the journals (e.g., with regard to themes, length and number of journals)

4. Whether to write journals dialogically, or monotonically?

5. Whether to allow teachers to write journals in their first language?

6. Where and when should teachers write journals?

7. Whether the journals should be word-processed or handwritten?

8. What forms of analysis (e.g., qualitative and quantitative) to apply to the data?

Taking these principles into account, in this study, I informed the participants in advance that their journals would be used for the research purposes and briefly explained the purposes and procedures of this research to them. All of the teachers were required to write journals at the end of every month. Journals were used in this research to track possible changes in teachers' beliefs over time and obtain unexpected information. Teachers were provided with guiding questions, in case they did not know what to write about. They were asked to write journals which consisted of open-ended comments on students, cooperating teachers, teacher education programme, positive or negative teaching experience, school leaders and so forth every month. They were also asked to write journals which focused on their beliefs about EFL learning and teaching, if any change had occurred during this month, how, why and when these changes had happened. Teachers had freedom to determine about writing journals in Chinese or in English. Teachers can make decisions about writing journals in class or in their own time. All the journals can be handwritten or word-processed based on teachers' preference.

3.4.3.3 Concept mapping

Borg (2006: 264) defines concept mapping as:

> Concept mapping is a research technique through which respondents' understandings of particular concepts and of relationships among them are

> represented graphically, through a concept map. In constructing a concept map, respondents typically first brainstorm on a particular topic and write down a list of concepts related to it; they them construct a diagram which shows how their understandings of how these concepts are related.

Various researchers have used this technique to investigate conceptual change in teacher education (e.g., Mergendoller and Sacks 1994, Trent, Pernell et al. 1998, Farrell 2001, Trent and Dixon 2004, Farrell 2009). For instance, Farrell (2009) adopted a concept mapping technique to examine the conceptual changes of seven MA participants attending a TESL course in Canada. At the beginning of the course, seven participants were asked to construct a concept map about the question - "What does teaching English as a second language mean to you" (Farrell, 2009: 334). After completing the maps, participants were asked to discuss their maps in the classrooms, aiming to further explore their current beliefs about TESL. The pre-course map was shown as following:

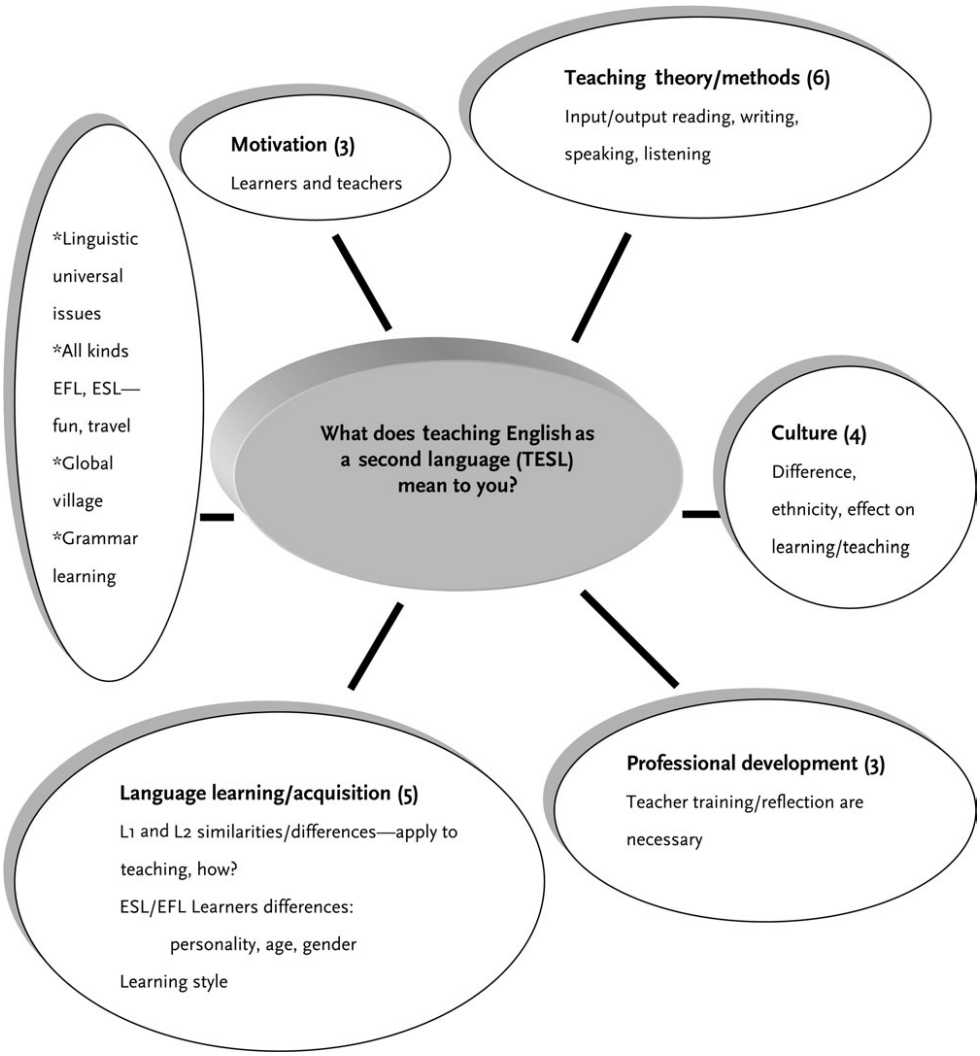


Figure 3-1 Pre-course conceptual map (Farrell, 2009)

At the end of the course, seven participants were again required to construct conceptual maps concerning the same topic and following the same discussion as they had on the first day of the course. The post-course map was shown:

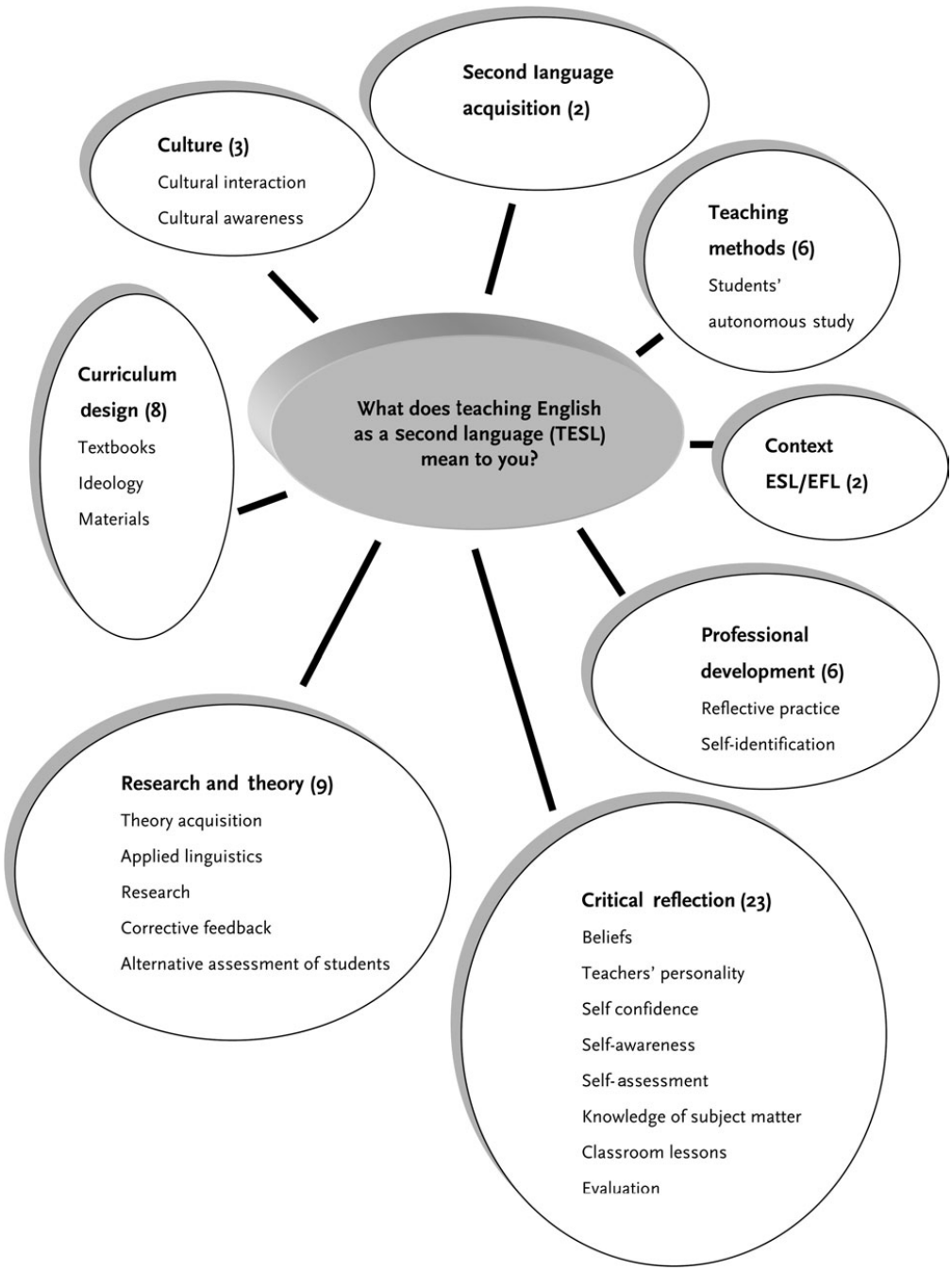


Figure 3-2 Post-course conceptual map (Farrell, 2009)

It was evident that participants added some new concepts to the original map. Farrell (2009: 229) concluded that "concept maps may be a useful teaching aid for the instructor to gauge participants' prior beliefs and experiences about a topic and to find out if they hold similar beliefs after taking the course." However, the technique of

conceptual mapping especially focuses on changes in participants' attitudes, cognitions and beliefs concerning a particular topic. It is difficult to say whether this technique can lead to the changes in participants' practices or not.

In this study, conceptual mapping was used as a good instrument to make the data more straightforward and validate the data. Since teachers may not have the skills to construct good conceptual maps, I constructed the maps on the basis of the data collected through the interviews and then required teachers to choose which maps closely match their own. At the beginning of the research, I constructed conceptual maps based on the data collected through interviews and asked the teachers to choose which maps closely linked with their own. Four months later, I again constructed conceptual maps after the interviews and asked them to choose their own maps. At the end of the research, we duplicated what we had done at the beginning and the middle of the research. The aim of doing so was to validate the data obtained from the interviews.

In general, I felt all the research instruments served the aim of the study. Three rounds of semi-structured interviews were conducted for this study: the first one at the beginning of the research, the second at the mid-point of the research, and the third at the end of research. The first interview was used to assess teachers' educational background and their beliefs about EFL teaching and learning first upon entering the

profession and currently (at the beginning of their third teaching year). A positive relationship had been established between the researcher and the participating teachers through the communication and interaction in the first interview. The data gathered in the first interview had presented an initial picture of the content of teachers' beliefs, changes in their beliefs, and reasons why changes may have occurred. The second and third interview helped further elicit changes occurred in teachers' beliefs over time. In the second and third interview, I read teachers' initial responses which were given at the beginning of the research and asked them if they still held the same beliefs. If the teachers indicated that they did not believe that any more, they were asked to explain why they had changed their beliefs. Telephone interviews were helpful in supplementing the data obtained in the three rounds of face-to-face interviews. Concept mapping was an effective means of making the data collected in the three rounds of interviews more straightforward and validating the data. Each interview ended, I would draw a map showing teachers' beliefs and changes and then required the teachers to choose which maps closely match their own. Through doing this, I became clearer about the changes occurred in teachers' beliefs and related influences. Journal writing is believed to be an effective technique to help teachers examine and reflect on their own beliefs. In this study, beginning teachers were asked to write journals which consisted of open-ended comments on students, mentor teachers, professional development, positive

or negative teaching experience, school leaders and so on every month. They were also asked to write journals which focused on their beliefs about EFL learning and teaching, if any change had occurred during this month, how, why and when these changes had happened. However, in this study, although I emphasized journal entries was an effective way of helping them reflect on their teaching experiences, the journals did not produce as much data as expected due to teachers' workload. Teachers felt difficult to write journals regularly because they had many other tasks to fulfil. The data analysis in this study heavily relied on the data gathered through three rounds of interviews.

3.4.4 Procedures of data collection

The data were collected over a period of ten months using semi-structured interviews, concept mapping, and journal entries. When this research started, all of the participants were at the beginning of their third year of teaching and interviewed for the first time, focusing on their educational background, past learning experiences in secondary schools, experiences in teacher education programmes, practice teaching experiences, and beliefs and understandings about learning and teaching upon first entering teaching and current. On the basis of the data collected through the interviews, I attempted to draw conceptual maps with regard to their teaching and learning beliefs and required the teachers to choose which conceptual maps most closely matched their own. About four months later (near the midpoint of their third year of teaching), all the teachers were

again interviewed. Based on the data provided by the interviews, I tried to construct conceptual maps as I had done at the beginning of the research. Teachers were again asked to choose conceptual maps which fitted with their own. At the end of the research (toward the end of their third year of teaching), the six teachers were interviewed for the third time and required to choose conceptual maps as they had done at the beginning and midpoint of the research. The conceptual maps will present the nature of teachers' beliefs and the purpose of using conceptual maps is to validate the data collected through interviews and to make the data more straightforward. Teachers were required to write journals at the end of each month throughout the whole academic year: teachers needed to write about their beliefs regarding EFL learning and teaching, if there were any changes, when, why and how these changes occurred during the month. Journals were mainly used to complement the findings. Teachers can write journals in Chinese or in English. Teachers can have a look at their prior interview transcripts and conceptual maps they chose near the end of the data analysis. If they found anything different from their current thoughts, they can ask the researcher to modify them. The teachers seemed satisfied with their accounts and did make any changes.

3.5 Data analysis

In order to get more nuanced understandings of the data and avoid missing any unexpected themes and patterns, I decided not to resort to any computer software to

help me with the analysis. According to Robson (2011), the process of data analysis is good to start with the research questions. In this research, I analysed the data according to two research foci: changes which occurred in teachers' beliefs and contributing or inhibiting factors on belief change. Data analysis started soon after the collection of data from the first interview. All the interviews were tape-recorded and transcribed soon after they ended. All the data were first transcribed in Chinese and then translated into English. It should be pointed out that teachers felt it was difficult to write their journals on a regular basis due to workload and other responsibilities. A total of 17 journals were submitted.

First, I set out to analyse the content of teachers' beliefs and changes which had occurred in beliefs during the first three years. I started the analysis using pre-determined codes: beliefs about subject, beliefs about teaching, beliefs about learning, beliefs about teachers, and beliefs about learners. These initial codes served as a clue for data analysis, from which basis I collected relevant phrases and sentences under each code heading, developing the five major areas of teachers' beliefs. Then I further identified the sub-themes and emerging themes under each category. Having coded all my data in this way (mainly the data from three rounds of semi-structured interviews and the journals), I printed out hard copies of the coded data and double-checked them by looking back to the original data to make sure that I had not missed any important

information. I compared teachers' beliefs at different time points: upon first entering the profession, at the beginning of their third year, at the midpoint of the third year, and at the end of the third year.

To answer the question about the contributing factors related to change, I looked for data from interview 1, 2, 3, and journals. An open and inductive coding procedure was used to explore factors on belief change. During the process of analysis, I kept an open mind to the unexpected themes and patterns, repeatedly reading the original material, comparing themes across cases and so on. If I encountered sentences like "I learn this idea from an educational book", I interpreted it as gaining new ideas from others and put it under the category of teacher activities. If a statement mentioned "collaborative relationships, buildings and so on", I interpreted it as a component of the school culture.

The theme of the relationships between teachers' beliefs and practices unexpectedly emerged. Teachers described their practices as being slightly deviated from their understandings about the ideal ways of EFL teaching. As far as the factors that were responsible for the inconsistency were concerned, three broad themes identified were used as initial codes: policy context factors, school context factors, and classroom context factors. After gathering the data under these three major areas, I started to repeatedly read the data for further emerging themes and patterns until I had decided the

categorization under each area. During the process of analysis, I kept an open mind to the unexpected themes and patterns, repeatedly revisiting the original materials and comparing themes across cases. The key codes and emerging themes were shown in **Table 3-2**.

Table 3-2 Key themes in contexts that mediate teacher beliefs and practices

Key codes	**Sub-themes**	**Sub-sub-themes**
Micro-context of classroom	Student factors	Students' grade level
		Students' ability
		Students' expectation
	Objective working conditions	Time constraints
		The lack of teaching resources
		Excessive workload
		Large class sizes
		Traditional classroom layout
Exo-context of school	Teacher effectiveness assessment	
	Contract employment practices	
Macro-context of society	The values of English in the less developed areas	
	Examination policy	

3.6 Ethical issues

Ethical issues emphasize that researchers need to protect the interests and rights of the subjects participating in the research (Cohen, Manion et al. 2007, Denscombe 2010).

According to Bryman (2008: 119), “in quantitative research, it is relatively easy to make records anonymous and to report findings in a way that does not allow individuals to be identified, however, this is often less easy with qualitative research, where particular care has to be taken with regard to the possible identification of persons and places.” This research was an in-depth case study of six teachers. It was inevitable that some ethical problems would emerge from this qualitative research. Diener and Crandall (1978) identify four main ethical principles:

The first principle is “whether there is harm to participants” (as cited in Byman, 2008: 118). Harm includes many aspects: “physical harm; harm to participants’ development; loss of self-esteem; stress; and ‘inducing subjects to perform reprehensible acts’” (ibid). It is the duty of researchers to minimize disturbance both to participants themselves and to participants’ relationships with their context or setting. All the teachers participating in this study were full time teachers. Some of them took on additional responsibilities. All of them were very busy. Thus, I attempted to be sensitive about any aspects of teachers’ engagement with the case study research that can potentially lead to physical discomfort or mental stress. I scheduled the interviews at the time when they were convenient. In this research, I tried my best to avoid causing pain or stress to participating teachers.

The second principle is “whether there is a lack of informed consent” (ibid). Bryman (2008: 121) claims, “as far as possible participation in sociological research should be based on the freely given informed consent of those studies.” This implies a duty on the researchers “to explain as fully as possible, and in terms meaningful to participants, what the research is about, who is undertaking and financing it, why it is being undertaken, and how it is to be promoted” (ibid). In this research, all the participants were invited to sign informed consent forms. The consent form outlines the purposes of the study, its background, the data collection methods, the extra time and effort they had to spend to the study, the benefits and potential harms to the participants, confidentiality and anonymity issues. Teachers were informed that their involvements with the research were voluntary and they had the freedom to refuse to answer any of the questions or withdraw from the research at any time. Teachers were also notified that nobody but the researcher and the supervisors had the right to see the data.

The third principle is “whether there is an invasion of privacy” (ibid., p.118). The issue of privacy can be related to issues of anonymity and confidentiality. In this research, I tried to be cautious about ensuring anonymity and confidentiality. I did everything I could do to guarantee anonymity and confidentiality. Information which was provided by teachers during the process of the research was treated as confidential. It cannot be traced back to the teachers who provided it. In order to protect identities, in this study, I

used *pseudonyms* for teachers who participated in the research. For example, in writing about the six teachers, I used pseudonyms like “Bijuan”, “Xiaoqin” or “Zhihui” to replace their real names.

The fourth principle is “whether deception is involved” (ibid). “Deception occurs when researchers represent their work as something other than what it is” (ibid., p. 124). In this research, I explained as fully as possible about the purpose of the research, its context, its procedure, the methods of data collection and everything relevant to the study to the participated teachers. I tried my best to avoid causing any deception and to present the work as what it was.

3.7 The issues of validity and reliability

Validity and reliability are two important aspects for effective qualitative and qualitative research (Cohen et al., 2007). In the present study, several measures were employed to enhance the validity and reliability.

The first related to methodological triangulation (Cohen et al., 2007). In capturing the complexity of teachers’ beliefs, this study adopted multiple methods which allowed me to elicit thick data and thus enabled me to present a comprehensive and holistic account of the phenomenon being studied. Semi-structured interviews offered me opportunities to probe and go more in-depth. Based on the interview transcriptions, I drew conceptual

mappings and asked the teachers to identify the one which closely matched their own, which further validated the data. Journals were employed to complement the data. The combination of these three methods thus powerfully enhanced the validity and reliability of this study.

Secondly, in order to ensure the validity, toward the end of data analysis, all the teachers had an opportunity to look at their prior interview transcripts and conceptual maps they chose. If they found anything different from their current thoughts, they could ask the researcher to modify them. The teachers all expressed satisfaction with their previous accounts and did not make any changes.

Thirdly, to ensure reliability, I tried my best to minimize researcher subjectivity and bias. During the process of collecting data, I constantly encouraged the teachers to express their real opinions rather than provide the answers in a way they thought I expected. In the process of data analysis, I tried to think outside and not to have particular expectations about the outcomes of the findings.

3.8 My role as a researcher

The main objectives of this study are to capture the beliefs and perceptions of six Chinese secondary English teachers, identify whether any changes occurred in these teachers' beliefs during their first three teaching years and illustrate why they change or

do not change beliefs. In order to investigate the above issues, I have to enter the social world of the participants and understand the contexts in which they work and live. I have to see the world through their eyes in order to understand why they interpreted certain situations like this. The participating teachers are my college classmates and we have a good personal relationship, which enables me to build rapport and trust with the respondents and reach a deep understanding. They felt relaxed and comfortable when talking with me and welcomed my presence, which allowed me to probe and go into more depth. In order to maintain our relationship and thank them for their cooperation, I would bring some small gifts from UK to my participants when I returned to China. However, due to our personal relationship, I needed to pay more attention to objectivity. During the whole research process, in order to remain objective, I reminded myself that I could not lose the sense of being a researcher and become too involved in the teachers' lives. I constantly reminded of myself of my researcher's role in the data collection and analysis process by reflecting on questions such as "What is my aim in this research? What kind of researcher-participant relationship is appropriate? Did I act as a researcher, and why and why not?" In addition, I encouraged the teachers to express their real opinions rather than provide the answers in a way they thought I expected.

In addition, I believe that my personal background as a trainee teacher and my professional knowledge of teachers' lives have affected the process and outcome of the

research. I think the active subjectivity of the researcher can facilitate her/him to work on the complex data and elicit the significant meanings of the subject's narratives. The researcher also needs to organize his/her subjectivity appropriately and generate a conclusion that is objective and empirically validated.

In many books and articles that centre on discussing the relationship between subjectivity and objectivity, the primary focus is on objectivity: what is it? how can we achieve it?, if we cannot, what can we do instead? and so on and subjectivity is always considered as secondary to objectivity and as something to be avoided (Gayle et al. 2013). However, some researchers accept subjectivity as inevitable and emphasize the significance of subjectivity in the pursuit for objectivity (e.g., Gayle et al. 2013, Ratner, 2002). For example, Ratner (2002) acknowledges that subjectivity of the researcher is inevitable because it guides everything from the selection of topic that the researcher examines, to formulating hypotheses, to designing methodologies and analysing data. He argues that:

> Objective knowledge requires active, sophisticated subjective processes – such as perception, analytical reasoning, synthetic reasoning, logical deduction, and the distinction of essences from appearances. Conversely, subjective processes can enhance objective comprehension of the world. (Ratner, 2002: 8)

Gayle (2013: 152) also recognizes the inevitability of subjectivity in research and suggests that "theorized subjectivity" moves researchers closer to "a positive, which we

might call objective, and is an attempt at what others have called ‘good enough objectivity’ or ‘collaborative objectivity’ and accepts that objectivity is value-laden.”

“Theorized subjectivity” acknowledges that:

> Research is a subjective, power-laden, emotional, embodied experience…Starting with subjectivity, though does not mean that we give in to the subjective, including in our subjectivities. Rather, it requires the constant, critical interrogation of our personhood within the knowledge production process. “Theorized subjectivity” relies on recognition that there is a ‘reality’ ‘out there’, but the political complexities of subjectivities are always part of the research process and impact on the research product. (Gayle et al. 2013: 152).

In my point of view, subjectivity and objectivity are intertwined in that subjectivity is difficult to be avoided in the process of pursuing objectivity and that the active subjectivity of the researcher can enable her/him to more accurately and objectively comprehend the subject’s meanings.

In this research, in order to utilize my subjectivity to enhance objective comprehensions of the reality, a reflexive approach was adopted during the entire research process. Finlay (2012: 317) defines reflexivity as “disciplined self-reflection” which is employed in various research areas as “explicit, self-aware reflection and analysis toward increasing richness and integrity of understanding.” A reflexive approach acknowledges “the significance of both the intellectual and personal auto/biography of researchers and of respondents” (Gayle et al. 2013: 90). My personal experiences as a trainee teacher

and my professional knowledge of teachers did have an effect on the process and outcome of the research. For example, during the process of interviewing, I was trying to be a "listening interviewer" who is involved in clarifying "what the respondent has said, suggesting alternative interpretations that seem to be consistent with the narrative construction of the respondent, and facilitating significant linkages between the evolving narrative of the respondent and the different meanings and events that the respondent has previously articulated" (Talmage, 2012: 296). Lillrank (2012: 282) also suggests that "the interviewer needs to first engage in active listening – meaning reflexive work or trying to understand the responses or an emerging story from the interviewee's point of view, and to theorize flexibly about what comes next regarding related follow- up questions." My professional knowledge of teachers' lives enables me to engage in these activities. For example, when Zhihui was asked to talk about the reason why she did not make significant changes in her beliefs and practices, she explained that "no chance…no one tells me how to improve…" (Interview 1b). My knowledge of school culture reminded me that perhaps this phenomenon was concerned with an 'individualistic school culture' and then I constructed a new question: "can you talk more about the learning environment in your school? are colleagues and leaders helpful?"

In the process of data analysis, my professional knowledge enabled me to capture and grasp the central themes and deep meanings of the teachers' narratives. The central themes are involved with "the significant psychological elements expressed in the narrative" (Ratner, 2002: 22). For example, based on my knowledge and understandings about teacher learning at the workplace, I categorized the activities that related to changes in teachers' beliefs into four themes: reflecting – (e.g., the teacher's comment: I think carefully about my practices while doing the laundry), experimenting – (e.g., the teacher's comment: I try out this new idea in my own classroom), getting a new idea – (e.g., the teacher's comment: I obtain this idea while surfing the internet), and experiencing a discrepancy – (e.g., the teacher's comment: as time went on I find this strategy does not work well, so).

Although the themes identified are my construction that go beyond the interviewees' literal words, the data validation strategies that I have used with my participating teachers (e.g. cross-checking my interpretations of their quotes) enabled me to be confident about the trustworthiness of my interpretations and judgment. These themes objectively reflect the meanings of the interviewees' statements. Ratner (2002: 22) indicates that the researcher should avoid declaring "meanings without grounding these in empirical evidence in the form of the subject's statements."

Chapter 4. Changes in beginning teachers' beliefs over time

4.1 Introduction

This study showed that beginning teachers' beliefs were not pre-determined or stable, but open to change and developments. During the three years, four beginning teachers had made dramatic changes in their beliefs about the nature of EFL from a tool for exams to a tool for communication, EFL learning from memorization to communication and interaction, EFL teaching from a traditional knowledge-transmission approach to a communicative student-centred approach, the role of EFL teacher from knowledge provider to learning facilitator and the role of students from passive acceptors to active participants. The teachers' belief changes can be interpreted as essentially cumulative and gradual. Factors that affect teachers' belief change will be discussed in Chapter 5. **Table 4-1** showed changes occurred in teachers' beliefs during the first three years in the profession.

Table 4-1 Changes in teachers' beliefs

Categories of beliefs		**Changes in beliefs during the first three years**	
Beliefs about subject matter (EFL)		A tool for passing the exams (all six teachers)	A tool for communication (Bijuan, Gaoyuan, Qiumei, Xiaoxue); an important tool for people's future career development (Bijuan and Xiaoxue); a different culture (Gaoyuan)
Beliefs about EFL learning		Memorization was the best way of learning EFL and time-commitment and hard work influence student learning (all six teachers)	Communication and interaction was the best way of learning EFL and students' active participation was important (Bijuan, Gaoyuan, Qiumei, Xiaoxue); collaborative learning was important (Bijuan); besides time-commitment and hard work, there were many factors that influence student learning, such as language aptitude (all teachers), family environment (Xiaoqin, Qiumei, Xiaoxue), parents' expectation (Bijuan) and involvement (Gaoyuan), and differences between boys and girls (Gaoyuan, Xiaoqin, Zhihui)
Beliefs about EFL teaching	Teaching aim	Passing exams (all six teachers)	Developing communicative skills (Bijuan, Gaoyuan, Qiumei, Xiaoxue); teaching the correct way of learning (Gaoyuan)
	Teaching process	Knowledge-transmission (all six teachers)	Learning facilitation (Bijuan, Gaoyuan, Qiumei, Xiaoxue)

	Teaching approach	Traditional language teaching approach (all six teachers)	Communicative language teaching approach (Bijuan, Gaoyuan, Qiumei, Xiaoxue); in the process of teaching teachers should consider the characteristics of the students and provide responsive support (all six teachers).
Beliefs about EFL learners	Learners' role	Passive recipients (all six teachers)	Active participants and younger sisters and brothers (Bijuan, Gaoyuan, Qiumei, Xiaoxue)
Beliefs about EFL teachers	Teachers' role	Knowledge providers and managers (all six teachers)	Facilitators (Bijuan, Gaoyuan, Qiumei, Xiaoxue), elder sisters (Bijuan, Xiaoxue), friends (Gaoyuan), and psychologists (Qiumei)
	Characteristics of effective teachers	An effective teacher was someone who had good knowledge about English, can explain things in an approachable way, and had great love for students (all six teachers)	An effective teacher should also respect students (Gaoyuan), and always be prepared (Bijuan), be enthusiastic (Xiaoxue and Bijuan), and be patient (Qiumei)

4.2 Teachers' beliefs about EFL teaching and learning

The beliefs of beginning teachers were assessed in five areas: subject matter (EFL), EFL learning, EFL teaching, EFL teachers (i.e., effective EFL teacher characteristics and the role of the EFL teacher), and the role of the EFL students. Comparisons

between teachers' beliefs upon first entering teaching and currently (in the third teaching year) were featured in this study.

4.2.1 Beliefs about subject matter: EFL

Upon first entering teaching, all six beginning teachers conceived EFL as a tool for passing the exams. The goal of language acquisition was to have a solid mastery of language knowledge and pass the exams. For example, Qiumei held the following belief:

> At the very beginning, I thought English was just a tool for passing exams. It is important for the students to build up a solid language basis. They can achieve high scores in exams only through this way. (Q.1b)

In the third year, four teachers changed to a view that English was a vehicle of the realization of communication among people, which can lead students to know more about other people and the outside world. They believed English was more concerned with the development of communicative skills than with the acquisition of linguistic knowledge. In Xiaoxue's words:

> Now I think English is essentially an international language, a tool that provides students with opportunities to communicate and understand foreign people and help them survive in the age of globalization. Learning English meant learning to speak English, and that should be the goal of English teaching. (X. 1b)

Two teachers also (Bijuan and Xiaoxue) stressed the importance of English for people's future career development, in that people with better English abilities were more likely

to gain decent jobs and get promotion opportunities. For example, Xiaoxue stated that "within the same profession, people with higher levels of English competence are more likely to get promotion and are much easier to be placed in manager positions" (X.1b). In addition, Gaoyuan began to attach cultural importance to English. She claimed that "English originates from culture. Teaching English means to introduce a different culture" (G.1b).

4.2.2 Beliefs about EFL learning

Teachers' beliefs about EFL learning comprised their beliefs about the best way of learning English and other factors that may influence student learning. When they first entered the profession, all the six beginning teachers conceived memorization as the best way of learning English. For example, Qiumei stated, "At that time, I thought students can learn English well if they can memorize the language points thoroughly and in detail" (Q.1b). In addition, all beginning teachers agreed that time-commitment and hard work was fundamental to English learning. For example, Xiaoxue indicated that "there are many ways to learn English. The key is time-commitment and hard work" (X.1b). In addition, Xiaoqin made the following comment:

> Learning English is not easy. It takes a long time for me to learn. You cannot master English through a day or one night. English is time-consuming and requires disciplined and continuous effort. (L.1b)

In the third year, four beginning teachers articulated how they shifted to a view that the best way to learn English was not memorizing, but to make every effort to use English. As Gaoyuan stated, “Students learn English best through communicating and interacting with other people. They need to catch every opportunity to use English” (G.1b). In addition, they began to emphasize the importance of students’ active participation in EFL learning. For example, Xiaoxue said that “students’ active engagement is especially important for English learning. In class, students should actively participate in the teaching activities in class, to speak, to communicate with other students; after class, they need to take more time to consolidate, to speak and to practice” (X.1b). In addition, Qiumei made the following comment:

> I have observed that high-performing students usually actively plan, set goals, and self-monitor at different points during the learning process. When encountering a problem in learning, high-performing students will seek a way to succeed; however, poor students will wait for the teacher’s explanations or simply ignore it. The successful students will actively enter extra training courses, read extra learning materials, and do extra exercises in order to improve their learning. (Q.2)

Moreover, one teacher (Bijuan) began to stress the benefit of collaborative learning among students by claiming that “we have study groups. Within the groups, students can challenge each other, exchange ideas, cooperatively solve learning problems and share learning materials. It can cultivate the students’ creativity, sense of responsibility and cooperation ability” (B.1b).

The six interviewed teachers became aware that besides time-commitment and hard work, there are a range of factors that may affect student learning, including language aptitude, family environment (e.g., divorced families and family violence), parental expectation and involvement, and the natural assets boys and girls brought to their learning. First, all the six beginning teachers became aware of the existence of language aptitude. For example, Xiaoxue once stated, “Some students just cannot learn English no matter how hard they worked. It seems that they lack an ability of learning English” (X.2). In addition, beginning teachers began to stress the impact of family environment on student learning. For example, Xiaoqin indicated that “the students who come from divorced families are more likely than their peers to exhibit bad behaviours (such as smoking, drinking and fighting with others) in school and cannot focus on study” (L.1b). Xiaoxue stated that “the students who are exposed to long-term family violence often have very low interpersonal and conflict solution skills” (X.1b). Qiumei also became aware of the fact that “the students who have experienced long-term family violence tend to show higher levels of anger, hostility and disobedience and are more likely to engage in violent behaviours (e.g., fighting or quarrelling with others) in schools” (Q.1b). The findings of these beginning teachers provide evidence for the results obtained from previous studies (Jenkins and Bell 1994, Cullinane, Alpert et al. 1997). For example, Jenkins and Bell (1994) indicated that high school students’ exposure to

community and family violence may induce negative behaviours (i.e., delinquency, violence, and drug abuse).

Moreover, beginning teachers reported that parents' expectation and involvement may have an effect upon student learning. For example, Bijuan found that there was a relationship between parental expectation on children's education and the students' academic achievement. She said that "the higher educational expectations the parents have on their children, the higher achievement their children make on the exams. These parents will overcome all difficulties and create the best conditions for their students' learning" (B.1b). Gaoyuan indicated that parental involvement can affect students' achievement by claiming that "the parents who actively get involved in school activities (e.g., teacher-parent meetings) and activities that promote learning outside of the class, such as visiting museums, places of interest, and famous universities are more likely to enhance their children's learning" (G.1b). The influence of parents on students' learning has also been found in former research (Christenson, Rounds et al. 1992, Keith, Keith et al. 1993, Singh, Bickley et al. 1995, Fan and Chen 2001, Jeynes 2007). For example, Fan and Chen (2001) indicated that parental expectation for children's education achievement had the strongest relationship with students' academic achievement whereas parental home supervision had the weakest relationship. Similarly, Singh et al. (1995) indicated that parental aspiration for children's education had a powerful

influence on the 8th-grade students' academic achievement, but this study found no effect of parents' participation in school activities upon students' achievement. Keith et al. (1993) argued that parental involvement in students' academic lives was indeed a significant influence on 8th-grade students' achievement. This effect held for all academic areas and might in part result from the increased homework completed by students with more involved parents. Jeynes (2007) also indicated that the influence of parental involvement was significant for the educational outcomes of urban secondary school children. The positive effects held for both white and minority children. Christenson et al. (1992) suggested five family and home environmental factors that influenced student achievement, including parent expectations and attributions, structure for learning, home affective environment, discipline, and parent involvement.

Furthermore, beginning teachers indicated that boys and girls were naturally different, which may affect their performance in learning. For example, Gaoyuan reported that "the girls often sit still, take notes, and listen carefully in the classroom whereas the boys have more physical movements and cannot focus on study" (G.1b). Xiaoqin claimed that "girls are often more quiet, more diligent than boys and thus, often score higher on exams" (L.1b). Zhihui found that "girls often learn language better whereas boys are better at learning maths or chemistry" (Z.1b). Former studies have confirmed that boys and girls really learn differently (Houtte 2004, King and Gurian 2006,

Kommer 2006). For example, Houtte (2004) found that girls' culture was more study-oriented than boys' culture and that this difference may explain why boys achieved less than girls at schools. In addition, King and Gurian (2006) indicated that "all over the world boys are struggling in school, with lower grades, more discipline problems, more learning disabilities, and more behaviour disorders than girls" (p. 56) and that "the natural assets that boys bring to learning comprise impulsivity, single-task focus, spatial-kinaesthetic learning, and physical aggression" (ibid).

4.2.3 Beliefs about EFL teaching

Teachers' beliefs about EFL teaching comprised their beliefs about EFL teaching objectives, EFL teaching processes, and EFL teaching approaches. When they first entered the profession, all six beginning teachers regarded helping students pass exams as their primary teaching goal. For example, Qiumei made the following comment:

> At that time, I was eager to be recognized by the school, parents, and students. I viewed enhancing students' scores as my primary goal. My school was a key public school in this city and students' performance in exams was one of the most important criteria to evaluate the effectiveness of a teacher. (Q.1b)

Teaching EFL was considered a process of knowledge-transmission. For example, Qiumei claimed that "at that time, teaching, for me, was a process of hammering knowledge into the students' heads" (Q.1b). All beginning teachers believed in the effectiveness of the traditional Chinese language teaching approach that combining the

grammar-translation method and audiolingualism which was characterized by "systematic and detailed study of grammar, extensive use of cross-linguistic comparison and translation, memorization of structural patterns and vocabulary, painstaking effort to develop good verbal habits, an emphasis on written language, and a preference for literary classics" (Hu, 2002: 93). For example, Bijuan made the following comment:

> At the very beginning, I thought the traditional approach could best help students. Most of my class time was spent on explaining, analysing, and retelling the vocabulary and grammar points which were carefully selected from the textbooks until the students learned every point by heart. Communicative activities were excluded in classrooms as I thought these activities were time-consuming and could not benefit students. Chinese was used when explaining difficult language points as explaining language points in English was often time-consuming and may make students become even more confused. (B.1b)

In the third year of teaching, teachers articulated how they shifted to a view that the ultimate aim of teaching English was to teach the students how to use English, how to communicate. For example, as Zhihui stated, "Now I think teaching English is not to teach students how to analyse sentence structures, how to translate and appreciate English literature and how to get high scores in exams. The ultimate aim is to teach the students ways to communicate with others" (Z.1b). Bijuan thought cultivating students' speaking and listening skills was especially important for the teachers who worked in rural areas:

> Rural students usually have poor spoken English and listening abilities, which make them less competitive compared with the students from urban areas after entering the universities and the society. The teachers who teach rural students should pay special attention to this phenomenon and attempt to shorten this gap. We should devote more effort into developing their communicative abilities. (B.2)

In addition, the beginning teachers developed a view that teachers should aim at teaching students how to learn, which was believed to be beneficial for students' lifelong learning. As Gaoyuan said, "There is a saying in Chinese which says it is always better to teach a person who were hungry to fish than to give him some fish. The teacher should teach the students the correct ways of learning rather than directly pass the knowledge to them" (G.2).

Teaching was viewed as a process of learning-facilitation. As Qiumei indicated, "Teaching is a process of facilitating students' learning. The teacher should use his/her own knowledge to facilitate and enrich the students rather than control them" (Q.1b). With regard to EFL teaching approaches, beginning teachers began to stress the value of the communicative language teaching approach. For example, Xiaoxue made the following comment:

> I now prefer a student-centred, communicative way of teaching. Communicative activities are effective to facilitate English learning. Group work can help students develop stronger cooperative and communication skills. The students are provided with an opportunity to share diverse perspectives. Working in pairs promotes maximum participation from all students, which is the only way of getting everyone speaking and listening at the same time in the classroom. The learning

> atmosphere can be significantly improved. Chinese should be excluded in an English classroom in order to create a pure English learning environment for the students. English classroom should focus less on grammar. The teachers should let the students use the grammar first and then ask them to induce the rules. (X.1b)

Three teachers also talked about the limitations of group and pair work. For example, Xiaoxue indicated that "some students would take advantage of pair or group discussion, talking about irrelevant topics" (X, 2). Zhihui claimed that "when students became excited working in groups or pairs they sometimes would use Chinese to express something they did not know the accurate English expressions" (Z.1b). Gaoyuan criticised that "group and pair work cause noisy and discipline problems in the classroom" (G.3). In addition, one teacher (Bijuan) realized that advanced technologies such as multi-media classroom, language labs, and computers can facilitate English teaching:

> I attended a famous teacher's lesson in the city centre. This teacher used multi-media to facilitate her teaching. I found that the students were attracted by the pictures and examples displayed in the big screen and showed great interest in learning. I think advanced technologies such as multi-media classroom and language labs are good to be used in English classrooms. (B.3)

All the beginning teachers realized that in the process of teaching teachers should consider the characteristics of the students and provide responsive support. For example, at the very beginning, Qiumei regarded adolescence as a time of alienation from adults and conducted emotional distancing behaviours:

> At that time, I thought the students at this age were at the transitional period between childhood and adulthood. They were rebelling and did not want to share their thoughts with parents and teachers. They were more willing to talk to their peers because they thought they were equal and could understand each other better. Usually I would leave them much personal space as I felt they did not like me to be too close to them. (Q.1b)

Over time, Qiumei shifted to a view that the students at this age were vulnerable, fragile and the students just wanted to obtain a certain degree of autonomy and did not like to be completely controlled by the adults. She emphasized that "teachers should increase interaction with the students and provide both emotional and academic support for them" (Q.1b).

In addition, Xiaoqin emphasized that the students from the economically disadvantaged rural or urban families should be provided with more economic, academic and emotional support because these students were more likely to be prejudiced or marginalized. She gave an example of Jiajue Ma. Jiajue Ma was a student in Yunnan University. He came from a very poor family. His classmates always looked down upon and bullied him. Consequently, he cannot bear it and killed four of his classmates. Xiaoqin thought this tragedy would have been avoided if the teacher had given more attention to him. Xiaoqin also realized that the teacher should encourage students. As she stated,

> Usually I would strongly criticize the students who performed badly in exams in order to stimulate them to work harder. However, after a time, I found these students became less motivated and some of them even gave up study. I began to think about my own contribution to it and concluded that too much criticism may hit their confidence and interest in learning. I realize students need encourage from teachers and parents. If the teacher and parents encourages the students when they do not perform well in the exams, the students may try harder to improve their performance. But if the teacher and parents only criticize the students for their bad performance, the students may lose self-confidence and even give up study. (L.1b)

Moreover, two teachers (Xiaoxue and Bijuan) became aware that the teacher should conduct more emotional communication with their students. For example, in the process of teaching, Xiaoxue felt frustrated that her relationships with students were not that close and the students were not willing to share ideas with her. She attempted to find solutions. An educational book suggested that the teacher should not only care about the students' academic performance but should also care about their personal lives and emotions and love them wholeheartedly. Xiaoxue reflected on her own practices and concluded that the teacher should pay more attention to students' emotions and personal lives. Bijuan realized that the students did not like her and felt great pressure when attending her lessons. This stimulated Bijuan to think about her own contribution to it. She realized that she focused too much on the students' academic achievements and lacked emotional communication with the students. She always left the classroom immediately when the bell rang. Bijuan felt that she should have more heart-to-heart communication with the students and provide the students with more emotional support.

Furthermore, Zhihui and Gaoyuan observed that the less gifted students were more willing to express their ideas and opinions in pairs or small groups because they would not be laughed at by the whole class if they said something wrong. Gaoyuan also realized that “the teacher should conduct more heart-to-heart talks with the introverted and silent students in class, encouraging them to open their hearts to others and actively interact with their peers” (G.1b).

Gaoyuan also reported that “the teacher should give special attention to the students with different ethnic or cultural backgrounds” (G.3). She had a Tibetan student. This student was quite different from other students in appearance, personality and behaviours. He showed great interest in singing and dancing. Gaoyuan respected his culture, providing a number of opportunities for this student to show himself and helped him adapt into the school.

4.2.4 Beliefs about EFL teachers and the role of the EFL students

Teachers hold beliefs about the characteristics of effective EFL teachers and the roles of the EFL teachers and EFL students.

Effective EFL teacher characteristics

The characteristics of effective teachers fell into three categories: knowledge about English, instructional skills and personal traits. During the three years, beginning teachers developed a more nuanced understanding of the characteristics of an effective teacher. An effective teacher was defined as someone who has sound knowledge about English, can explain things clearly, has good classroom management skills, had great love for students, respected students, and was always prepared, enthusiastic, and patient. When they first entered the profession, all six teachers expressed that an effective teacher was someone who had good knowledge about English, can explain things in an approachable way, and had great love for students. For example, Qiumei stated that:

> An effective teacher should have sound English knowledge and can answer the students' questions immediately and correctly. S/he should have the skills to explain things clearly and love the students wholeheartedly. (Q.1b)

In addition, Xiaoqin thought that an effective teacher should, on one hand, love the students and devote great time and energy into helping students, and, on the other hand, have a good knowledge about English and can provide students with correct, immediate and easily understood explanations. Three of them (Gaoyuan, Xiaoqin and Qiumei) also indicated that an effective teacher should have good classroom management skills. For example, Xiaoqin made the following comment:

> I do not think I was an effective teacher at the very beginning as I had difficulty in maintaining classroom discipline. The students keep talking when I need to talk. I have no idea to make them listen to me, only saying stupid things like, 'Be quiet,' 'Shut up,' and 'Stop talking." (L.1b)

As time went on, Qiumei realized that "an effective teacher should be patient with the students" (Q.2). Qiumei reported that her younger sister moved to her house recently and always asked her about English questions. She would became impatient and refuse to explain it for the third time if her sister still could not understand. Her sister felt angry and said that she was not a good teacher, due to lack of patience. Qiumei realized that she should become more patient with the students. In addition, Xiaoxue and Bijuan identified enthusiasm as one characteristic of an effective teacher. In Xiaoxue's words:

> I think a good teacher should be enthusiastic in teaching. Once in a staff meeting, school leaders strongly criticized some old teachers who had lost enthusiasm and muddled along from day to day. They said a good teacher should always be enthusiastic and energetic. I think enthusiasm is very important as it can motivate the teacher to improve current knowledge and skills and thereby better help the students. (X.1b)

Moreover, Gaoyuan indicated that "an effective teacher should respect the students" (G.3). Once a student was found smoking in the classroom. The head teacher was so angry and slapped him in the face in front of the whole class. However, teachers found this boy behaved worse and worse. Gaoyuan thought the head teacher's deeds may have destroyed this student's self-esteem and self-confidence and this student abandoned himself. Gaoyuan emphasized that each student had self-esteem and the teacher should

pay special attention to their words and deeds in order to protect the students' self-esteem. Furthermore, Bijuan realized that an effective teacher should always be well-prepared before entering the classroom. This idea originated from the teacher research group meeting. One teacher was strongly criticized by the leading teacher for her lack of preparation detected by the leading teacher's classroom tour.

The multidimensionality of teacher effectiveness was also evident in the findings of previous research (e.g., Miron 1983, Brown and Atkins 1993, Brosh 1996, Patrick and Smart 1998, Pozo-Muñoz, Rebolloso-Pacheco et al. 2000, Minor, Onwuegbuzie et al. 2002, Walls, Nardi et al. 2002, Koutsoulis 2003, Murphy, Delli et al. 2004, Park and Lee 2006, Arnon and Reichel 2007, Walker 2008, Stronge, Ward et al. 2011). For example, Patrick and Smart (1998) revealed that teacher effectiveness comprises three critical factors: showing respect for students, the ability to challenge students, and organization and presentation skills. Similarly, Brown and Atkins (1993) identified three factors of teacher effectiveness, including caring, being systematic and stimulating. In addition, Walker (2008) suggested twelve personal and professional characteristics of effective teachers, including being prepared, positive, holding high expectations, being creative, fair, displaying a personal touch, cultivating a sense of belonging, compassionate, having a sense of humour, respecting students, being forgiving, and admitting mistakes. Moreover, Minor, Onwuegbuzie et al. (2002) found that the pre-

service teachers' perceptions of the effective teacher characteristics can be categorized into the following seven themes: being student-centred, effective classroom and behaviour manager, a competent instructor, ethical, enthusiastic about teaching, having knowledge about subject, and being professional.

The roles of the EFL teacher and students

Teachers' beliefs about the teachers' and students' role tended to be consistent with their beliefs regarding teaching and learning. Upon first entering teaching, all six teachers defined themselves as a 'knowledge provider' whose task was to impart knowledge to the students and a 'manager' who controlled everything in the classroom. Students were considered 'passive recipients of information', with no power, no opinion. For example, Qiumei claimed that "my students are like a tape recorder and they can do nothing to the information they had recorded except to play it back" (Q.1b). In the third year, four beginning teachers articulated how they had shifted to a view that the teachers should be the 'facilitators' of students' learning and consistently, students' role became 'active participants.' For example, Gaoyuan indicated "what the teacher needs to do is to provide the needed help to the students at the proper times" (G.2). In addition, the terms used by the teachers to describe themselves and the students showed they began to care about students' emotional and psychological well-being. They began to stress

that the teachers should also be ‘elder sisters,’ (Bijuan, Xiaoxue) ‘friends,’ (Gaoyuan) and ‘psychologists’ (Qiumei) who tried to go into students’ hearts, understand their feelings and maintain their psychological health. Consistently, they thought the students should act as “younger sisters, brothers,” trusting the teacher, opening their heart to the teacher, and sharing worries and happiness with the teacher. In the third year, Qiumei indicated that the teacher should also be an “observer” because “s/he should be sensitive to the students’ bad tempers or behaviours and attempt to correct them in time” (Q.1b). Qiumei noticed that a student became very rude and irritated recently and thought this change might be avoided if she could detect and find the reasons behind it earlier and offer help in time.

Chapter 5. Factors that influence beginning teachers' belief change

5.1 Introduction

In this chapter I conduct a detailed discussion on factors that affect teachers' belief change. The factors that influence teachers' belief change can be grouped into three themes: (1) professional learning activities (including getting new ideas from others, experimenting, reflecting, and experiencing a discrepancy); (2) personal factors (including self-efficacy beliefs and goal orientations); and (3) workplace conditions (including the culture of the school and leadership practices).

Table 5-1 A summary table of factors that influence teachers' belief change

Teachers / Factors	Qiumei	Xiaoxue	Bijuan	Gaoyuan	Xiaoqin	Zhihui
	Dramatic changes in beliefs				**No evident changes in beliefs**	
Learning activities	High levels of engagement in activities and a focus on collaborative activities				Lower levels of engagement in activities and a focus on individual activities	
Personal factors	Strong sense of self-efficacy and mastery-oriented goal orientation				Performance goal orientation and low self-efficacy	Mastery goal orientation and diminishing efficacy beliefs
School culture	Collaborative school cultures					Individual school cultures
Leadership	Supportive leaders (e.g., creating collaborative cultures, providing professional development opportunities, and encouraging risk-taking and experimentation)					Unsupportive leaders

5.2 Professional learning activities

There appeared to be four major categories of professional learning activities which beginning teachers experienced: getting new ideas from others, experimenting, reflecting, and experiencing a discrepancy. Four teachers reported that dramatic changes in their beliefs about the nature of EFL, EFL learning, EFL teaching, EFL teachers and EFL students were an outcome of their high levels of engagement in various professional learning activities. Especially, collaboration with colleagues and experimentation with colleagues' ideas were considered important. The remaining teachers who made no evident changes in their beliefs exhibited lower levels of participation in these activities and a focus on individual activities, in particular experimentation with a self-invented method due to realization of the ineffectiveness of certain method.

5.2.1 Getting new ideas from others

Getting new ideas from others constituted deliberate information seeking and accidental acquaintances with new ideas. The sources of new ideas comprised books, internet, in-service activities, colleagues and students. This activity often leads to a change in teachers' beliefs combined with reflecting and/or experimenting. This activity can be conducted both individually (e.g., reading an educational article, magazine or book,

searching the educational websites) and in interaction with others (e.g., colleagues, students). For example, Xiaoxue got a new teaching idea called ‘emotional education’ from an educational book:

> This idea comes from an educational book introducing a teaching approach called ‘emotional education.’ It suggests that the teacher should not only care about the students’ academic performance but should provide more emotional support for the students, loving and caring them wholeheartedly. This idea really inspires me. (X.1b)

Teachers can get new ideas from an informal, unplanned interaction with a colleague (e.g., having a casual chat with a colleague). For example, Bijuan reported that she got an idea of contextualized vocabulary teaching when conducting a casual talk with her colleague during the long break:

> Usually we would bring the students to the playground during the long break and our teachers got a chance to talk to each other. I found that my students felt difficult to remember the words and told one colleague about my problem. My colleague mentioned that the new words can be taught with vivid example sentences. This idea really inspired me. (B.1b)

By engaging in a formal or planned interaction with colleagues (e.g., mentoring support, teacher research groups, lesson preparation groups), the teachers had an opportunity to obtain new teaching ideas and methods. For example, Qiumei indicated that she learned an idea of a ‘student lesson’ when observing her mentor’s class:

> I think a ‘student lesson’ is a good way to teach. I learned this idea from my mentor teacher. Once I saw my mentor doing a ‘student lesson.’ She let the students prepare to teach and then teach a part of the lesson. The students showed great interest in it and expressed they learned well in this way. It really inspired me. (Q.1b)

Four beginning teachers reported that they frequently attended formal activities such as workshops and short courses during the first three years and found these activities helpful and valuable. For example, Qiumei indicated that formal training activities contributed to the changes in her beliefs:

> I had participated in lots of formal training activities. The educational specialists introduced how English should be taught from their perspectives. On the whole, they promoted that English teaching should centre on communicative functions rather than merely linguistic knowledge. Communicative activities (e.g., games, role plays, and problem-solving tasks) should be widely adopted in order to provide students with opportunities to use English. A relaxed, pleasant learning environment should be created. The teacher should provide proper help when needed and the students were the centre of the classroom. These ideas really inspired me. (Q.1b)

This finding is in line with the observation of Richards et al’s (2001) study. Their participating teachers listed the in-service courses as the most influential factor on their beliefs because it provided them with opportunities to gain up-to-date teaching ideas from other experts and to meet and share ideas with their counterparts in other schools.

Beginning teachers also indicated the limitations of the formal training activities. First, they stated that the in-service teacher training courses were still conducted in a traditional way, with the teachers listening to theory-based lectures. The teachers as the

main body of the training rarely had opportunities to experience, investigate, and evaluate the concepts introduced by the courses. In Xiaoqin's words:

> Most training I have attended is carried out in the form of classroom lectures, with educational specialists standing in front of the class and lecturing what they know. They try to hammer the new concepts into our heads. We have no opportunities to further discuss and explore the new approach during the course. (L.2)

Second, the training programmes adopted a 'one for all' strategy, ignoring the individual differences of the teachers, such as their needs, abilities, and teaching realities and so on. For example, Bijuan made the following comment:

> The situations in rural schools are quite different from urban schools in many aspects, such as teaching facilities, teachers' abilities, students' needs, and so on. But the training courses often ignore it and train the rural and urban teachers in the same way. (B.2)

The third limitation was that formal teacher education courses lacked follow-up opportunities for the participants and programme staff to interact and communicate. As Xiaoxue stated, "In-service training ends when we leave the course and no one will go into our school and teach us how to apply the theory hand by hand." (X.3)

5.2.2 Experimenting

Experimenting refers to an activity in which a teacher deliberately tries out new ideas in teaching practice and evaluates the outcomes. Experimentation can be divided into experimentation with a teaching idea directly from others, experimentation with a self-

invented teaching method, and experimentation with a method developed together with colleagues. The interviewed teachers experimented either because they found their current method did not work well or occasionally encountered a new idea or method they wanted to try within their own classrooms. A change in teachers' beliefs often occurred after their witness of the positive outcomes of the experimentation. When Bijuan was asked to talk about why she began to stress the importance of students' active participation in learning, she explained:

> I used to think I should correct everything for the students. But later after doing this for a while I realized that the disadvantages of this were greater because many students just simply looked at the mistakes, without deeply thinking about them and repeated the same mistakes next time. I told this problem to one colleague. She suggested that perhaps asking the students to correct their own work first and then for me to offer some feedback was better. I tried this new idea and found students indeed remembered the mistakes better. Then I begin to think that students can learn better if they actively participate in learning process. (B.1b)

5.2.3 Reflecting

Teachers both reflected while actively engaging in teaching and after the practice. This meant teachers both reflected in and on action (Schőn 1983). This activity led to changes in teachers' beliefs either in combination with experimenting or on their own. Teachers either reflected alone or together with other colleagues. The following example showed how reflection-in-action caused a change in the teacher's beliefs:

> I remembered once I was teaching a reading lesson. Most students felt that it was difficult to understand the reading passage. I felt puzzled because it did not contain

> any new vocabulary and complex sentences. I began to ask myself "What did I ignore?" "How can I help them?" Then I tried to introduce some background cultural information and found the students suddenly understood and laughed. I realize that language cannot be separated from culture and we should introduce more cultural knowledge while teaching a language. (Q.1b)

In addition, Bijuan indicated that at the very beginning she was obsessed with teaching grammar. The majority of her class time was spent on presenting, explaining, and retelling the grammar points. Bijuan had high expectations for her students' achievements in the final exam. She believed that her students had a solid mastery of grammatical knowledge and were able to achieve high scores in the exam. However, to her disappointment, the students performed very badly in the final exam. It seemed that the students failed to remember what she taught in class. Bijuan reflected on her own practice and concluded: "I think the teacher should not teach too much grammar in lessons. The students cannot remember it and it only becomes a burden for them" (B.1b).

5.2.4 Experiencing a discrepancy

Similar to the research of Bakkenes, Vermunt et al. (2010), two forms of discrepancies were also found in this study: (1) an entirely unexpected event (positive or negative) took place in class; (2) the awareness that usual teaching behaviours or methods did not work any longer. The first form was a spontaneous accidental experience, the latter referred to a longer period of time during which there was a growing feeling of

dissatisfaction. Experiencing a discrepancy between what was expected and what really happened usually gave rise to the activities such as seeking new ideas from others, reflecting in/on action, and experimenting. In the following example, the teacher's realization of the ineffectiveness of her current traditional ways of teaching led her to seek new methods from colleagues, and following her successful experimentation with the new ideas in classroom, she appeared to have changed beliefs:

> I found my students were not very motivated in class. I thought I have to make some changes in my current traditional teaching ways. I turned to my mentor teacher and other colleagues for help…Then I began to constantly try out communicative activities such as group and pair work in my own classroom. Gradually, the classroom learning atmosphere had been indeed improved. Then I started to think the communicative student-centred approach is really on the right track. (Q.1b)

5.3 Personal factors

Teachers' self-efficacy beliefs and goal orientations were identified as two important personal factors that affected their participation in professional learning activities. Teacher self-efficacy is defined as a "teacher's belief in his or her own capability to organize and execute courses of action required to successfully accomplish a specific teaching task in a particular context" (Tschannen-Moran, Hoy et al. 1998: 233). In the current research I found that self-efficacy can strengthen the effort and time teachers put into teaching, the goals they set for themselves, their persistence in the face of obstacles and failures, which tended to enhance their engagement in professional learning

activities and in turn, this led to belief change. For example, Xiaoxue made the following comment:

> I am confident in my abilities and aim to be one of the most capable teachers in this school. I am eager to absorb new insights from others. I read a lot of books, attending colleagues' lessons…and I will try out those new ideas in my own classroom and compare…I am still thinking about my teaching while doing laundry. In the end, I made dramatic changes in beliefs about EFL learning and teaching. (X.1b)

Five interviewed teachers indicated that although facing up a variety of difficult challenges and problems after entering teaching, they still maintained strong self-efficacy beliefs. The key problems derived from the six informants comprised classroom management, lack of knowledge in the subject matter/curriculum, and lack of effective teaching strategies. The assistance from the colleagues and school leaders made a significant contribution to their strong sense of efficacy. To quote two of the teachers:

> The beginning period was very hard for me. I was so inexperienced and lacked lots of things. I did not know how to explain things clearly. I lacked knowledge about the subject matter and cannot answer the students' questions immediately. I felt great pressure. But I never lose hope and confidence. I know many people stood behind me. I can ask help from the mentor teacher and other colleagues when difficulties arise. Although it is not easy, I think I will succeed if I persist and keep learning with and from others. (Qiumei, interview 2)

> I became aware of the complexity of the teaching reality shortly after entering the profession. But I think I can develop as an effective teacher as time went on. In our school, colleagues are willing to help each other. The mentor teacher offers me a lot of encouragements and advice. Our leaders value the teachers' collective work, offer us sufficient CPD opportunities, and are sensitive to the needs and problems

> of the new teachers and provide responsive support. I feel good to be a teacher in our school. (Xiaoxue, interview 1b)

The effects of in-school support on teachers' self-efficacy have also been found in previous studies (Hong, 2012, Hoy and Spero, 2005, Swan et al., 2011, Tschannen-Moran and Hoy, 2007). For example, Hong (2012) highlights the importance of supportive administration for establishing teachers' stronger sense of self-efficacy and shaping a safe environment for teachers. Tschannen-Moran and Hoy (2007) claim contextual factors such as teaching resources and interpersonal support affect teachers' efficacy. Goal orientation refers to "the goals pursued by individuals in achievement situations" (Chiaburu and Marinova, 2014: 113). The teachers with mastery goal orientations focused on "increasing their learning and/or task competence, seeking challenges, and persisting in the case of failures" (Chiaburu and Marinova, 2005: 113) and were likely to participate more in various learning activities and make more dramatic changes in beliefs. The performance-oriented teachers were interested in "demonstrating task competence through gaining positive and avoiding negative judgments of competence" and tended to "avoid challenges, decrease their effort and persistence following failure, and fear negative evaluation by others" (ibid), which may negatively influence their involvement in learning activities and thus, the extent to which they changed beliefs. The following example showed how Gaoyuan's mastery goal orientation contributed to the significant change in her beliefs about EFL teaching.

Gaoyuan reported that once she attended her mentor's class and found that her mentor's lessons were really appealing and full of interesting activities, pictures and jokes. There was a big smile on every student' face. Gaoyuan was greatly inspired by her mentor's student-centred, communicative way of teaching. Gaoyuan was a person who liked to seek challenges and constantly learn new things. She did not avoid it but began to exert great effort and time in systematically comprehending and evaluating the communicative teaching approach, such as reading the information packets, watching online videos of successful teachers' demonstration lessons, checking the students' feedback, discussing the problems she encountered with her mentor teacher and so on. In the end, she discarded her traditional teacher-centred view on EFL teaching and began to stress that the student-centred, communicative way was really on the right track.

5.4 School culture

The culture of the school plays a significant role in creating or diminishing opportunities for teacher learning. School culture is "a complex web of norms, values, beliefs and assumptions, and traditions and rituals that have been built over time as teachers, students, parents, and administrators work together, deal with crises, and develop unstated expectations for interacting and working together" (Peterson and Brietzke, 1994: 6). In this study, I applied Jurasaote-Harbison's (2010) framework

highlighting five dominant dimensions of school culture: the school mission, traditions, physical architecture, organizational arrangements, and professional relationships.

5.4.1 School mission

The mission of a school mirrors philosophy, values, and priority of the school community. According to Deal and Peterson (2009: 26), the purpose and mission of the school define "what actions ought to occur; they motivate staff and students by signalling what is important and what will be rewarded; and they steer the allocation and distribution of resources, depending on what is considered important or valuable."

Teachers indicated how the school had posted its mission statement on the web and hanged it in the main hallway. Some other schools even had the mission statement in every single classroom and in the office. In general, the missions of the participating schools covered the following five themes: (1) academic development (e.g., students' academic success), (2) emotional development (e.g., sense of morality), (3) social development (e.g., helping students develop interpersonal skills and better integrate into the community), (4) physical strength and well-being (e.g., a strong and healthy body), and (5) civic development (e.g., responsible citizens, contributing members of the society). This finding is similar to the results of previous studies (Stemler, Bebell et al. 2010, Chapple 2015). Most beginning teachers reported that the mission of the school

exerted an impact on their beliefs about teaching and learning. For example, Gaoyuan made the following comment:

> I think the teacher should conduct more heart-to-heart talks with the ted and silent students in class, encouraging them to open their hearts to others and actively interact with their peers. The school mission affects me. The mission of our school is to help students better integrate into the society. The silent or introverted students were more likely to have problems in socializing into the society in the future than the talkative, extrovert students. (G.1c)

5.4.2 Traditions

Teachers indicated that schools' traditional events played a significant role in extending contexts for teacher interaction and learning. For example, Xiaoxue indicated that there was a tradition in the English department that all the teachers within the department would have dinner together at the end of every month, which provided them with opportunities to meet and share ideas with each other. Xiaoxue stated that,

> During the dinner time, we will talk about the problematic students, rumours about the leaders, and our own worries and happiness. Once, my colleague talked about a girl who worked very hard but still lagged behind. We concluded that she just lacked good learning strategies. (X.1b)

In addition, Qiumei reported that her school would hold a teaching competition every year, which provided teachers with opportunities to learn with and from one another:

> Every year, our school holds a teaching competition. All the teachers have to participate in it. We learn a lot through preparing for the demonstration lesson and observing other teachers' demonstration lessons. (Q.2)

5.4.3 Physical environments

The architecture features of the school buildings can provide or inhibit opportunities for teachers' interaction and learning. Some teachers reported that the architecture of the buildings created obstacles for their interaction. For example, Zhihui indicated that she worked in a two-winged, four-floor building and did not have much spare time to interact with the teachers on the other wing and other floors in the building:

> I only have opportunities to exchange ideas with the colleagues on the other wing and other floors when we take the students to the yard during the long break…only several words like, "Which unit are you in?" Interaction is scarce. (Z.2)

Similarly, Xiaoqin reported that "there are two separate teaching buildings in the school and the teachers lack opportunities to meet and share opinions with the teachers who work in the other building" (L.1b). Others indicated that the structure of the buildings provided spaces for their interaction. For example, Qiumei stated that "there is a big terrace in the building. During the break, many teachers like to go there, breathing fresh air, talking, and exchanging ideas" (Q.1c).

The proper classroom allocation within the floor plan of the building was also found to increase the teachers' interaction. For example, Gaoyuan indicated that all the seventh grade teachers occupied the third floor, which allowed them to interact:

> All the teachers in our grade-level work in the same floor. I feel easy to meet other colleagues and find out what they do in their classrooms. We also can share educational materials, discuss students' work and exchange information in time. (G.1c)

Likewise, Xiaoxue reported that the teachers' office and her classroom were placed at the same floor, which allowed her interaction with other colleagues. She stated, "During the break, I will stay at the teachers' office which is near my classroom. I get more opportunities to conduct timely communication about teaching with other teachers" (X.1b).

5.4.4 Organizational arrangements

Three types of organizational arrangements that created opportunities for teacher interaction and learning were found in all six schools: mentor-trainee pairs, teacher research groups, and lesson planning groups.

In order to ease initial transition into the classroom, all schools implemented the systems of mentoring teachers. Teachers reported that mentor-mentee pairs were built by schools when they first joined teaching. Mentors were found to influence the new teachers in the following three ways: first, mentors can provide demonstrations of good teaching practices. Usually, the mentors would invite new instructors to observe as they taught. Second, mentors would also observe the mentees' lessons and provide timely and constructive feedback on their performance. Third, mentors can help solve mentees'

uncertainties and problems. For example, mentors can offer suggestions on the ways of motivating students, classroom management and allocating students homework. The guidance and suggestions the new teachers received from their mentor appeared to help them a lot. Taking Qiumei as an example:

> When I first started teaching, I was assigned a mentor, an experienced senior teacher, by the school. For that semester I frequently attended her lessons and observed how she explained things. I often thought while I was listening to her. "Wow, it was not the way I was going to explain it, but it was really much easier to understand!" I got lots of inspirations while listening to her… She also gave me suggestions on how to get along with students. She said that the teacher should keep a certain distance from the students and not be too close to them in order to maintain teacher authority. As time went on, with the mentor's help, I developed a deeper understanding of the methodology and art of teaching. (Q.1b)

In addition, the findings in this study provided some evidence for the characteristics of effective mentoring support. Teachers reported that they preferred to work with the mentors from the same subject area and grade level as they were experiencing similar situations and the mentor teachers knew more about their concerns and dilemmas and were more likely to offer timely and appropriate support. Beginning teachers also reported that ideally mentors and beginners had similar personalities as they had more commonalities and can better understand each other. Similarly, White and Mason (2006) argued that "mentoring effectiveness was impacted by whether the mentor and new teacher were teaching in the same building, and teaching in the same type of students,

and teaching at the same grade level, as well as the level of administrative support they received" (p. 198).

According to Paine and Ma (1993), the teacher research group was a major form of Chinese teachers' collaboration. The teacher research group comprised teachers working within the same subject area. Every teacher research group had a head who was regarded as the best of the group. The teacher research group would organize weekly group meetings and collectively study and explore the subject matter, examine teaching methods, set the teaching objectives of each grade level, and so on. The teachers frequently mentioned the positive effects of the teaching research groups upon them for their teaching. Taking Xiaoxue as an example:

> Our English teacher group holds meetings every Friday's afternoon. We have opportunities to meet and exchange information with other colleagues. The more experienced teachers will introduce some fresh ideas and effective teaching methods in the meeting, which is especially helpful for our new teachers. I learn a lot from here. (X.1b)

The third type is lesson planning groups. The teachers teaching the same subject in the same grade level worked together to discuss what the Chinese termed 'important points,' 'difficult points,' and 'key points' in the lesson and how to teach these and then design an instructional plan for this lesson. All the teachers taught on the basis of the agreed

lesson plan. This practice may increase teachers' confidence while teaching and guarantee the quality of teaching. In Bijuan's words:

> As a new teacher, I was so inexperienced. The senior teachers in lesson preparation groups would tell us what the key points of a lesson were and how to teach them. I felt more confident and secure while teaching after the lesson plan discussion. (B.1b)

5.4.5 Professional relationships

Five beginning teachers expressed satisfaction with and enjoyment of their professional relationships. The atmosphere of their schools seemed to be friendly and collegial. Teachers indicated they frequently engaged in professional dialogue with colleagues, shared ideas, experiences, methods, and materials, and worked on things together (e.g., analysing teaching practices and effects, discovering solutions to challenging problems, etc.). For example, Gaoyuan indicated she got a lot of useful stuff from the talk with a colleague:

> Ellen and I both arrive early in the morning and we chat. We chat endlessly about lessons, students. I think the most important thing she does is just to be somebody there for me to talk to. I stop her and say 'Can I ask you a stupid question?' and I just ask question. I think I get the most useful stuff at the beginning of the day. (G.1b)

Qiumei reported that teachers in her school felt natural to work on things together. In her words:

> We are doing a lot of things together. For example, we prepare lesson plans together, design and prepare materials together, analyse teaching effects and

> practices together, and so on. We feel it is natural for us to collaborate with one another. (Q.2)

There was a climate of support, trust and openness within their school. Teachers indicated they would not waste time and effort covering their failures. They felt safe to share and discuss their problems with other colleagues. Colleagues were willing to share their ideas, experiences, and teaching methods and listen to both the concerns and ideas of others. They also willingly revealed the more personal sides of themselves. Colleagues took pride in each other's accomplishments and recognised the efforts of others, not seeing themselves in competition with one another. For example, Xiaoxue made the following comment:

> I think we have a supportive, collegial environment. We frequently collaborate with one another. We feel safe to share and discuss our failures and problems. Other teachers will not laugh at you, but will help you wholeheartedly and offer useful suggestions. Teachers do not see themselves in competition with one another and were willing to share their ideas, experiences and teaching methods. They also care about the personal lives of others. (X.1c)

One teacher consistently talked about their feelings of individualism and isolation. Teachers in schools seemed reluctant to be observed by others – they fervently protected their professional identify from any damage. They were not willing to reveal the personal sides of themselves and share ideas and experiences with each other. The teacher research group and lesson preparation group meetings, although introduced formally to the teachers, did not occur on a regular basis. During this time, teachers

were not actively engaged in discussions and some teachers even did not show up. Teacher isolation was enhanced by the architectural features.

5.5 Leadership

School leaders were found to play a significant role in supporting teacher learning. First, five beginning teachers reported that their school leaders were committed to shaping collaborative school cultures. For example, in Gaoyuan's school, an atmosphere of mutual respect and collegiality was created by the principal:

> Our principal is very friendly. He allows us to visit him, calls him by his full name, and shares problems. Our teachers pick it up and transmit to the students. He also introduces a nice tradition of break talk. We have a lengthy twenty-minute' break every morning. At that time, the teachers, the principal and other administrators will gather in the staff room. It is for everyone and we can talk about anything we like. Our teachers like it very much. (G.1c)

Such a collegial spirit appeared to permeate to every corner of the school. Gaoyuan indicated that the teachers in her school were willing to help and share ideas with each other and they would do many things together, such as compiling the test papers, exploring teaching methods, and organizing students' activities. In the case of Qiumei, the leaders of the English department frequently visited classrooms, talking to the students and observing teachers' teaching, and then gathered all teachers together to discuss about the problems they detected in classroom tours. "Their visit felt like pressure at the very beginning. But as time went on, I feel more comfortable because I

really learn a lot from the discussion meetings" (Q.1b). Bijuan indicated that "I was new here. The head of our department encouraged me to attend experienced teachers' classrooms and told me that observing how she did might give me some inspirations" (B.1c).

In addition, five teachers indicated that school leaders provided support for their formal professional development. For example, as Xiaoxue stated, "The leaders of the department will inform us about any possibilities for professional development outside the school and encourage our participation. Last year, I went to Australia. Next year, probably I will fly to Shanghai to attend a short in-service course." (X.1b) Qiumei also pointed out that the leaders of her department put great efforts into conducting in-service teacher education by arranging for teachers to have opportunities outside the school and organizing opportunities in the school by inviting outside 'experts' to give lectures about their new ideas and reflections on English teaching.

Moreover, three beginning teachers reported that their school leaders encouraged risk taking and experimentation. For example, Qiumei claimed that "we feel supported by leaders to experiment with something new. The schools leaders give us the time to try out a new method and ask us afterwards what the outcome was" (Q.1b).

One teacher felt bitter toward the way the leaders treated their staff. The leaders enacted a top-to-down management style. Neither the principal nor middle managers provided support for formal professional development and valued informal interaction and collaboration among teachers. The teachers were at the bottom of the hierarchy and acted as implementers of what the government and the administration required them to do. Zhihui made the following comment:

> In our school, it seems that the managers believe all the power belongs to them. When discussing a problem with a colleague, they can interrupt at any time and tell us what to do. They felt free to enter our classroom to check if we taught as they required. (Z.1b)

5.6 Conclusion

This chapter presented the factors that affected teachers' beliefs. Teachers' engagement in professional learning activities, namely getting new ideas from others, reflecting, experimenting, and experiencing a discrepancy, was found to play a significant role in affecting their beliefs. Teachers' strong self-efficacy and mastery goal orientation tended to enhance their engagement in professional learning activities and therefore, their belief change. Teachers tended to have more learning opportunities in the schools where the physical architecture allowed teachers' interaction, collaborative school cultures were established, and the leaders attached great importance to teachers' professional development. In the present study, four teachers made dramatic changes in

their beliefs about the nature of EFL from a tool for exams to a tool for communication, EFL learning from memorization to communication and interaction, EFL teaching from a traditional knowledge-transmission approach to a communicative student-centred approach, the role of EFL teacher from knowledge provider to learning facilitator and the role of students from passive acceptors to active participants. Teachers' high levels of engagement in professional learning activities and a focus on collaborative activities, strong self-efficacy beliefs, mastery goal orientation, collaborative school cultures and supportive school leaders were major reasons for the dramatic changes in their beliefs. For one teacher, although learning opportunities in the workplace were rich, she did not frequently participate in them due to her weak efficacy beliefs and performance goal orientation. For the other teacher, negative learning conditions of the workplace (e.g., individualistic culture, lack of appropriate CPD, unsupportive leaders) constrained her participation, despite her mastery goal orientation. The efficacy beliefs of this teacher declined as time went on due to problems encountered in teaching and negative learning environments.

Chapter 6. The extent to which teachers perceived that their beliefs influenced their practices

6.1 Introduction

This study did not set out to explore the relationships between teachers' beliefs and practices. However, the narratives of the six beginning teachers provided some evidence on this topic. Four beginning teachers reported that although they had made dramatic changes in their beliefs about the nature of EFL from a tool for exams to a tool for communication, EFL learning from memorization to communication and interaction, EFL teaching from a traditional knowledge-transmission approach to a communicative student-centred approach, the role of an EFL teacher from knowledge provider to learning facilitator and the role of students from passive acceptors to active participants, their teaching practice can be best described as presenting a mixed approach, integrating the features of a communicative student-centred language approach with a traditional teacher-centred language approach. Contextual factors (e.g., student expectation, working conditions, teacher assessment, etc.) appeared to constrain teachers' ability to fully implement their beliefs into practice, which is in line with the findings of previous studies (e.g., Anderson 1993, Karavas-Doukas 1996, Phipps and Borg 2009).

6.2 Changes in teachers' practices over time

All six beginning teachers indicated that they had taught English in a traditional teacher-centred way upon first entering teaching. The most obvious features of their English classrooms were: (1) teacher-centeredness. The teacher was the centre of classroom activities and the lecture-method was used: the teacher told the students what she thought they ought to know, with all the students either listening or taking notes; (2) an emphasis on linguistic details and a lack of attention to communicative skills. The teachers spent the majority of the classroom time explaining the vocabulary, grammar points, sentence structures, and then asked the students to learn them by heart. Little attention was paid to communicative skills; and (3) Chinese was widely used when explaining language points. For example, Xiaoqin made the following comment:

> Initially, I taught in a very traditional teacher-centred way. There was a keen interest in an exact understanding of every word and grammar point. In the classroom, I frequently asked: "Why is it used here?" "Can you tell me the difference between these two?" Pair work activities were occasionally implemented whereas group work activities were never used. There was little classroom interaction. Most of the students kept silent throughout the lesson. When a question was asked, few students volunteered to answer, even though they knew the answer. (L.1b)

As time went on, two beginning teachers reported that they remained teaching EFL in a traditional teacher-centred way, despite some minor adjustments. As Zhihui stated, "There are no evident changes in my teaching. I still teach in a traditional teacher-centred way and focus on transmitting language knowledge to students" (Z.2). The

remaining teachers indicated that they taught English in a mixed approach, combining the features of both a traditional language teaching approach and a communicative language teaching approach. First, although teachers spent a large amount of time explaining vocabulary and language points and required the students to learn them by heart, they would provide students with opportunities to practice and learn how to use the language. As Xiaoxue indicated, “During the process of introducing the language knowledge, I will initiate some questions for the students to answer and motivate their active participation. The students would also be encouraged to engage in pair and group discussion after the presentation of the vocabulary and language points” (X.2). In addition, Qiumei made the following comment:

> Now my approach is not completely traditional or communicative. Although I place great emphasis on explanations of language points, I will ask questions to motivate the students’ involvement and will leave some time for communicative activities, such as playing games and sing songs. I will not tell them in advance what we are going to do after the explanations of language knowledge in order to maintain their interest and curiosity. (Q.1b)

Second, the teachers usually would present elaborate explanations on grammar rules first and then provide them with some circumstances to apply the rules. As Bijuan indicated, “Merely presenting grammar rules is insufficient to help students master the rules, the teacher should offer students more opportunities to use the rules and internalize the rules” (B.3). Third, the teachers would attempt to use English as much as

possible, but also would use Chinese when explaining vocabulary and language points since the students cannot understand English explanations.

6.3 Contexts: affecting teachers' ability to apply their beliefs into practice

The impact of teachers' beliefs on practices tended to be significantly affected by the contextual factors. The context in which the teacher worked can be regarded as a complex system that constituted the micro-context of classrooms, exo-context of schools, and macro-context of society.

6.3.1 Micro-context of classrooms

The classroom is an immediate context where teaching and learning are conducted. Two major contextual factors emerged as ones which significantly affected teachers' teaching: student factors and other factors relating to objective working conditions in the classrooms.

Student factors

Student factors included students' grade level, students' ability and students' expectations. Beginning teachers reported that they attached great importance to these factors and tended to adjust and change their practices accordingly.

In terms of students' grade level, beginning teachers expressed that when teaching the students at higher grade levels, they usually would focus more on the explanations of language knowledge and taught in a more traditional way. For example, Xiaoqin indicated "now I am teaching the students who are at grade 10 and having a solid mastery of language knowledge is especially important for them. Even more class time was spent on the elaborate explanations of language knowledge" (X.3). Similarly, Qiumei stated that "now my students are at grade 12 now and are about to attend the national entrance exam. We focus on doing the excises about language points" (Q.3).

With regard to students' ability, two teachers indicated that although they believed that Chinese should be avoided in the English classroom in order to create an all-English environment for the students, in the real teaching they used lots of Chinese because of the students' limited proficiency in English. For example, Qiumei indicated that "my students felt it difficult to understand English expressions. They become more confused if I explain language points in English. I think I cannot help but use Chinese" (Q.1b). Gaoyuan stated that "my students cannot understand my English orders. For example, I say 'keep quiet!' They don't understand and are still talking. I have to express it in Chinese again" (G.1b). In addition, some teachers also expressed that they did not leave students much independence due to the learners' insufficient self-control and regulation ability. As Xiaoqin stated, "Although I think the teacher should encourage students'

active and self-regulated learning, students lacked sufficient independent learning abilities and did not know what the important points were and we cannot leave them too much independence. We have to guide them." (L.2) Similarly, Gaoyuan reported that "students are young and not clear about the purpose of learning, about what to learn, and about how to learn. It is dangerous if we leave too much independence for them. We should guide them and make sure they are on the right track" (G.2).

As far as students' expectations were concerned, some beginning teachers reported that most of their students preferred learning vocabulary and grammatical knowledge and expected the teachers to teach English in a traditional teacher-centred way. They showed no interest in communicative activities, such as group/pair work, role plays, and investigation projects. For example,

> Teaching is difficult to continue if the communicative language teaching approach is adopted. When I ask them to discuss in groups or pairs, they will either show no response or talk about other topics in Chinese. The students expect that the teacher is at the centre, teaching vocabulary and grammar. They completely have no interest in communicative activities as they think these activities are useless for examinations and a waste of time. (X.1b)

The findings confirm the results of previous work (e.g., Anderson 1993, Rao 2002, Xu 2012, Kirkebæk, Du et al. 2013). For instance, as Anderson (1993) argued, the learners appeared to be even more conservative than the teachers. Learners' conventional attitudes were well illustrated in the following example:

> MS Wang said several students told her to her face that they consider her "method" ridiculous and inappropriate. They refuse to sit in circles and speak English to each other. They don't like to invent conversations or play communication games. They insist on taking conventional examinations. Several just don't attend her classes at all, preferring to audit the older professors' lectures on intensive reading and grammar instead. Since the older professors at the centre don't care about whether they speak English or not, all the students have to do is memorize twenty new vocabulary words a day and they can pass with flying colours (Anderson, 1993: 474).

Likewise, Li and Du (2013) found that "many Chinese students expect the teacher to take the leading role and may consider a teacher that invites student participation, discussion, and critique to be weak or less competent" (cited in Kirkebæk et al., 2013: 7). Rao (2002) also indicated that students like non-communicative activities more than communicative ones. Most students believed that the outdated traditional classroom activities such as dictionary exercise, workbook type drill and practice, and direct explanations of grammar rules by the teachers and so on were still effective ways to facilitate their English learning.

Working conditions

In this research I found that the difficult working conditions, including time constraints, the lack of teaching resources, an excessive workload, large class sizes and traditional classroom layout had a powerful impact on teachers' practices.

Time constraints

Teachers frequently complained about the time pressure concerning keeping up with the teaching plan. All six teachers reported that in order to fulfil the strict and fixed teaching plan within the regulated time, sometimes they had to abandon the communicative activities and directly present and explain the knowledge points. In Qiumei's words:

> I really have no time to implement too many communicative activities in the classroom. I have too many things to teach. Usually I will skip the communicative steps and directly present the knowledge to the students. (Q.3)

This finding lends some support to the observation of Zheng (2011), who found that time constraints activated the tensions between the teacher-centred ways of teaching and communicative ways of teaching. In her words:

> When facing time constraints, a paradox emerged: the more the teachers wanted to abide by the requirements of the NECS quantified in the teaching plans, the farther away they moved from it in terms of keeping the essence of the NECS. In such circumstances, the usual method adopted by the teachers was to drop some of the 'time-consuming' principles advocated in the NECS, such as experiential learning, TBLT, group/pair work, by taking shortcuts, such as using L1, de-contextualized presentation and mechanical drills, to achieve the teaching aims of the NECS embodied in the teaching plans (Zheng, 2011: 200).

Lacking teaching facilities

For the teachers who worked in rural areas, a serious shortage of teaching facilities appeared to be a big obstacle for their implementation of the communicative ways of teaching. Two rural teachers (Bijuan and Xiaoqin) reported that unlike the schools in

urban areas which were provided with the latest teaching facilities, their schools were inadequately equipped and lacked funds to obtain the up-to-date teaching facilities that aided new concepts of education, such as language labs, multi-media classrooms, televisions, and computers and so on. In the classroom, the teacher and textbooks were the sources of knowledge and the chopsticks and blackboard were the main instruments to facilitate teaching. In such circumstance, the rural teachers had no choice but to teach in a more traditional teacher-centred way. For example, Bijuan made the following comment:

> I remembered last time I went to the city to attend a famous teacher's demonstration lesson. This lesson was carried out in a multi-media classroom. I found that the teaching content was vividly presented in the big screen. Students showed great interest in learning and actively participated in the teaching activities. The whole learning atmosphere was relaxed, active, and harmonious. I realized that the advanced technologies did help improve the quality of English teaching. But our school did not have any advanced equipment and the tape recorder was the only instrument to facilitate my teaching. (B.3)

Many other researchers also indicate the regional differences in resources when examining English language teaching practices in China (e.g., Hu 2005, Huang 2009, Wang 2011). As Hu (2005) argues,

> Many schools in the developed areas are now provided with the latest teaching facilities such as state-of-art multimedia language labs (Ross, 2000). The availability of modern educational hardware encourages new concepts of education and facilitates new student-teacher relationships as well as new instructional practices. On the other hand, schools in the disadvantaged areas tend to be

> inadequately equipped. Many of them do not even have the financial resources to repair their dangerous dilapidated school buildings, let alone obtaining up-to-date teaching facilities (Hu, 2005: 650-651).

Excessive workload

The findings showed that excessive workload constrained the teacher's time and effort to design and implement innovative teaching, which was identified as one reason why the teacher stuck to the old ways of teaching. This finding echoes the observation of Crookes and Arakaki (1999) who also indicated the negative effects of overwork upon the quality of teaching.

For example, Xiaoxue blamed that she had no time to prepare communicative activities due to the heavy workload. On Christmas Day, she originally planned to create a real situation for the students, such as bringing a Christmas tree in to the classroom, sending Christmas cards to the students, inviting the students to sing the Christmas song together and so on. But she found that she had no time to prepare for it because she was a head teacher of one class and had to teach another two classes. She did not even have time to rest let alone spend time in designing these time-consuming activities. In the end, Xiaoxue just gave a general introduction about Christmas. Xiaoxue believed that she might be able to produce more interesting lessons if she had a reasonable workload. Likewise, Qiumei complained that she lacked time to create debate activities for her

students because of her heavy workload, which was well illustrated in the following quotation:

> Sometimes I am thinking about organizing a debate in class because this is really a good way to practice students' oral English and cultivate students' critical thinking and reasoning ability. But I really had no spare time to prepare for it, such as choosing debating topics, grouping the students, and so on. I am teaching three classes and had to correct about two hundreds students' work every day. (Q.1b)

Large class sizes and traditional classroom layout

The large class size was found to be one of the main constraints that teachers faced when considering conducting communicative classes. Four teachers worked in public schools. The average classroom size of these government-aided schools was 70 to 80 students. These four teachers reported that although they did want to conduct communicative activities in the classrooms, they were always constrained by the large class size. The other two teachers worked in private schools. The situation in these schools was much better and the average classroom size was 30 to 40 students. However, the teachers still reported that even 30 to 40 students were too many to conduct effective communicative classes. Doğruer, Meneviş et al. (2010) also reported that the participating teachers preferred to employ individual activities and whole class activities because the physical conditions of the classes were not suitable for group work activities and the classes were too crowded (35-40 students in each class) and classroom management may be difficult for instructors.

In addition, three teachers (Gaoyuan, Xiaoqin, and Zhihui) reported that it was impossible for them to give individual attention to every student because of the big class sizes. In Xiaoqin's words:

> I think the teacher should be sensitive to the unique features of every student and teach accordingly. But there are approximately eighty students in each class. I cannot attend every one and the most realistic way for me is to take care of most the students. (L.2)

Beginning teachers mentioned that the traditional layout of the classroom inhibited their implementation of the communicative activities. For example, Xiaoxue said, "The students sat in three big groups and there were only two narrow aisles between the groups. It was difficult to carry out the communicative activities like dancing, fashion show. So I gave up" (X.1b). As Gaoyuan stated, "The students sit in rows and lines. I feel very difficult to organize games, role plays, group discussions, and really join to the students" (G.2).

6.3.2 Exo-context of schools

Teacher effectiveness assessment

Examination results are of critical importance to the image and reputation of the schools. In this study all the schools attached great importance on students' test results and used the students' exam scores to assess the effectiveness of the teachers. The schools' obsession with the examination results was found to significantly affect their teachers'

teaching. For example, as Zhihui stated, “School places great emphasis on students’ scores and use students’ exam performance to evaluate our effectiveness. Traditional language teaching method is preferred and someone will come to stop you if you use too much communicative activities in classroom as they think these activities are time-consuming and of no use to improve students’ performance in exams” (Z.3). In addition, Qiumei made the following comment:

> Our school is a key school in this district and has very high university enrolment rate. The purpose of our school is to improve its enrolment rate and thus to be the first in the city, the province, and the country. Thus, it attaches great importance to the learners’ examination performance and use the students’ examination results to evaluate a teacher. (Q.1b)

Contract employment practices

Two participating teachers (Gaoyuan and Zhihui) indicated that they were not permanent teachers in the school. They only received fixed-term contracts and it was very convenient for schools to hire them, even without notifying the local education authority. They lived in great insecurity and uncertainty, which made them unconditionally obey schools’ requirements. In the case of Zhihui:

> In our staff meeting, the principal referred to ‘enhancing scores or else your contract will be terminated’ a hundreds time. The school can fire us at any time if the school thinks we are not able to help the learners score well in the exams. We must work harder to enhance students’ scores without complaining. (Z.1b)

Similarly, Gaoyuan explained her difficult situation by saying:

> I am working in a private school. All the teachers only had a fixed-term contract. We will be fired if the school thinks we are not qualified. And our school adopts an end-place wash out policy. The teacher whose students' performance in the exams is at the last place will be fired. It is a cruel competition. Every teacher is thinking about how to improve students' scores. (G.1b)

The teachers who only received long-term contracts felt insecure and were afraid of being fired and therefore, were more likely to unconditionally obey the requirements of the school, focusing on enhancing students' performance in exams and teaching in a traditional way. Gao (2008) also argued that contract employment practices may add to teachers' vulnerability and insecurity:

> Since the mid-1990s, many schools in the region started adopting contract employment practices, which divides teachers into two categories: those who had worked in the same school for over ten years or been teachers for fifteen years obtained tenured positions or permanent positions. Those who had worked less than ten years in the same school or been teachers for less than fifteen years received fixed-term contracts and became contract teachers…since contract teachers have fix-term contracts, it is very convenient for schools to fire them, even without notifying the local education authority. Such teachers live in great uncertainty and insecurity. (Gao, 2008: 159)

6.3.3 Macro-context of society

The values and uses of English in the less developed regions

All the participating teachers in the current research worked in the undeveloped western area in China. They indicated that for people in the eastern developed areas, English had more practical use. For example, they had to use English to read slogans, to communicate with foreigners, to watch movies, to do business and so on. However,

people in the western areas continued to have fewer opportunities to use English and thus, English for them was still principally valued only as a tool to pass exams. People in these districts attached great importance to learners' knowledge of vocabulary and grammar and writing and reading skills and lacked attention to the learners' communicative competence. The teachers reported that the traditional views on the uses of English in these backward districts exerted significant influence on their teaching. For instance, Bijuan held the following belief:

> The district where I am working is among the most backward and poorest districts in the country. Unlike developed areas, learning English seems to have no practical use to our students. English for the people living here is only a tool for passing the exams and thus, they can leave this backward district and their destiny is likely to be changed. (B.1b)

Likewise, Hu (2005) identified the less developed regions' traditional beliefs about the value of English.

> The more numerous opportunities to use English have heightened awareness of the importance of communicative competence in the language and exerted pressures on classroom instruction to move away from transmission of knowledge about English to the development of students' ability to use it for communication. The less developed areas, however, offer fewer opportunities to use English for social and vocational purposes. English has been largely restricted to the domain of education (Zhao & Campbell, 1995). Students study the language mainly to secure a place in a tertiary institution. (Hu, 2005: 652)

Examination policy

The paramount place of examinations in the system remains untouched. The entrance examination scores are by far the greatest determinants of admission to both senior middle schools (10^{th} grade to 12^{th} grade) and universities. Examinations mainly focus on testing language knowledge and lack attention to communicative skills. Examination results are of critical importance to the future paths of students. As Hu (2005) argued, "The higher the level of the examination that students can pass, the higher social values they are conceptualized to have and the more respect that they will gain from the society" (p.30). Degrees and educational level were believed to be closely linked to students' future career development. In Qiumei's words:

> When companies are selecting workers for laid-off, the workers with high educational level are less likely to be laid off. They are more likely to obtain new job opportunities. (Q.2)

Parents were concerned with their children's future paths and had strong ambition for their children to attend top universities, fearing that the communicative approach would hinder their children's examination success:

> Parents will hire a tutor for their children if the school does not have extra lessons; Parents will buy practice books for their children if teachers do not set the homework; Once they find their children fall behind, they will ask the teacher to pay more attention to scores. (Q.2)

As the examination success remained the major form of the assessment of the teachers, principals, and school performance, schools were afraid of the negative effect that the implementation of the communicative approach might have on their enrolment rate and implemented the communicative language approach only to the degree that the examination success of the students was not affected.

The teachers felt strongly that they had the responsibility to help students achieve success in exams and win a bright future and thus, they adopted the traditional teacher-centred language teaching approach as they thought this approach can best help them fulfil the purpose of enhancing students' exam performance. For example, Xiaoqin made the following comment:

> As in a high school, the priority for the students is to fight for chance to enter universities. Educational level is closely related to students' job opportunities. Recruitment systems in society prefer the graduates from top universities. Many enterprises or government departments regulate that only those with Bachelor degrees or above will be employed. The most important thing is to help them achieve success in the national entrance exam and enter universities. Since the national entrance exam mainly tests students' language knowledge, I focus more on explaining language points. This is also what the students, parents and school expect. (L.2)

Qiumei also indicated that "I did not perform well in Gaokao (the national college entrance exam) and entered an ordinary university and consequently, I only could find an ordinary job and live in an ordinary life in this small city. So I had to focus on

teaching vocabulary and grammar points and help my students achieve high scores in exams and win a better future" (Q.1b). This finding lends some support to the observation of Anderson (1993)

> Perhaps the greatest drawback in using the communicative approach is the fact that Chinese English teachers have as their primary responsibility the duty of preparing their students for the English section of the national examination-a must for the few who will be allowed to go to the university. This discrete-point, structurally-based examination does not test communicative skills. Since the future of their students is in their hands, can a Chinese English teacher gamble on the communicative approach to produce the best English scholars? (p. 472)

Teachers reported that in order to implement the communicative teaching approach in the classroom, reforming the current examination system was absolutely a priority. Examination content remained in line with traditional teaching and learning methods. For instance, writing and reading were emphasized but listening and speaking were excluded in English tests. They put forward that the assessment of the students should be based on a variety of criteria including performance in group-based projects, classroom interaction, morality, and so on. However, the teachers further identified a risk of adopting alternative subject assessment methods which was that it might increase the social inequality. To quote three of them:

> The current system, while imperfect, is the fairest method available. (X.1b)

> The subjective assessment criteria might advantage the students from upper-level families. (Q.1b)

> The public examinations are necessary to prevent corruption in the selection of excellent candidates for limited resources. (L.1b)

6.4 Conclusion

The findings of this study indicated that teachers' beliefs are not always reflected in their practices. For example, during the research process, most participants began to emphasize the communicative function of EFL and promote a student-centred, communicative way of teaching. However, they taught in a hybrid approach. The contextual factors were found to lead to this discrepancy between teachers' beliefs and practices. The context the teacher worked in can be conceived as a complex system which consisted of the micro-context of classroom, exo-context of schools, and macro-context of society. In the classroom context, teachers reported that they would adjust their teaching according to students' grade level, students' ability and students' expectations, despite the fact that they did not match their own beliefs. The negative working conditions such as time constraints, the lack of teaching resources, an excessive workload, large class sizes and traditional classroom layout were also found to constrain teachers' teaching. In the school context, the assessment on teacher effectiveness tended to exert a profound influence upon teachers' classroom practices. All the schools the schools in which the participating teachers worked in used learners' scores in exams to evaluate the effectiveness of the teachers, which compelled the teachers to teach in a teacher-centred, exam-oriented manner. The teachers who only

received fixed contracts might unconditionally obey the requirements of schools and were more likely to focus on enhancing students' scores and teach in a traditional way. In the society context, the traditional views on the use of English in the less developed areas significantly influenced their teachers' teaching. All the interviewed teachers worked in the western undeveloped areas in China and reported that English for people living in these areas was still mainly a tool for passing the exams, which constrained their implementation of the communicative ways of teaching. Examination results can determine the students' future paths and thus, the expectations of students and parents, the mission of the school and the teachers' teaching.

Chapter 7. Understanding how beginning teachers learn and change during the first three years in the profession: Through the lens of teachers' beliefs

7.1 Introduction

In this chapter I conduct a detailed discussion about why these beginning teachers change or do not change their beliefs during the first three years in the profession. I focus on three concepts. These comprise: (1) a conceptualization of teacher learning (Section 7.3); (2) unpacking how variations in personal (related to teacher self-efficacy and goal orientation) and workplace conditions (related to school culture and leadership) affect teacher learning (Section 7.2); and (3) discussion on the relationship between teacher learning and belief change (Section 7.4). The stories of two teachers with contrasting belief change experiences are presented in the end of this chapter (Section 7.5).

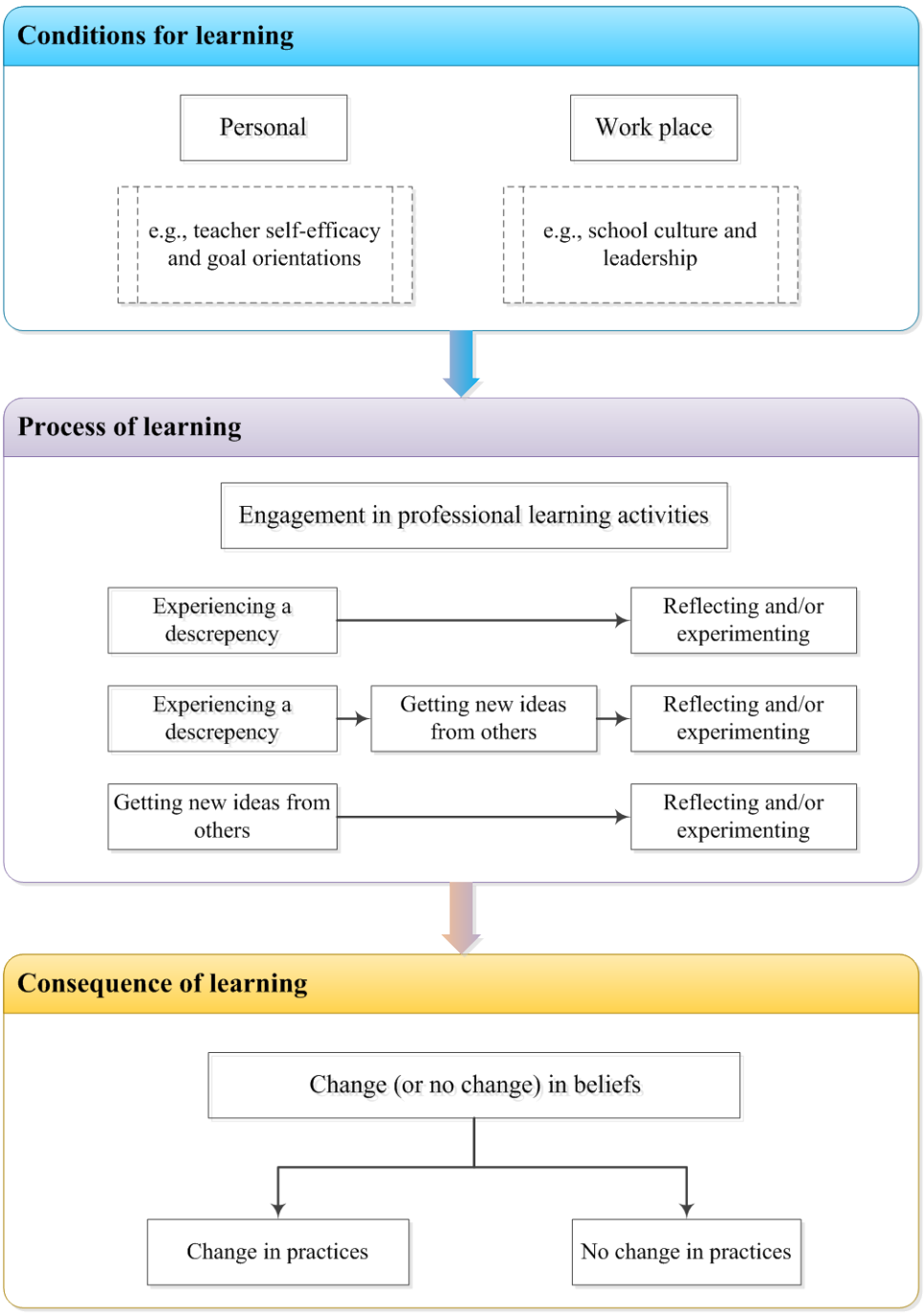


Figure 7-1 A framework explaining how beginning teachers change and develop over time

7.2 Personal and workplace conditions affect teacher learning and change

The research revealed that the interplay between personal and workplace conditions influences teachers' engagement in professional learning activities (Kwakman 2003), and in turn, influences their belief change. Schools offer opportunities for learning and personal factors influence how teachers elect to engage in activities (Billett 2001).

Workplace conditions: school culture and leadership

Workplaces provide different types of positive and negative opportunities for learning (Fuller and Unwin 2004, Tynjälä 2008, Day and Gu 2010). For example, Day and Gu (2010) indicate that:

> The way schools are matters enormously to early career teachers. This is because, at least in part, school sites are immediate venues of opportunities, as well as challenge. Some serve as oases of learning and development, where new teachers are engaged in close collaborations with their more experienced colleagues….Others, in contrast, can be minefields of hostile challenges and problems.
>
> (Day and Gu, 2010: 82)

In addition, Fuller and Unwin (2003, 2004) observe considerable differences in the quality of apprentice learning in different firms in the steel industry. They attributed these differences to variations in the learning environments. The apprentices with the best learning had an 'expansive' environment, whilst those with the poorest experiences had a learning environment which they described as restrictive. An 'expansive' learning

environment is one which presents wide-ranging and diverse opportunities to learn, in a culture that values and supports learning. Hodkinson and Hodkinson (2005) suggest that 'one of the most effective ways of improving teachers' learning is through creating and encouraging more expansive features of teachers' learning environments' (p. 124). My research evidence also showed that not all schools offered equal opportunities for professional learning of beginning teachers. Five teachers reported they worked in positive learning environments where there were collaborative cultures, provision of appropriate professional development opportunities, and supportive leaders. In contrast, one teacher reported her dissatisfaction with CPD opportunities and lack of support from colleagues and leaders.

School culture

School culture plays a significant role in creating or diminishing opportunities for teachers' informal learning (Jurasaite-Harbison and Rex, 2010). Hargreaves distinguishes four types of school culture in secondary schools: individualism, balkanization, collaboration, and contrived collegiality. He found that collaborative school cultures provided the richest learning and developmental opportunities for teachers. Hargreaves (1994) characterizes collaborative teacher cultures as working relationships between teachers and colleagues that are "spontaneous, voluntary, development-oriented, pervasive across time and space, and unpredictable" (Hargreaves,

1994: 192). Nias and her team also contribute to the key characteristics of culture of collaboration in primary schools: pervasive qualities, attitudes, and behaviours that run through staff relationships on a moment-by-moment, day-by-day basis; help, support, trust, and openness are at the heart of these relationships; there is a commitment to valuing people as individuals and valuing the groups to which people belong (Fullan and Hargreaves, 1991: 48). In the present study, five schools showed signs of a collaborative culture. In these schools, most teachers frequently engaged in professional dialogue with colleagues, shared ideas, experiences, methods, and materials, and worked on things together (e.g., preparing lesson plans, analysing teaching practices and effects, discovering solutions to challenging problems, etc.). They took pride in each other's accomplishments, not seeing themselves as in competition with one another. In contrast, the culture of one school was dominated by individualism and isolation. Most teachers neglected each other and they did not often support and acknowledge each other's positive efforts. Teachers' personality, architecture, and evaluation and self-preservation were reported as major reasons for teacher individualism (Fullan and Hargreaves 2012).

Former research has indicated that a culture of collaboration facilitates and supports teacher change (Briscoe and Peters 1997, Meirink, Meijer et al. 2009, Thoonen, Sleegers et al. 2011). For example, Thoonen et al. (2011: 519) indicate "collaboration

provided teachers opportunities to work together to solve problems and to provide feedback and information. This stimulated the extent to which teachers experiment in their classroom with new materials, try out new things and reflect on their current teaching, leading to better instructions." Meirink, Meijer et al. (2009) confirm that merely exchanging ideas and teaching methods with colleagues is insufficient to result in belief changes and a combination of exchanging teaching methods, experimentation in their own practice with alternative methods and deliberate evaluation of this experimentation contributes to a change in teachers' beliefs. Likewise, Briscoe and Peters (1997: 51) state that collaboration facilitates change as "it provides opportunities for teachers to learn both content and pedagogical knowledge from one another, encourages teachers to be risk takers in implementing new ideas, and supports and sustains the processes of individual change."

The findings in this study also showed that a culture of collaboration can increase opportunities for teachers to interact with and learn from one another, which tended to enhance the extent to which the teachers reflected on their current teaching and/or experimented with new ideas in the classroom and ultimately, may promote teachers' belief change. For example, as Qiumei stated, "We work in a culture of collaboration. Through exposure to the ideas and teaching methods of other colleagues, I was prompted to reflect on my own teaching and experiment with the new methods in my

own classroom and then, a change in beliefs is likely to occur" (Q.3). In addition, Xiaoxue indicated that "collaboration with colleagues offers opportunities for us to challenge our existing beliefs through ongoing communication with colleagues, hearing the multiple perspectives of others, and sharing new experiences." (X.2)

Leadership

School leaders also have a strong influence on teachers' participation in professional learning activities (Leithwood, Harris et al. 2008, Thoonen, Sleegers et al. 2011). First, school leaders play a crucial role in shaping and developing the culture of the school (Fullan and Hargreaves 1991, Peterson and Brietzke 1994, Harris 2002, Flores 2004). Five teachers indicated that their leaders were committed to building a collaborative culture. Three broad strategies were perceived to have been adopted: (a) school leaders attempted to create a physical and social environment that allowed teacher interaction and collaboration (Jurasaite-Harbison and Rex 2010); (b) the school leaders instilled the importance of sharing knowledge and working together through direct and frequent communication (Fullan and Hargreaves 1991); and (c) the school leaders created structures to facilitate the development of collegial relationships (e.g., mentor-trainee pairs, teacher research groups and lesson planning groups) (Harris and Anthony 2001). For example, one beginning teacher made the following comment:

> We have a good learning environment. School leaders place great emphasis on teacher collaboration. We were assigned a mentor teacher on the first day and I learn a lot from her. School leaders also encourage us to observe other teachers' classes and say we might find something useful…and the head of our department would arrange a trip for us at the end of every month and I also got some inspiration about teaching through casual talk with colleagues during that time. (Q.2)

Second, school leaders are primary providers of professional development opportunities (Whitworth and Chiu 2015). Five teachers indicated that their school leaders placed great emphasis on the continuing professional development of their staff. One beginning teacher stated, "Our leaders either inform us of in-service opportunities outside the school and encourage our participation or invite 'experts' into the school to give lectures and assist us" (G.2). Richter et al. (2011) found that beginning teachers attend more in activities dealing with topics that are particularly challenging for those new to the profession, such as activities targeting classroom management and student discipline.

Third, school leaders can stimulate teachers to engage in professional learning activities through encouraging risk taking and experimentation. Three beginning teachers in this study indicated they felt supported to experiment with something new. As one teacher stated, "Our leaders support teachers having new things and changing things. They give us the time to try out an alternative method and ask us afterwards what our impressions are" (G.2). Encouragement that teachers receive from their leaders to experiment with new teaching ideas provides legitimacy for teachers to pursue improvement activities

and helps establish norms for risk-taking for continuous improvement, which are strongly associated with teacher change (Smylie, 1988: 10).

Personal factors: teachers' sense self-efficacy and goal orientations

Although how schools support learning appeared to be strongly related to the nature of teacher learning, how teachers elect to engage in activities also matter (Hodkinson and Hodkinson 2005).

Self-efficacy and goal orientations are two of the most important personal factors that have been found to influence teachers' participation in professional learning activities (Smylie 1988, Lohman 2006, Thoonen, Sleegers et al. 2011). The findings showed that self-efficacy can enhance teachers' engagement in activities through setting themselves high goals and strengthening persistence in the face of setbacks (Patrick and Pintrich 2001, Hoy and Spero 2005, Geijsel, Sleegers et al. 2009, Thoonen, Sleegers et al. 2011, Oude Groote Beverborg, Sleegers et al. 2015). For example, Bijuan indicated that:

> I believe in my capability to be a successful teacher and have high expectations on myself. In order to improve my current knowledge and skills, I constantly consult professional literature, surf the internet, and learn from colleagues. I strongly persist and never think about giving up even in the hardest days. (B.2)

In addition, the research revealed that mastery-oriented teachers who focused on increasing their learning and/or task competence and seeking challenges appeared to be more willing to engage in various professional learning activities than performance-

oriented teachers who feared negative evaluation by others and avoided challenges (Patrick and Pintrich 2001, Chiaburu and Marinova 2005). For example, Xiaoqin had a performance goal orientation and exhibited an avoidance attitude towards new challenges. She made the following comment:

> I remember once the experts in an in-service course introduced an idea of 'student lesson'. They encouraged us to let students teach the first half of the lesson and then for us to complement. I will never try this as it may cause discipline problems and damage the learning outcomes and my reputation. (L.2)

How schools support learning and how teachers elect to engage in activities tend to influence how teachers learn at the workplace, as I show below, and in turn, influence belief change.

7.3 Teacher learning: engagement in professional learning activities

Three conceptions are often used to characterize learning: acquisition, participation and construction (Hager 2005). Many researchers argue while an acquisition metaphor has been typical in formal education, participation and construction metaphors better define teachers' workplace learning (Hodkinson and Hodkinson 2005). Kwakman (2003) defines teacher learning at the workplace as "participation in professional learning activities, which can be divided into individual activities addressing the categories of reading, experimenting, and reflecting and into collaborative activities taking place within the school" (p. 153) based on the following three principles:

> (1)Cognition is situated in nature and learning and knowing is integrally and inherently situated in the everyday world of human activity.
> (2) Learning is not only individual but also social in nature.
> (3) Teachers' learning is strongly connected to professional goals which demand teachers to strive for continuous improvement of their teaching practices. Teacher learning is rather referred to as professional learning.
>
> (Kwakman, 2003: 152)

Within Kwakman's (2003) definition, formal professional development opportunities in or beyond the workplace are not taken into account.

Tynjälä (2008) argues that teacher workplace learning is both informal and formal and distinguishes the two by claiming that "informal learning occurs as a part of everyday work processes and activities and produces mainly implicit or tacit knowledge, formal learning takes place in the context of organised training and learning activities and is meant to generate explicit, formal knowledge and skills" (p. 140). Three basic modes of workplace learning have been suggested: (1) incidental and informal learning, which takes place as a side effect of work, (2) intentional, but non-formal learning activities related to work (mentoring), and (3) formal on-the-job and off-the-job training (Tynjälä, 2008: 140). The findings in this study confirmed that both formality and informality were attributors of teacher workplace learning. As Qiumei stated, "I continue formal training while participating in informal activities (e.g., reading, reflecting, conversation, etc.)." (Q.1b) Most of these beginning teachers showed high attendance of informal

activities (e.g., reading, surfing the internet, observing, etc.) as well as formal activities such as short courses and conferences.

In addition, Bakkenes, Vermunt et al. (2010) argue it is not appropriate to divide learning activities into individual and collaborative activities as, in essence, all types of professional learning activities could be both conducted individually and in interaction with others. My research findings also support the observation of Bakkenes et al. (2010). The following example showed how experimentation in collaboration with colleagues led to a change in Gaoyuan's beliefs about teaching writing:

> …Usually I would ask the students to complete a composition based on a given topic first and then for her to give feedback. But after a while, I found the students had not made much progress in writing. Together with colleagues I developed a new strategy for teaching writing. In class, we would provide a topic first and then ask the students to discuss what they planned to write about and the phrases and sentences they planned to use. After the discussion, the students had some time to write. And then, the students had to read and correct each other's work. Through this way, the students became more involved in the writing process and learned more interesting expressions and ideas. All the colleagues felt happy with this result and changed our prior beliefs about writing teaching (G.2).

In this research I have used the 'change as growth or learning' perspective that focuses on 'teachers as learners' and 'schools as learning communities' (Clarke and Hollingsworth, 2002). Based on prior definitions of teacher learning at the workplace and the research evidence in this study, I conceptualize *teacher workplace learning as engagement in professional learning activities*, which include getting new ideas from

others (through reading books, the search of the internet, observing, conversation, attending an in-service course, etc.), reflecting in and on action, experimenting (trying out new ideas), and experiencing a discrepancy (taking the form of a completely unexpected event or the realization that a usual teaching method did not work any longer). These professional learning activities interacted in particular ways, resulting in changes or no changes in teachers' beliefs (Meirink, Meijer et al. 2009). To be specific, new ideas gained from others (e.g., books, internet, colleagues, in-service courses, etc.) may cause teachers to reflect on their own teaching practice and/or conduct experiments in the classroom, leading to changes in teachers' beliefs. Getting new ideas from others may constitute accidental acquaintances with new visions or ideas and deliberate information seeking, stimulated by the awareness that a particular teaching method does not work any longer. In addition, experiencing a discrepancy between intentions and practice (including an unexpected event in class and the realization of the ineffectiveness of a particular method after a period of time) may also give rise to learning activities such as reflecting in and on action and experimenting, leading to changes in teachers' beliefs.

There appeared to be a great deal of variation in teachers' engagement in professional learning activities (Kwakman 2003, Richter, Kunter et al. 2011). This, as I discussed earlier, can be attributed to differences in teacher personal factors (e.g., self-efficacy

beliefs and goal orientations) and contextual factors (e.g., school culture and leadership). Four beginning teachers indicated that they actively and constantly engaged in professional learning activities, in particular collaboration with colleagues, which can be attributed to their strong efficacy beliefs, mastery goal orientations, collaborative school cultures and supportive leaders. The remaining two teachers exhibited lower levels of involvement in professional learning activities and a focus on individual activities, especially experimentation with a self-invented method due to realization of the ineffectiveness of a particular method. For one teacher, although learning opportunities in the workplace were rich, she did not frequently participate in them due to her weak efficacy beliefs and performance goal orientation. As she stated:

> The atmosphere of learning is good. Colleagues are willing to help others and share experiences. School leaders place great emphasis on professional growth of teacher of all experience levels. But I seldom actively communicate with colleagues because I am not very confident and afraid that they may laugh at my naive ideas. I seldom experiment with new ideas in the classroom as I do not think I have the ability to successfully apply these ideas. I fear negative evaluations by others once I fail. (L.1c)

For the other teacher, negative learning conditions of the workplace (e.g., individualistic culture, lack of appropriate CPD, unsupportive leaders) inhibited her participation, despite her mastery goal orientation. The efficacy beliefs of this teacher reduced over time due to difficulties in teaching and poor learning environments. Zhihui indicated that “although I am highly motivated to participate in various professional learning

activities because I feel a teacher should constantly learn new things and seek challenges, schools does not offer opportunities for me to participate" (Z.1b).

7.4 Consequence of engaging in professional learning activities

Teachers learn differently at the workplace due to differences in personal and school conditions, which may lead to different outcomes of learning. Two patterns of change were found in this study: change in belief and partial change in practice and no change in belief and practice. Four teachers made dramatic changes in their beliefs about the nature of EFL from a tool for exams to a tool for communication, EFL learning from memorization to communication and interaction, EFL teaching from traditional knowledge-transmission approach to communicative student-centred approach, the role of EFL teacher from knowledge provider to learning facilitator and the role of students from passive acceptors to active participants. This can be attributed to teachers' high levels of engagement in professional learning activities and a focus on collaborative activities, which was a function of their strong self-efficacy beliefs, mastery goal orientation, collaborative school cultures and supportive school leaders. Despite the fact that they made dramatic changes in beliefs, contextual factors (e.g., students' expectations, level, and ability, the working conditions, teacher effectiveness assessments, etc.) constrained their ability to fully implement their beliefs into practice (Karaağaç and Threlfall 2004, Hu 2005). Their teaching practice can be best described

as presenting a mixed approach, integrating the features of communicative student-centred language approach with traditional teacher-centred language approach. For example, Gaoyuan stated that “although I think a student-centred, communicative approach is the best way to teach English, I taught English in a hybrid approach, at times engaging students in communicative activities, but at other times requiring them to complete worksheets, memorize language points” (G.3).

In contrast, the remaining teachers exhibited no evident changes in their beliefs about the nature of EFL, EFL teaching, EFL learning, and the role of EFL teacher and students and still taught in a traditional knowledge-transmission way, despite some minor adjustments in teaching. Teachers’ low levels of engagement in professional learning activities and an emphasis on individual activities, and weak self-efficacy, performance goal orientation, individualistic school cultures, and unsupportive leadership were responsible for this.

7.5 Stories of two teachers

I have selected the stories of two beginning teachers whose contrasting professional trajectories illustrate why beginning teachers’ beliefs changed or did not change over time and the role played by leaders, school cultures, self-efficacy beliefs, goal orientations, and teacher learning.

Story 1: Positive personal and workplace conditions facilitate teacher learning and change

Xiaoxue was 24 years old, an EFL teacher in a public senior high school, and in the third year of her teaching career. The school was situated in an urban area. Xiaoxue indicated she had been primarily attracted to teaching because of a deep interest in her subject and her expectation of a rewarding opportunity to work with children and make a contribution to their progress. Before entering teaching, Xiaoxue had formed some initial conceptions about EFL teaching and learning, which can be dated back to her past EFL learning experiences in secondary schools. She emphasized a teacher-centred, exam-oriented, and knowledge-transmission mode of teaching and learning. For example, Xiaoxue made the following comment:

> I had three English teachers and all of them were good at helping students pass the exams. Their English classrooms were typical traditional Chinese classrooms. Most of the classroom time was spent on teachers' explanations of the vocabulary and grammar points, with students either listening or taking notes. There was little classroom interaction. I always achieved high scores in exams at that time and thus, I thought this approach can really help students learn things and achieve academic success. (Xiaoxue, interview 1a)

Over time, Xiaoxue shifted to beliefs which stressed students' needs, speaking and listening skills, and their active role in learning. Although Xiaoxue made significant changes in beliefs, she taught in a mixed approach due to contextual constraints. Strong efficacy beliefs, mastery goal orientations, high levels of engagement in various

professional learning activities, collaborative school culture, and supportive leaders significantly contributed to her dramatic changes in beliefs. Xiaoxue was very confident in her capabilities to be a successful teacher. She liked to seek challenges, set high goals for herself, and try out new things. Xiaoxue constantly read educational books, searched the internet and formally or informally communicated with colleagues, and participated in different formal training activities. Through engaging in these activities, Xiaoxue was exposed to a lot of new ideas, experiences and teaching methods, which stimulated Xiaoxue to reflect on her current teaching and experimented with new things in the classroom, leading to belief changes. Although she encountered a lot of challenges and difficulties, such as classroom discipline and getting along with students, Xiaoxue never thought about giving up; instead, she thought she definitely can do it and devoted greater effort and time into enhancing her current knowledge and skills. The collaborative culture of the school provided Xiaoxue with lots of opportunities to learn with and from colleagues. Xiaoxue consistently reported she learned a lot from other experienced colleagues. The colleagues in her school trusted each other and willingly shared their ideas and methods with one another and revealed the more personal sides of themselves (e.g., divorce, worries about their children). When someone had a bad day, the response of other colleagues was sympathetic rather than feeling offended. The leaders of the school were also very supportive. The principal and middle managers

were always visible around the school to see and hear their staff. When teachers needed their advice, they willingly offered it. They fixed the schedule for the teachers to work on things together. They created additional opportunities for teachers' informal interactions by organizing traditional events (e.g., having dinner together at the end of every weekend). They supported teachers trying out new things in classrooms and asked them afterwards what the outcomes were. They provided teachers with a lot of CPD opportunities in or outside the school and encouraged the teachers' participation. The supportive school environment and leaders further enhanced Xiaoxue's efficacy beliefs, and in turn her engagement in professional learning activities and belief changes.

Story 2: Negative workplace conditions inhibit teacher learning and change

Zhihui was 22 years old, an EFL teacher in a private foreign languages school and felt dissatisfied with professional development opportunities within the school. During the three years, Zhihui made no evident changes in her traditional beliefs and remained teaching in a teacher-centred, knowledge-transmission way, despite some minor adjustments in teaching. Zhihui indicated that although she was highly motivated to participate in professional learning activities as she thought a teacher should constantly learn new things and seek challenges, school conditions inhibited her participation. She only made some adjustments after realizing certain methods did not work well. Zhihui consistently talked about her feelings of individualism and isolation. Teachers in her

school were not willing to share their own teaching ideas, experiences, and methods, which might be, at least in part, due to the fierce competition among teachers in the school. As she stated, “All the teachers in the school only have a fix-termed contract and the administration of school feel free to fire the teacher who had lagged far behind other colleagues. Thus, the teachers in the school would like to keep the effective ideas and methods private in order to enhance their competitiveness” (Z.2). The leaders enacted a top-to-bottom management. Neither the principal nor the middle managers provided support for formal professional development or valued informal interactions between teachers. The teachers were at the bottom of the hierarchy and had to implement what the leaders required them to do. The teachers were not encouraged to share experiences and learn from each other. Isolation was enhanced by the architecture of the four-storey winged building, preventing teachers from sharing experiences and dilemmas. These negative workplace learning conditions combined with difficulties encountered while teaching diminished Zhihui’s efficacy beliefs, and in turn, reduced her motivation to participate in professional learning activities. As she stated, “I encounter many challenges and difficulties but no one helps me. I began to question and lose confidence in myself and became less motivated in improving my knowledge and skills. I just muddle along from day to day” (Z.3).

7.6 Conclusion

The findings in this study showed that how teachers learn at the workplace influences the outcome of their learning (e.g., change or no change in beliefs), and the kinds of learning available at the workplace and how teachers elect to engage in activities affect the nature of learning. Teacher learning is conceptualized as engagement in professional learning activities (Oude Groote Beverborg, Sleegers et al. 2015). There appeared to be four major categories of professional learning activities which they experienced: getting new ideas from others, reflecting, experimenting, and experiencing a discrepancy. The nature and extent of participation in professional learning activities varied, which led to different consequences. Teachers who made significant changes in beliefs reported high levels of engagement in learning activities and a focus on collaborative activities, whilst teachers who made no evident changes in beliefs exhibited low levels of involvement in activities and an emphasis on individual activities. The difference can be attributed to differences in personal and workplace conditions. Teachers with stronger efficacy beliefs tended to set higher goals for themselves and persisted longer in the face of difficulties and therefore, seemed to be more motivated to engage in professional learning activities than those with weaker efficacy beliefs. Mastery-oriented teachers who focused on learning and increasing their competence appeared to be more willing to participate in professional learning activities than performance-oriented teachers who

feared negative evaluations by others and avoided challenges. Teachers who worked in a culture of collaboration had more opportunities to learn from one another than teachers who worked alone. School leaders played a significant role in shaping a collaborative culture, providing professional development opportunities, and stimulating teachers' engagement in learning activities.

Chapter 8. Conclusion

This final concluding chapter consists of three sections. Section 8.1 presents a model that shows the contributions of this research. Section 8.2 depicts the implications of this study for teacher education, school leaders and policy makers. Section 8.3 discusses the limitations of the study and future research directions.

8.1 Contributions of the study

The belief change model (**Figure 8.1**) is the major contribution of current research. A majority of the new teachers (four of the six) in this study underwent significant belief changes during their first three years of teaching and based on these teachers' experiences, I developed this model. This model sheds some light on the nature of teachers' beliefs, how and why teachers change their beliefs over time and the associations between teachers' belief change and practice change. To be specific, first, with regard to the nature of teachers' beliefs, this models shows that a teacher's beliefs are a complex system which consists of different components, including beliefs about subject, about teaching, about learning, about teachers (i.e., the characteristics of effective teachers and the role of the teacher) and the role of the students. Such beliefs are consistent and inter-related. In addition, teachers' beliefs are not stable and inflexible, but dynamic and open to change. For example, in this research, during the

first three teaching years, four of the six beginning teachers changed their beliefs about the nature of EFL from a tool for passing exams to a tool for communication, about EFL learning from memorization to communication and interaction, about EFL teaching from a traditional knowledge-transmission approach to a communicative student-centred approach, about the role of the teacher from knowledge provider to learning facilitator, and about the role of students from passive acceptors to active participants. Second, teachers' belief change tends to be affected by the interaction of a range of factors, comprising teacher learning activities, teacher individual characteristics, school culture and leadership. How teachers learn at the workplace influences the outcome of their learning (e.g. change or no change in beliefs), and personal (e.g. efficacy beliefs and goal orientations) and workplace conditions (e.g. school culture and leadership) in combination influence the nature and extent of teachers' participation in professional learning activities. Third, teachers' belief change does not necessarily lead to practice change due to contextual constraints.

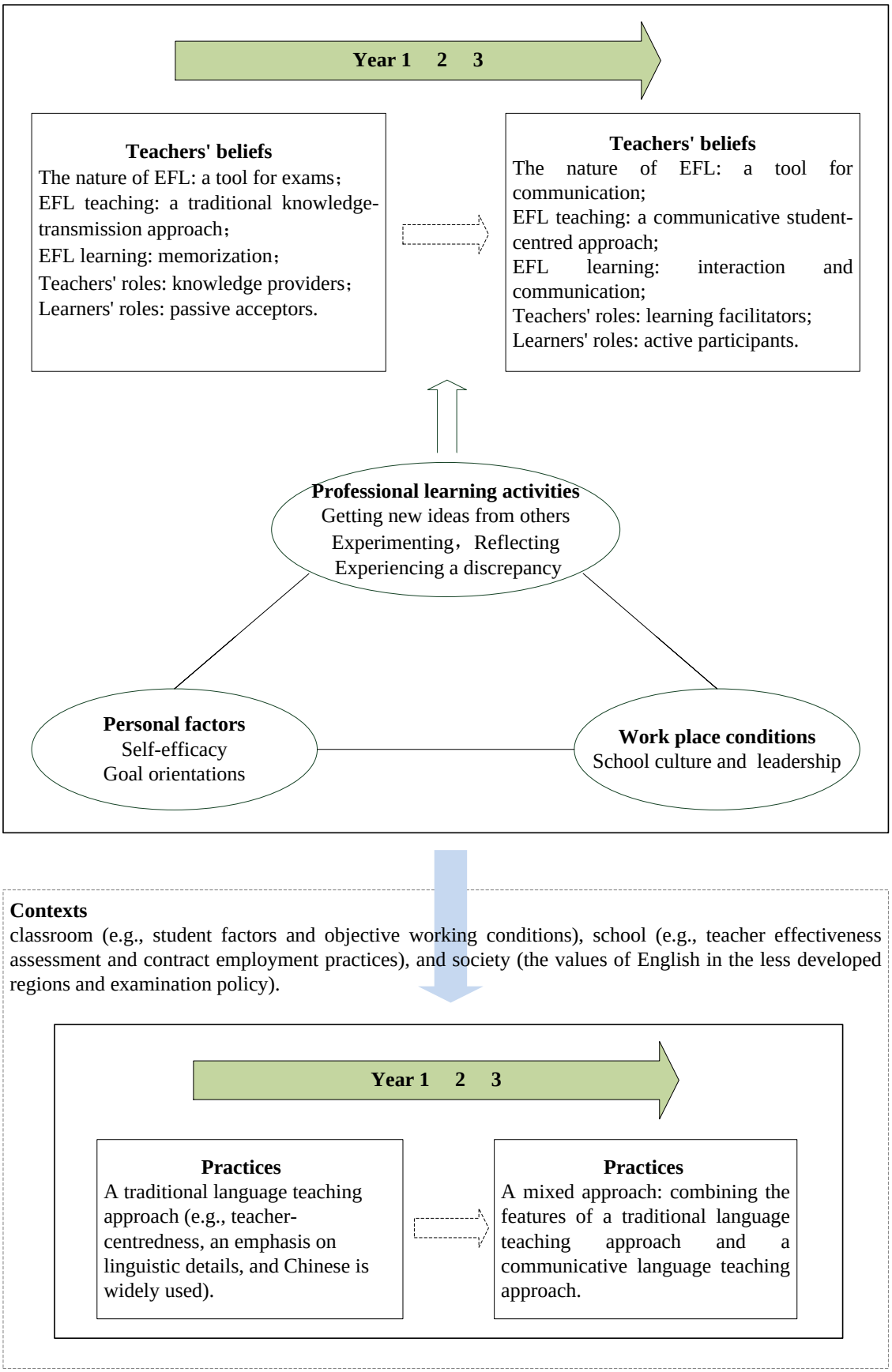


Figure 8-1 Teacher belief change model

8.1.1 The nature of teachers' beliefs

The findings in this research shed some light on the nature of teachers' beliefs, including the components of a teacher's belief system, how these different elements interact within a belief system and whether teachers' beliefs can be changed or not. First, because humans have beliefs about everything, Pajares (1992) recommends that it is necessary for researchers to make a distinction between teachers' broader, general belief systems and their educational beliefs. Following Pajares's recommendation, in this research I specifically focused on exploring teachers' educational beliefs and found teachers' beliefs about teaching and learning comprise their beliefs about the nature of subject (EFL), about learning (the best way of learning EFL and other factors that influence students' learning), about teaching (the teaching objectives, teaching processes, and teaching approaches), about teachers (the characteristics of effective teachers and the role of the teacher) and about students (the role of the students). These different elements interact with each other and combine together, forming a complex system of teachers' beliefs.

Second, this research revealed teachers' beliefs about the nature of EFL, EFL teaching, EFL learning, and the role of the teacher and learners are consistent and interrelated, which is in line with the results from previous studies (e.g., Tsai and Tsai 2002, Watersadams 2006). For example, if a teacher conceives English as a tool for

communication, s/he may favour a communicative language teaching approach. English can be learned best through interacting and communicating with others. Students' active participation is emphasized. The role of teachers is to facilitate students' learning. If a teacher views English as a tool for passing exams, she may favour a traditional, teacher-centred, and exam-based language teaching approach and view memorizing language knowledge as the best way of learning English. Teachers' authority and students' passive roles are emphasized.

Third, this study found that teachers' beliefs are dynamic in nature and open to change and are affected by a range of factors (the related factors will be discussed in detail in the next section). For example, beginning teachers in this study held 'traditional' beliefs which stressed EFL as a tool for passing exams, emphasized the value of a traditional knowledge-transmission approach, conceived memorization as the best way to learn EFL, and stressed the teacher's authority and learners' passive role when they first entered the profession. Their initial conceptions of EFL teaching and learning were found to be mainly originated from their past language learning experiences, particularly in secondary schools. Former studies also identify teachers' past learning experiences or 'apprenticeship of observation' Lortie (1975) as a significant influence on teachers' beliefs (e.g., Peacock 2001, Erkmen 2014). During the first three years, four of the six teachers changed to beliefs which emphasized EFL as a tool of

communication, stressed the effectiveness of a communicative student-centred approach, viewed communication and interaction as the best way to learn English, and emphasized students' active role in learning. The dynamic nature of teachers' beliefs has also been identified in previous studies (e.g., Richards, Gallo et al. 2001, Clarke and Hollingsworth 2002, Guskey 2002, Mohamed 2006, Cimer, Çakır et al. 2010, Borg 2011, Yuan and Lee, 2014, Blömeke et al, 2015). For example, Yuan and Lee (2014) found that significant changes did take place in pre-service language teachers' beliefs during the teaching practicum and conclude that student teachers' beliefs are not pre-determined and inflexible, but open to change and development. As they claimed,

> Given their past learning experience as a language learner and student teacher, student teachers could form a set of beliefs about language teaching and learning, language teachers' professional lives and development, as well as themselves as a language teacher. As they come to the field school, their encounters with the realities of language teaching could trigger a chain of changes in their teacher beliefs. (Yuan and Lee, 2014: 8).

In addition, Blömeke et al. (2015) conducted research to investigate the developments of beginning primary teachers' knowledge and beliefs during induction. Beginning primary teachers' knowledge and beliefs were assessed at the end of teacher education and 4 years later. The researchers reported that the primary teachers' general pedagogical knowledge (GPK) grew significantly and their beliefs on the nature of mathematics developed towards a dynamic view during the first 3 years in the profession. They indicated the significance of school climates in the developments of

teachers' knowledge and beliefs. As they stated, "those teachers who had perceived a stronger climate of trust revealed higher content knowledge, pedagogical content knowledge and GPK as well as more dynamic beliefs" (Blömeke et al. 2015: 287). Moreover, in Tam's (2015) study, the participating Chinese secondary school teachers made evident changes in their beliefs in five dimensions (curriculum, teaching, learning, roles of teachers, and learning to teach) after engaging in a professional learning community. He concluded that "the features of a PLC-facilitating teacher change are development of a coherent structure, a collaborative culture, and effective learning activities" (p. 22).

8.1.2 Conceptualisation of why teachers change or do not change beliefs

As I discussed earlier, four beginning teachers made significant changes in their beliefs about the nature of EFL from a tool for exams to a tool for communication, EFL learning from memorization to communication and interaction, EFL teaching from a traditional knowledge-transmission approach to a communicative student-centred approach, the role of EFL teacher from knowledge provider to learning facilitator and the role of students from passive acceptors to active participants, whereas the remaining teachers did not report evident changes in their beliefs. The difference can be attributed to the variations in how beginning teachers learn at the workplace, which is influenced

by teacher individual characteristics and workplace conditions (e.g., school culture and leadership).

The findings in this research also contribute to our understandings about teachers' workplace learning. Three conceptions are often used to characterize learning: acquisition, participation and construction (Hager 2005). Many researchers argue while an acquisition metaphor has been typical in formal education, participation and construction metaphors better define teachers' workplace learning (Hodkinson and Hodkinson 2005). In this study, I understand teacher workplace learning from a participation perspective which argues that ''learning and learning activities should not be considered separate from the context in which they take place'' (Sfard, 1998: 6). In addition, Tynjälä (2008) argues that both formality and informality were attributors of teacher workplace learning and distinguishes the two by claiming that "informal learning occurs as a part of everyday work processes and activities and produces mainly implicit or tacit knowledge, formal learning takes place in the context of organised training and learning activities and is meant to generate explicit, formal knowledge and skills" (p. 140). The findings in this study confirmed that teacher workplace learning is both informal and formal. For example, most beginning teachers showed high attendance of informal activities (e.g., reading, surfing the internet, observing, etc.) as well as formal activities such as short courses and conferences. Moreover, Bakkenes,

Vermunt et al. (2010) argue it is not appropriate to divide learning activities into individual and collaborative activities as, in essence, all types of professional learning activities could be both conducted individually and in interaction with others. The findings in the current research confirm the observation of Bakkenes et al. (2010). For example, beginning teachers can either reflect alone or together with others. Teachers can either experiment with a new teaching strategy or idea on their own or together with other colleagues. Therefore, in this study, teacher workplace learning is defined as *engagement in professional learning activities*, which include getting new ideas from others (through reading books, the search of internet, observing, conversation, attending an in-service course, etc.), reflecting in and on action, experimenting (trying out new ideas), and experiencing a discrepancy (taking the form of a completely unexpected event or the realization that a usual teaching method did not work any longer). Although these learning activities and their relationships with belief and/or practice change have also been identified in former studies, the ways in which these activities interact with each other, leading to a change in beliefs and/or practices have been missing in these studies (e.g., Bakkenes et al, 2010). The results in this study showed that these professional learning activities interacted in particular ways, resulting in changes or no changes in teachers' beliefs. To be specific, new ideas gained from others (e.g., books, internet, colleagues, in-service courses, etc.) may stimulate teachers to reflect on their

own teaching practice and/or conduct experiments in the classroom, leading to changes in teachers' beliefs. Getting new ideas from others may constitute accidental acquaintances with new visions or ideas and deliberate information seeking, stimulated by the awareness that a particular teaching method does not work any longer. In addition, experiencing a discrepancy between intentions and practice (including an unexpected event in class and the realization of the ineffectiveness of a particular method after a period of time) may also give rise to learning activities such as reflecting in and on action and experimenting, leading to changes in teachers' beliefs.

This research also indicates the influence of the interplay between teacher individual characteristics and workplace conditions on the nature of teacher learning at the workplace and in turn, their belief change. The nature and extent of teachers' participation in these activities vary, which lead to different learning outcomes (e.g., significant changes in beliefs or no evident changes in beliefs). The four teachers who reported dramatic changes in beliefs exhibited high levels of engagement in professional learning activities and a focus on collaborative activities, whereas the two teachers who made no evident changes in beliefs reported lower levels of participation in learning activities and an emphasis on individual activities. The variations in the interactions between teacher individual characteristics and workplace conditions are responsible for this difference. How schools support teachers and how teachers elect to engage in these

activities, in combination, influence the nature and extent of teachers' engagement in professional learning activities and in turn, belief change. For example, in this research, two teachers who exhibited no evident changes in beliefs reported lower levels of involvement in professional learning activities and a focus on individual activities, especially experimentation with a self-invented method due to realization of the ineffectiveness of particular method. One teacher explained that although learning opportunities in the workplace were rich, she did not frequently participate in them due to her weak efficacy beliefs and performance goal orientation. The other teacher stated that poor learning environments of the workplace (e.g., individualistic culture, lack of appropriate CPD, unsupportive leaders) inhibited her participation in professional learning activities, although she was highly motivated or willing to engage in various learning activities and enhance her knowledge and competence. Her efficacy beliefs also reduced as time went on due to the negative learning conditions in the school.

Self-efficacy and goal orientations are identified as two of the most important personal factors that have been found to affect teachers' engagement in professional learning activities (e.g., Smylie 1988, Lohman 2006, Thoonen, Sleegers et al. 2011). The findings showed that teachers with higher levels of efficacy beliefs tended to set themselves higher goals and persisted longer in the face of difficulties and challenges and therefore, were likely to engage more in professional learning activities than those

with lower levels of efficacy beliefs. My research also revealed mastery-oriented teachers who focused on increasing their learning and/or task competence and seeking challenges appeared to be more willing to engage in various professional learning activities than performance-oriented teachers who feared negative evaluation by others and avoided challenges. In this research, I found that although teachers' motivation to participate in various learning activities is important, the kinds of learning opportunities provided by the workplaces also matter. Hargreaves distinguishes four types of school culture in secondary schools: individualism, balkanization, collaboration, and contrived collegiality and indicates that collaborative school cultures provided the richest learning and developmental opportunities for teachers. The findings in this research also identified the significant role played by collaborative cultures in teacher learning and belief change in that culture of collaboration can increase opportunities for teachers to interact with and learn from one another, which tended to enhance the extent to which the teachers reflected on their current teaching and/or experimented with new ideas in the classroom and ultimately, may promote teachers' belief change. Earlier studies have confirmed that collaborative cultures can facilitate teacher learning and change (e.g., Briscoe and Peters 1997, Meirink, Meijer et al. 2009, Thoonen, Sleegers et al. 2011). For example, Briscoe and Peters (1997: 51) indicate the significance of collaboration in change as "it provides opportunities for teachers to learn both content and pedagogical

knowledge from one another, encourages teachers to be risk takers in implementing new ideas, and supports and sustains the processes of individual change." In addition, the findings revealed the role played by school leaders in teachers' workplace learning and belief change. School leaders can affect teachers' learning at the workplace and belief change through shaping school cultures, providing formal professional development opportunities and stimulating teachers' participation in professional learning activities through encouraging risk taking and experimentation. This research also shed some light on the strategies that school leaders can employ to establish a collaborative school culture, including creating a physical and social environment that allowed teacher interaction and collaboration, instilling the importance of sharing knowledge and working together through direct and frequent communication, and creating structures to facilitate the development of collegial relationships (e.g., mentor-trainee pairs, teacher research groups and lesson planning groups).

8.1.3 The influence of teachers' belief change on practice change: the contexts play a mediating role

The current investigation showed that changes in teachers' beliefs did not guarantee changes in their practices. Teachers' practices were found to be significantly affected by the contexts. For example, in this study, four beginning teachers reported that although they made dramatic changes in their beliefs about EFL teaching from a traditional

knowledge-transmission approach to a communicative student-centred approach, their teaching practice can be best described as presenting a mixed approach, for example, on the whole, the lessons were teacher-centred and exhibited a focus on elaborate explanations of language points, but the teachers would also use some communicative activities at times in order to motivate the students' active involvement and provide opportunities for the students to use English. In a review of research on teacher cognition in language teaching, Borg (2003) also makes a conclusion that behavioural change does not imply cognitive change, and the latter does not guarantee changes in behaviours either.

Three levels of contextual factors were found to constrain teachers' abilities to fully implement their beliefs into practice, including micro-context of classrooms (e.g., students' grade level, students' ability and students' expectations, time constraints, the lack of teaching resources, excessive workload, large class sizes and traditional classroom layout), exo-context of schools (e.g., the assessment on teacher effectiveness and contract employment practices), and macro-context of society (e.g., examination policy). Former studies confirm that the relationships between teachers' beliefs and practices are complex and non-linear (e.g., Karaağaç and Threlfall 2004, Hu 2005). For example, Ertmer (2001) found that although teachers reported they held constructivist philosophies, they taught technology in a mixed approach, at times engaging their

students in authentic, project-based work, but at other times requiring them to complete worksheets, practice skills, and learn facts. The inconsistency can be attributed to a range of contextual factors, such as curricular expectations, given current classrooms, students and resources. Alger (2009) employed an online survey to explore changes in teachers' beliefs over the career span. The teachers were asked to identify which metaphors of teaching closely matched their own under three stages: first entering the profession, at present, and ideally. The teachers can choose from the following six options, including teaching is guiding, is nurturing, is moulding, is transmitting, is providing tools, and teaching is engaged in community. The researcher found that 42% teachers' metaphors for ideal teaching were inconsistent with the metaphors for their actual practices. Students, curriculum, home and community, lack of resource, and administration were the main obstacles for their teaching.

8.2 Implications of the study

The current investigation had several implications for pre-service and in-service teacher education programmes, school leaders and policy makers.

Pre-service and in-service teacher education programmes

Based on my findings, I provide several suggestions for teacher education:

First, teachers hold certain beliefs in relation to teaching and learning upon entering teacher education, which may affect the way the teachers interpret the courses. Teacher education programmes need to admit the existence of teachers' prior beliefs and provide more opportunities for the participants to explore and confront with their pre-existing beliefs.

Second, the courses need to improve the way in which the content is delivered. Rather than directly present the content, the programme staff needs to provide the teachers with more opportunities to experience, investigate and evaluate the introduced ideas.

Third, the content of the courses should be designed according to teachers' needs. The participating teachers usually have different experiences, personality, abilities, types of students and school environments and thus, have different needs. Teacher education programmes would preferably conduct research aiming at addressing the participants' concerns and needs prior to their arrival and then provide responsive support.

Fourth, the programmes need to provide sufficient follow-up assistance and support for the participants. The programme staff should increase their communication and contact with the participating teachers after the course and help the teachers manage the problems they encounter in the process of applying the introduced ideas into practice.

School leaders

The findings presented in previous chapters showed that beginning teachers stressed the importance of collaboration with other colleagues and support from leaders for their belief change and professional growth.

Therefore, I suggest that, first, the school leaders should commit to shaping a school-wide collaborative culture and encourage the teachers of all experience levels to engage in collegial and collaborative activities. The leaders should take all measures to enhance teacher interaction, for example, decreasing as much as possible the architectural obstacles for teacher interaction and organizing traditional events through which teachers have opportunities to gather together.

Second, school leaders should have an awareness of supporting and assisting beginning teachers and a commitment to the professional development of themselves and teachers of all experience levels. In order to better assist and support teachers, school leaders should regularly get involved in leadership courses, for example, a course on mentor selection, as the new teachers felt formal mentoring support was especially important for them in their first year. School leaders should also be sensitive to the professional development opportunities for all teachers and encourage them to engage in these opportunities.

Policy makers

The findings showed that most English teachers' beliefs in relation to English teaching and learning were generally consistent with the direction of the principles of the new curriculum. However, their instructional practices were reported as being considerably deviated from their perceptions. They usually adopted a hybrid approach which integrated the features of a traditional Chinese language teaching approach as well as a communicative language approach. The examination-oriented environments were found to shoulder the major responsibility for this discrepancy.

Exam results determine the future paths of students and therefore, parents' expectations and objectives of the school and its teachers. There have been lots of voices on elimination of examination policy. However, completely abandoning the existing examination system is irrational as the current system, while imperfect, is a relatively fair method for the selection of excellent candidates for limited recourses, compared with other subjective criteria (e.g., entry interviews) and is more likely to prevent corruption and provide the students from all levels of families with equal competitive opportunities. Therefore, the priority of policy-makers is to reform examination content in line with the aims of the new curriculum. For example, English exams should include listening comprehension and speaking tests rather than grammar and written work alone. In addition, students' performance in project work can also be considered.

8.3 Limitations of the study and future research directions

Several limitations in this study need to be acknowledged. The first limitation relates to the limited sample size. This study was concerned with a case study of six Chinese secondary English teachers. Due to the small sample size, and the fact that it was based in a particular context, one may argue that the findings in the current investigation cannot be generalized to all teachers and contexts as every teacher has his/her own understandings and experiences and every school has its own unique characteristics. However, the rich and in-depth data collected by three rounds of interviews and dairies enhanced the validity of the findings in this research and made it possible for others to decide to what extent the findings in this study can be applied to their own contexts.

The second limitation involves the convenience sampling adopted in this research. The participating teachers were the researcher's university alumni. One may question the validity of the data as they thought that due to the personal relationships between the researcher and the participants, the interviewed teachers may answer the questions in the way they thought the researcher expected. Within the whole research process, I tried my best to keep a proper distance with the participants in order to maintain my objectivity and often reminded my participants to keep objective.

Third, the findings of this research relied heavily on the teachers' perspectives and the researcher's interpretations. A more complete understanding about language teachers' belief systems may develop if students, parents, school leaders and policy makers had all participated in this research. The descriptions of these people may provide the researcher with a different perspective from which to make sense of the language teachers' perceptions of English teaching and learning, teachers and students, and teaching contexts.

The final limitation concerns research methodology. This research was originally designed to unpack language teachers' belief systems and track the possible changes that occurred in their beliefs during the three years of teaching. The relationship between teachers' beliefs and practices was not conceived as a research focus and therefore, in the research design, classroom observation as a data collection method was not included. However, in the process of the research, the participants constantly referred to their actual practices in the classrooms. A theme related to the relationships between teachers' beliefs and practices emerged. Thus, the data related to instructional practices, presented in chapter 6, all derived from the teachers' own descriptions. If the teachers' behaviours in the classrooms had been carefully observed, the arguments in relation to relationships between teachers' beliefs and actual practices might have become more convincing.

Based on the findings, the study suggests the following areas for future research:

First, this study unpacked the beginning teachers' belief change during their first three years. It would be interesting to conduct a follow-up study of the six teachers in this study and see whether any further changes occurred in their beliefs, their beliefs were still incompatible with actual practices, and any changes occurred in school culture and leadership. Through doing this, we can generate a theory or pattern of secondary teacher belief change in different teaching phases.

Second, this study examined English teachers' beliefs regarding teaching and learning in western areas of China. Due to the different economic, cultural, political features in western and eastern areas in China, it would be meaningful to conduct a research on the conceptions of eastern areas' teachers and compare the differences and similarities between the teachers from different regions.

Third, this study illustrated that teachers' belief change cannot guarantee their practice change and contextual constraints were identified as the major reasons. Future researchers can do more work to investigate whether a change in teachers' practices can lead to a change in their beliefs, if yes, why? If not, why not?

Fourth, teachers in the current research tended to adopt an 'eclectic approach' integrating both the features of traditional and communicative approaches. Similarly, Karavas-Doukas (1996) found that, on the whole, teachers agreed with the principles of a communicative language teaching approach, however, their practices in classrooms were considerably deviated from their beliefs:

> Teachers tended to follow an eclectic approach, exhibiting features of both traditional and communicative approaches in their classroom practices (the former featuring much more frequently than the latter). Most lessons were teacher-fronted and exhibited an explicit focus on form; pair work activities were used in two classrooms whereas group work activities were never implemented—although each unit in the textbooks contains an average of four pair work activities and two group work activities. (p. 193)

However, the current investigation did not have sufficient data to show whether eclectic teaching can improve students' achievement, which needs to be further investigated. According to Gu (2007), eclectic teaching is an attitude of "seeking the middle way in the face of the tradition and the innovation is an inadequate approach to addressing the complexities of the pedagogical process" (p. 90). Many other researchers identified this eclectic approach as effective for EFL classrooms (Rao 1996, Hu 2010, Shaikh 2014). For example, Shaikh (2014: 40) suggested that "one and the same method of teaching may not prove successful for teaching to the whole class" and the teacher should "select different teaching strategies from different methods, and blend them to suit the needs of the materials and learners. Therefore the use of an eclectic approach is one of the most

suitable ways of teaching English." After analyzing the advantages of the communicative approach and its difficulties in Chinese classroom contexts, Hu (2010) concluded that "in order to develop students' communicative competence more effectively, Chinese English teachers should adapt communicative approach and compromise it with Chinese traditional approach in light of the Chinese environment of the teaching situation" (p. 82) and offered some suggestions:

(1) integrating communicative function into linguistic teaching,

(2) developing students' cultural awareness in the target language,

(3) incorporating situational constrains into language teaching,

(4) making good use of activities. (p.80-81)

To conclude, current research suggests the following areas for future research: (1) conducting a follow-up study of these six teachers and seeing whether any further changes occurred in their beliefs, how and why, trying to generate a theory or pattern of secondary teacher belief change in different teaching phases; (2) conducting a research on the beliefs of eastern areas' teachers about English teaching and learning and comparing the differences and similarities between the teachers from different regions; (3) this research showed that teachers' belief change cannot guarantee their practice change due to contextual constraints. Future research can aim at exploring whether a

change in teachers' practices can lead to a change in their beliefs; and (4) more work can be done to investigate the influence of eclectic teaching on students' learning.

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Appendix I Consent Form

The University of Nottingham
UNITED KINGDOM · CHINA · MALAYSIA

PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM

Project title： Beginning EFL teachers' beliefs about EFL teaching and learning in secondary schools in China

Researcher's name: Naixin Zhang

Supervisors' names: 1) Professor Qing Gu

2) 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 and voluntarily agree to take part in this study.
- I understand the purpose of the research project and my involvement in it.
- I understand that I may withdraw from the research project at any stage 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 results will remain confidential.
- I understand that I will be audiotaped during the interview.

- I understand that data will be stored in a secured database. This data will be treated confidentially and will only be accessed by the researcher, the supervisors and the examiners.

- I understand that I may contact the researcher or supervisor 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 relating to my involvement in the research.

Research Participant:

Signature: **Print name**:

E-mail: **Date:**

Phone Number:

Contact details:

Researcher: Naixin Zhang – School of Education, the University of Nottingham. Email: *ttxnz1@nottingham.ac.uk*

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School of Education Research Ethics Coordinator:
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Appendix II LETTER AND PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET

Dear Sir/Madam:

Beginning EFL teachers' beliefs about EFL teaching and learning in secondary schools in China" is the title of this research. The aim of this study is to examine Chinese beginning secondary school EFL teachers' beliefs about EFL teaching and learning, whether there are any changes in their beliefs over time and the enabling or inhibiting factors which influence these changes. China has launched a nationwide reform in compulsory education, promoting a shift in educational orientation from an emphasis on knowledge transmission to a focus on individual students' needs and their language competence. This shift has challenged teachers' traditional beliefs in relation to EFL teaching and learning and is seen to have led the clashes between teachers' beliefs and practices. Your participation in this study will provide invaluable insights on change (or no change) in teachers' beliefs during the time of the National Curriculum Reform.

If you are interested in taking part in this study, and after having confirmed this through your written consent, you will be required to:

(1) participate in three face-to-face interviews which will be audio taped.

(2) write nine reflective journals during the whole research (you need to write one journal at the end of every month in order to track possible changes in your beliefs about EFL teaching and learning.)

(3) identify your own concept maps (you need to choose the one which matches closely with your own from the concept maps constructed by the researcher on the basis of the data generated from the interviews and the reflective journals. This procedure will be duplicated for three times during the whole research project.)

This study is purely for research and academic purpose. Information gathered will be treated with strict confidence and will only be reported in anonymous form. Findings from the research may be published, but your identity will remain confidential.

You have the right to contact me for any further information about the research and you may withdraw from this research at any stage. Attached herewith is a consent form explaining your rights as research participant. Please read and provide your signature to indicate your willingness to participate in this research (a copy of the consent form will be given to you).

I look forward to working with you.

Thank you for your cooperation.

Yours sincerely,

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Appendix III Semi-structured interview questions

Interview 1a

Background biographies of teachers

First of all, I want to know your experiences of learning English at school. Can you answer the following questions?

1. **Can you briefly introduce your experiences of learning English at school?**

Prompt: (1) When did you begin learning English?

(2) What kind of school did you enter (a key school or an ordinary school, a private school or a public school, an urban school or a suburb school)?

(3) Did the school promote a particular way of teaching?

2. **Can you tell me something about your English lessons at school?**

Prompt: (1) Did you enjoy your English lessons? If yes, why? If not, why not? What kinds of teaching materials did you use?

(2) What do you think about the teaching materials? What were the advantages and limitations of the teaching materials?

(3) Did teachers attach different importance to the teaching of listening, speaking, reading, writing, vocabulary and grammar in their lessons?

(4) What methods did teachers employ to teach language skills (speaking, reading, listening and writing), vocabulary and grammar?

3. **Are there any teachers you will not forget? Can you tell me about the reasons?**

Prompt: (1) What are the characteristics of these unforgettable teachers?

(2) What methods did these teachers employ to teach language skills (speaking, listening, reading and writing), vocabulary and grammar?

Secondly, I want to learn more about your experiences of learning English at university. Can you answer the questions as follows?

1. **Can you tell me something about your experiences of English learning at university?**

Prompt: (1) What kind of university did you enter (a key university or an ordinary university, a normal university or a comprehensive university)?

(2) Why did you choose English as your major?

2. **Can you tell me something about the courses provided at university?**

Prompt: Which course did you think was most useful? Can you tell me the reasons?

3. **Are there any teachers you will not forget at university? Can you tell me the reasons?**

Prompt: (1) What are the characteristics of these teachers?

(2) What teaching methods did these teachers employ?

4. **Can you tell me something about your practicing teaching experiences?**

Prompt: (1) How long was your teaching practice?

(2) What were the most unforgettable teaching experiences? Can yo tell me the reasons?

Thirdly, I want to know your experiences of teaching English at your school. Can you answer the following questions?

1. **Why and how did you become an English teacher?**

Prompt: Did anyone or any significant events influence your decision?

2. **Can you tell me something about what is like to be an English teacher in your school?**

Prompt: (1) What are your strengths as an English teacher?

(2) What are your limitations as an English teacher?

(3) Do you have any additional responsibilities? Do these additional responsibilities influence your teaching?

(4) What satisfaction does English teaching provide for you?

(5) What dissatisfaction does English teaching give you?

3. **Can you tell me something about the school you work for?**

Prompt: (1) What kind of school do you work for (a key school or an ordinary school, a public school or a private school, an urban school or a suburb school)?

(2)Does the school you work for promote any particular style of teaching?

(3)Did your school provide any in-service teacher education programmes? Do you think these programmes are effective? If yes, why? If not, why not? In what way these programmes influence your beliefs of English teaching?

(4)What else do you think your school should do to help promote your professional development?

(5)What are the evaluations for teachers in your school? Do you think these evaluations have an impact on your teaching? What do you think is a perfect way of evaluating teachers?

4. Can you tell me something about the English department in your school?

Prompt: (1) Does department promote any particular style of English teaching?

(2) Are there any restrictions on the use of teaching materials or the content and the organization of the English lessons?

(3) What do you think of this particular type of English teaching? What are the advantages and the limitations?

(4) What kinds of teaching methods does your head teacher employ to teach language skills (writing, listening, reading and speaking), vocabulary and grammar?

(5) How did s/he promote these teaching methods? Do her/his ways of English teaching exert an impact on your own teaching?

5. Can you tell me something about your English class?

Prompt: (1) Do your students have any preferences for a particular style of English teaching?

(2) Are your students happy with their English learning outcomes? Did students' views on English learning and teaching affect your ways of teaching? If yes, how? Can you give me an example? If not, why not?

(3) Do their parents prefer to a particular type of English teaching? Are they happy with the outcomes of students' English learning? Did parents' views on students' English learning and teaching influence your teaching? If yes, how? Can you give me an example? If not, why not?

(4)What kinds of teaching materials did you use? What do you think of the advantages and the disadvantages of the teaching materials?

(5)What kinds of teaching methods did you employ to teach language skills (listening, speaking, reading and writing), vocabulary and grammar?

(6)What is your way of assessing students' EFL learning?

(7)Did you depart from your lesson plan? If so, why? Did the change make things better or worse?

(8)Which lesson do you think is most successful? Can you describe it? Which lesson do you think is least successful? Can you describe it? In what ways, these lessons influence your beliefs about teaching?

(9)Have you experienced job burnout? When and why do you have such feelings? Can you give me an example?

Interview 1b

Section 1: Teachers' beliefs about EFL learning and learners

In this section, I want to know your beliefs about English learning and learners. Can you answer the following questions?

1. **In your view, what is the most effective way for your pupils to learn English?**

   - What were your views when you first started teaching?
   - Are there any changes? If yes, what are they? What are the contributing factors? If not, why not?

2. **In your view, what are the enabling or constraining factors for your students' English learning?**

   - What were your views when you first started teaching?
   - Are there any changes? If yes, what are they? What are the contributing factors? If not, why not?

3. **What do you think is the role of the students in your English class?**

- What were your views when your first started teaching?

- Are there any changes? If yes, what are they? What are the contributing factors? If not, why not?

4. **In your view, what kinds of students are successful in learning English in your class? What kinds of students are not? Why?**

    - What were your views when your first started teaching?

    - Are there any changes? If yes, what are they? What are the contributing factors? If not, why not?

5. **Do you want to add anything to what we have been talking about?**

Section 2: Teachers' beliefs about EFL teaching and teachers' roles

In this section, I want to know your beliefs and understandings about English teaching and teachers' roles. Can you answer the following questions?

1. **In your view, what is the best way to teach English in your class?**

    - What were your views when you first started teaching?

    - Are there any changes? If yes, what are they? What are the contributing factors? If not, why not?

2. **What do you think about group and pair work? Which one do you prefer? And what are the advantages and disadvantages?**

    - What were your views when you first started teaching?

    - Are there any changes? If yes, what are they? What are the contributing factors? If not, why not?

3. **What do you think about the use of L1? Do you allow your students to use their first language in your classes? When and why? What do you think of the advantages and disadvantages of the use of L1?**

    - What were your views when you first started teaching?
    - Are there any changes? If yes, what are they? What are the contributing factors? If not, why not?

4. **In your view, what are the enabling or constraining factors on your English teaching?**

    - What were your views when you first started teaching?
    - Are there any changes? If yes, what are they? What are the contributing factors? If not, why not?

5. **Do you see yourself as an effective teacher? And why?**

Prompt: What kind of role do you think you play in your English class?

    - What were your views when you first started teaching?
    - Are there any changes? If yes, what are they? What are the contributing factors? If not, why not?

6. **Do you want to add anything to what we have been talking about?**

Interview 1c

In this interview, I want to know about the factors which can influence your current beliefs about English teaching and learning and practices. Can you answer the following questions?

1. **To what extent do your English learning experiences at school influence your current beliefs about English teaching and learning and practices and how?**

Prompt: (1) To what extent do English lessons influence your current beliefs and practices and how?

(2) To what extent do unforgettable teachers influence your current beliefs and practices and how?

2. **To what extent do your experiences of English learning at university influence your current beliefs about English teaching and learning and practices and how?**

Prompt: (1) To what extent do courses provided at university influence your current beliefs and practices and how?

(2) To what extent do unforgettable teachers at university influence your current beliefs and practices and how?

(3) To what extent do practicing teaching experiences influence your current beliefs and practices and how?

3. **To what extent does the school you work for influence your current beliefs about English teaching and learning and practices and how?**

Prompt: (1) To what extent does the school culture influence your current beliefs and practices and how?

(2) To what extent do evaluations for teachers in your school influence your current beliefs and practices and how?

4. **To what extent does the English department in your school influence your current beliefs about English teaching and learning and practices and how?**

Prompt: (1) To what extent does the teaching style promoted in your department influence your current beliefs and practices and how?

(2) To what extent does the head teacher influence your current beliefs and practices and how?

5. **To what extent do your English classes influence your current beliefs about English teaching and learning and practices and how?**

Prompt: (1) To what extent do your students influence your current beliefs and practices and how?

(2) To what extent do your students' parents influence your curret beliefs and practices and how?

(3) To what extent do your teaching experiences influence your current beliefs and practices and how?

6. **To what extent does education policy influence your current beliefs about English teaching and learning and practices and how?**

7. **Are there any other factors influencing your current beliefs and practices? If there are, what are they? To what extent they influence your current beliefs and practices and how?**

Interview 2

Section 1: Background information of teachers

1. Have there been any changes in your school?

2. Have there been any changes in your department (changes in the head teacher, requirements of the department and so on)?

3. Have there been any changes in your class (changes in teaching methods, teaching materials, students' seating arrangements, students' expectations, your relationship with students, parents' expectations and so on)?

4. Have there been any changes in you (changes in professional development, additional responsibilities, position promotion, personal factors and so on)?

5. Have there been any changes in education policy?

Section 2: Teachers' beliefs about EFL learning and learners

1. What do you think about the nature of EFL?

Last time you mentioned:

Are there any changes in your beliefs? Why did you change or not change your beliefs?

2. In your opinion, how English can be learned?

Last time you mentioned:

Are there any changes in your beliefs? Why did you change or not change your beliefs?

3. What do you think of the reasons for students' effective EFL learning? Answer:

Last time you mentioned:

Are there any changes in your beliefs? Why did you change or not change your beliefs?

4. What do you think is the role of students in your English class? Can you describing them using a metaphor?

Last time you mentioned:

Are there any changes in your beliefs? Why did you change or not change your beliefs?

Section 3: Teachers' beliefs about EFL teaching and teachers' roles

1. What do you think is the most effective way of EFL teaching?

Last time you mentioned:

Are there any changes in your beliefs? Why did you change or not change your beliefs?

2. What do you think about the use of L1? Do you allow the students to use their first language in your classes? When and why? What do you think of the advantages and disadvantages of the use of L1?

Last time you mentioned:

Are there any changes in your beliefs? Why did you change or not change your beliefs?

3. Do you usually organize group and pair work? How and when? What do you think about group and pair work? What are the advantages and limitations?

Last time you answered:

Are there any changes in your beliefs? Why did you change or not change your beliefs?

4. What is the role do you think you play in classroom?

Last time you mentioned:

Are there any changes in your beliefs? Why did you change or not change your beliefs?

5. What do you think about the qualities of a good, effective teacher?

Last time you mentioned:

Are there any changes in your beliefs? Why did you change or not change your beliefs?

Interview 3

Section 1: Background information of teachers

1. Have there been any changes in your school?

2. Have there been any changes in your department (changes in the head teacher, requirements of the department and so on)?

3. Have there been any changes in your class (changes in teaching methods, teaching materials, students' seating arrangements, students' expectations, your relationship with students, parents' expectations and so on)?

4. Have there been any changes in you (changes in professional development, additional responsibilities, position promotion, personal factors and so on)?

5. Have there been any changes in education policy?

Section 2: Teachers' beliefs about EFL learning and learners

1. What do you think about the nature of EFL?

Last time you mentioned:

Are there any changes in your beliefs? Why did you change or not change your beliefs?

2. In your opinion, how English can be learned?

Last time you mentioned:

Are there any changes in your beliefs? Why did you change or not change your beliefs?

3. What do you think of the reasons for students' effective EFL learning? Answer:

Last time you mentioned:

Are there any changes in your beliefs? Why did you change or not change your beliefs?

4. What do you think is the role of students in your English class? Can you describing them using a metaphor?

Last time you mentioned:

Are there any changes in your beliefs? Why did you change or not change your beliefs?

Section 3: Teachers' beliefs about EFL teaching and teachers' roles

1. What do you think is the most effective way of EFL teaching?

Last time you mentioned:

Are there any changes in your beliefs? Why did you change or not change your beliefs?

2. What do you think about the use of L1? Do you allow the students to use their first language in your classes? When and why? What do you think of the advantages and disadvantages of the use of L1?

Last time you mentioned:

Are there any changes in your beliefs? Why did you change or not change your beliefs?

3. Do you usually organize group and pair work? How and when? What do you think about group and pair work? What are the advantages and limitations?

Last time you answered:

Are there any changes in your beliefs? Why did you change or not change your beliefs?

4. What is the role do you think you play in classroom?

Last time you mentioned:

Are there any changes in your beliefs? Why did you change or not change your beliefs?

5. What do you think about the qualities of a good, effective teacher?

Last time you mentioned:

Are there any changes in your beliefs? Why did you change or not change your beliefs?

Appendix IV Journal Writing

Dear participants,

I am interested in examining Chinese beginning secondary EFL teachers' beliefs regarding EFL teaching and learning, whether there are any changes in their beliefs over time and what are the contributing factors in these changes. Therefore, I intend to keep a track of yourself reflections on teaching and your beliefs regarding English teaching and learning using journal entries. Please follow the instructions below when you write journals.

Thank you for your cooperation

Naixin Zhang

1. Please write in the first person.

2. You can write journals in English or Chinese. Do not worry about the style, grammar or organization.

3. Write journals at the end of every month. The aim of doing so is to keep a track of the teaching experiences during this month.

Date: **Name:**

Framework of the Journal

- What do you think is the most successful lesson during this month? Can you describe it? To what extent has this lesson changed or not changed your beliefs about English teaching and learning?

- What do you think is the least successful lesson during this month? Can you describe it? To what extent has this lesson changed or not changed your beliefs about English teaching and learning?

- Did you try anything new to improve your teaching during this month?

    a. If yes, what was it? Why did you try it? Will you continue to use it in your teaching? If yes, why? If not, why not?

    b. If not, why not?

- Has any of the experiences which you described above impacted your beliefs about English teaching and learning? If yes, how? If not, why not?

Name: Gaoyuan

Framework of the Journal

What do you think is the most successful lesson during this month? Can you describe it? To what extent has this lesson changed or not changed your beliefs about English teaching and learning?

The most successful lesson during this month is on Oct. 24, when I was teaching non predicate verbs and writing. It was after the National Day and the monthly test and every student was worried about their mistakes made in the test, so they were totally attracted by the knowledge I taught in this class. I was trying to provide a very practical way of learning non predicate verbs and writing. First, I offered an easy understanding of non predicate verbs and the way of doing this kind of exercise, after which I gave them some related exercise to do. They were so happy to find that the method I taught was so practical and efficient. Then I showed then a composition written by a student in our class and asked them to correct the mistakes in it, telling them that this was from a student in another class. Lots of mistakes were found by them, even by the writer himself. Everyone, especially the writer, was surprised to find that they were able to find as many mistakes as possible when viewing the composition as a picky reader. From then on, they bagan to view their work and knowledge as a picky reader.

Actually, this lesson has, more or less, changed my beliefs about English teaching and learning. It's not students' faults if they can learn something well, but the teachers'. We should try out best to help them improve, which of course needs time and effort.

What do you think is the least successful lesson during this month? Can you describe it? To what extent has this lesson changed or not changed your beliefs about English teaching and learning?

Teaching articles may be the least successful lesson during this month, because I found it was so hard for me to teach them all the knowledge about articles since it contains so many grammar rules which are difficult to remember. They may understand each point of the articles, but they could not understand why there are so many rules about it and it's so hard to find some easy ways which could be used in the test. This may affect their confidence and interest in English learning, and also I may think it's impossible for us to think some good methods for every grammar point as a teacher.

Did you try anything new to improve your teaching during this month?

a. If yes, what was it? Why did you try it? Will you continue to use it in your teaching? If yes, why? If not, why not?

b. If not, why not?

Yes, I tried. I tried to use a different way to teach them to correct their composition, and it worked, because I found it was almost impossible for them to make any correction when they know they are correcting their own composition. We need to change the roles when doing so. Of course I will continue it, since it's very effective.

Has any of the experiences which you described above impacted your beliefs about English teaching and learning? If yes, how? If not, why not?

Yes. I have mentioned this in the second paragraph.

What do you think is the most successful lesson during this month? Can you describe it? To what extent has this lesson changed or not changed your beliefs about English teaching and learning?

这个月印象最深的一堂课不是英语教学课，而是情感教育课。在早自习的时候，我进门就发现同学们为了一个很小的事情在相互攻击，特别是几个男同学，你一句我一句，说的很是难听。这个时候我发火了。后来下课后我仔细在想到底要怎么样才能让大家和睦相处，变成一个团结的班集体，宁外一个老师提醒说那天是感恩节。于是上课的时候我就说 I want to say thanks to my friends, because…… 我说的时候是真情流露，感染了一些同学，我说完后问他们有想要感谢的人吗。这个时候有一两女生个人举手 ，她们起来边讲边哭，我做了点总结和引导。这个时候很多人举手了，有感谢父母的，有感谢同学朋友的，也有感谢老师的。教室里哭成了一片。大家都讲完了以后我做了总结，我控制不住自己的情绪，好几次都哭得说不出话来，从学生地表情我可以看出他们是很有感情的人，他们生活中只是缺少感动，缺少表达的机会。从那次以后，班上的同学团结多了。

What do you think is the least successful lesson during this month? Can you describe it? To what extent has this lesson changed or not changed your beliefs about English teaching and learning?

这个月最不成功的一堂课是在录播室上的一堂汇报课。上的是 When is your birthday?的第一课时。这个课时所涉及的内容很困难，包括十二个月份，还涉及到日期。由于同学们之前只学习过基数词，现在要过渡到序数词，还有很多不规则的变化。首先十二个月份已经很难了，再加上要表达自己以及他人的生日，很多同学根本开不了口。学校一直提倡"超前善后"模式，我其实提前应该把单词教会，这样正试上课的时候就没有什么难点了。上课的引入部分，我拿出了一张我曾经收到的生日卡片，并找了几张非常可爱的猪的图片，以我是猪的概念，用第一人称讲述了我去年生日的情形，引出了 birthday party ,birthday cake

and birthday card.设计这个引入的时候，我说我是猪本以为学生会大笑。但是我讲的时候鸦雀无声，学生很严肃，很茫然地看着我。第一是因为他们第一次到录播室上课，有很多摄像头，紧张。第二，我的引入不够好，让他们放不开。上完课后，其他老师给我提意见 就说要是把我后面的月份歌作为引入效果会很好。虽然上课前学生不懂什么意思，但是这就是一种氛围，学生可以模仿，歌声很动听，他们听到后会放松。是啊 ，特别是到一个陌生的环境上课，学生很紧张，这个时候老师就更应该设计好引入部分。

Have there been any significant events which have influenced your beliefs about teaching and l earning and practices?

班上有一个学生很讨厌学习，上课总是开小差，课后作业也乱做，我找他谈了好多次都没有起色，有一次周末作业一个字都没有写，我一生气就叫到办公室打了手板。第二天去教室上课的时候，他就一直说不喜欢英语，说了两遍。我就说不听课就出去。之后他安静了，奇怪的是他那堂课很认真的在听课。他是个非常好面子的男孩。由于爸爸妈妈没有太管，所以学习和生活的习惯都非常的差。对于这样的学生是极度需要耐心的，要怎么样才能让他从被动学习变成主动学习，是我接下来的教学中值得深思的问题。

Name: 胥碧娟

What do you think is the most successful lesson during this month? Can you describe it? To what extent has this lesson changed or not changed your beliefs about English teaching and learning?

这个月上得最成功的一堂课算是高一英语必修（2）的 Module3 Music 当中的 Pronunciation& Everyday English 了。这部分的课堂结合了听和说，同时还有模仿，同学们对此似乎特别的感兴趣。首先是 Pronunciation 里面的 intonation: 听句子并注意句子里面的声调和降调，用箭头标注出来。同学们可能是对于英语对话当中的句子语调觉得听起来很有意思很有趣，所以听得特别认真并且也完成得很好，之后又跟着磁带模仿阅读。接下来的 Everyday English 是谈论他们平时都用什么工具在听音乐，讨论之后听了一则对话：Tom 和 Anna 在谈论他们听音乐用到的 CD Discman, Walkman, MP3 等。在这里面大家学到了一些常用的表达：Cool! No way! Really? Excellent! 这些表达他们记得很好，课后基本都不会说英语的他们就像初一刚开始学了 Yes 和 No 一样，到处都在用。

从这堂课我明显感觉到，孩子们都可以把英语学好的，无论以前的基础如何，关键的问题在于要他们感兴趣，要他们想说并且有话说，他们才会愿意说有激情去说去学。

- **What do you think is the least successful lesson during this month? Can you describe it? To what extent has this lesson changed or not changed your beliefs about English teaching and learning?** 这个月最失败的一堂课就是 Cultural Corner。新课改之后的教材每个单元的后面都有一个文化角，是用来进一步拓展孩子们的视野，让他们对于相关单元和相关方面的知识有更多的了解。但这个单元的文化角却没有达到这个目的。因为班主任工作事情多而杂，这

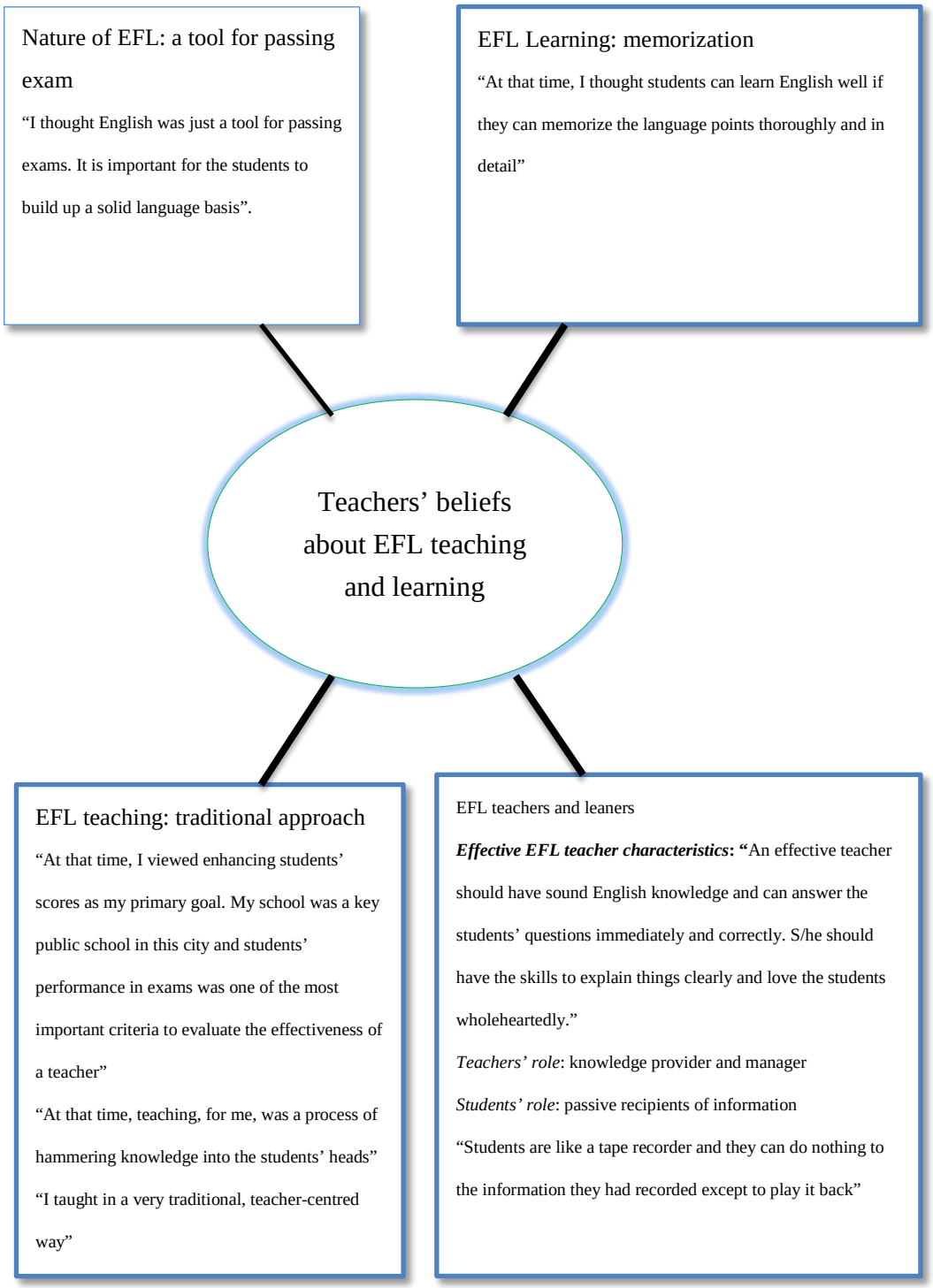
个文化角我就随便的看了一眼，发现是介绍另一位中国当代著名的作曲家的，我想一般文章中都会有很多介绍，所以没有过多的去查阅资料。当我上课的时候，我才发现我对这位作曲家也是一无所知，以前也没有听说过，我就知道完了，我只能按照课文给他们大致的讲一下翻译几个句子讲几个重要词汇就结束了这堂课，到课堂结束我都不知道自己这堂课的重点是什么。

作为老师，课前的充分准备工作是多么的重要我是深刻的体会到了，只有我们有充分的准备广阔的知识面，学生才能了解更多学到更多。因为，毕竟他们还习惯于直接的接受老师的教，而不是自己主动去查阅很多资料了解一些他们不是很感兴趣的东西。

- **Have there been any significant events which have influenced your beliefs about teaching and learning and practices?**

学了 Everyday English 之后，第二天上午的第一堂课我去查班，刚走到教师门口就听到有个男生吼了句：Cool! 我发现居然是坐在班上最后一排的一个平时都不怎么学习英语的同学。全班看到我去了都笑了，我也微微的笑了一下，还把那个男生搞得满脸通红。其实，当时我心里蛮高兴的，只能说，兴趣对孩子的学习太重要了。高中的学习压力大而且枯燥，孩子们不能在平时专注于自己的兴趣，但我们可以尽可能的把他们的兴趣融入课堂。

Appendix V Concept mapping (Qiumei, beliefs about EFL teaching upon first entering the profession)



Appendix VI Procedures of data collection

Procedures of data collection (a period of ten months)

Instruments	De	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	June	July	Aug	Sep
Semi-structured interviews	√		Spring festival			√			Summer holiday	√
Concept mapping	√					√				√
Journals	√	√		√	√	√	√	√		√