December 2018

Chinese Language Teacher Competency: A Literature Review for a Study Series

Huiwen Li
Cleveland State University

Hui Pang
Qingdao University

Zhenzhen Hu
Cleveland State University

Chinese Language Teacher Competency: A Literature Review for a Study Series

Huiwen Li (Cleveland State University)
Hui Pang (Qingdao University)
Zhenzhen Hu (Cleveland State University)

1 Introduction

Teaching is a special profession with complex pedagogical procedures. It prepares qualified workers and citizens who are expected to yield values and bring benefits to the society, the nation, and the whole world (Nessipbayeva, 2012). This makes the profession require well-qualified teachers. In light of this, teachers must have (and be able to exercise) a broad range of competency array every day in an especially complex environment so that students can realize their full academic potential with the help of teachers (Jackson, 1990). The more competent a teacher is, the better students' achievements will be (Johansson, Myrberg, & Rosén, 2015). It is urgent for us to know how to prepare competent teachers.

With the growing importance and influence of China's global economy, Chinese as a foreign language (CFL) has become a critical language in the United States. It is also indispensable to have competent teachers to teach this language. Relevant research must be launched for this purpose to address the following questions.

Question 1: *What are the existing standards of CFL teacher competency in the United States?*

Question 2: *What competencies should CFL teachers be expected by employers?*

Question 3: *Do the current CFL teachers feel competent about their positions?*

Question 4: *What measures should be taken to fill the gap between the expectations and the competence the CFL teachers have perceived, if there is any?*

To answer these questions, a series of research studies need to be conducted as a collective effort. The present study attempts to start this study series with an aim to examine the major findings in the literature of teacher competency and also CFL teacher competency if possible, serving as a general and foundational background for the rest studies.

This literature study starts with the presentation of the definitions involved. Later, a chronological order will be followed to introduce the research efforts on the topics. Due to the significant changes in the 21st century in education and other fields involved, the introduction of the literature will be given in two sections: the research

in the 20th century and that in the 21st century. It aims to show the development of the teacher competency and, possibly, the CFL teacher competency.

2 Competency and Competence: Definition

There are two concepts around this research topic – competence and competency. These two concepts are often misunderstood or misused. Pooler, Campbell, and Longbottom (2017) clearly described their definitions: "Competence (competences in the plural) is the demonstrable ability and skills required to undertake a particular role or activities" and "Competency (competencies in the plural) is more about what a person brings to job – knowledge, skills, abilities, personal characteristics which enable successful performance" (p. 31). Clearly, competence focuses on what is being required, i.e., the organizational standard, whereas competency is about what the employee has, i.e., the personal quality. Therefore, it is correct to say that a teacher proves to be competent with his or her competencies in the competence-based assessment conducted by the school against the competence standard.

This research and its further studies to follow will be discussing both competence and competency by treating these two concepts distinctively. Specifically, teacher competence will be used as either a term describing the organizational standard or the general status whether a teacher is competent or not. In contrast, teacher competencies refer to specific characteristics (such as ability, skills, or attributes) a teacher demonstrates or should demonstrate to meet the competence expectations. The next part will present the teacher competency research in the 20th century.

3 Research on Teacher Competency in the 20th Century

To define the competence coverage or competency has been through an ongoing process. The very start of competence used in the field of human resources was when R. W. White published the article "Motivation reconsidered: The concept of competence" in 1959, where competence was referred to as an inner ability, is very different from what it means today.

It was until 10 years later that researchers began to think about how to specify and operationalize the concept for teacher education and training and other purposes. In 1969, Smith proposed four competence areas. These areas are (1) theoretical knowledge of learning, (2) attitudes which foster learning and positive relationships, (3) knowledge of the subject matter to be taught, and (4) a repertoire of teaching skills and techniques that provide teachers with the tools necessary to make and implement professional decisions. Smith's proposal included knowledge and skills that were unequivocally valued for teachers to learn toward being competent. And it was also a very thoughtful vision to consider attitudes as an important competency since this laid the foundation for the construction of a well-balanced competency array. This

initiation was influential in this teacher competence field, and it inspired endless research to follow mainly focusing on specification and expansion of competency types.

In 1977, Medley (1977) summarized a series of observational research studies on teacher competence and teaching effectiveness. Eight competencies were culled significantly contributive to teacher effectiveness: (1) working with groups; (2) classroom management; (3) time allotment; (4) questioning techniques; (5) teacher reactions; (6) behavior problems; (7) teaching techniques; (8) working with individual pupils. The author identified these contributive in the dynamics of the teaching process. Obviously, the particular attributes are quite inclusive for classroom teachers but needs a better categorization.

Compared with Medley's work, Shulman's effort in 1986 was more appraisable in this regard. Shulman studied the content knowledge that a competent teacher must gain. He divided the content knowledge into three sub-area knowledge: (1) subject matter content knowledge, (2) pedagogical content knowledge, and (3) curricular knowledge. According to Shulman, it is not enough for teachers to have the content knowledge of subject matter. What is also important for teachers is, first, curricular knowledge, i.e., what other courses that students learn simultaneously and in the future. By having curricular knowledge, teachers can look at the individual courses in such a broad view as to help with students' lifelong comprehensive development. Moreover, the third type of knowledge that Shulman proposed – pedagogical content knowledge – is defined as "the ways of representing and formulating the subject that make it comprehensible to others" (p. 9). The pedagogical content knowledge that Shulman valued as an epistemological concept (Mishra & Koehler, 2006) gathered wide acknowledgement. Researchers (such as Cochran, DeRuiter, & King, 1993; Grossman, 1990; Shulman, 1987; Wilson, Shulman, & Richert, 1987) believed it as a revolutionary conception enabling teacher education to include such an unneglectable knowledge into the scholarship of a competent teacher.

In 1996, Parry synthesized the competency categories and raised his three facets competency structure. Parry argues that competencies that affect one's job performance majorly can fall into knowledge, skills, and attitudes, and a cluster of related personal characteristics. It is believed that Parry's categorization of competency reflects the core nature of the concept, and knowledge, skills, and attitudes became the three pillars of professional competence in the inclusive education (Mu et al, 2015). And these three pillars also serve as the conclusive teacher competency categorization.

4 Research on Teacher Competency in the 21st Century

The aforementioned research in the 20th century had laid a structural foundation for the future practice, solid but basic. The education in the 21st century is characterized with innovation and transformation (Serdyukov, 2017) and demands competent teachers that can align their teaching with the features (Darling-Hammond,

Wise, & Klein, 1999). Greenhill (2010) argued that "[i]f we commit to a vision of 21st century knowledge and skills for all students, it is critical that we support educators in mastering the competencies that ensure positive learning outcomes for students" (p. 11). Research on teacher competency for the new century has been developing fast exemplified with Nine Competency Dimensions (Selvi, 2010), Classroom Teaching Skills (Nessipbayeva, 2012), Teacher Professional Competence (Baumert & Kunter, 2013), and Soft Skills.

Selvi (2010) examined what competencies yield the greatest teaching and learning results. The author proposed nine different competence dimensions as field competencies, research competencies, curriculum competencies, lifelong learning competencies, social-cultural competencies, emotional competencies, communication competencies, information and communication technologies competencies and environmental competencies. These competencies are obviously well beyond the competency scope in the last century. More importantly, the author explained that teachers' competencies affect their values, behaviors, communication, aims, and practices in school and also support professional development and curricular studies. This explanation has enabled us to see the mechanism how teacher competencies affect teaching and learning effect.

Baumert and Kunter (2013) argued that teacher professional competence is the individual's ability to cope with specific occupational situations. Based on this, they developed a theoretical model of professional competence. Four major competence areas were included in the model: (1) professional knowledge, (2) professional values, beliefs, and goals, (3) motivational orientations, and (4) professional self-regulation skills. Among the four competency types, the professional knowledge covers Shulman's (1986) three knowledge types. Another two types – appropriate motivation, professional values/beliefs/goals – will guarantee the teaching career is what teachers pursue, and the self-regulation skills will enable teachers to adjust their professional behaviors to keep themselves on the right career track. Research (Kunter, Klusmann, Baumert, Richter, Voss, & Hachfeld, 2013) revealed positive effects of teachers' pedagogical content knowledge, enthusiasm for teaching, and self-regulatory skills on instructional quality, which in turn affected student outcomes.

Gryl, Kanwischer, and Schulze (2015) believed that there are still many competencies which a teacher should obtain in today's digital world, such as "digital knowledge and media competence, information management, communication as well as learning capabilities, civic and cultural awareness, Spatial Citizenship competence" (p. 374-375). Instefjord and Munthe (2017) also articulate the importance to integrate professional digital competence in teacher education.

In addition to the above perceptions of the 21st teacher competency, more and more researchers and educators (such as Attakorn, Tayut, Pisitthawat, & Kanokorn, 2014; Pachauri, & Yadav, 2014; Ngang, Yunus, & Hashim, 2015) have realized the importance of soft skills as competencies. Evidence indicates that soft skills play a key role to help employees to perform competently (Jerald, 2009). Wing Institute (n.d.) believes teachers with these skills can affect students profoundly by stimulating their interest in learning.

Soft skills refer to the personal attributes that complement an individual's "hard" skill – technical skill and knowledge. Attitude proposed in the last century is a soft skill; yet, relevant research and especially its application in education were rarely discussed although being treated as a key competency type. Wing Institute (n.d.) identified eight soft skills as appropriate expectation establishment, encouraging a love for learning, listening to others, good adaptation to novel situations, showing empathy, cultural sensitivity, higher order thinking facilitation, positive regard for students. Easily understood, these soft skills are very much applicable for classroom activities. Attakorn, Tayut, Pisitthawat, & Kanokorn (2014) identified seven soft skills that teachers should have in a broader view. They are communicative skills, life-long learning and information management skills, critical and problem solving skills, teamwork skills, ethics, moral and professional skills, leadership skills, and innovation invention and development skills. These soft skills are believed to be able to make significant contributions to student learning. Obviously, teachers need both the specific and the more general soft competencies that help teachers perform well in the school settings.

5 Language Teacher Competence

In the United States, Chinese language has been a top-ten world language in terms of the learner population size. It is critical to have competent teachers for the Chinese classes, so the Chinese language teacher competency needs to be mapped out. However, current relevant research has predominantly focused on the general features on teacher competence discussed earlier, as well as competence of teacher in some specific subject areas (by researchers such as: Freeman, 1989; He, 2013; Kaplan & Argün, 2017; Leung & Teasdale, 1998; Magnusson, Borko, & Krajcik, 1999; Vannatta-Hall, 2010; Yu, Luo, Sun, & Strobel, 2012). We must first refer to the research findings on foreign/second language teacher competency.

The field of second and foreign language teaching is consistently being renewed both by different claims on must-knows and by different approaches help teachers achieve competence (Richard & Nunan, 1990). In 1987, Thomas proposed two aspects of teacher competence: one is the linguistic competence, and the other is pedagogical competency, which pretty much reflected the traditional structure. The summarization of Bell (2005) on the relevant literature between 1981 and 2003 demonstrates a big change in foreign language teaching from traditional linguistic approaches to the new approaches which are more communicative and interactive. Examples of the new approaches that the author identified include communicative language teaching, computer-assisted language learning, the Standards for Foreign Language Learning, teaching culture, content-based instruction, languages for specific purposes, and authentic assessment. More recent research by Richards (2010) also emphasizes the new competencies. According to Richards, language teachers must possess ten core skills and expertise in language teaching. They are language proficiency, content knowledge, teaching skills, contextual knowledge, language

teacher identity, learner-focused teaching, specialized cognitive skills, theorizing from practice, joining a community of practice, and professionalism.

In addition, in 2013, American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL) and Council of Accreditation of Educator Preparation (CAEP) launched the Program Standards for the Preparation of Foreign Language Teachers. According to the version modified in 2015, teacher candidates must have these competencies in order to perform well in maximizing student learning. The knowledge, skills, and dispositions that candidate teachers must attain mainly include content knowledge, knowledge of learners and learning, instructional skills, and professionalism (Table 1). This officially acknowledges that teacher competency in language teaching field remains as an ongoing process. The education and training of foreign language teachers has to keep up with the times.

Table 1 *CAEP Principles and ACTFL's Six Content Standards at a Glance*

ACTFL STANDARD	CAEP Principle
Standard 1: Language proficiency: Interpersonal, Interpretive, and Presentational Standard 2: Cultures, Linguistics, Literatures, and Concepts from Other Disciplines	CAEP Principle B: Content
Standard 3: Language Acquisition Theories and Knowledge of Students and Their Needs Standard 4: Integration of Standards in Planning, Classroom Practice, and Use of Instructional Resources	CAEP Principle A: The Learner and Learning CAEP Principle C: Instructional Practice
Standard 5: Assessment of Languages and Cultures – Impact on Student Learning	CAEP Principle A: The Learner and Learning CAEP Principle C: Instructional Practice
Standard 6: Professional Development, Advocacy, and Ethics	CAEP Principle D: Professional Responsibility

Adapted from *ACTFL/CAEP Program Standards for the Preparation of Foreign Language Teachers* (2013, modified in 2015).

It is true that the general teacher competency mentioned above should be applicable to Chinese language teaching. Yet, Chinese language teachers should have some specific and unique competencies to possess, as well. It is unfortunate that little research is identified for our reference. This requires us to conduct focused research to fill the gap.

6 Our Research and Uses

This literature review provides a general background description for a group of research studies. The studies include, at this stage, one policy inquiry on the

competence standard, one Chinese teacher job analysis, one survey and interview study on competencies reported by employers, and one survey study on competencies perceived by Chinese language teachers. Further research may be initiated based on needs. The research results may be useful for multiple kinds of program design such as teacher education curriculum development, licensing course building, and training content selection. Individual teachers or candidates can also make a plan for their professional development and lifelong learning. Only when we know why and how a teacher is effective can we decide how best to train teachers (Medley, 1977). It is our hope, with the Chinese teacher competency research findings, the Chinese teaching and learning will be more and more effective and efficient.

References

ACTFL, & CAEP. (2013, modified in 2015). *ACTFL/CAEP Program Standards for the Preparation of Foreign Language Teachers.* Retrieved from https://www.actfl.org/sites/default/files/CAEP/ACTFLCAEPStandards2013_v2015.pdf

Attakorn, K., Tayut, T., Pisitthawat, K., & Kanokorn, S. (2014). Soft skills of new teachers in the secondary schools of Khon Kaen Secondary Educational Service Area 25, Thailand. Procedia-Social and Behavioral Sciences, *112*, 1010-1013.

Baumert, J., & Kunter, M. (2013). The COACTIV model of teachers' professional competence. In M. Kunter, J. Baumert, W. Blum, U. Klusmann, S. Krauss, & M.

Neubrand (Eds.), *Cognitive activation in the mathematics classroom and professional competence of teachers* (pp. 25-48). Boston, MA: Springer.

Bell, T. R. (2005). Behaviors and attitudes of effective foreign language teachers: Results of a questionnaire study. *Foreign Language Annals, 38*(2), 259-270.

Cochran, K. F., DeRuiter, J. A., & King, R. A. (1993). Pedagogical content knowing: An integrative model for teacher preparation. *Journal of teacher Education, 44*(4), 263-272.

Darling-Hammond, L. (2006). Constructing 21st-century teacher education. *Journal of teacher education, 57*(3), 300-314.

Darling-Hammond, L., Wise, A. E., & Klein, S. P. (1999). *A License to Teach. Raising Standards for Teaching.* San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, Inc., Publishers.

Freeman, D. (1989). Teacher training, development, and decision making: A model of teaching and related strategies for language teacher education. *Tesol Quarterly, 23*(1), 27-45.

Greenhill, V. (2010). *21st century knowledge and skills in educator preparation.* Washington, DC: American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education; Partnership for 21st Century Skills.

Grossman, P. L. (1990). *The making of a teacher: Teacher knowledge and teacher education.* Teachers College Press, Teachers College, Columbia University.

Instefjord, E. J., & Munthe, E. (2017). Educating digitally competent teachers: A study of integration of professional digital competence in teacher

education. *Teaching and Teacher Education, 67*, 37-45.

Jackson, P. W. (1990). *Life in classrooms.* New York, NY: Teachers College Press.

Jerald, C. D. (2009). *Defining a 21st century education.* Alexandria, VA: Center for Public Education.

Johansson, S, Myrberg, E, & Rosén, M. (2015). Formal teacher competence and its effect on pupil reading achievement. *Scandinavian Journal of Educational Research, 59*(5), 564-582.

Kaplan, H. A., & Argün, Z. (2017). Teachers' diagnostic competences and levels pertaining to students' mathematical thinking: The case of three math teachers in Turkey. *Educational Sciences: Theory & Practice, 17*(6), 2143-2174.

Kunter, M., Klusmann, U., Baumert, J., Richter, D., Voss, T., & Hachfeld, A. (2013). Professional competence of teachers: Effects on instructional quality and student development. *Journal of Educational Psychology, 105*(3), 805.

Leung, C., & Teasdale, A. (1998). ESL teacher competence: Professionalism in a social market. *Prospect, 13*(1), 4–23.

Magnusson, S., Krajcik, J., & Borko, H. (1999). Nature, sources, and development of pedagogical content knowledge for science teaching. In J. Gess-Newsome, & N.

G. Lederman (Eds.). Examining pedagogical content knowledge: The construct and its implications for science education *(Vol. 6)* (pp. 95-132). Dordretcht: Kluwer Academic Publishers.

Medley, D. M. (1977). *Teacher competence and teacher effectiveness: A review of process-product research.* Washington, DC: American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education.

Mishra, P., & Koehler, M. J. (2006). Technological pedagogical content knowledge: A framework for teacher knowledge. *Teachers College Record, 108*(6), 1017.

Mu, G. M., Wang, Y., Wang, Z., Feng, Y., Deng, M., & Liang, S. (2015). An enquiry into the professional competence of inclusive education teachers in Beijing: Attitudes, knowledge, skills, and agency. *International Journal of Disability, Development and Education, 62*(6), 571-589.

Nessipbayeva, O. (2012). *The competencies of the modern teacher.* Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Bulgarian Comparative Education Society.

Ngang, T. K., Yunus, H. M., & Hashim, N. H. (2015). Soft skills integration in teaching professional training: Novice teachers' perspectives. *Procedia-Social and Behavioral Sciences, 186*, 835-840.

Pachauri, D., & Yadav, A. (2014). Importance of soft skills in teacher education programme. *International Journal of Educational Research and Technology, 5*(1), 22-25.

Parry, S. B. (1996). Just What Is a Competency? (And Why Should You Care?). *Training, 35*(6), 58.

Pooler, A., Campbell, P., & Longbottom, A. (2017). *Nursing in general practice: The toolkit for nurses and health care assistants.* London: Routledge.

Richards, J. C. (2010). Competence and performance in language teaching. *RELC Journal, 41*(2), 101-122.

Richards, J. C., & Nunan, D. (Eds.). (1990). *Second language teacher education.*

Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Schulze, U., Gryl, I., & Kanwischer, D. (2015). Spatial citizenship education and digital geomedia: Composing competences for teacher education and training. *Journal of Geography in Higher Education, 39*(3), 369-385.

Selvi, K. (2010). Teachers' competencies. *Cultura International Journal of Philosophy of Culture and Axiology, 7*(1), 167-175.

Serdyukov, P. (2017). Innovation in education: What works, what doesn't, and what to do about it?. *Journal of Research in Innovative Teaching & Learning, 10*(1), 4-33.

Shulman, L. (1987). Knowledge and teaching: Foundations of the new reform. *Harvard educational review, 57*(1), 1-23.

Smith, B. O. (1969). *Teachers for the real world.* Washington, DC: American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education.

Thomas, A. L. (1987). Language teacher competence and language teacher education. In R. Bowers (Ed.), *Language teacher education: An integrated programme for ELT teacher training* (pp. 33-42). London and Reading: Modern English Publications.

Vannatta-Hall, J. E. (2010). *Music education in early childhood teacher education: The impact of a music methods course on pre-service teachers' perceived confidence and competence to teach music* (Doctoral dissertation). Illinois University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign.

White, R. W. (1959). Motivation reconsidered: The concept of competence. *Psychological Review, 66*(5), 297.

Wilson, S. M., Shulman, L. S., & Richert, A. E. (1987). "150 different ways" of knowing: Representations of knowledge in teaching. In S. M. Wilson, L. S. Shulman, A. E. Richert, & J. Calderhead, *Exploring teachers' thinking* (pp. 104-124). London: Cassell.

Wing Institute (n.d.). Teacher competence overview. Retrieved from https://www.winginstitute.org/uploads/docs/Teacher%20Competencies%20PDF%20final.pdf

Yu, J. H., Luo, Y., Sun, Y., & Strobel, J. (2012). A conceptual K-6 teacher competency model for teaching engineering. *Procedia-Social and Behavioral Sciences, 56,* 243-252.