Challenges of Teaching Chinese in Australian Schools: Lesson from Beginning Teacher-researchers

Zhu Chen
Centre for Educational Research, University of Western Sydney, Australia;
Institute for Positive Psychology and Education, Australian Catholic University, Australia

Abstract—Chinese has been taught as a foreign language in Australian schools based on the recognition of economic and social importance of China to Australia. However, Chinese language teaching in Australian schools conducted by teachers who are native speakers of Chinese is perceived as low in quality and inefficient to meet non-background speakers' needs. As a result, there is a high drop-out rate of non-background learners in Chinese subject. This qualitative investigation explores the issue of inefficient Chinese language teaching in Australian schools by reviewing the challenges native-speaking Chinese language teachers encountered in real classrooms. Based on this understanding, Chinese language teacher education may be adapted to enhance teachers' capability to satisfy non-background speakers' needs and perform effectively in Australian classroom.

Index Terms—foreign language teaching, languages other than English (LOTE), language teacher education, language policy

I. CHINESE LANGUAGE TEACHING IN AUSTRALIA

Recognizing the growing impact of China in the world, more foreigners are learning Chinese to increase their access to people in China, which creates a 'Chinese fever' worldwide (Scrimgeour, 2014). School-based Chinese language education has been promoted in recent years in the context of *Melbourne Declaration on Educational goals for Young Australians* and the National Asian Languages and Studies in Schools Program (NALSSP) of Rudd government. In 2008, *Melbourne Declaration* stresses that "Australians need to become 'Asia literate', engaging and building strong relationships with Asia" (Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs, 2008, p. 4). NALSSP initiative aims at significantly increase the number of high school graduates' with proficiency in Asian languages (Scarino, et al., 2011). It is one of the Australian Government's aspirations that by the end of 2020, at least 12% of Year 12 Australian students should be fluent in Chinese, Japanese, Indonesian or Korean (Asia Education Foundation, 2008). In 2008, 92931 students in Australian were studying Chinese (Sturak & Naughten, 2010). Victoria is the state with the largest number of students studying Chinese (Sturak & Naughten, 2010). The number of students enrolled in Chinese programs in New South Wales is estimated to be more than 20000. However, students' achievement in Chinese language learning was unsatisfactory. A high drop-out rate has been observed in NSW as well as other states. It is found that 94% of students enrolled in Chinese programs choose to quit Chinese before Year 11 (Orton, 2008). In NSW in 2011, out of 72, 391 Year 12 students who participated in HSC test, only 1,091 (1.5%) students studies Chinese (Herscovitch, 2012). The achievement of non-Chinese background learners is particularly low (Scarino et al., 2011; Scrimgeour, 2012). The students who stayed with Chinese programs are mostly first language speakers of Chinese (Asia Education Foundation, 2008; DEEWR, 2010). In this sense, the current state of Chinese language teaching is described as "teaching Chinese to Chinese" (Orton, 2008, p. 4). Confronted with these facts, retention of non-background Chinese language learners has been regarded as the first priority for achieving the aspirational goal in 2020 (Asia Education Foundation, 2008; DEEWR, 2010).

II. SHORTAGE OF HIGH QUALITY TEACHER

It is maintained that teachers play an important role in retaining students in Chinese language classroom and reducing high drop-out rate of Chinese learning. As stated by Lo Bianco (2009, p. 28) in his study of second language learning in Australian schools "good teaching is the single most important controllable variable in successful language learning…". Nevertheless, there seems to be a shortage of high quality Chinese language teachers in Australia (Asia Education Foundation, 2008; DEEWR, 2010; McKay, 2000; Orton, 2008; Sturak & Naughten, 2010). The number of new graduating Chinese teachers from Australian universities per year is less than twenty in each state of Australian (Orton, 2008). Since it is difficult for English-speaking teachers to develop desired level of proficiency in Chinese in terms of phonology, grammar, vocabulary and written characters, about 90% of Chinese language teachers employed in Australian schools are native speakers of Chinese (Orton, 2008; Sturak & Naughten, 2010). These native speaking

teachers have often been criticized as inadequately prepared to teach Chinese in Australian classrooms even though some of them are trained in Australian universities (Asia Education Foundation, 2008; DEEWR, 2010). A qualitative study of Chinese student-teachers' practicum experience in Australian schools by Scrimgeour (2010) identified five major challenges native-speaking teachers confronted in Australian classroom including unfamiliarity with Australian culture of learning, low levels of learner motivation, responsibility to engage learners, inability to see language learning from the learner's perspective and low proficiency in English. The current study by reviewing some classroom-based research intends to further enrich understanding about challenges native-speaking teachers face when teaching Chinese in Australian classroom.

III. This Study

In response to federal government's increasing attention to Asia literacy education in Australia, a partnership between NSW Department of Education and Communities-Western Sydney Office, Ningbo Municipal Bureau of Education and University of Western Sydney was initiated to promote Chinese language and culture in western Sydney region. Known as Research-Oriented, School-Engaged Teacher Education (ROSETE), this program recruits volunteers from China to teach Chinese in western Sydney schools and to undertake classroom-based research at the same time. As these volunteers are teaching and doing research on their own teaching at the same time, they are considered as teacher-researchers in this program. In the past few years, 35 university graduates from China have worked as teacher-researchers in ROSETE program to support Chinese language teaching in western Sydney region and have produced significant amount of classroom-based research on teaching Chinese in local public schools. Most of these classroom-based researches are qualitative investigations of volunteers' own classroom practice and professional development with the common goal of improving Chinese language teaching effectiveness. While studying their professional development, the volunteers documented challenges they encountered in teaching Chinese as a foreign language in Australian schools.

A. Metasynthesis

This article is a qualitative metasynthesis of the major challenges reported in the volunteers' classroom-based research. Qualitative metasynthesis involves analyzing, synthesizing and interpreting findings from different qualitative studies to identify common themes (Major & Savin-Baden, 2010). Such re-interpretation of existing findings contributes to a refined understanding of a particular event (Thorne et al., 2004). The metasynthesis in the current study attempts to understand the major challenges for the ROSETE volunteers to teach in Australian schools by analyzing, synthesizing and interpreting findings of their classroom-based research.

B. Data Collection

All the ROSETE volunteers wrote theses based their classroom-based research to obtain a Master of Education (Honours) at the university. Therefore, their classroom-based research was collected through the university's publicly available thesis repository, using the terms "Chinese language teacher" and "beginning Mandarin teacher". By reading the abstracts, 22 theses were identified as relevant to ROSETE program. One thesis which is a discourse analysis of language policy with no focus on classroom practice was excluded from the current study. Hence, 21 theses were finally included in the current metasynthesis (see Table 1).

TABLE 1
LIST OF THESES INCLUDED

Name	Year	Title
Hongwei Chen	2011	A Chinese beginning teacher's professional identity transformation: An auto-ethnographic study
Yi Chen	2011	Assessment for Learning: Enhancing activities to learn Mandarin
Xiaowen Huang	2011	A 'self-study' of a Chinese teacher-researcher's practice of transnational knowledge exchange: Stimulating students' Mandarin learning in Australia
Ye Li	2010	Constructing the identity of a Mandarin teacher in Australia: A narrative self-study
Qian Liu	2012	A path to professional knowledge and identity building: Self-study of a native Chinese language two teacher in Western Sydney schools
Wenlu Qiu	2013	The impact of beginning Mandarin teachers' knowledge on primary students' classroom engagement in western Sydney schools
Jingjing Weng	2010	Magic moments: A second language teacher's zone of professional development
Ting Wu	2010	Teacher engagement in second language (L2) classrooms: Teacher-as-researcher
Jing Yuan	2011	Interest-based language teaching: Stimulating Australian students' interest in learning Mandarin
Minmin Zhang	2010	A bilingual second language teacher teaching bilingually: A self-study
Xijun Mao	2010	An investigation into appreciative approaches to pedagogy: The perspective of a volunteer teacher researcher in language classrooms in NSW public schools
Xinxin Xu	2010	Environmental education as a cross-curriculum perspective in teaching Mandarin: Implications for environmental worldview
Wenyuan Zhang	2010	Journey to the west-Reading communicative language teaching in Australia
Jiadong Liao	2011	Knowledge in practice: A grounded theory approach to constructing beginning Mandarin teachers' use of the communicative language teaching approach
Ji Ma	2011	The implementation of culture tasks in teaching Chinese to Australian high school beginners
Shuyan Mao	2011	Teaching Hanzi to non-native speakers of Chinese
Yi Weng	2011	Exploring the funds of knowledge in the Chinese community in Australia for Mandarin teaching and learning in schools
Ying Zhang	2011	Reading respect in Australian schooling: A Chinese perspective
Luhua Huo	2012	The impact of visual pedagogy on students' learning of Hanyu: A case study of a western Sydney public school
Zhou Lan	2013	Scaffolding Chinese teaching and learning
Xinyu Yu	2012	Popular culture and engagement in teaching Mandarin: An action research project

C. Data Analysis

Three stages of data analysis were employed in the current study. The first stage is to select relevant narrative about challenges in teaching from the large amount of texts in each thesis using holistic coding. As a time-saving approach for preparing massive amount of data for more detailed analysis, holistic coding "grasp basic themes or issues in the data by absorbing them as a whole rather than by analysing them line by line" (Dey, 1993, p. 104). The second stage employs descriptive coding which summarizes basic topics of the narratives selected in the first stage in short phrases. Then, at the third stage, focused coding was applied to organize the descriptive codes into themes. All the themes are discussed in the following section one by one.

IV. FINDINGS

A. Different Educational Culture

Teachers often bring with them a set of beliefs and understanding about teaching that are shaped by their own experiences as students (Feiman-Nemser, 2001; Watzke, 2007; Richardson, 1996). As students previously nurtured in Chinese education systems, the teacher-researchers' belief about teaching is profoundly influenced by Chinese educational culture. However, as reflected in their theses, drawing upon these beliefs to teach Australian students turns out to be unproductive. H. Chen (2011) mentioned that the dignity of teachers and teaching is an important part of traditional Chinese educational philosophy. In Chinese schools, teachers have absolute authority in the classroom and students' respect and obedience to teachers are taken for granted. Without experiencing such teacher authority and respect and obedience from students in Australian classroom, H. Chen (2011) found it challenging to teach in Australia. As other local beginning teachers in schools in western Sydney region, ROSETE teacher-researchers had issues with managing students' behavior problems. However, what makes these Chinese-educated teachers' situation worse was that they did not expect behavior problem before entering Australian classroom due to their belief in teacher authority and students' respect for teachers as the norm.

How could they be so rude! I was really shocked and disappointed. Why they not listened to me, just as my authority was totally ruined. Don't the teachers enjoy their authority naturally and students must respect teacher and follow the teachers' instruction? (Liu, 2012, p. 103)

However, after I started teaching, I experienced a—reality shock! Not only could I not organise effective group work, I could not control or discipline the class and could not stimulate my students to learn Mandarin. (Li, 2010, p. 6).

On the next day I entered the class of Mifeng HS, where I was going to work as a volunteer. There I received a "shock"…..It seems normal to eat and drink during class. Their way of sitting and standing is very relaxed, there is even one laying on the floor, I cannot describe the situation with words. (Huang, 2011, p. 77)

As shown in the excerpts above, teacher-researchers felt 'shocked' when they found that high level of teacher authority and students' obedience do not come automatically in Australian classroom as in Chinese classroom. Students' behavior problems negatively affected teacher-researchers' capability to promote student learning in different ways. One of the most important impacts is that students' disruptive behaviors caused negative emotions in teachers and reduced teacher engagement.

I began to dislike the naughty boys who always talked and disturbed the other students. After this lesson, I realised that my feelings and my emotional engagement in the class and towards the students were changing. I felt nervous and I was reluctant to teach in the high school (Wu, 2010, p. 160)

Students made noise, moved, and even stood beside the window to talk to people outside. I was so frightened. How could Australian students be like this? … I was so tired and depressed. My voice was mute after this lesson. I was so sad that I had only one thing in mind: I want to go back to China; I cannot stay if it's always like this. My tears were nearly coming out. (Li, 2010, p. 115)

W. Zhang (2010) pointed out that student's behavior problems made her reluctant to use student-centered pedagogy such as CLT for which students' self-regulation is the prerequisite. To avoid the risk of classroom being out of control, she adopted more teacher-centred approach instead.

Chinese students' obedient behavior is also to some extent due to the fact that they are self-motivated for exams (Li, 2004a). The exam-oriented educational culture in China is described by Huang (2011) as follows:

[exams] function as a standard for ensuring equal competition and a mechanism to externally motivate "slow students" to catch up, and to provide "good students" with a sense of success. A Chinese Suyu can be used here to interpret this situation……it literally means "exam, exam, exam, teachers" magic weapon; score, score, score, students "life roots."……This Suyu captures the importance of examinations for Chinese students and teachers, indicating students and teachers' different interests in engagement with examinations and their attitude towards them. Examination is an extrinsic motivator, playing an important role in stimulating students' learning and in directing teachers' work. (Huang, 2011, p. 100)

As most students are mostly self-motivated for exams, Chinese teachers usually put less effort on motivating students but focus more on academic work. Conversely, in Australian educational culture, students do not have exams as frequently as students in China and teachers pose negative attitudes towards exams, as observed by the teacher-researcher:

At that time, DET was about to hold an examination and acquire the exam results from schools. All teachers again objected to it. They said that it is not right to prepare students for tests. Finally, all staff voted for a decision to send a letter to present their opinion to DET, and they were going to give out newsletters to parents at the school gate. (Huang, 2011, p. 99)

Without recognizing the difference in educational culture in terms of exams, teacher-researchers tend to assume that Australian students are self-motivated as Chinese students and teaching involves merely academic work. It is only when they realize that exam is not a valid external motivator for most Australian students that they started to acknowledge motivating students as an essential part of teaching in Australian schools.

Chinese educational culture and Australian educational culture are also different in terms of asking and answering questions in the classroom. Being educated in Chinese schools, Weng (2010) developed the belief that during the lesson, students are supposed to respond to teachers' questions with perfect answers rather than frequently asking questions to interrupt teachers. From her perspective, giving wrong answers is associated with losing face and asking questions is considered as weakness in learning. Holding these beliefs, Weng (2010) felt uncomfortable with being frequently interrupted by students' questions in Australian classroom.

The teacher-researchers were also bothered by the reality that in Australia, all teachers have to teach without official textbook. Coming from China where teaching and learning of all school subjects and assessments are organized according to a set of official textbooks used national wide, H. Chen (2011) was not prepared to teach Chinese without textbook. Consequently, the absence of official textbook for Chinese subject in Australia causes the her concern. In contrast to Chinese educational culture which attaches greater importance to memorizing information from textbooks and quantity of knowledge, Australian educational culture values the interest of learning. Li (2010) found it hard to internalize such philosophy of teaching and learning:

I thought learning and playing were difficult to integrate: fun learning reduced the amount of knowledge that students could learn. There is always a conflict between my two minds……On one hand, I tried to adapt to teaching that values fun learning. On the other side, I was still the person who focused on learning results and knowledge feeding. I did not believe that students who learned with fun could gain as much knowledge as they did with ─serious teaching. (Li, 2010, p. 120)

Instead of following certain textbooks, Australian education emphasize on the role of hands-on activities for developing students' deep understanding about knowledge. Teachers in Australia are expected to design classroom activities themselves by drawing upon ideas and materials from various sources. The requirement for teachers' to design activities is perceived as another challenge for the teacher-researcher.

B. Unmotivated Learners

In some regions of Sydney, students with Chinese background take up a large population of local schools. Schools in these regions also provide Chinese language programs. Chinese classroom in these schools are different from Chinese classroom in western Sydney regions in that the former is mostly consisted of background/first language learners while the latter mostly includes non-background learners. Unlike non-background learners in western Sydney regions, background/first language learners demonstrated more positive behavior in Chinese class:

I recorded my reflections about the Mandarin lessons I observed in these schools, which were mostly located in Chinese-Australian communities. Through this observation, I thought that Australian students had a self-initiated and motivated attitude towards Mandarin learning…..Many students are Chinese-Australian…… students are free to have free discussion with their groups, and few of them were chatting about irrelevant topics…. (Huang, 2011, p. 77)

The different behaviors of background/first language learners and non-background learners can be explained by their different levels of motivation towards Chinese language learning. From the perspective of H. Chen (2011), closely related to non-background students' disruptive and off-task behaviors in Chinese classroom is their lack of motivation for Chinese language learning. Unlike background/first language learner who has access to Chinese-speaking community, non-background learners learn Chinese without being supported by a Chinese-speaking environment. As a consequence, learners have fewer opportunities to test out what they have learnt, which in turn affects their motivation. This problem may also be explained in the light of Fishman's (1972) concept of *domains* of language use. *Domains* are the institutional contexts which determine people's language choice (Adams, Matu & Ongarora, 2012, p. 100; Jeffery & Mesthrie, n.d, p. 1). Home, school and work are typical examples of domains (Jeffery & Mesthrie, n.d.). Nevertheless, *domains* are not equivalent to physical settings, but are more related to the types of activities and events which language is used for (Jeffery & Mesthrie, n.d.). *Domains* are concerned with situation of language use which can be described by "who is using language to whom, how, why, when and where" (Jeffery & Mesthrie, n.d., p. 1). Even though both background learners and non-background learners communicate with teachers and peers in English, their *domains* outside school are different. Background learners of Chinese have *domains* in which Chinese can be used for communication since they may talk to family members in Chinese. For non-background learners, there is almost no *domain* outside school in which Chinese is more appropriate to use than English or their own languages. As a result, they are unmotivated to learn Chinese, which is perceived as a major challenge for teacher-researchers.

Without reinforcement by Chinese-speaking *domain*, it has been pointed out that the success of foreign language learning, as a part of the school curriculum, to a large extent depends on contextual factors including attitudes of school, local community and government towards foreign language learning (Ellis, 1996). These factors may increase learners' integrative motivation (desire to get involved in the target community) or instrumental motivation (desire to accomplish some non-interpersonal purpose such as to pass an exam or to advance a career) (Liuolienė & Metiūnienė, 2011, p. 94). In China, learning English is highly significant for students since it is a compulsory subject and the competitive advantage of good English competence is always evident in admission for leading schools and universities as well as recruitment into highly-paid jobs. The success of English education in China has often been attributed to the use of various English tests (Chang, 2008). Unlike this, in Australia, there is no such strong community and government support in the form of exam, admission criteria or employer preference to materialize the benefit of Chinese language learning and create learners' instrumental motivation. Family attitudes may act as another negative influence on non-background students' motivation for Chinese language learning. Huang (2011) found that even though Australia is becoming increasingly multicultural than before, some Anglo-Australian parents may have less favorable or even racist attitudes towards other cultures and learning other languages.

As the teacher-researchers cannot take advantage of learners' integrative motivation and instrumental motivation, they try to enhance immediate enjoyment and add extra attraction of classroom activities as an alternative to motivate students' learning. Such strategy for managing language learners' motivation is called as 'interest enhancement' (Wolters, 2003, p. 195) or 'satiation control strategies' (Dornyei, 2005, p. 113). To eliminate boredom of Chinese lesson, the teacher-researchers employed a variety of tools such as games, cultural artefacts, crafts, colouring, popular music which reflect Australian learners' preferences. Nevertheless, students' interest in games, cultural artefacts, crafts, and colouring may not be extended to the Chinese language itself. As an 'interesting' lesson may involve limited use of the target language, students may be engaged in the teacher-researchers' lesson, but were not necessarily engaged in learning the target language. As a result the teacher-researchers are faced with a conflict between enhancing interestingness of the lesson and teaching the language:

C. Insufficient Understanding about Students

Despite that as native speakers of Chinese, the teacher-researchers are highly proficient in the content, their insufficient understanding about students and its associated implication for teaching constitute a major challenge for them to function effectively in Australian classrooms. Without the same experience of learning Chinese as a foreign language, the teacher-researchers lacks understanding about the difficulties non-background learners would encounter in their learning. Consequently, they are challenged in preparing lessons tailored to students' potential errors and barriers in learning. The teacher-researchers sometimes assume non-background speakers will have the same problems as first language or background learners. Based on this assumption, the teacher-researchers taught non-background learners following the same approach as teaching Chinese as a first language, which does not satisfy non-background learners' needs. Gradually, the teacher-researchers realised that "teaching Mandarin to non-background speakers is

more than knowing the language" (M. Zhang, 2010, p. 4). As foreigners who just arrived Australia, the teacher-researchers have not yet developed a good understanding about life of local students:

However, even though I spared no effort to understand students' life and communicated with them as much as possible, it was very hard for me to gain profound idea about their life because I didn't have enough time both in class and after class, to understand their life experience. (Liu, 2012, p. 151)

To look for connections to introduce new knowledge to students based on their prior knowledge is challenging, because of the limited knowledge students have about China, and my limited knowledge – that is my ignorance – about their country. (Huang, 2011, p. 114)

As mentioned in the second excerpt above, insufficient understanding about students' life creates challenges for teacher-researchers to establish connections between Chinese language learning and students' life or to use students' existing knowledge as the starting point for introducing new concepts. Moreover, insufficient understanding about students' life and existing knowledge based on their life may even leads to misunderstanding about students as follows:

Today I taught numbers. [.....] it went well except when I was teaching number 8. Students always say it with a trill and prolonged voice sound, and then laugh. I did not know why, they are so naughty. This student's reaction could be taken simply as students being "naughty." It was later, when I talked to an Australian that I learnt the pronunciation of "8" in Mandarin (bā) is basically the same as the sound sheep make in Australian English. It was then that I realised the reason why students in my class made a funny sound when I taught this number. (Huang, 2011, p. 151)

Multiculturalism is an important feature of Australia as a country. This has significant implication for teaching in Australia as teachers' practice needs to attend to all cultures represented by students in the classroom. In this sense, teachers' awareness of students' various cultural backgrounds becomes an essential part of teachers' knowledge of students which enables them to perform effectively in Australian classroom. However, with no recognition of the diversity of students' cultural background, the teacher-researchers demonstrate a lack of inclusivity in their teaching.

Insufficient understanding about students also constrained teacher-researchers to communicate effectively with students and give clear instruction understandable by students. The use of correct language based on understanding about students is highly relevant to the production of clear teacher instruction understandable to students. Teacher-researchers' limited knowledge about students' literacy levels gave rise to their use of inappropriate language which could not be understood by students. For example:

However, I did not consider that they were only Yr 8 kids. Even though they could speak fluently, they could not necessarily recognise difficult words. Many words used in the story were too long, complex, and academic for them. They could not understand my language, even though I was speaking in English. (Li, 2010, p. 194)

D. Low English Competence for Teaching Purposes

As the majority of students of the teacher-researchers are beginning learners with no Chinese language background, Chinese can hardly be used as the medium of instruction for the lessons. Instead, the teacher-researchers relied on the use of English for classroom instructions. English is the first language for most of the students, but a foreign language for the teacher-researchers. Teaching their first language, Chinese, by using their foreign language, English, as the medium of instruction is not easy. Despite that all the teacher-researchers are assessed as competent users of English in internationally-recognised test such as IELTS, it does not necessarily indicate they can teach Chinese successfully with English. In classroom context, their English capability is deficient in terms of understanding expressions of young children, responding immediately and appropriately to students' behaviour, establishing explicit criteria of work and maintaining students' interest and concentration. Firstly, learning of English as a foreign language in China does not facilitate the teacher-researchers to understand expressions used by Australian students in their daily lives, despite that some of them are English major graduates. Poor English comprehension also restricts teacher-researchers to respond immediately to students. W. Zhang (2010) and Li (2010) reported that it takes some time for them to understand students' message and respond accordingly. Lack of immediate response is also considered as negatively influencing their ability in disciplining students' behaviour:

I could not immediately construct a "sharp" sentence which would make sense and stop the disruptive behaviour. I did not have confidence in the English used by Australian teachers, which I needed to manage these students' behaviours. (Huang, 2011, p. 159)

Additionally, the teacher-researchers are also incompetent to establish explicit criteria or present the lesson in an interesting way with limited English skills, which leads to students' confusion and loss of interest in learning Chinese.

Using English for teaching purposes demands more than what is required to attain high scores in standard English tests. From the perspective of the communicative approach, poor communicative competence can be attributed to either language comprehension or inappropriate application of language in a specific context. The ineffectiveness of communication between students and teacher-researchers lies mainly in the latter factor, specifically, undeveloped understanding about the application of English in a classroom context. There is attributed to the fact that their learning of English in China which is mainly concerned with general communication does not match their actual use of English to communicate with young children in classroom settings.

E. Time Limitation

Time is another obstacle for Chinese language teaching in Australia. Chinese language especially its written form follows a system of meaning expression which is quite different from English. Due to such difference between Chinese and English language, it is estimated that a native English-speaker needs approximately 2200 hours of study to achieve proficiency in Chinese, which is about four times more than the hours required for becoming proficient in other European languages (Orton, 2008). However, the teacher-researchers reported that time allocated for Chinese lesson in Australian schools is far from enough for teachers to yield significant students' progress in Chinese language learning:

Having a lesson for less than half an hour was difficult for me to organise in terms of a comprehensive lesson in which students could demonstrate good understanding, especially the young children. (M. Zhang, 2010, p. 117)

The time factor also hugely hindered the effect of formative assessment in promoting learning. When the teacher-researcher felt pressure from time constraints, she shortened the discussion about feedback, provided feedback before students finished their work, or transferred feedback in a teacher-centred way rather than communicating it in a way more consistent with student-centred approaches. (Y. Chen, 2010, p. 189)

As indicated in the excerpts above, limited class time constrains the teacher-researchers from implementing fully what they have planned. With limited class time, the teacher-research also cannot conduct effective formative assessment and provide thorough feedback accordingly to help students' understanding. Huo (2012) pointed out that learning of Chinese characters which are written form of Chinese language is compromised due to limited class time:

She believed that teaching and learning Chinese characters was a slow process. Considering the short teaching time, she made her choice to teach other components of the language such as *pinyin* and Chinese culture instead of characters. This decision allowed more content to be covered in the given time. Ayala also pointed out that she would like to teach characters if the time permitted this, which further demonstrated the influence inadequate time-allocation may have caused on character teaching. (Huo, 2012, p. 66)

F. Unsupportive School Context

The teacher-researchers consider some school contexts they experienced as unsupportive for Chinese teaching and learning. Some local teachers hold indifferent attitudes towards Chinese lessons:

Mandarin lesson was totally new and marginal subjects of this school, it was hard for me to communicate with teacher about that because they didn't understand and showed no interest in attending such a new subject. (Liu, 2012, p. 151)

The professional role of the teacher-researchers as Chinese language teacher in the school is not supported. The teacher-researchers are not accepted and recognized by the school in the same way as local teachers, which resulted in their lack of belongingness to the school and teacher community. In terms of supportive school context, mentoring is highly appreciated by teacher-researchers:

Having a mentor in school meant that I would be 'taken care of' by somebody, which reassured me in certain ways, enhanced my teaching confidence and improved my teaching practice. I did not seek emotional support from my mentor. What she provided was largely the knowledge I asked for……Practical advice and help were exactly what I needed, such as with solving pedagogical problems; providing feedback on my teaching; organising my teaching context; introducing available resource materials; and giving me information in advance so that I could prepare. Thus, I believe that a formal mentoring relationship in schools for beginning teachers, helps them work more effectively and to have a more positive impact on students' learning. (M. Zhang, 2010, p. 166)

With the help of the supervising teacher, the beginning teacher gained specific knowledge of local students' preferences, preconceptions and the prior knowledge they brought to class. (H. Chen, 2011, p. 123)

Technically, mentors are someone that teacher-researchers can discuss their concern with and seek practical advice and help from. By providing feedback focused on teacher-researchers' specific teaching practice, mentors also help teacher-researcher rectify their misunderstanding, develop their knowledge about students and reflect on their prior belief about teaching and learning. Mentors' modelling gives beginning teachers authentic, empirically-based idea about effective teaching. Mentoring is essential for teacher-researcher to fit into local school environment also because emotionally, it provides teacher-researchers with reassurance and feeling of being "taken care of". It is maintained that coaching beginning teachers through joint lesson planning with experienced teachers is especially effective for beginning teachers to gain insight into the complexity of teaching and learn to take into account a variety of factors in decision-making (Crookes, 2003; John, 2006).

V. CONCLUSION

The review of a cohort of Chinese language teachers-researchers' classroom-based research highlighted several challenges that native-speaking Chinese language teachers encounter in Australian classroom, namely different educational culture, behaviour management, unmotivated learners, insufficient understanding about students, low English competence for teaching purposes, time limitation, and unsupportive school context. Given the fact that Chinese native speakers are the major teacher supply for school-based Chinese language education in Australian, addressing these real-classroom challenges is essential for Chinese language teaching to satisfy non-background learners' needs and thus ultimately increase their retention in Chinese programs. These challenges highlight potential areas that need to be enhanced in Chinese language teacher education and language education policy.

A. Implication for Language Teacher Education

Native speakers educated in China held belief of teaching and learning profoundly influenced by Chinese educational culture. Some of these beliefs may not be applicable to Australian teaching context. To prepare native Chinese teachers for Australian classroom, it is important to promote their reflection on the similarities and differences between educational cultures in China and Australia through teacher training. They should be provided with rich opportunities to observe local schools and compare their observations with what they have experienced in China. Native Chinese teachers should be encouraged to reflect on the applicability of their prior belief in Australian context. Teacher educators need to offer guidance to make sure that student teachers' judgement is evidence-based and free from bias and prejudice. Teacher education should also foster native Chinese teachers to adapt to local educational culture. Due to the cultural difference, Chinese teachers may need extra training and coaching in behaviour management, motivating strategies, lesson planning skills and activity design in addition to what is usually provided for local teachers. Moreover, developing Chinese teachers' understanding about local students' life experience, existing knowledge, prior learning, and typical errors and difficulties in non-background learners' learning of Chinese is of great help for Chinese teachers to satisfy local students' needs and thus improve quality of their teaching. Additionally, it should be noted that standardised English test scores which are often used to assess use of English for general or academic purposes is an invalid indicator for teachers' competence in using English for foreign language teaching purposes. Chinese teachers' knowledge in using English as a medium of instruction should be substantially developed through teacher education. For instance, this may include specific training on classroom language for organizing discussion, managing students' behaviour, and establishing explicit criteria. Furthermore, the findings of this research pointed to mentoring as a form of effective support for Chinese teachers to adapt to local culture and develop skills needed for teaching in Australian schools.

B. Implication for Language Education Policy

Findings of this research also have implications for language education policy in Australia. Firstly, learners' lack of motivation as a challenge for Chinese native teachers implies that current language education policy fails to provide enough incentives for non-background learners to learn Chinese language. Background/first language learners' motivation for Chinese language learning arises from *domains* in their life in which Chinese can be used as a communication tool. For non-background language learners who are lacking such *domains,* it is important to stimulate their learning through language education policy. One alternative is to increase non-background learners' instrumental motivation by introducing academic or employment advantages attached to Chinese language learning. Additionally, communicating with school people, parents and local community about the significance of Chinese language learning to increase contextual support for non-background learners is also an urgent need. Furthermore, considering the intrinsic difficulty of Chinese language for English speakers, time allocated for non-background learners' learning of Chinese language should be increased.

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Zhu Chen was awarded her PhD (education) from University of Western Sydney, Australia in April 2014.

She has rich experience in teaching Chinese as a foreign language to speakers of other languages. She worked as a Chinese language teacher in western Sydney public schools for three years. After getting her PhD degree, Dr Chen worked at University of Western Sydney as a Project Manager for a few large-scale longitudinal research projects funded by government bodies including Australian Research Council. Her current role is Research Project Officer at Institute for Positive Psychology and Education (IPPE) of Australian Catholic University. As an educational researcher, Dr Chen's research interests include foreign language teaching, languages other than English (LOTE), language teacher education, pedagogy and educational psychology.