

An Examination of English Language Instructional Strategies Used by Teachers in China

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Abstract

Foreign language instructors inconsistently implement instructional practices to support Chinese high school students' learning of oral English as a second language (ESL). The purpose of this basic qualitative study was to explore the perceptions of foreign language teachers working in the Hangzhou region of China, regarding their use of instructional strategies to support Chinese high school students' learning of oral English language. Sato and McNamara's general-purpose second-language oral competency theory served as the basis for the conceptual framework to examine foreign teachers' perspectives regarding instructional practices related to lesson plans, classroom management, and extrinsic pressures created by tests and assessments. Research questions were designed to obtain foreign language teachers' perceptions concerning implementation of instructional practices. Data were obtained from interviews with eight purposively sampled foreign ESL instructors teaching at a public school and learning center. Inductive, deductive, and NVivo coding were used to analyze data. Themes included preparation methods for ESL instruction, classroom management strategies for courses and individual learners, and ways institutional-related educators prepare students for external demands for success. Instructors perceive that their classroom management methods are strong; however, practices to improve student engagement and anticipation of classroom challenges could enhance outcomes.

This study could affect positive social change through creation of best practices to improve ESL education in public schools and learning centers in China as well as promote proactive foreign ESL teacher strategies for classroom management.

Key words: *English as a second language, instructional strategies, foreign language instruction, ESL instruction, oral proficiency development.*

Introduction

The goal of foreign language instruction is to help the learner master the selected language and achieve successful communication in the shortest time possible (S. Wang, 2019). To reach that goal, foreign language teachers and applied linguists try to find the most efficient and effective ways of teaching a foreign language. Various instructional strategies are used in Chinese ESL classrooms, including vocabulary development, grammatical instruction, content-based instruction, task-based exercises, and storytelling. However, limited data exists on how these are applied; the focus has been on documenting the instructional strategies, not on exploring how these are practiced in real-world considerations, such as lesson plans, classroom management, and extrinsic pressures created by tests and assessments (S. Wang, 2019).

A gap in practice exists regarding foreign ESL teachers in China inconsistently implementing instructional practices to advance oral English language proficiency. There is an increasingly high stakes testing system that has supported ESL communication skills but has not placed emphasis on oral speaking comprehension during the secondary education process. According to the local director of a leading learning center (personal communication, August 2021), over the past two decades, the English College Entrance Examine (Gao Kao) has only focused on discrete grammar points, vocabulary tests, Chinese to English translations, and 120-150-word compositions. According to this onsite learning center improvement plan regarding linguistic processes and outcomes, professional development was scheduled to be incorporated into foreign teachers' schedules. These improvement plans are based on after-class feedback, upgrade tests, and combined oral and written exams.

The Chinese government's efforts to restructure its economy and sustain its economic foundation and future growth have supported teachers' skills and development. Because of additional private resources, learning centers can develop programs that support in-service training for teachers and, in turn, boost student test performance. The rapid rise of the organization, New Oriental Education and Technology Group, which uses an after-school model that fosters teaching various types of English speaking and literacy skills to K-12 students, represents a specific case in point. The model that the New Oriental organization employs provides services across 1,472 learning centers located throughout China. The organization appeals to a diverse range of students and families, offering innovative types of English language instruction at lower prices than typical tutoring programs in the country (Seeking Alpha, 2021).

This study could be advantageous for both foreign ESL teachers and Chinese students to widen perspectives and gain insight regarding influences that affect students' English-speaking ability. Bilingualism has increasingly gained recognition, and the findings of this study argue for the development of a pedagogical framework and professional development to support foreign teachers with ESL Chinese classroom instruction. Based on my communication with the public

high school district representative (August 21), rather than assuming foreign teachers are intuitively capable of delivering multimodal classroom instruction, it would better serve an organization to conduct ongoing professional development for the purpose of teacher modeling. These models would specifically address the limitations notable among public high schools, even following the Ministry of Education of the People's Republic of China's (2018) establishment of the national English curriculum standard for regular high schools, which created a model to address discrepancies in English educational plan quality among regular and key public schools. Introducing bilingual models would help students adversely impacted by these gaps gradually achieve and incrementally improve their English knowledge and speaking competency.

Namaziandos et al. (2019) stated teachers should carefully identify and define the specific strategies and student ESL skills that need to be developed. Next, instructors must acquire the insight and skills to teach oral English. Although foreign ESL instructors are encouraged to teach autonomous learning, many still use traditional methods. Teachers find it difficult to change how they teach and continue to offer instruction in traditional ways. As such, many ESL educators only have a limited understanding of how to use a learner-centered approach when teaching speaking skills.

Historically, speaking and listening in China have not been given the same degree of importance in second language acquisition as writing and reading. Many high school Chinese students have less than adequate English-speaking skills and are passive in their response to listening. However, researchers have shown that oral skills increasingly impact how a student learns listening, reading, and writing skills (Nugroho et al., 2020). Current research has specifically explored aspects of Chinese students' English language learning regarding instructional classroom curriculum approaches, theoretical teaching perspectives (B. Wang et al., 2017), teacher roles, and standardized performance assessments (Ming & Wang, 2017). However, the literature does not fully explore or detail how ESL teachers in China implement instructional practices. Therefore, it is not yet understood how instructional methods for improving the oral English language proficiency of Chinese ESL students are implemented in Chinese English as a foreign language (EFL) classrooms.

The problem addressed in this study is that foreign language instructors inconsistently implement instructional practices to support Chinese high school students' learning of oral English language. The research problem is related to the practical problem, which is the low level of oral proficiency among Chinese ESL students (Ming & Wang, 2017). A gap in practice exists at the local level where foreign ESL teachers in China are inconsistently implementing instructional practices used to advance oral English language learning in China. In practical terms related to lesson plans, classroom management, individual teachers' strengths and weaknesses, and extrinsic pressures created by tests and assessments, ESL teachers in China implement different instructional practices to develop oral proficiency among Chinese ESL students.

Purpose

The purpose of this basic qualitative study was to explore the perceptions of foreign language teachers working in the Hangzhou region of China regarding their implementation of instructional strategies to support Chinese high school students' learning of oral English language. The study examined the problem by identifying how foreign teachers currently support students' learning of oral English, whereby academic leaders may better understand how to support teachers

serving ESL students. Although instructors are initially trained in teaching English to speakers of other language courses, which are the basics of learning oral English, there is a need for professional development so they can acquire the skills and knowledge necessary to implement oral English teaching principles in a Chinese classroom context.

Research Questions

The Research questions and sub-research questions contributed to the study's exploration of preferred ESL strategies among foreign teachers. The feedback generated by the interview-based format also allowed for a critical assessment of these practices. These outcomes could be used to identify the changes needed to improve Chinese high school students' English competencies.

RQ: What are the perceptions of foreign language teachers in China about the instructional ESL strategies they implement in daily instruction in Chinese ESL classrooms?

Sub-RQ1: What are the perceptions of foreign language teachers in China about how they implement instructional practices related to lesson plans to support high school ESL students' learning of oral English?

Sub-RQ2: What are the perceptions of foreign language teachers in China about how they implement instructional practices related to classroom management?

Sub-RQ3: What are the perceptions of foreign language teachers in China about how they implement instructional practices related to extrinsic pressures created by tests and assessments?

Methods

A basic qualitative design was appropriate for this study because semistructured participant interviews and a researcher journal are the data collection methods best suited to gather the most descriptive data. The rationale for choosing a basic qualitative design was to gain information from the teacher-participants' semistructured interviews and researcher journal to provide an in-depth understanding of foreign language teachers' perceptions in China about the instructional ESL strategies they utilize daily instruction in Chinese ESL classrooms.

Eight ESL teachers were purposefully selected for this basic qualitative study. Purposeful sample selection was used to select participants who met the study's specific criteria (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Half the participants were from a local public high school in the Hangzhou region of China; the other half were selected from a private learning center in the same region. Public schools are state-funded education systems in China (Ministry of Education of the People's Republic of China, 2018), while private learning centers offer classes targeting communicative and foreign language competence.

The sample size was limited to the pools of available foreign ESL teachers at the public high school and the private learning center. In addition, the participant criteria required that the teachers: (a) had at least 3 years of teaching experience, (b) were native English speakers who had spent most of their lives in English-speaking countries, (c) had no prior acquaintance with me, the researcher, and (d) were currently teaching ESL full time to Chinese secondary students. Teacher-participants were classified according to the following characteristics: (a) educational background, (b) prior professional or work experience, (c) country of origin, and (d) gender. It should be noted that at private (versus public) learning centers, students can select courses according to their language proficiency.

The target population of this study was eight foreign English teachers (four from a Chinese public high school and four from a private learning center). All participants had at least 3 years of teaching experience and were male and female. These foreign English teachers were from native English-speaking countries such as: Australia, Great Britain, Canada, the United States, and South Africa. All had attained a bachelor's degree and certifications related to teaching English to speakers of other languages. Criteria for the selection of teacher-participants were based on several factors. First, teacher-participants confirmed they were familiar with learner-centered instruction in the letter of invitation to participate in research and expressed their willingness to participate in individual interviews in the study. Second, they confirmed they have continued implementing this approach in their teaching practice. The participants also stated their willingness to express their views openly and honestly concerning implementing a new approach to oral English instruction. A limited number of instructors were chosen for this research to examine the data within a specific context, the local public high school and a learning center. As a result, four foreign ESL instructors were selected from the local public Chinese high school and four foreign ESL instructors from the private learning center.

Data Analysis

The data analysis included a three-part process. A manual approach was used for triangulation and techniques to examine the findings from an individual and comparative standpoint. First, the aggregate information was deconstructed into segmented components that reflected each group and participant's response to the interview. Second, I coded this data to create categories that were both descriptive and accessible for reference. Third, discrepant cases were added into the broader dataset. This latter stage ensured the accuracy of the study's findings. It also maintained the ethical principle of recording all responses regardless of their alignment with the broader trends in the interview responses.

The aggregate data was deconstructed and generated by the interviews by relying on a nine-step operational process. First, responses were separated for the individual questions presented to the respondents. During the second step, the findings were subdivided related to the 12 total questions into groups reflective of the themes associated with Sato and McNamara's (2019) theory. These discussion points included issues regarding lesson plan construction, classroom management, and instructor management of extrinsic pressures induced by exams. This enabled the identification of the themes generated through the responses. Third, the emerging themes were triangulated from the data collected from both groups as they responded to the individual questions.

These initial steps contributed to the fourth step, which was the organization of primary and secondary themes related to the individual responses. During the Zoom interview, the fifth step, themes were separated into categories as both groups provided them. The categories were prepared for NVivo processing and classification. The sixth step in this process included presenting advanced themes that emerged from manual and NVivo-assisted data analysis. The seventh step was a secondary approach to triangulation, where the emerging themes were compared from the participants' responses to the impressions recorded in the journal. During the eighth step, any primary or secondary findings (i.e., participant responses) that appeared to correlate with my perspective were eliminated. During the ninth step, the discrepant data associated with each dataset containing the participants' feedback were interposed. This step-by-

step process eliminated any bias and ensured the findings' trustworthiness, and enabled us to formally present the themes that emerged and accurately reflected the participants' insights.

The emerging themes derived from these steps included information coded into four primary categories. Each participant was assigned an alphanumeric code, and the response was labeled according to their classification. Public-school teachers were designated as PS1, PS2, etc. A similar process was utilized when identifying the group representing the language center instructors as LC1, LC2, etc. The codes additionally classified each discussion question presented to the respondents during the interview. The themes created through this method reflected each participant's response to individual interview questions, the aggregate themes notable for each group (public school and learning center educators), and the discrepant data related to each question.

Themes reflective of the participants' general insights included issues related to class size. Themes regarding testing materials referred to the need to ensure teacher knowledge of ESL-based concepts and the role of specific resources in advancing student knowledge. Themes related to classroom management involved the efficacy of specific organizational and communication strategies. Themes reflective of exigent testing pressures referenced classroom instructional models' strategic role in preparing students for these exams. These themes encompassed most respondents' perspectives and a few participants' discrepant views. The discrepant themes reflected minority opinions that diverged from the groups' majority views and only represented the expressed beliefs of a few respondents. These included one learning center participant who viewed their institution's instructional models as representing an effective approach and an additional learning center respondent who indicated that their organization relies on limited forms of data analysis as they planned their exam preparation-based curriculum.

Results for the Main Research Question

The main RQ in this dissertation was: "What are the perceptions of foreign language teachers in China about the instructional ESL strategies they implement in daily instruction in Chinese ESL classrooms?" Participants addressed issues related to instructors' practices when preparing lesson plans. The responses derived from the learning center group indicated that their institution relied on various approaches to media and materials to teach their students. Respondent LC1 stated, "Our agency relies on a multimodal strategy as we incorporate readings, video, and helpful websites. These approaches appeal to various types of learners and students with various levels of English knowledge and mastery." Based on this assessment, the learning center instructors identified the plurality of sources used to guide their students through various stages of the second language acquisition process.

However, other findings within the second group, foreign teachers working in high schools, indicated the instructors' dissatisfaction with their institution's methods. The group's responses expressed this by identifying the tendency among Chinese learning centers to emphasize vocabulary training as an essential aspect of their curriculum. Participant HS3 noted, "Vocabulary teaching represents our [public] school's priority. Much of our focus [in teaching English] tends to emphasize the students' ability to recognize and use specific terms." These comments referenced the conditions that often impact the work of the aggregate of interviewed instructors. Participant LC4 elaborated on these trends by identifying how Chinese educational policy limits the instructor's perceived ability to prepare ESL learners for future challenges:

This method [vocabulary-focused English education] does little to assist students in developing the skills that they need to become fluent in English. While vocabulary can help learners broaden the phrases they can use, this instruction does not help them understand social contexts. As a result, they may use the wrong term while attempting to converse. I believe that teaching vocabulary outside of a broader context only confuses their abilities.

Based on this assessment, the participant and the broader group tended to view the external variables that introduce constraints on their teaching methods as limiting factors. Accordingly, the foreign language instructors viewed teacher preparation methodologies as strategies that would not likely prepare or motivate ESL learners' practice of their second language (Sato & McNamara, 2019).

Results for Subresearch Question 1

Sub-RQ1 asked, "What are the perceptions of foreign language teachers in China about how they implement instructional practices related to lesson plans to support high school ESL students' learning of oral English?" A sample response from Participant HS4 to Question 4's prompt to discuss the types of curricula available to high school teachers highlighted a major perceived problem. According to this participant,

We use very dated textbooks. The school mandates our use of the books, and we seldom have access to newer materials [through the school]. Many teachers solve this problem by finding resources of their own. They frequently use websites. Or maybe someone will bring in a news or magazine article written in English. We do this to provide students with more current information.

This statement indicates the instructor's challenges in balancing the materials provided by the high school and supplementing information that was missing in the documents. This view also demonstrates the respondent's belief that the existing curriculum requires an instructor's ability to locate additional resources to prepare their students for formal exams and related challenges.

At the same time, responses from the learning center participants showed their innovation when addressing their ESL learners' holistic needs. Respondent LC1 observed, "Games engage our students. They also require them to apply what they learn through lessons, homework, and lectures. This broadens their [language learning] abilities." These insights indicated that the instructor's role in designing curriculum and pedagogical strategies emphasized motivating ESL learners to practice their second language in a formal classroom setting (see Sato & McNamara, 2019). Participant HS1 elaborated on these concepts as they apply in high school settings: "Our [institution's] limitations require teachers to be creative. And so, we often spend much of our time developing methods and materials that we believe will capture our students' interests and motivate them into participating." Based on this assessment, teacher innovations and planning enable the instructors to address their school's resource-based challenges.

Other responses indicated that learners' acceptance of these methods might vary as they develop their second language skills. Respondent LC1 stated, "Since students exhibit different types of strengths and weaknesses at various stages of their [language] learning process, it is always important to use different ways of correcting their speech." This approach reflects the instructor's understanding of their student's tendencies and underscores the necessity of tailoring response methods to a specific learner's skill level and cultural attitudes.

Finally, the participants' interview responses also concerned the teachers' roles in encouraging their student's use of multimedia texts and sources as they gradually enhanced their second language acquisition skills. Respondent LC4's comments provide a primary example:

Learners need ongoing and immersive types of media that will foster their skills outside of the classroom. Diverse media can help them with this process. These options also allow them to explore their interests, like sports, while practicing their reading, listening, and comprehension skills.

Based on these assessments, the learning center participants indicated that their teaching methods incorporated holistic methodologies that encouraged student learning beyond the classroom. Feedback from the high school group indicated similar responses. When viewed in the context of the group's appraisal of their learning center's organizational characteristics, the comments reflect the belief that an instructor's role needs to incorporate effective forms of planning and innovation to overcome critical barriers. Examples include their institution's tendency not to integrate data review of student performance along with its reliance on a curriculum that will not likely prepare students for the rigors of formal examinations. These trends reflect conditions observed and identified by both learning center and high school groups.

Responses to Question 5 indicated a tendency among the respondents to rely on systematic approaches to ESL education as they present lesson plans to students. Respondent LC4 noted that while the instructor adheres to the organization's curriculum plan, they also assess learning progress among the broader classroom and individual learners. LC4 observed, "I rely on a methodical approach to present information to [my students]. My strategy mainly follows the curriculum. At the same time, I will pause and readdress issues that appear to be difficult for my student's retention." Similarly, Participant PS2 referred to their selected methodology as a learner-oriented approach: "While [instructors] need to follow the plan for a given semester, we also make allowances for students [who struggle to demonstrate selected skills]." Based on these observations, the participants rely on a combination of curriculum-oriented and student-focused presentation strategies.

Results for Subresearch Question 2

Sub-RQ2 asked, "What are the perceptions of foreign language teachers in China about how they implement instructional practices related to classroom management?" The responses demonstrated how instructors managed situations where they needed to correct ESL learner mistakes. These responses additionally detailed their strategies for encouraging students to extend learning beyond the classroom. These findings demonstrated the participants' practices regarding engaging their students.

The collective participant responses to Question 6 aligned with sub-RQ2 and included discussions of their roles in correcting speakers within their classrooms. These findings demonstrate the teachers' awareness of the recommended methods of correcting L2 learner mistakes as well as a simultaneous understanding of the conventions related to Chinese culture. Participant PS2 observed,

As teachers, we always try to strike a balance between what we know the student requires as forms of correction and the methods that we utilize in a situation. Our students do not like to be corrected in front of their friends and peers, and so I often will consult with a learner following a session. Correcting errors in this way reduces their embarrassment.

These comments reflect the Chinese cultural issue of “face,” as it enabled the teachers to correct the students without shaming them in front of peers. At a deeper level, the comments underscore the participant’s awareness that hot correction—methods used as a speaker immediately makes a mistake—do not always represent effective strategies.

Respondents in the learning center group additionally noted that they rely on private correction, particularly in cases where the student would likely be embarrassed by public approaches to hot correction. Participant LC2 argued, “By correcting students in private, we are less likely to cause them public embarrassment in front of their peers. These approaches will also increase the student’s chances of receiving and applying the correction to their speaking.” These insights both identify the drawbacks associated with public correction and the value associated with lessons delivered to the learner at a one-on-one level.

Respondents demonstrated the participants’ belief in their methodologies’ value in encouraging their students’ learning beyond the classroom. The instructors in the learning center group indicated that their approach enabled individual student learning. Respondent LC3 observed, “Private correction and ongoing forms of encouragement improve our students’ willingness to continue their English language learning [beyond the classroom].” Participants in the public school also reflected similar beliefs. Respondent PS4 observed, “We [teachers] improve our students’ language learning by offering relevant forms of correction. We also seek to enhance their learning by encouraging them to practice their skills within their home or community environments.” These comments reflect the participant’s confidence in their selected methodology’s ability to encourage student learning across the complex L2 acquisition process. The aggregate findings derived from both groups demonstrated similar beliefs.

Also identified was the respondents’ approach to learner engagement and how the instructors achieved this outcome within their classrooms. A recurrent theme was the participants’ reliance on varying methodologies. According to respondent LC1, “Diverse engagement strategies appeal to students with different expressed learning style preferences.” The respondent elaborated on this statement by describing the methodologies used to engage students at the cognitive and social learning levels. Respondent PS3 explained the methods for encouraging students in the classroom and one-on-one instructional settings. Regarding this second setting, PS3 stated, “I utilize the [engagement] approaches that best align with the student’s skill level and comfort level in utilizing their linguistic skills.” Participants in both groups recognized the importance of using diverse engagement strategies that correspond with various educational settings.

Results for Subresearch Question 3

Sub-RQ3 asked, “What are the perceptions of foreign language teachers in China about how they implement instructional practices related to extrinsic pressures created by tests and assessments?” Participants discussed their institution’s role in utilizing data to make teaching decisions that prepare learners for exigent institutional pressures. These pressures can be defined as the requirements for learners in public school and learning center environments to pass formal English exams. Responses from both groups indicated that their institutions did not rely on these methods. Participant PS1 noted, “Our schools do not apply retrospective data to prepare students or exams.” Similarly, respondent LC3 indicated that these methodologies “do not represent organizational priorities” in their learning center.

Responses further identified instructors’ approaches in utilizing various pedagogical interventions that prepare their students for exigent challenges. Respondents from both groups indicated they rely on several methods to achieve these outcomes. Participant PS2 referenced the instructor’s use of focused preparation methodologies to structure and guide the “lesson plans for the entire course,” including integrating material directly related to the exam content. Similarly, Respondent LC4 identified “longer-term and success-based strategies” as the approach that adequately prepared students for the pressures presented by exams. Primary examples included the development of a long-term study plan that provided learners with opportunities for mastering exam-related material over 3 months.

Participants were asked to assess the public school and learning center strengths in preparing students for exigent pressures. Respondents in the public-school group indicated the belief that their institution adequately prepares their learners for these challenges. According to PC4, “Our institution prioritizes exam-based instruction and allocates time and resources to student preparation.” In contrast, the participants in the learning center group identified their school’s weaknesses in this area. Respondent LC2 summarized this theme by observing: “While our school recognizes student preparation as a concern, its focus in terms of curriculum design and course emphasis often limits the direct instruction that would allow for student success.”

Participants also identified factors that could prevent students from achieving success as they prepare for formal ESL exams and other exigent pressures. Public school instructors referenced student-oriented variables, such as anxiety and lack of adequate personal preparation, as primary concerns. Participant PC3 noted, “We can prepare our students for [exams]; . . . however, we are not always successful in convincing them to follow the practices that will improve their performance.” However, respondents in the learning center group referenced institutional factors and instructional limitations as primary contributing factors. Participant LC1 observed,

Our school’s approach to exam pressures can be viewed as a potential challenge to student success. While teachers [within the institution] rely on approaches that can improve their performance, the limited time that we have often detracts from positive outcomes. I attempt to resolve these challenges by recommended strategies that students can learn to prepare for exams over a long-term period.

Both populations’ instructors identified several factors that could potentially limit student success as learners prepare for exams and exigent pressures. Table 1 outlines the themes, categories, and codes derived from the participant interviews.

Table

1

Research Question, Subresearch Questions, Themes, Categories, and Codes

RQ and sub-RQs	Themes	Categories	Codes
RQ: What are the perceptions of foreign language teachers in China	Theme Instructional strategies used in ESL classrooms.	1: Pedagogical strategies.	Descriptive features Noted participant preference

<p>about the instructional ESL strategies they implement in daily instruction in Chinese ESL classrooms?</p>	<p>Theme 2: ESL model effectiveness in teaching formal English grammar and vocabulary.</p>	<p>Assessment and critique of applied ESL instructional framework.</p>	<p>Attributional features Strengths Weaknesses Limitations</p>
	<p>Theme 3: How the models contribute to student formal linguistic knowledge.</p>	<p>Linkage between ESL pedagogical methodology and measured student performances.</p>	<p>Linkages. Strengths Weaknesses Limitations.</p>
<p>Sub RQ1: What are the perceptions of foreign language teachers in China about how they implement instructional practices related to lesson plans to support high school ESL students' learning of oral English?</p>	<p>Theme 1: Teacher role in ESL curriculum implementation.</p>	<p>Curriculum design and implementation. Teacher involvement in the process.</p>	<p>Involvement Decision making Limitations Insights</p>
	<p>Theme 2: Describe the instructional methodologies used to present ESL lesson plans to students.</p>	<p>Description of pedagogical strategies. Linkages to student performance and success.</p>	<p>Linkages Attributional features Strengths Weaknesses</p>
<p>Sub RQ2: What are the perceptions of foreign language teachers in China about how they implement instructional practices related to classroom management?</p>	<p>Theme 1: Strategies for encouraging ESL students to practice English despite their mistakes.</p>	<p>Models for generating ESL student participation. Overcoming ESL student anxieties.</p>	<p>Descriptive features Linkages Motivational factors</p>
	<p>Theme 2: Model effectiveness in motivating student ESL practice.</p>	<p>Models for generating ESL student participation. Model effectiveness.</p>	<p>Attributional features Strengths Weaknesses</p>
	<p>Theme 3: Methods for engaging ESL</p>	<p>Models for generating ESL student participation.</p>	<p>Limitations</p>

learners. Recommended practices.	Preferred approaches selected and justified by the participants.	Linkages Noted participant preferences Strengths Limitations
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(table continues)

RQ and sub-RQs	Themes	Categories	Codes
Sub-RQ3: What are the perceptions of foreign language teachers in China about how they implement instructional practices related to extrinsic pressures created by tests and assessments?	Theme 1: Institution use of data to prepare lesson plans that anticipate external pressures.	Data-oriented planning. Approaches in managing external pressures.	Noted participant preferences Data management External pressures Student anxieties Instructional practices External pressures
	Theme 2: Implementation of instructional interventions that prepare students for external academic pressures.	Instructional interventions. Approaches in managing external pressures.	Noted participant preferences External pressures School readiness Strengths Weaknesses Limitations
	Theme 3: School strengths and gaps in preparing students for external pressures.	Institutional assessment and critique. Approaches in managing external pressures.	Linkages Attributional features Strengths Weaknesses Limitations
	Theme 4: Potential limitations, gaps, and barriers that can prevent students from successfully completing external academic requirements.	Institutional barriers. Instructional limitations. Student anxiety. Institutional assessment and critique.	Weaknesses Limitations

Limitations, Implications, Applications, and Conclusions

The limitations associated with this study stem from three key factors. First, the research design limited the degree to which the phenomenon could be examined. On the one hand, my

reliance on an interview-based qualitative study helped identify critical themes reflective of the participants' responses. Professional knowledge and familiarity with ESL educational processes within the Chinese region helped to generate reliable data that directly corresponded with the study's themes and areas of emphasis. On the other hand, a limited sample population was selected to keep the data gathering and analysis processes manageable. Accordingly, the insights presented by the respondents cannot be considered broadly reflective of the trends associated with either Chinese public schools or private learning centers. Second, the qualitative nature of the study is subjective, as the participants' feedback cannot be quantified or contextualized. These limitations derive from the study's reliance on an interview-based qualitative framework. This approach provides the respondents' insights but does not allow the researcher to connect these insights to external themes or issues. The application of a mixed-methods study might address these limitations.

Finally, external factors and developments disrupted in the research. Due to the restrictions imposed by COVID 19-related regulations, all interviews were conducted relying on web conferencing technologies. While this format allowed for convenience as it simplified the requirements for developing a setting conducive to generating participant feedback, it also may have affected the rapport that can be created with them in comparison to in-person interviews.

Findings from data analysis indicate that the Chinese public school and learning center ESL education discussed by the participants exhibits strength in classroom management. Its weaknesses are in the areas of classroom preparation and exigent pressure anticipation, planning, and management. The performance and quality gaps attributed to the first category largely reflect the limitations of institutional strategies related to curriculum design and ESL program development (Sato & McNamara, 2019). Instructor weaknesses could be associated with factors outside their direct control. Conversely, many of the limitations the participants identified related to exigent pressure planning and management could be linked to specific instructor-related strategies. Recommendations to improve these broader conditions would be to encourage Chinese ESL teachers working in both settings to transform aspects of their classroom planning and exam preparation strategies to anticipate and overcome the weaknesses associated with institutional-level practices.

The first recommendation in this context would be to encourage instructors to apply the current practices that improve student engagement. Appropriate techniques might include identifying the known weaknesses associated with the required curriculum and developing a list of supplementary materials to help overcome these gaps. These practices might specifically benefit public school teachers who face challenges from outdated or limited curricula. Additionally, a scholastic manual or guide for ESL teachers could be generated.

A second recommendation involves the need among both public school and learning center instructors to better anticipate the exigent challenges facing their students. Micro-level reforms in ESL program design and lesson planning can better ensure the instructors' ability to help their learners develop the skills needed to overcome these challenges. Finally, additional qualitative studies will need to be completed to research broader trends among similarly composed populations. This strategy could address the current study's limitations related to its narrowly sampled population.

In this basic qualitative study, Sato and McNamara's (2019) theory on second language acquisition was used to examine the quality of ESL programs utilized within a Chinese regional public school and learning center. The foreign instructors interviewed provided an outsider's analysis that identified the strengths, weaknesses, and areas of improvement needed for these current practices. Findings indicated that while native English speakers working as Chinese ESL instructors exhibited important classroom management-related competencies, ongoing weaknesses in classroom preparation and exigent pressure management require improvements.

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