

## ***An Explorative Study of Chinese College English Teachers' Professional Development***

**Li Jing**

*Huazhong University of Science and Technology, China*

This paper attempts to examine the current situation of college English teachers' professional development in China and to offer some tentative suggestions for college English teachers to be better prepared for the changes and the challenges they encounter in their career. To these ends, a survey was carried out based on a professional development model by means of questionnaire, providing detailed information of college English teachers including their pre-service learning and preparation, working environment, professional development and perceptions of professional development. The results show that a large number of participants hadn't had any practice teaching before they were employed as college English teachers and that more than half of them have never participated in any formal in-service professional programs related to English teaching. However, most teachers indicated that they had involved themselves in different types of informal professional development activities. On the whole their ways of professional learning are rather limited and not very effective. Besides, there is a lack of institutional support for college English teachers in their ongoing professional development. In view of these problems and obstacles, this paper reinforces the significance of teacher's awareness of their own professional growth and suggests a variety of job-embedded collaborative learning activities for teachers. It also appeals for tangible support from university administrators.

**Key words: professional development, college English teachers, college English teaching reform, institutional support**

## INTRODUCTION

Societal changes are putting huge pressures on university teachers, in particular college English teachers in China.<sup>1</sup> In fact, college English teaching has already fallen far short of meeting the needs of social development, as the demand for university graduates' English level and English language education has increased exponentially with economic growth and globalization. To meet the changing conditions, college English teaching is now undergoing dramatic reform and renovation. And the nationwide college English course reform has placed new demands on college English teachers (Xia, 2007). Besides helping students to enhance basic language skills, teachers are required to offer advanced courses, such as English and American literature, ESP, critical reading and creative writing, cross-cultural communication, etc., as an important component of liberal arts education. Technological change is also having a huge impact on students' way of learning and therefore has called for explorations into new types of English language education. For example, "computers and networks have been integrated into various language learning curricula and self-access language learning centers based on computers and networks have been established in universities and colleges worldwide" (Guo & Qin, 2009). Therefore, teachers should not only integrate computer technology into their daily classroom teaching, but learn how to assist students in their computer-assisted autonomous language learning and monitor this brand new learning process effectively. Moreover, new theories and research findings about how students learn and develop are transforming the way of teaching as well. And university classrooms in China are serving more and more high school graduates, which means much larger class size, thus also presenting challenges for language teachers.

Researchers have agreed that the success of school improvement and reform initiatives relies, in large part, on the qualifications and effectiveness

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<sup>1</sup> In this paper, "college English teachers" refers to teachers of English who teach non-English majors in their first two years at university.

of teachers (Garet, Porter, Desimone, Birman, & Yoon, 2001; Hughey, 2000; Killion, 1999). Changes will occur in schools as a result of teachers' ongoing learning as well as organizational efforts in supporting teachers' professional development (Fine & Raack, 1994). Therefore, education must address the changing needs of teachers and improve their performance, just as business has reacted to its changing needs by implementing employee training programs, which have long been considered one of the keys to corporate success (Cook, 1997). Unfortunately, many teachers do not receive on-the-job training that they need to teach effectively. Traditional perceptions of teachers' work might be held accountable for hampering the implementation of a professional development plan. According to McDiarmid (1995), there are higher expectations for teachers resulting from school reform, but both the public and policymakers still hold the restricted view that teachers are working only when they are in the classroom. Therefore, teachers don't receive much support for the time and resources they need for their professional development.

And as far as research in teacher education is concerned, progress has been disappointingly small (Schulz, 2000). As Freeman (in Richards & Nunan, 2000, p. xiii) pointed out, "The field of teacher education is a relatively under-explored both in second and foreign language teaching" and "the literature on teacher education in language teaching is slight compared with the literature on issues such as methods and techniques for classroom teaching."

In China the ignorance of college English teachers' professional development and its research also exists. Wu (1995) and Zhang (1999) both pointed out that the study on foreign language teacher education in China in the 1990s was hard to find. As Gan (2000) described, "the study of teacher professional development has always been ignored". But in recent years, education administrators are increasingly aware of this fact, and teacher professional development has begun to receive attention, especially for college English teachers (Wu, 2001). Yet, the present paper assumes that college English teachers' in-service professional development hasn't been so effective mainly

due to the generally poor quality of teacher training programs, limitation of time and a lack of institutional and financial support. Therefore, the present study is trying to examine various aspects of college English teachers' professional development and look for possible solutions to existing problems.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **Teacher Training, Teacher Education, and Teacher Professional Development**

Several confusing terms can be found very often in the literature in this field, namely, "teacher training," "teacher education," and "teacher professional development." Only a few researchers have made the distinction between "teacher training" and "teacher professional development" (Freeman, 1989; Richards & Nunan, 2000), but the meanings of these two terms overlap to some extent, making readers puzzled. Thus, it is necessary to define "teacher professional development" used in this paper first.

Wallace (1991) proposed that teacher training is something that can be presented or managed by others, whereas professional development is something that can be done only by and for oneself. Woodward (1991) provided bi-polar scales for clarifying attitudes to teacher education. In his bi-polar scales, teacher training is a short-term activity, which is one-off, temporary and skill and knowledge based, while teacher development is a long-term program, which is ongoing, continual, awareness based, and angled towards personal growth and the development of attitudes or insights. But little has been written about the differences between "teacher education" and "teacher professional development," and they are often used interchangeably. To some extent, "teacher education," like "teacher training," is often presented and managed by others. Nevertheless, unlike "teacher training," "teacher education" is not temporary, but lifelong and aims at all-round development of teachers including all kinds of skills, knowledge, and insights.

To sum up, teacher training is the narrow view of improving teacher quality and is only a form of teacher professional development. It usually consists of pre-service teacher training program, participation of individual teachers in professional conferences, workshops or lectures, taking short-term courses in one's main assignment field and other activities offered by the school or other sponsors. As for teacher education and teacher professional development, the former is also a major means to fulfill professional growth and is usually presented by others, while the latter is a more self-awareness based concept. According to Jackson and Davis (2000), professional development for teachers, taking a variety of forms, is the range of formal and informal processes and activities that teachers engage in both inside and outside of the school, in order to improve their teaching knowledge and skills.

### **Grant's Approach to Professional Development**

As for what constitutes effective professional development, numerous experts have carried out in-depth research (Garet et al., 2001; Grant, 1996; Guskey, 2000, 2003; Killion, 1999; NCES, 2001; NSDC, n.d.; Pate & Thompson, 2003; Richardson, 2003; Shulman, 1987; Sparks, 1997; Sparks & Hirsh, 1997). Among the experts, Grant (1996) provided us with a complete idea of effective professional development. She proposed two types of professional development: formal processes and informal and job-embedded processes. Formal processes mainly refer to well-designed workshops and courses which offer depth and focus, provide adequate opportunities for practice and grappling with ideas, involve doing real work instead of being "talked at," provide opportunities for consultation with colleagues and experts, and make possible follow-up classroom consultation and coaching (Little, 1993). Informal and job-embedded processes, on the other hand, are essential to support and extend the learning that takes place in workshops and in classes. Among others, such processes include inquiry, observation, mentoring, working alongside specialist, use of a learning center or demonstration center, teacher collaboratives, partnerships with businesses.

Grant (1996) also pointed out that traditional models of formal and informal professional development have typically been constrained by barriers of time and place. Only recently have educators discovered ways in which technologies can be adapted to support the processes of professional development and break down these persistent barriers of time and space.

Guskey (2003) pointed out that the characteristics that influence the effectiveness of professional development, however, are multiple and highly complex. However, generally speaking, to ensure effective professional development, teachers themselves must be aware of its significance and make it a part of their daily work. It should be designed as a career-long continuum. In the meantime, continuous support from government, university and other relevant organizations is also indispensable.

### **University Teacher Training and Research in China**

Since the late 90s, university teacher training, which was once neglected, has begun to receive increasing concern and attention in China. There are a number of forms, such as pre-service training, attending academic conferences, in-service training for teaching assistants, formal education for in-service teachers to obtain higher degrees, mentoring, visiting scholar experience at home and abroad, and short-term workshops. Despite the variety of teacher training activities, Guan, Lv, & Xu (2001) pointed out that the form of training and the training content have failed to meet the demands of university teachers. Moreover, a lack of fund has become the major factor that hinders the development in this area.

Research in this field carried out by Chinese scholars was scant until the turn of the century. Utley (1986) once pointed out that in China there existed the abnormal phenomenon of ignoring in-service teacher training and development and that the research in this field is still virgin ground in this nation. Xie (2000) found that among 400 papers concerning foreign language education published in 30 distinguished journals in the past ten years, only 3 focused on teacher quality. But in the late 1990s, discussions on foreign

language teacher education began to appear in academic periodicals. And there has been a growing interest in this field among Chinese scholars. However, the research generally centers on some theoretical aspects and the number of empirical study is relatively small.

Much work still needs to be done to find out real problems that lie in college English teachers' professional development so as to ensure that teachers engage in effective and sustained professional development that is aligned with recent research findings. Therefore, a survey was conducted to visit the issue based on Grant's approach to professional development. It examines important indicators of teacher quality and various aspects of their professional development.

## **METHOD**

### **Participants**

One-hundred-twenty college English teachers were randomly selected from twenty universities in Wuhan<sup>2</sup> to participate in the survey, among which Wuhan University and Huazhong University of Science and Technology, directly under the supervision of the National Ministry of Education, both rank among the top ten universities in China and are the first to carry out college English teaching reform. Therefore, college English teachers at these two universities are the first to feel the challenges and the urgent demand for professional growth. Teachers from other state-key universities and some non-key universities in Wuhan also took part in the survey. Thus, these participants can be an epitome of college English teachers across the country.

The sampling technique used in this study is convenient sampling. The survey was carried out when the teachers were grading the writing part of

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<sup>2</sup> Wuhan is the capital city of Hubei province in central China, boasting of a large number of famous universities and abundant educational resources.

College English Test (CET, generally referred to as CET-4 and CET-6) in Wuhan University. CET is a large-scale standardized test designed and developed by the National College English Testing Committee (NCETC). Held twice annually, CET is designed for non-English majors who have completed corresponding English courses, aiming at measuring precisely college students' comprehensive employment of English and thus play an active role in realizing the objective of college English teaching. CET-4 is designed for the college students who have completed college English courses under the basic requirements while CET-6 is for the college students who have completed college English courses under the intermediate requirements.

Generally, teachers chosen to grade the writing section of CET should have at least 5 years of teaching experience and are below the age of 45. The distribution and demographic information of the subjects are shown in the following tables.

**TABLE 1**  
**Distribution of Subjects**

University	No. of University	Total No. of Subjects
Huazhong University of Science and Technology	1	22
Wuhan University	1	42
Normal universities <sup>3</sup>	2	10
Other key universities <sup>4</sup>	4	21
Non-key universities <sup>5</sup>	12	25
Total	20	120

<sup>3</sup> Normal universities include Huazhong Normal University and Hubei Normal University.

<sup>4</sup> Other four key universities are Wuhan University of Technology, China Geology University, Huazhong Agriculture University, and Zhongnan University of Economics and Law.

<sup>5</sup> The twelve non-key universities are Jiangnan University, Wuhan Institute of Chemical technology, South-Central University for Nationalities, Hubei Polytechnic University, Wuhan Institute of Science and Technology, and some other universities including four military universities.

**TABLE 2**  
**Demographic Information of Subjects**

Items	Frequency	Percent	
Gender	Male	27	22.5
	Female	93	77.5
	Total	120	100
Age	Below 30	34	28.3
	30-39	58	48.3
	40-49	28	23.4
	Total	120	100
Professional title	Assistant	14	11.7
	Lecturer	68	56.7
	Associate professor	33	27.4
	Professor	5	4.2
	Total	120	100
Length of teaching	1-5 years	14	11.7
	6-10 years	60	50
	Over 10 years	46	38.3
	Total	120	100

### **Instruments**

A detailed questionnaire is employed for the purpose of the survey, which was presented in Chinese to avoid misunderstandings from the participants. The questionnaire items are mainly based on and adapted in accordance to the Chinese context from the questionnaire used in the 2000 survey conducted by U.S. National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) on Teacher Professional Development and Training. The questionnaire is composed of both close-ended questions which are reliable and easy to score and an open-ended question from which one can expect the range of responses for exploratory research (Wallace, 1998).

The *Survey on College English Teachers' Professional Development* consists of three parts. Table 3 presents its structure along with the number of items for each part.

A survey is used only to examine the current situation of college English teachers' professional development. For one thing, the survey covers almost

all the detailed information required by the present exploratory study. For another, a large number of subjects provided their answers to the open-ended question, already showing their personal opinions and suggestions, which otherwise should be obtained through interviews.

### Data Collection

Two-hundred questionnaires were distributed. Professor Xiong Dunli, who is an executive council member of Hubei College English Association with a high prestige in the field of college English teaching, helped to distribute and collect the questionnaires. One-hundred-fifty questionnaires were returned with the rate of 75%, among which 120 are valid. The subjects were assured that all the data would be kept strictly confidential and used for research purposes only.

**TABLE 3**  
**Structure of Questionnaire**

	Content	No. of Items
Part A	Personal details: sex, age, professional title, years spent in college English teaching, the university where they work	5 (A01 to A05)
	Basic teaching information: class hours per week, main and other teaching assignment fields	4 (A06 to A09)
	Early teaching experiences	
Part B	Early Teaching Experiences	8 (B01 to B07)
Part C	Informal and formal professional development	18 (C01 to C18)
	Administrative support of college English teachers' professional development	2 (C19 to C20)
	Feelings about preparedness	2 (C21 to C22)
	Views on professional development	2 (C23 to C24)

## **SELECTED FINDINGS**

### **Pre-service Learning and Preparation**

Findings from the survey show that those who did not have any practice teaching account for 17.5% of the 120 participants. The percentages of the teachers who never had practice teaching experiences vary by undergraduate major. For those who majored in English education at university, the percentage is zero<sup>6</sup>, compared with 23.6% for those whose major is English language and literature, 28.6% for those who specialized in English for science and 66.7% for those in other fields related to English.

### **College English Teachers' Professional Development**

#### *Formal Professional Development*

Of all the subjects in the survey, less than half (48.3%) have participated in formal professional development programs related to English teaching. Generally the participation rate increases with years of teaching experience. Teachers were also asked their participation in some in-service formal professional development programs that focused certain subjects, as is shown in Table 4.

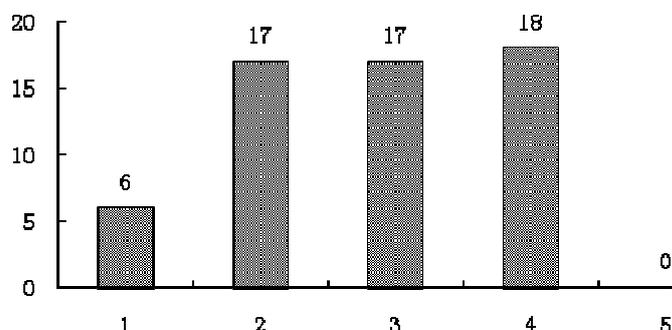
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<sup>6</sup> All students from normal universities majoring in English education in China are required to have practice teaching experiences before graduation.

**TABLE 4**  
**Percentage of Teachers Who Participated in Formal Professional Programs that Focused on Various Subject Areas**

Subject Areas	Participation Rate	
	Yes	No
Teaching content and performance standards	74.1%	25.9%
New methods of teaching (e.g., cooperative learning)	86.4%	13.8%
Use of educational technology for instruction (e.g., use of computers)	41.4%	58.6%
Student assessment	69%	31%
Addressing the learning needs of students	53.4%	46.6%
Classroom management	62.1%	37.9%

Teachers who reported having participated in formal professional development programs were asked to indicate the extent to which they believed the programs improved their teaching (Figure 1). In general, participating in these programs was perceived moderately or somewhat helpful in teaching by the majority of the teachers. However, nearly one third of the teachers believed that it was not so useful in improving their teaching.



**FIGURE 1**  
**Teachers' Evaluation of the Effect of Formal Professional Development Programs**  
 (1= "very helpful"; 2= "moderately helpful"; 3= "somewhat helpful"; 4= "not very helpful"; 5= "not at all helpful")

*Informal Professional Development*

Almost all the college English teachers in the survey have been involved in different kinds of informal professional development activities. Teachers' choices are displayed in Table 5.

In the survey the participants were asked to give their overall assessment of all the professional development activities they have participated in. In general, they held positive views on the impact of their professional development. About half of them felt that the activities were very helpful or moderately helpful. This may indicate that formal professional programs play an important part in teacher professional development.

**TABLE 5**  
**Choices among Types of Informal Professional Development Activities**

Types of Activities	Answer	
	Yes	No
Observational visits to other schools	61	59
Individual or collaborative research professionally	87	33
Discussing issues of teaching with other teachers	107	13
Regular review of one's own teaching	99	21
Participating in mentoring and peer observation	114	6
Participating in a network of teachers	37	83
Attending national or international academic conferences	44	76
Being the presenter in any national or international academic conferences	19	101
Publishing papers in academic journals related to English teaching	70	50
Doing some reading to improve professional qualities	118	2
Participating in teaching competitions arranged by the university	69	51

**Work Environment**

The data in this part contains useful information on the types of support for professional development that college English teachers ever received.

*Early Support for Beginning Teachers*

In the survey 79.2% of the 120 participants reported that they had been given pre-service training. The data also suggests that more emphasis on pre-service training has been attached greater importance to in recent years.

*Institutional Support*

This section provides information on class hours per week, supports for teachers' professional development, incentives and rewards that encourage teachers to participate in professional development programs.

More than half of the teachers (72.5%) spent 12-16 hours or more in the classroom per week. In addition, teachers have to teach bigger size of class with more class hours per week since the university admission rate has been continuously increasing. What's more, teachers will spend a certain number of hours after class tutoring and on other course-related activities, such as lesson preparation, grading students' homework and meetings.

Besides time, the results shown in Table 6 reveal the information concerning the various types of support teachers ever received for in-service professional development.

**TABLE 6**  
**Various Types of Support for In-service Professional Development**

Types of Support	Percentage of Teachers Receiving the Support
Release time from teaching	20%
Scheduled time for professional development	27.5%
Stipend for professional development	12.5%
Full or partial reimbursement of tuition	38.7%
Reimbursement for academic conferences	26.6%
Reimbursement of travel expenses	32.8%
Commendation from the leader	40%
Increase in salary or receiving bonus	21.7%
Recognition in the annual teacher evaluation	41.7%
Given priority in the evaluation of professional titles	17.5%

## Perceptions of Their Own Professional Development

### *Teachers' Feelings about Preparedness*

To explore the extent to which teachers might be prepared for new and ongoing challenges in the classroom, the survey asked about how prepared they felt for the overall demands of their teaching assignments. They were also asked about how prepared they felt for specific classroom activities. The survey data indicate that teachers generally felt either “moderately” or “somewhat” well prepared for most classroom activities. But differences existed in preparedness between those who had participated in the formal professional development programs versus those who had not (Table 7). Group A refers to the 58 subjects who have participated in formal professional development programs while Group B refers to the 62 subjects who have not. In general, the former were more likely than their peers to indicate that they felt very prepared.

**TABLE 7**  
**Teachers' Response to Preparedness for Classroom Activities**

Classroom Activities	Group A	Group B
Implementing new methods of teaching	18%	7.1%
Implementing college English syllabus and performance standards	18.6%	9%
Integrating educational technology into classroom teaching	16.7%	6.2%
Using student performance assessment	10%	5%
Maintaining order and discipline in the classroom	22.2%	4.5%
Addressing the needs of students	25.8%	19%

### *Three Top Priorities for Teachers' Own Additional Professional Development*

Participants were asked to select their three top priorities for their own additional professional development from a list.<sup>7</sup> The results show that

<sup>7</sup> The list is given in the Appendix.

“teaching methods” ranks first (72.5%). The other two are “use of technology in instruction” (61.7%) and “student assessment” (47.5%). These findings echo the results of teachers' feeling about preparedness for various classroom requirements.

#### *Preferable Ways of Teachers' Own Professional Development*

Teachers were required to select the ways they prefer to make their own professional development. The most preferable way selected is pursuing PhD studies. Teachers are also more likely to choose attending national or international academic conferences as a way of professional development. Those choosing mentoring or peer observation to make improvement in their profession take up 45.8%. However, they are least likely to choose to attend formal teacher professional development programs.

#### *Teachers' Suggestions on Professional Development*

At the end of the questionnaire the participants were asked to write down any suggestions on professional development. Altogether 42 subjects provided their response. Generally, the answers fall into two categories: one is to appeal for support from authorities of the department and the university; the other is to offer their own suggestions.

Concerning teachers' appealing for administrative support, their opinions are grouped and summed up as follows:

- 1) Twenty seven participants mentioned that the number of class hours should be reduced so that teacher can have more time available for professional development. Reducing class size is also called for to achieve more effective teaching and better student performance.
- 2) Thirty five participants called on the university and the department to provide more them with more chances of attending training programs and other kinds of formal professional development activities. Moreover, 12 teachers called for

a fair system of selecting teachers to attend formal programs should be established. Some think that younger teachers should be given more opportunities.

- 3) Fourteen participants thought that the university and the department should constantly organize different kinds of informal professional development activities so as to give teachers more chances communicate with and learn from each other. The activities mentioned by those participants include inter-school communication, teaching experience exchange workshops among teachers, academic communication, collaborative lesson planning, classroom observation and mentoring.
- 4) Nine participants proposed that a collaborative environment is very important, where teachers and administrators develop common goals, share ideas, and work together to achieve their goal of professional development. They thought that a positive and uplifting university culture must be created so that all the teachers will have great zeal for professional development.

Some teachers provide valuable suggestions on college English teachers' professional growth. One suggestion is that college English teachers should not only read literature in their subject field, but also dabble in other kinds of books. Since we are now living in the era of knowledge explosion and the articles in college English textbooks usually cover a wide range of topics, extensive reading can help teachers broaden their horizon and benefit their teaching. It is also suggested that teachers should study professional knowledge in a certain field, such as finance or medicine, so that they can be qualified for ESP teaching in the future. Last but not least, some participants mentioned that college English teachers should enhance their research capability.

## **DISCUSSION**

This section provides a detailed analysis and discussion of the major

findings of the survey.

Firstly, as can be seen from participants' pre-service learning and preparation, a certain number of college English teachers in general have not been trained for the profession. It is an indisputable fact that teaching is a complex process, and the demands continue to change and grow. Much of teachers' learning, after initial pre-service learning, will actually take place on the job. Therefore, they should involve themselves in various kinds of professional development activities to make up for the insufficient pre-service learning and preparation and prepare for challenges facing them.

Secondly, as far as formal professional development programs are concerned, the participation rate of subjects in such programs is less than 50 percent. Various reasons may account for this phenomenon, such as teachers' heavy workload, lack of support from department or university, being short of fund, unavailability of opportunities, etc., which can be proved by the related survey results in work environment. But whatever the reasons, it can still be inferred that teachers' professional development hasn't been attached due importance to.

Thirdly, formal professional development programs can provide a means for teachers to meet new requirements since the majority of the teachers did find them moderately or somewhat helpful in teaching. However, criticisms of such programs also exist because they are operated by administrators and are not "teacher-centered." And the program content has little connection with classroom practice (Dai, 2006). On the one hand, as is shown in the survey, around 40 percent of the participants ever participated in programs related to educational technology for instruction. On the other hand, teachers are still required to further enhance their competence in this field. This discrepancy reveals a common problem with lots of professional development programs – lack of consistency with teachers' needs and new requirements in English language teaching. The programs are not likely to have lasting effects unless they are designed to provide continuity between what teachers learn and what goes on in the classroom (Fullan & Steigelbauer, 1991). It's also interesting that when asked to select the ways they prefer to

make their own professional development, they are least likely to choose participating in formal professional development programs. The reasons for such a finding can be various. One interpretation is that college English teacher usually cannot afford the time since the survey results show that their workload is heavy. The alternative interpretation is that for those younger teachers with less teaching experience, chances to participate in such programs are few. In China, it is a common practice to select teachers to participate in these programs based on professional title or years of teaching experience as well as teacher performance. Lack of institutional support may also be an important factor. The findings might also suggest that many professional development programs are not perceived so effective by teachers. But it must be admitted that if well designed, such programs can still be an irreplaceable choice for teachers to promote the professional growth.

Fourthly, among those informal professional development activities, college English teachers are more likely to collaborate with their colleagues in teaching and doing research. This may suggest that collaboration with other teachers has been considered essential to college English teachers' professional growth. For one thing, opportunities for teacher collaboration are often far more accessible than those for participation in formal programs. For another, teachers can productively exchange their ideas and reflections about teaching practice through various collaborative activities. However, teacher collaboration at present mainly exists within one's own department, which actually should be extended to teacher networks that are powerful learning mechanisms for teachers to share subject and pedagogical knowledge across universities and nations (Lieberman & Grolnick, 1996). Besides collaboration, most teachers often reflect on their own teaching as a way of learning and do regular academic reading to update their knowledge in pedagogy and education. Many have also published papers in academic journals to improve their research ability. Moreover, over half of them have participated in teaching competitions to engage themselves in sharing the experience of teaching practices with other teachers and to urge themselves to improve teaching.

Finally, the findings concerning institutional support for teacher professional growth suggest that besides pre-service training the support new teachers received in their early teaching was insufficient and unvaried. Since quite a number of teachers had never engaged in practice teaching before being employed, one can imagine that transition into teaching would inevitably be difficult and struggling for them. Therefore, various forms of early support are a necessity to help new teachers cope with classroom realities. And it must be treated seriously by both the university and teachers themselves. Time has emerged as another key issue in teacher professional development. To meet the new demands, teachers need more time to work with colleagues, more opportunities to develop, master, and reflect on new approaches to working with students (Corcoran, 1995). McDiarmid (1995) also stressed the connection between higher expectations for teachers and the importance of time. In order to achieve the goals of school reform and meet the momentous changes, teachers must spend considerable amount of time learning new techniques and improving their performance at work.

However, the fact is releasing time from teaching can be hard to achieve if universities continue to enlarge recruitment. This can also be proved by the high proportion of choosing releasing time from teaching, suggesting that college English teachers usually have a heavy teaching load and they want to have their class hours reduced so as to get more time for professional growth. On the whole, results related to institutional support indicate that the working environment is relatively supportive as far as pre-service training programs are concerned. However, other aspects still need to be improved, including time and tangible support available for teachers' professional development.

## **IMPLICATIONS**

Effective professional development programs encompass both formal and informal means of supporting ongoing teacher learning. In China, since college English teachers usually don't have much access to formal programs

or workshops due to various factors, i.e., lack of time, fund, or institutional support, they can turn to informal professional development activities which suit their needs, such as study groups, action research, peer coaching and observation, etc. What's more, they can also explore new ways of professional development with the support of technology. For example, teachers can take advantage of sorts of technologies, e.g., the Internet and video and audio-conferencing so as to obtain teaching resources, join professional networks and make better use of their time (Fine & Raack, 1994). On the other hand, although formal professional development programs are a luxury to college English teachers and some of them not very well designed, they are actually indispensable if established well, and they will enable teachers to develop further expertise in subject content, teaching strategies, use of technologies, and other essential elements in teaching to high standards.

Effective professional development is also heavily dependent on institutional support from department and university. However, providing tangible support seems quite difficult and challenging. The most significant is how to provide teachers with the time they need to pursue their professional growth, interact with their colleagues, and participate in different learning activities. According to the American National Education Association (1994), it is advisable that 50 percent of teachers' time be given to their professional learning. In fact, reducing instructional time and workload seems almost impossible as Chinese universities are recruiting more and more high school graduates. Lack of funding is another challenge, so it is difficult to give teachers financial support or incentives for professional development. But no matter how difficult it is for them to provide support for teachers' professional development, administrators must pay due attention to this important issue. If they really take it seriously, they can work out some creative ways to deal with any difficulties. For example, they can employ some strategies to create time for teachers, such as the use of teaching assistants and team teaching. On the whole, they should regard teachers' professional development as an inseparable part of the development of the

university.

It is true that administrators have the primary obligation to ensure that all teaching staff can receive the training necessary to carry out job responsibilities effectively. However, it should be noted that teachers themselves have a parallel obligation to continue their own professional growth. Because teachers are central mediators in what and how students learn in their classroom, they must engage in their own professional learning in order to improve student learning (Darling-Hammond & Sykes, 2000). Beyond the opportunities provided by the department or the university, all teachers have the responsibility to keep abreast of new research, to seek out new strategies to improve their performance, and to share new ideas and information with their peers. Teachers should also create a lifetime passion for learning since teaching has always been a changing and demanding job.

## **LIMITATIONS**

Limitations of the present study must be addressed. First, the survey was carried out mainly in the form of questionnaire. The instrument hasn't been proved to be valid or reliable, though it was designed by referring to the 2000 survey conducted by NCES on Teacher Professional Development and Training, which should enjoy high validity and reliability. And the questionnaire is primarily descriptive due to the exploratory nature of the study. Second, the subjects are mainly from universities in Wuhan, which might limit the generalizability of findings and implications of this research. And university policy towards teacher professional development and administrators' opinions about teacher quality were not taken into account. Further research concerning institutional support is necessary, since there is a need to build in mechanisms to support teacher professional development more effectively. To interview university authorities can be a good way to obtain more detailed information in this field. Moreover, an in-depth assessment of the effectiveness of in-service formal professional programs as

well as different types of informal ways of professional growth should be included in future studies.

## THE AUTHOR

*Li Jing* is a lecturer in the School of Foreign Languages of Huazhong University of Science and Technology in Wuhan, the capital city of Hubei province, P.R. China. Her current research interests cover translation studies, English teaching, and teacher education. Her recent publications include *The Linguistic Turn or the Pragmatic Turn: The Linguistic Foundation of Translation Studies* (2008) and *The Pragmatic Turn of Translation Studies* (2008).

Email: [lijing@mail.hust.edu.cn](mailto:lijing@mail.hust.edu.cn)

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## APPENDIX

### Main Items from College English Teachers' Professional Development Questionnaire

#### Part A Basic Information<sup>8</sup>

#### Part B Early Teaching Experiences<sup>9</sup>

#### Part C Informal and Formal Professional Development (1=Yes 2=No)

*(1) Informal and formal professional development activities*

C01 Did you ever participate in any formal Ph.D. programs?	1	2
C02 Did you ever pay observational visits to other universities?	1	2
C03 Did you ever do research alone or with other teachers?	1	2
C04 Do you often discuss issues of teaching with other teachers?	1	2
C05 Do you review your own teaching regularly?	1	2
C06 Did you ever participate in mentoring and peer observation?	1	2
C07 Did you participate in any network or association of teachers?	1	2
C08 Did you attend national or international academic conferences?	1	2
C09 Did you present your paper in any academic conferences?	1	2
C10 Did you ever publishing papers related to English teaching?	1	2
C11 Do you often read academic books to improve your professional qualities?	1	2
C12 Did you ever participate in teaching competitions?	1	2
C13 Did you ever participate in any formal English teacher professional development programs? 1. Yes 2. No (Please go to question C18)		
C14 How many times did you participate in formal English teacher professional development programs? 1. Once 2. 2 or 3 3. 4 or 5 4. More than 5		

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<sup>8</sup> Details are provided in Table 3.

<sup>9</sup> Items in Part B mainly cover the following information: (1) Major field of study in undergraduate program; (2) Length of practice teaching experiences before graduation; (3) Pre-service training at university; (4) Preparedness toward different teaching-related activities in the first year of teaching; (5) Institutional support in the first year of teaching.

C15 Did the formal development programs in which you participated cover any of the following subject area? And were these programs related to your classroom teaching? (1= A lot; 2= Moderately; 3= Somewhat; 4=Not at all)

Subject area	Yes	No	Related to classroom teaching			
Teaching content and performance standards	1	2	3	4		
New methods of teaching	1	2	3	4		
Use of educational technology for instruction	1	2	3	4		
Student assessment	1	2	3	4		
Addressing the learning needs of students	1	2	3	4		
Classroom management	1	2	3	4		

C16 Did the programs in which you participated cover other subject areas which are not mentioned above? 1. Yes (Please describe) \_\_\_\_\_ 2. No

C17 Did you feel the formal development programs helpful to your teaching?

1. Very 2. Moderately 3. Somewhat 4. Not very 5. Not at all

C18 Please give an overall assessment of all the professional development activities you have participated in.

1. Very helpful 2. Moderately helpful  
3. Somewhat helpful 4. Not very helpful 5. Not at all helpful

*(2) Administrative support of college English teachers' professional development*

C19 Did you ever receive any types of administrative support? (1=Yes 2=No)

a. Release time from teaching	1	2
b. Scheduled time for professional development	1	2
c. Stipend for professional development	1	2
d. Full or partial reimbursement of tuition	1	2
e. Reimbursement for academic conferences	1	2
f. Reimbursement of travel expenses	1	2

C20 Did you ever get any of the following incentives and rewards for your professional development? (1=Yes 2=No)

a. Commendation from the leader	1	2
b. Increase in salary or receiving bonus	1	2

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- |   |   |   |
|---|---|---|
| c. Recognition or higher ratings in the annual teacher evaluation | 1 | 2 |
| d. Given priority in the evaluation of professional titles        | 1 | 2 |

(3) *Feelings about preparedness*

C21 How well prepared are you feeling for the following specific classroom activities? (1=Very well; 2=Moderately; 3=Somewhat; 4=Not at all)

- |   |   |   |   |   |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| a. Implement new methods of teaching                            | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| b. Implement college English syllabus and performance standards | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| c. Integrating educational technology into classroom teaching   | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| d. Student performance assessment                               | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| e. Maintaining order and discipline in the classroom            | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| f. Addressing the needs of students                             | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |

C22 Please select your three top priorities for their own additional professional development from the following list.

- a. Student discipline and behavior problems;
- b. Teaching students with special needs (e.g., ESP or EAP);
- c. Use of technology in instruction;
- d. Teaching content and performance standards;
- e. Methods of teaching;
- f. Student assessment.

(4) *Perceptions of professional development*

C23 Please select the ways you prefer to make your own professional development.  
(Circle all that apply)

- a. Participating in formal professional programs
- b. Attending academic conferences or seminars both home and abroad
- c. Joining an English teaching network or association
- d. Pursuing PhD degrees
- e. Peer mentoring and observation
- f. Releasing time from teaching to get more time for professional growth
- g. Other (Please describe) \_\_\_\_\_

C24 Please offer your own suggestions on college English teachers' professional development.