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# **Teacher Knowledge about Oral English Instruction and Teacher Profiles: An EFL Perspective**

## **Abstract**

Teacher knowledge, an important cognitive basis of teaching, has attracted tremendous attention in educational research in the last few decades. This study examines whether teachers' self-perceived knowledge about oral English teaching differs with regard to their professional profiles in the English as a Foreign Language (EFL) context in China. A sample of 527 teachers from 56 universities in 29 cities across the country responded to a self-report questionnaire. Thirty teachers were interviewed. Teachers' self-perceived knowledge was assessed by two factors: pedagogical content knowledge about oral English teaching (PCK) and knowledge of students' oral English characteristics (KOS). The reliability and validity of the instrument are tested and presented. Results showed that EFL teachers generally reported having insufficient PCK and KOS. ANOVA and *t*-tests revealed no significant knowledge difference among teachers with different teaching experiences, training and overseas exposure. However, teachers' learning experiences, self-perceived speaking ability and familiarity with teaching methodologies were found to influence teacher knowledge in a significant way. The findings highlight the need for the development of teacher knowledge about oral English teaching in the EFL contexts. Suggestions for further research are offered.

**Keywords:** Teacher knowledge; professional profiles; teacher development; oral English teaching; Chinese EFL contexts

## **Introduction**

Educational research in the past few decades has recognized the impact of teacher cognition on teachers' classroom practice (Borg 2003, 2006, Clark & Peterson 1986, Woods 1996). An area of teacher cognition that has attracted a great deal of attention is teacher knowledge (Ben-Peretz 2011, Borg 2006). In the field of English language teaching field, although increasing efforts have been made to understand language teachers' knowledge in

relation to the teaching of grammar, reading and writing, there has been relatively little attention given to listening and speaking (Borg 2006). Our recent search for relevant literature showed that this paucity remained. Nevertheless, there is some evidence that strongly suggests that many English teachers have limited knowledge about teaching speaking and listening (Chen and Goh 2011; DeBoer 2007; Goh et al. 2005), and that such inadequacy poses a challenge to effective oral English instruction in countries such as China and South Korea (Chen and Goh 2011, Li 1998). Given the importance of developing oral communication abilities among language learners everywhere, the need to examine teacher knowledge concerning oral English instruction is more urgent now than ever. Our study which focuses on teachers' knowledge in the context of English as a foreign language (EFL) in China is therefore expected to provide further insights into this issue. Specifically, we attempt to develop an instrument that can investigate Chinese teachers' self-perceived knowledge about oral English teaching, as well as examining whether and how their knowledge may be related to selected teacher characteristics. To our knowledge this approach to investigate teacher knowledge concerning the teaching of oral English in the EFL context is the first of its kind.

### ***Research on Teacher knowledge***

One of the biggest challenges in the field of teacher cognition research is posed by the overwhelming array of concepts (Borg 2006), sometimes apparently overlapping. There has been intense debate during the last two decades, for example, on how to conceptualise teacher knowledge and beliefs (Woods & Çakır 2011). Some researchers tended to view *knowledge* and *beliefs* as inseparable constructs and used the two terms interchangeably (Grossman, Wilson, & Shulman 1989, Pajares 1992, Woods 1996, Woods & Çakır 2011); others argued

that there were clear distinctions between the two – knowledge was seen as factual, objective, evidential, and emotionally-neutral whereas beliefs were described as both evidential and non-evidential, affective, subjectively derived and emotionally bound (e.g., Fenstermacher 1994, Meijer, Verloop, and Beijaard 2001, Smith & Siegel 2004). In this paper, the term ‘teacher knowledge’ is defined as teachers’ evidential and factual understanding about themselves as teachers, teaching and learning oral English, and their students’ needs and characteristics. Teacher knowledge is considered to be ‘factual propositions’ which are separate from beliefs, which are a teacher’s ‘personal values, attitudes, and ideologies’ (Meijer, Verloop, and Beijaard 2001, 172).

Teacher knowledge has been investigated in various related forms. Some common forms are ‘practical knowledge’ (Elbaz 1981, Meijer, Verloop, and Beijaard 1999; van Tartwijk *et al.* 2009, Zanting, Verloop, and Vermunt 2001), referring to teachers’ knowledge and beliefs about their own teaching practice that underlie their classroom behaviours; ‘professional knowledge’ (Tamir 1991, Tillema 1994), referring to the body of knowledge and skills that teachers need in order to function successfully as professionals; ‘personal practical knowledge’ (Connelly, Clandinin, and Ming Fang 1997; Tsang 2004), referring to the personal-experiential knowledge from past experiences that is embedded in their present teaching practice and future plans and actions; and ‘emotional knowledge’ (Zembylas 2007), referring to teachers’ knowledge concerning their emotional experiences with respect to themselves, their students and their contexts. Other terms such as ‘action-oriented knowledge’ and ‘content and context related knowledge’ have also emerged in the research (see Verloop, Van Driel, and Meijer 2001 for a discussion). The various concepts mentioned above have contributed to a deeper and more nuanced understanding of teacher knowledge as a multifaceted construct that is personal, contextual, experiential, tacit and content-related (Meijer, Verloop & Beijaard, 1999). These characteristics of teacher knowledge point to

multiple sources and contexts for its construction, not least a teacher's own classroom practices and his or her individual experiential history, such as formal schooling experiences, pre-service and in-service teacher training (Clandinin 1985). As teacher knowledge is strongly influenced by teachers' individual experiences, personal background, and personality characteristics (Verloop, Van Driel, and Meijer 2001), any endeavour to explore teacher knowledge must therefore be informed by teachers' lives, both professional and personal. The present study takes this multifaceted notion of teacher knowledge as a basis for establishing some understanding of whether and how Chinese EFL teachers' knowledge may be related to selected teacher characteristics.

In the literature about language teaching knowledge, there remains a call for research into specific curricular areas and teaching contexts (Verloop, Van Driel, and Meijer 2001). One area which has received some attention is in the domain of grammar teaching in which researchers have reported inadequacies in the grammatical knowledge of pre-service and in-service English teachers in both English as first and foreign language contexts (e.g., Andrews 1994, 1999; Borg 2001; Williamson and Hardman 1995; for reviews, see Borg 2003). Teacher educators tasked with preparing native-speaker EFL teachers found that 50% of their trainees had low levels of grammatical knowledge (Andrews 1994). It has also been suggested that teachers' development of explicit grammar knowledge can be influenced by key experiences in their lives, such as prior education and teaching experiences (Andrews 1999, Borg 1999, Johnston & Goettsch 2000). Research on language teacher education has also explored the knowledge base of teachers for reading and writing instruction. Variation in teachers' practical knowledge for teaching reading comprehension has been reported in the areas of subject matter knowledge, student knowledge and knowledge of student learning and understanding (Meijer, Verloop & Beijaard, 1999, 2001). With respect to writing instruction, teachers' knowledge about assessing student writing has attracted the most attention in

research. Many pre-service teachers' knowledge about grading student writing was found to be inadequate, prompting calls for contextualized professional dialogues and mentored field experiences to help teachers develop this knowledge and support them in making changes to classroom-based assessment of writing (Graham, 2005). Similar to studies on grammar instruction, research on reading and writing instruction showed that background variables such as the amount and type of teachers' training experiences, the degree of consultation with colleagues, the nature of their reflection on teaching practices and the number of years of teaching, all have an impact on teachers' knowledge (Meijer, Verloop, and Beijaard 1999). Unfortunately, teachers' knowledge in relation to the teaching of oral English remains under-explored (Borg 2006). Further investigation into this respect is needed. The present study, with a focus on EFL teachers' knowledge about oral English instruction, is expected to provide some insights into this issue.

For the purpose of this study, we have limited 'teacher knowledge' to teachers' self-perceived knowledge relevant to the practice of teaching oral English. Two specific aspects are examined: pedagogical content knowledge about teaching oral English (PCK) and knowledge of students' oral English characteristics (KOS). We further examine teacher knowledge according to professional profiles, which comprise a set of characteristics of the teachers' professional lives related to prior language learning, teaching and training experiences, overseas exposure, self-perceived speaking ability and familiarity with the methodologies for teaching oral English.

### ***PCK and KOS***

Shulman (1986, 1987) presented a framework for categorizing teacher knowledge based on seven domains: (1) content knowledge, (2) general pedagogical knowledge, (3) curriculum knowledge, (4) pedagogical content knowledge, (5) knowledge of learners and their

characteristics, (6) knowledge of educational contexts, and (7) knowledge of educational ends, purposes, and values, and their philosophical and historical grounds. Many researchers who investigated teacher knowledge have built on the concept of pedagogical content knowledge (PCK), which was described as ‘that special amalgam of content and pedagogy that is uniquely the province of teachers, their own special form of professional understanding’ (Shulman 1987, 8). It is a specific form of teacher knowledge, which ‘represents the blending of content and pedagogy into an understanding of how particular topics, problems, or issues are organized, represented, and adapted to the diverse interests and abilities of learners, and presented for instruction’ (Shulman 1987, 8). PCK reflects a close relationship between the specific subject content and the pedagogy, and emphasizes the communication between teacher and students. PCK alone, however, does not equip teachers with the flexibility needed to manage the complexity of teaching. Teachers also need to know about their students. This knowledge of students and their characteristics (KOS) would help a teacher to determine ways of explaining concepts in ways that are most effective for the students. In this sense, there seems to be a reciprocal relationship between PCK and KOS. They are equally important knowledge domains for ensuring that learning can take place. To understand the knowledge that undergirds teachers’ practice, investigation into both their PCK and KOS is required.

For the present study, PCK consists of teachers’ self-perceived knowledge about the content to be taught and the methods and strategies for teaching effectively. KOS encompasses a broad range of teachers’ self-perceived knowledge about their students’ oral English characteristics, such as knowledge about students’ oral language development stages, learning experiences, and proficiency levels, as well as knowledge in assessing and diagnosing students’ performance, and knowledge about how to maintain students’ motivation. More specifically, the present study will address the following questions:

- (1) What is Chinese EFL university teachers' self-perceived knowledge about oral English teaching?
- (2) Does teachers' self-perceived knowledge differ according to their professional profiles, namely, teaching experience, learning experience, overseas exposure, training for teaching speaking, self-perceived speaking ability and familiarity with methodologies for teaching oral English?

## **Method**

### *Participants*

Participants in this study were 741 university teachers who are teaching English as a foreign language in China. We employed questionnaire surveys, semi-structured interviews and a multi-method case study to elicit both qualitative and quantitative data. Because of space limitations, however, this paper focuses only on data elicited from the questionnaire survey, though the interviews are drawn on in interpreting and discussing the findings from the questionnaire data.

Convenience sampling was used to select participants. All the participants whom we had access to were invited to take part in the survey. Snowball sampling was also employed when some of the participants helped to invite their colleagues and identify further appropriate participants into the survey. Each questionnaire was presented individually in an unsealed envelope. A cover letter accompanied it to explain that participation was on a completely voluntary basis and that efforts will be made to ensure their anonymity. The questionnaire was distributed through three ways. First, the first author administered the questionnaire in person in 12 universities (359 copies collected). Secondly, some of the

authors' friends who were also EFL professionals helped to administer the questionnaire to teachers in their universities. Each respondent was asked to return his or her questionnaire sealed inside a postage-paid envelope provided for them directly to the first author (81 copies received). Thirdly, the questionnaire was also emailed to some teacher participants (87 copies received). Altogether, 538 teachers returned their completed questionnaires, accounting for a return rate of 72.6%. Of these, 527 questionnaires with no missing data were retained for analysis. These respondents came from 56 universities in 29 cities across China. Their demographic information is shown in Table 1.

**Table 1** Demographic details of respondents ( $n = 527$ )

	<b>0-2 years</b>	<b>2-5 years</b>	<b>5-10 years</b>	<b>More than 10 years</b>
1. Years of teaching	40 7.6%	143 27.1%	198 37.6%	146 27.7%
2. Overseas experience	<b>Never</b> 310 58.8%	<b>Less than 1 year</b> 154 29.2%	<b>1-3 years</b> 55 10.4%	<b>More than 3 years</b> 8 1.5%
3. Academic qualification	<b>Bachelor</b> 140 26.6%	<b>Master's</b> 376 71.3%	<b>Doctor's</b> 11 2.1%	
4. Training experience	<b>Without training</b> 281 53.3%	<b>With training</b> 246 46.7%		

### **Instrument**

A number of questionnaire items were developed to investigate teachers' knowledge about oral English teaching (KOET) (see Appendix 1). Questions were also included to elicit information about teachers' demographics and professional profiles. The latter consisted of items that focused on years of teaching, academic qualifications, training experiences, overseas experiences, self-perceived speaking ability and familiarity with the methodology of

teaching speaking skills. These six items were subsequently treated as independent variables in order to investigate whether and how teachers' professional profiles had influenced their knowledge about oral English teaching.

There were altogether 10 items concerning teachers' pedagogical content knowledge about teaching speaking (PCK), and eight items on their knowledge about students' oral English learning needs and characteristics (KOS). Each item was measured on a five-point Likert scale from 1 (None) to 5 (Excellent). For the development of the items on PCK, we referred to the literature about teaching speaking skills (e.g., Hughes, 2002; Thornbury, 2005). For KOS, the first three items were adapted from DeBore's (2007) Survey of Teacher Oral Language Knowledge (STOLK). We separated one of the items in STOLK 'Assessing / diagnosing students' oral performance' to give greater clarity to the respondents. Other items were developed to reflect the participants' teaching contexts by referring to interviews we had previously conducted (Chen and Goh 2011).

### ***Validation of the questionnaire***

The full sample ( $N = 527$ ) was divided randomly into two halves for instrument validation (Field, 2009). The first sample ( $n = 263$ ) was used to perform principle component analysis (PCA), and the other sample ( $n = 264$ ) was used for confirmatory factor analysis (CFA). PCA is an exploratory approach which is often used for theory postulation. When the theory is formed, it is important to evaluate whether the findings and assumptions are consistent across samples which are randomly selected from the same population. CFA serves to fit the postulated models into various datasets and provides multiple goodness-of-fit statistics to decide on the validity of the model specified a priori. Chi-square tests across all demographic variables indicated that these two samples were not significantly different from one another ( $p > .05$ ).

The results of factor analysis are presented in Tables 2 and 3. Only 14 items were retained after four other items were deleted due to low correlations and complex loadings. The items that clustered on the same factors confirmed that component one represented teachers' self-perceptions of their PCK while component two represented teachers' KOS. The results of PCA and CFA indicate that KOET is reliable and valid. Table 4 shows the regression estimates of the correlated two-factor KOET. The correlation between the two scales PCK and KOS was .568.

Table 2. Summary of principle component analyses for the 14-item KOET ( $n = 263$ )

Item	Rotated Component Loadings	
	PCK	KOS
<b>I think I have the knowledge about</b>		
PCK1. Teaching intonation	<b>.75</b>	-.09
PCK2. Teaching spoken grammar	<b>.79</b>	-.04
PCK3. Teaching oral English vocabulary	<b>.74</b>	-.01
PCK4. Teaching speech acts	<b>.68</b>	.12
PCK5. Teaching conversational rules and structure	<b>.76</b>	.03
PCK6. Increasing oral English fluency	<b>.81</b>	.05
PCK7. Increasing oral English accuracy	<b>.84</b>	-.05
PCK8. Planning effective oral English tasks	<b>.69</b>	.13
KOS1. Current oral English development stages of my students	-.05	<b>.87</b>
KOS2. Oral English learning experiences of my students	-.01	<b>.78</b>
KOS3. Oral English proficiency levels of my students	.00	<b>.84</b>
KOS4. Assessing students' oral performance	-.03	<b>.84</b>
KOS5. Diagnosing students' oral performance	.14	<b>.74</b>
KOS6. Maintaining students' motivation of learning oral English	.03	<b>.73</b>
<b>Eigenvalues</b>	6.63	2.05
<b>% of variance</b>	47.37	14.64
<b>a</b>	.90	.90

Table 3. Goodness-of-fit indexes for the KOET model

Model fit indexes	Values	Recommended guidelines*
$\chi^2$	212.87, $p < .001$	Non-significant
$\chi^2 /df$	2.80	< 3
CFI	.92	> .90
TLI	.91	> .90
SRMR	.06	$\leq .08$
RMSEA	.08	$\leq .08$

Note. \* References were taken from Hair et al., 2006; L. Hu & Bentler, 1999; McDonald & Ho, 2002.

Table 4. Regression estimates of the measurement model for the 14-item KOET Scale

		Estimate	Standard error	Critical ratio	p
Pedagogical Content Knowledge	PCK1	1.000*	--	--	--
	PCK2	1.145	.128	8.937	**
	PCK3	1.022	.118	8.662	**
	PCK4	1.126	.125	8.986	**
	PCK5	1.018	.117	8.686	**
	PCK6	1.343	.133	10.106	**
	PCK7	1.262	.123	10.252	**
	PCK8	1.138	.121	9.372	**
Knowledge of Students	KOS1	1.000*	--	--	--
	KOS2	.719	.071	10.095	**
	KOS3	.952	.076	12.565	**
	KOS4	1.007	.077	13.048	**
	KOS5	.984	.080	12.282	**
	KOS6	.656	.075	8.726	**

## Results

### ***Teachers' self-perceived knowledge about oral English teaching***

Teachers' self-perceived knowledge about oral English teaching were measured in terms of their PCK and KOS. A 5-point Likert scale was used for each item, with anchors at 1 (*none*),

2 (*limited*), 3 (*fair*), 4 (*adequate*), and 5 (*excellent*). A value of 3 was not used as a neutral point so that respondents could not hedge. Table 5 presents the respondents' mean scores with the standard deviations of the two subscales. Results showed that teachers reported higher PCK than KOS. However, both mean scores were below 4 (the value for adequate knowledge), indicating that these teachers' perceived themselves as not possessing adequate knowledge.

Table 5. Descriptive statistics for each subscale in KOET ( $n = 527$ )

Subscale	No. of items	Mean	Standard Deviation
Pedagogical Content Knowledge	8	3.28	0.67
Knowledge of Students	6	3.17	0.68

### ***Teachers' self-perceived knowledge and professional profiles***

The one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) tests and *t*-tests were used to analyze teachers' self-perceived knowledge differences with regard to various professional characteristics. The factor-based teachers' pedagogical content knowledge and knowledge of students' oral English characteristics were subjected as dependent variables, with the groupings of respondents with different professional profiles as independent variables. A preliminary assumption testing detected violations to homogeneity of variance. In cases where the assumption of equality of variance had been broken, following the suggestion of Field (2009) Welch's *F* was reported. In order to control the Type I error rate, for this study, the alpha level was set at .005 for tests of significance.

### *Teaching experience*

Two one-way ANOVA tests were performed to test whether PCK and KOS (dependent variables) differed by teaching experience (independent variable). Levene's test indicated that the assumption of homogeneity of variance had been violated for the data regarding PCK ( $F(3, 523) = 2.88, p < .05$ ), such that the Welch's  $F$  was reported. Results showed that PCK was not significantly different across the teacher groups,  $F(3, 163.02) = 0.78, p > .05$ . With regard to KOS, results revealed no significant difference between the teacher groups,  $F(3, 523) = 0.55, p > .05$ . Overall, the results suggested that teachers with different teaching experience were not much different in their self-perceived knowledge about teaching oral English.

### *Overseas experience*

Two one-way ANOVA tests were performed to test whether PCK and KOS (dependent variables) differed by overseas experience (independent variable). The results showed that teachers with different overseas exposure in English speaking countries seemed to have similar levels of PCK,  $F(3, 523) = 1.74, p > .05$ ; and KOS,  $F(3, 523) = 2.29, p > .05$ . In other words, teachers' self-perceived knowledge about oral English teaching was not significantly affected by their overseas exposure.

### *Training experience*

Two independent  $t$ -tests were performed to test whether there was any difference in PCK and KOS (dependent variables) between teachers with training experience for teaching speaking and those without such experience (independent variable). Results show no significant difference on their PCK scores,  $t(525) = -1.92, p > .05$ . With regard to KOS, no significant difference was found among teacher groups,  $t(525) = -2.36, p > .01$ . The findings indicated

that teachers with or without training on teaching speaking were similar in their self-perceived knowledge about oral English teaching.

### *Learning experience*

Two one-way ANOVA tests were performed to test whether PCK and KOS (dependent variables) differed by the teachers' own learning experience (independent variable). Results are presented in Table 6. PCK was significantly different across the teacher groups,  $F(2, 524) = 25.48, p < .0001, \omega^2 = .09$ .  $\omega^2$  is the commonly reported effect size measure, with values of .01, .06 and .14 representing small, medium and large effects respectively (Kirk, 1996). For the data regarding KOS, the ANOVA test revealed a significant difference on KOS scores,  $F(2, 524) = 13.68, p < .0001, \omega^2 = .05$ . As sample sizes were very different across the groups, Hochberg *post hoc* tests were applied in the subsequent paired comparison (Field, 2009). Results showed that teachers who were satisfied or moderately satisfied with their learning experience involving speaking skills reported significantly higher PCK and KOS than teachers who were not satisfied with that experience ( $p < .0001$ ). However, the difference between teachers of the moderately satisfied group and the satisfied group was not significant ( $p > .05$ ).

Table 6. ANOVA results of PCK and KOS examined by learning experience ( $n = 527$ )

Learning Experience	N	PCK		KOS	
		M	SD	M	SD
(1) Unsatisfactory	185	3.00	0.67	2.97	0.63
(2) Moderately Satisfactory	201	3.39	0.65	3.25	0.69
(3) Satisfactory	141	3.46	0.60	3.32	0.67
<i>F</i>		25.48*		13.68*	
$\omega^2$		.09		.05	
<i>Post hoc</i> tests		(3) > (1) *		(3) > (1) *	
		(2) > (1) *		(2) > (1) *	
		(3) > (2) **		(3) > (2) **	

*Note.* \* $p < .0001$ ; \*\*  $p > .05$ .

### *Self-perceived speaking ability*

Two one-way ANOVA tests were performed to test whether PCK and KOS (dependent variables) were affected by teachers' self-perceived speaking ability (independent variable). Results presented in Table 7 showed that teachers' PCK was significantly different among teachers with different self-perceived ability,  $F(2, 524) = 59.76, p < .0001, \omega^2 = .18$ . The effect size indicated that the effect of teachers' speaking ability on PCK was substantial. Hochberg post hoc tests revealed significant differences between all groups ( $p < .0001$  for all tests), indicating that as the level of teachers' self-perceived speaking ability increased, their reported PCK increased accordingly.

With regard to KOS, the assumption of homogeneity of variance had been violated,  $F(2, 524) = 9.07, p < .0001$ , so the Welch's F was reported. The ANOVA test indicated a significant effect of teachers' self-perceived speaking ability on KOS,  $F(2, 159.48) = 60.25, p < .0001, \omega^2 = .12$ . The effect size indicated that this was a fairly substantial effect. As group variances were not equal, Games–Howell *post hoc* tests should be used (Field, 2009). Results showed significant differences between all groups ( $p < .0001$  for all tests), indicating that KOS increased as the level of teachers' self-perceived speaking ability increased.

Table 7. ANOVA results of PCK and KOS examined by self-perceived speaking ability ( $n = 527$ )

Speaking Ability	N	PCK		KOS	
		M	SD	M	SD
(1) Low	46	2.58	0.63	2.64	0.37
(2) Moderate	285	3.17	0.62	3.06	0.64
(3) High	196	3.59	0.60	3.44	0.67
<i>F</i>		59.76*		60.25*	
$\omega^2$		.18		.12	
<i>Post hoc</i> tests		(3) > (2) > (1) *		(3) > (2) > (1) *	

*Note.* \* $p < .0001$ .

### *Familiarity with methodology*

Two one-way ANOVA tests were performed to investigate whether PCK and KOS (dependent variables) differed with regard to teachers' reported familiarity with teaching speaking methodology (independent variable). Results in Table 8 showed a significant effect on PCK,  $F(2, 524) = 94.41, p < .0001, \omega^2 = .26$ . With regard to KOS, significant differences were found among the teacher groups,  $F(2, 524) = 44.77, p < .0001, \omega^2 = .14$ . The effect size indicated that the effect of teachers' familiarity with teaching methodology on PCK and KOS was substantial. Hochberg post hoc tests revealed significant difference between all groups ( $p < .0001$  for all tests), indicating that as teachers' familiarity with the methodologies of teaching speaking increased, their PCK and KOS increased accordingly.

Table 8. ANOVA results of PCK and KOS examined by familiarity with methodology ( $n = 527$ )

Teaching Methodology	N	PCK		KOS	
		M	SD	M	SD
(1) Unfamiliar	102	2.65	0.53	2.73	0.56
(2) Moderately Familiar	229	3.26	0.63	3.13	0.61
(3) Familiar	196	3.62	0.67	3.45	0.68
<i>F</i>		94.41*		44.77*	
$\omega^2$		.26		.14	
<i>Post hoc</i> tests		(3) > (2) > (1) *		(3) > (2) > (1) *	

*Note.* \* $p < .0001$ .

In summary, the results revealed no significant knowledge difference among teachers with different teaching experiences, prior training and overseas exposure. However, teachers' learning experiences, self-perceived speaking ability and familiarity with teaching methodologies were found to influence knowledge in a significant way.

## **Discussion**

The present study explored teachers' self-perceived knowledge about oral English teaching in the EFL contexts in China. Results from the questionnaire survey revealed that the majority of teachers in this study did not have adequate knowledge about oral English instruction. The results also shed interesting light on the relationship between teacher knowledge about oral English instruction and their professional profiles.

Previous research suggested that teachers developed their knowledge from teaching experience; and experienced teachers often had more knowledge at their disposal than novice teachers did (Clermont, Borko, and Krajcik 1994; van Dijk and Kattmann 2007). This study, however, found no statistical evidence for such relationships. Teachers' self-perceived pedagogical content knowledge about oral English teaching (PCK) and knowledge of students' oral English characteristics (KOS) did not seem to vary with regard to different years of EFL teaching. The lack of a significant relationship between teacher knowledge and teaching experience can be understood by a closer examination into their teaching contexts. The teaching of speaking skills at the university level does not always receive adequate attention even though there is general acknowledgement of the importance of spoken English. Teachers are often prevented from conducting oral English teaching because of a lack of a conducive language environment, limited teaching resources, large class and insufficient curriculum time. Some Chinese university teachers in an interview study reported that although they had taught English for over 10 years, they had only limited experience in teaching speaking because most of their curriculum time was spent on reading, writing and listening, all of which were required in the exams (Chen and Goh 2011). The number of years of EFL teaching experience was therefore not a strong indicator of the teachers' specific knowledge about oral English teaching. This finding reflects the subject-specific nature of

PCK because a teacher who has developed rich knowledge for teaching speaking could still be lacking in knowledge for teaching speaking.

Furthermore, the non-significant differences in the reported knowledge among teachers with different years of teaching suggest that experience is not necessarily a prerequisite for expertise or knowledge development. Tsui (2009) observed that expert teachers differed from experienced non-expert teachers because of the former's "constant engagement in experimentation and exploration, in problematizing the unproblematic and in responding to and looking for challenges, thereby engaging in the kind of learning that extends one's competence" (p. 437). In other words, pedagogical knowledge or expertise does not develop automatically from years of experience. Experience may be important but it is insufficient for teacher knowledge development. A factor which is also crucial to the development of teachers' knowledge and expertise is the teachers' active and reflective engagement in teaching and learning.

In recent years, there have been many opportunities for EFL teachers to study or teach in English-speaking countries. The impact of these overseas experiences on teacher change, however, is still uncertain. While there is evidence to indicate that overseas exposure has contributed to teachers' professional and personal growth (e.g., Barkhuizen and Feryok 2006, Lee 2009, Willard-Holt 2001), some doubts have been expressed as to the effectiveness and lasting effects of such experiences for teacher development (Janusch, 2007). The results from the present study showed no significant impact of teachers' overseas experience on PCK and KOS. For the purposes of this study, teachers' overseas experience was examined in terms of how many years of learning/teaching experiences they had had in English-speaking countries. One possible explanation for the non-significant difference may have to do with variations in the quality of such overseas experiences. If the experience had to do with some professional training they received, it would be reasonable to expect a higher degree of knowledge about

teaching speaking. If, however, the purpose was simply to live or work overseas for personal reasons, little discernible impact on teachers' knowledge about teaching speaking may be expected. The quality of experience may also be determined by the duration of living overseas. The above considerations were illustrated in the previously mentioned interview study. Two English teachers who attended a 10-month graduate diploma programme in a university in Singapore, reported substantial development in their pedagogical knowledge about oral English learning and teaching (Chen and Goh 2011).

This study also failed to find any significant difference between teachers who received training for teaching speaking and those who did not. The finding appear to contradict previous research which suggested significant impact of training on teachers' knowledge growth (e.g., Grossman 1990, Grossman and Richert 1988, Tillema 1994), as well as the self-reports of the two teachers mentioned in the previous paragraph. Grossman and Richert's (1988) qualitative study of six prospective teachers who took part in the teacher preparation programmes reported considerable knowledge gains, including enhanced knowledge about general pedagogy and content, and growing knowledge of student understanding. The seemingly conflicting findings may be largely due to the different training programmes examined in each study. In Grossman and Richert's (1988) study, the teacher preparation programmes comprised 9 to 12 months of coursework followed by fieldwork. On the contrary, in the Chinese EFL contexts, university teachers generally received no pre-service training (Wu 2001). While attempts to develop teacher education programmes are already underway, these programmes have had minimal influence on the classroom teaching of oral English, particularly at the college level. Most teacher professional development programmes have been designed for the teaching of reading, writing and listening. The few programmes that addressed the teaching of speaking were typically short, lasting only a few hours or a couple of days. Teachers felt that these programmes had

unrealistic expectations as the activities introduced would work well only with a small group of highly-motivated and proficient students, and not with their normal classes of 60 to 90 students of different proficiency levels and development needs compounded by insufficient time for teaching speaking.(Chen and Goh 2011).

A factor that had had a significant impact on teacher knowledge was teachers' learning experience. As there is no systematic pre-service training for university EFL teachers in China, learning experience in this study refers mainly to oral English instruction that teachers received as language learners during formal schooling. Teachers who were satisfied or moderately satisfied with their learning reported significantly higher PCK and KOS than those who were not satisfied. As is well acknowledged, prior language learning experience is an important source of teacher knowledge (Ellis 2006, Reeves 2009). In the special case of language teaching, during 'the apprenticeship of observation' (Lortie 1975), what respondents learned about language, among other things, formed the basis of knowledge about content; how their teachers taught the language and attended to students' needs informed the knowledge about pedagogy and students. This exposure to good modelling is critical for knowledge development. In addition, language learners who eventually go on to become language teachers may find their positive learning experiences to be a source of knowledge and inspiration.

Another factor which showed a substantial impact on teacher knowledge was teachers' self-perceived speaking ability. Results indicated an interesting linear relationship: as the level of teachers' self-perceived speaking ability increased, their PCK and KOS increased accordingly. Similar patterns were found in the impact of teachers' familiarity with methodology. Teachers who reported higher familiarity with methodologies about teaching speaking skills seemed to have significantly better PCK and KOS. It could be argued that teachers who are more confident about their speaking ability are more proficient users of the

language and may be more familiar with spoken English (i.e., better knowledge about content, such as pronunciation, intonation, spoken vocabulary and grammar, and conversational rules). Since PCK is an integration of knowledge about content and pedagogy, it is possible that higher self-perceived speaking proficiency and familiarity about teaching methodology (i.e., knowledge about pedagogy) are linked to better PCK. With regard to KOS, the significant impact found in this study lends support to the growing evidence that suggested a positive relationship between teachers' sense of efficacy and their level of willingness and commitment to teaching (e.g., Borg 2001, Coladarci 1992, Tschannen-Moran and Hoy, 2001). It is reasonable to expect that teachers who are confident about their oral English proficiency and are familiar with teaching methodology for speaking are also likely to make a greater effort at developing their students' speaking ability. They may also interact with their students more and these frequent interactions with students would enable them to understand the students' needs and abilities better.

### **Conclusion and implications**

This study has described the development and validation of a self-report questionnaire to investigate teachers' self-perceived knowledge about oral English teaching. Results indicate that KOET questionnaire is reasonably valid and reliable. This instrument opens new possibilities for capturing the construct of teaching knowledge for teaching spoken English. A methodological analysis of teacher knowledge research suggests that small-scale qualitative studies have been a strong feature in literature (e.g. Clandinin 1985; Elbaz 1981; Francis 1995; Gholami and Husu 2010; van Dijk 2009). The approaches commonly adopted in such work are interviews and case studies that offer rich and in-depth insights into the complexities and specifics of the knowledge of a small selected group of teachers, but the findings are not generalisable even to other teachers in the same context. Although in recent years, quantitative methods such as surveys have been used to investigate teachers'

technological pedagogical content knowledge (e.g. Erdogan and Sahin 2010; Koehler and Mishra 2005; Mishra and Koehler 2006; Sahin 2011; Schmidt et al. 2009), no such attempts were seen in the exploration of language teachers' knowledge. The advantage of a large-scale survey is its capability to test hypotheses generated from such in-depth studies and to produce reliable that may be generalisable to a variety of contexts by using standardised measures. The KOET questionnaire should prove to be a useful tool for researchers interested in exploring teacher knowledge, particularly in the field of oral English teaching.

The framework guiding the questionnaire items in this study was an integrated model of teacher knowledge that weaves together PCK and KOS. The close relationship between these two domains of knowledge was supported with empirical evidence. This has gone some way to expanding our understanding of the construct of teacher knowledge. This study has also further contributed to the discussions by examining the relationships between teacher knowledge and their professional profiles. The findings could have some implications for the development of teacher education in China and hopefully for other EFL countries as well.

Although efforts to provide training and professional development for university EFL teachers in China have increased in recent years, current programmes often neglect the teaching of speaking (Wang et al. 2008). In light of the escalating demand for oral English instruction in China, it is well worth the effort of policy makers and teacher educators to work out effective pre-service training programmes to prepare teachers with sufficient linguistics and pedagogical knowledge that serve immediate personal purposes for the teachers, such as anxiety reduction and confidence building for the profession. In the meantime, there should be continual support for teachers' professional development through in-service teacher education programmes. As the teaching of speaking has been a weakness of English teachers in China and other countries (Chacon 2005; Li 1998; Liu and Dai 2003), professional development programmes should not only provide teachers with language skills

and pedagogical knowledge in grammar, reading and writing, but also give emphasis to listening and speaking so that teachers are able to make comprehensive efforts at helping students develop English competence.

As the results of the present study show, teachers' knowledge was significantly influenced by a number of personal characteristics related to their profession. It is important that teachers recognize in their efforts at improving their own language abilities. This can lead to the development of strong self-efficacy beliefs which can in turn boost their motivation to reach further beyond their skills and capabilities (Bandura 1997; Tschannen-Moran and Hoy 2007).

Teacher development programmes should also take cognisance of a widening gap in teachers' knowledge and skills, as there is a growing number of Chinese EFL teachers travelling overseas to do courses or graduate studies. Like other EFL countries such as China, Japan and Thailand are taking initiatives to improve the quality of English teacher training programmes by providing short-term overseas professional development programmes (Bodycott and Crew 2001; Lee 2009), the impact of such programmes merits further investigation. It is crucial for teacher educators and programme designers to achieve a better understanding of the strengths and limitations of such programmes, so that they could help teachers make best use of the overseas experiences for their personal and professional growth.

It is also important to explore how such overseas programmes can have a more lasting impact on teacher development. Meanwhile, the substantial impact of teachers' self-perceived ability on teacher knowledge suggests the need for teacher educators to provide teachers with not only language skills and pedagogical knowledge, but also ways to foster teacher efficacy (Chen and Goh 2011).

This study invites continuing research into the relationship between teacher knowledge and professional profiles. Pedagogical content knowledge and knowledge of students as well as other aspects of teacher knowledge about oral English teaching present themselves as key areas for further exploration. Questionnaires that are adequately developed, piloted and validated should still be used. More in-depth qualitative studies (e.g. ethnography, case study) about the effect of personal experiences on teacher knowledge would also be useful. To understand the factors that contribute to teacher development, longitudinal studies following teachers through various experiences, such as their training and overseas years, would be of great value.

In conclusion, this paper has explored how teachers' self-perceived knowledge about oral English teaching differs by their professional profiles. The KOET questionnaire has proved to be an efficient model to investigate teacher knowledge with special reference to the Chinese EFL contexts. As EFL countries share many characteristics in English teaching it would be of interest to see how KOET may also be useful for other EFL contexts.

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## **APPENDIX 1. Original Questions on Knowledge about Oral English Teaching (KOET)**

Respondents were asked to respond in the following ways according to their self-assessment of their knowledge.

1=None      2=Limited      3=Fair      4=Adequate    5=Excellent

Respondents were also asked to indicate the source(s) of their knowledge or skills (they may choose more than one option):

A = School learning experiences

B = Workshops or training programmes

C = Colleagues

D = Experiences in English-speaking countries

E = Classroom teaching experiences

F = Self-study

### **Part I: Pedagogical Content Knowledge of Oral English Instruction**

The amount of knowledge I think I have about the following is:

1. Teaching pronunciation
2. Teaching intonation
3. Teaching spoken grammar (e.g., heads, tails, ellipsis, repetition, etc.)
4. Teaching oral English vocabulary (e.g., deixis, idioms, discourse markers, etc.)
5. Teaching speech acts (e.g., inviting, requesting, complimenting, etc.)
6. Teaching conversational rules and structure, e.g., turn-taking
7. Increasing oral English fluency
8. Increasing oral English accuracy
9. Planning effective oral English tasks
10. Implementing oral English tasks

### **Part 2: Knowledge of Students**

The amount of knowledge I think I have about the following is:

1. Current oral English development stages of my students
2. Oral English learning experiences of my students
3. Oral English proficiency levels of my students
4. Assessing of students' oral performance
5. Diagnosing of students' oral performance
6. Developing student motivation of learning oral English
7. Maintaining student motivation of learning oral English
8. Balancing different oral English development needs