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Investigating Chinese Tertiary ESP Teachers’ Professional Development and Identity (Re)formation: Challenges, Needs and Pedagogical Practices

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A THESIS SUBMITTED IN FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY (PH.D.) IN EDUCATION (APPLIED LINGUISTICS)

THE UNIVERSITY OF AUCKLAND, AUCKLAND NEW ZEALAND 2017
ABSTRACT

The overarching purpose of this study is to shed light on the understanding of English for specific purposes (ESP) teachers’ lived experiences of professional development and identity (re)formation amid a new round of English educational reforms in China. The study draws on theories of teacher cognition and teacher knowledge, Activity Theory (Engeström, 2001), sociocultural theory of learning and identity (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Wenger, 1998), and the construct of ethico-politics of teachers’ identity work (Clarke, 2009a). A two-part mixed methods design was adopted consisting of a questionnaire survey (N=208), a survey of narrative frames (N=54), and an in-depth ethnographic and narrative-oriented multiple-case study (N=3).

The findings show that the challenges confronting ESP teachers are mainly derived from four sources: (1) insufficient ESP teacher knowledge, (2) individual teacher variables, (3) collective and collaborative relations with various stakeholders both within and between disciplinary boundaries, and (4) the systemic contradictions within the university activity system. Teachers’ needs mainly involve university policy and funding support for cross-disciplinary collaboration and professional development. With close field observations, I found each of the three case-study teachers had their own focuses and approaches to ESP teaching. Their focuses and approaches hinged on their cognition, past and present teaching experience, as well as their competence to implement the ESP curriculum and to deal with the various university stakeholders. Moreover, ESP teachers’ pedagogical practices were operationalised through boundary-crossing activities, which stand in sharp contrast to conventional General English teaching practices. In addition, the identity (re)formation and professional development of ESP teachers involved in this project was realised through participation and
negotiation within an emerging ESP community of practice, which inhabits a university activity system that experiences systemic contradictions at various levels as a consequence of its complex discursively-constructed power relations. This process has also witnessed the crucial role that teachers’ ethical agency played out in the ethical formation of teacher identity.

It is hoped that this project will contribute to research on ESP teacher knowledge and cognition, and generate insights into how language teachers both renegotiate their professional identities and enact professional development in a time of ongoing educational changes. Various implications, both of a theoretical and practical nature, as well as suggestions for future research, are also presented.
DEDICATION

To my late grandparents
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

My PhD journey has marked a significant turning point in my life. All the hard work of the past few years has brought me to where what it was possible to achieve is more than the sum of the hundreds of pages that make up a thesis. It’s the cognitive, emotional and mental growth that pays off all the anxieties, uncertainties, frustration, stress, and depression that I’ve endured. This said, I know I could not have made it without the support of a group of people.

First and foremost, I owe a great deal of gratitude to my supervisors: Prof. Stephen May and Prof. Lawrence Jun Zhang. As prominent academics, they have helped me shape the direction of this research. With trust and encouragement, they gave me enough room to grow as an independent academic. Meanwhile, whenever I sought them out for supervision and guidance, they were always ready to share their scholarship and academic resources. They have been very instrumental in my growth as a scholar, and have greatly inspired me with their wisdom and expertise.

I would also like to extend my sincere appreciation to the teachers who participated in the research and who shared their stories and experiences with me.

Much appreciation goes to Prof. Alison Jones for her academic writing workshop and her encouraging acknowledgement of the progress that I have made. My gratitude also goes to Prof. John Read, who generously offered guidance in relation to my research interest in ESP/EMI assessment. I would like to thank Assoc. Prof. Katie Fitzpatrick, who shared with me her paper submitted to the AERA conference. I’m grateful to Dr. Peter Keegan, Dr. Sophie Tauwehe Tamati, Dr. Tekawahaw, Ms Maryrose Houston, Ms Rose Mandica Yukich, and Ms Tepora Pupepuke. Their friendship, care and help in
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I am grateful for the financial support of the New Zealand-China Doctoral Research Scholarship, which made my PhD study possible.

Warm thanks go to my parents and family for their everlasting love and support in every step of my PhD journey. And finally, I owe an especial debt of gratitude to Dr. Richard Heraud. Thank you for supporting me and assisting me in building my confidence in this still largely unknown land.
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The undersigned hereby certify that:
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<th>Description</th>
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<tr>
<td>ESP</td>
<td>English for specific purposes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ELT</td>
<td>English language teaching</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GE</td>
<td>General English</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CET</td>
<td>College English teaching</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7-year Programme</td>
<td>Severn-year Basic Medical Science Programme</td>
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<tr>
<td>CET-4</td>
<td>College English Test-Band 4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CET-6</td>
<td>College English Test-Band 6</td>
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<td>CECR</td>
<td>College English Curriculum Requirements</td>
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<td>MOE</td>
<td>Ministry of Education</td>
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<td>EMI</td>
<td>English as the medium of instruction</td>
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<td>AT</td>
<td>Activity Theory</td>
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<tr>
<td>CoP</td>
<td>Community of practice</td>
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<td>PBL</td>
<td>Problem-based learning</td>
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<tr>
<td>CBI</td>
<td>Content-based instruction</td>
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<tr>
<td>CLIL</td>
<td>Content and language integrated learning</td>
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<td>EFA</td>
<td>Exploratory factor analysis</td>
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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Chapter Overview

The introductory chapter begins with an explanation of the rationale for embarking on the investigation of this topic. This is followed by an articulation of the three questions that will be addressed in this research, after which an outline is given explaining how the research is situated within a wider context of this study. Following this, there is a theoretical preamble that expositions the main complexities of the thesis argument. Next, the chapter moves to examine the contributions this project will make, both in the theoretical and practical domains related to the questions addressed in this study. This is followed by an explanation of how my choice of topic implicates me in drawing on my own story as an English teacher and researcher from China. Finally, I outline my motivation for why I regard this topic to be important to the field of language teacher education and professional development.

1.1 The Rationale of the Research

The primary reason and the incentive for this research stems from the fact that English for specific purposes (ESP) teachers-in-the-making remain under-researched. These teachers are neglected in the field of ESP research, which dwells heavily on the complexity of the curriculum, needs-analysis, the linguistic features of texts, and ESP learners (Wu & Badger, 2009). They are also neglected by research interest in English language teaching (ELT) and teacher education. This is probably because ESP has had difficulty establishing itself as a free-standing area within ELT, since “many of the ideas
closely associated with ESP have been subsequently appropriated by the ‘parent’ discipline” (Flowerdew, 1990, p. 327, quoted in Brunton, 2009, p. 3).

This is a pity because qualified ESP teachers, as successful mediators between knowledge and students, are not simply produced through pre-service English teacher education programmes or in-service training. Nor is it a simple and automatic metamorphosis for English teachers to become competent in ESP instruction. Rather, teachers who are new to the field of ESP are making an effort to assert themselves within an uncharted professional trajectory which, as a complex and recursive process of learning and adaptation, formation and reformation, is mediated by multiple factors, as is particularly the case in contemporary China.

The deepening globalisation and marketization of higher education has entrenched China’s incentive to reform and update its higher educational system. Chinese universities are aiming at cultivating professional competitiveness and the development of a deeper and broader talent pool, with the intention of competing with local and overseas academia and job markets. To this effect, universities are adopting new language policies and English education patterns. Since the implementation of the College English Curriculum Requirements (CECR) (Ministry of Education [MOE], 2007), traditional curricular emphasis on the teaching of reading, grammar and translation for non-English majors has shifted to fostering students’ communicative competence and learner autonomy.

Recent national curriculum policy changes have explicated that English should function as a media for scientific advancement and cultural exchange. In the wake of the fact that English has established its status as academic and professional lingua franca worldwide, and in response to China’s globalised and market-oriented strategies for economic growth, English for specific purposes (ESP) is making significant inroads into
College English programmes, as an increasing number of higher institutions are providing ESP courses (see Cai, 2015, for a review).

Given a lack of an explicitly stated ESP curriculum objective, I would like to use this umbrella term ESP to refer to English both for academic purposes and professional purposes instead of dividing them into two separate ones, as is common practice in Chinese universities. Following Dudley-Evans and John (1998), the purpose of ESP is to cater to the needs of learners, draw on the disciplinary methodology and culture, and centre on the discourse and genre of the discipline. These distinctive features make ESP a preferable approach to equipping students with the English proficiency urgently required in today’s restructured educational and professional settings.

However, in tandem with the growing popularity of ESP in Chinese tertiary English education, heated debates have arisen over the legitimacy of ESP becoming the primary orientation and objectives of contemporary College English Teaching (CET). To a large extent, contemporary CET is still dominated by a traditional General English (GE) teaching paradigm which is grounded in the teaching philosophy of general education and also aimed at fostering students’ all-round quality. Meanwhile, a number of issues have emerged concerning the effectiveness of ESP implementation. For instance, due to a lack of explicitly scripted positioning of ESP in CECR, there is no unitary requirement for ESP curriculum and syllabus. This leads in practice to diverse attitudes, reactions and enactment of ESP. In addition, a commonly recognized impediment for effective ESP teaching is the lack of appropriate teaching materials. Nevertheless, the overriding concern that provokes the general climate of scepticism towards the legitimacy of doing ESP in China relates to in-service ESP teachers’ accountability and quality.
Currently, driven by ongoing curriculum reforms and the increasingly higher learning needs of the students, a large number of tertiary English teachers in China are making the arduous transition from teaching GE to teaching ESP. The implementation of the ESP programme, in parallel to or in substitution for the traditional GE programme, along with university-wide educational innovation, spells the end of the old “activity system” (Engeström, 2001). Stepping out from the familiar GE teaching terrain, teachers are struggling to reconstruct their professional identities as ESP teachers so as to meet the expectations of their institutions and students. ESP is conceived as a challenge as well as an opportunity.

A primary challenge exists in the fact that “ESP requires superior teachers” (Strevens, 1980, p. 119, quoted in Richards, 1997, p. 115). This statement still holds water half a century after ESP arose as a term in the 1960s and is truer than ever in the contemporary globalized but also “glocalized” world (Robertson, 1995) where global and local needs have become intertwined. Encompassing an “ever-diversifying and expanding range of purposes” (Belcher, 2006, p. 134), ESP, with its emphasis on needs-analysis and outcomes, places higher demands on the practitioner’s five-in-one role as a teacher, collaborator, course designer and materials provider, researcher and evaluator (Dudley-Evans, 1998).

What is more, in an increasingly heterogeneous and multifaceted ESP classroom, the nature of communication is made challenging by the difference of the subject matter knowledge possessed by students and the language teacher. Losing their prior status as the “authority of knowledge” or “primary knower”, even expert GE teachers may feel at a loss. The ESP classroom has thus become a site full of disturbance, tensions and unpredictable situations and, as such, a site of asymmetrical power relations in
poststructuralist terms. The knowledge structure and pedagogical competence of ESP teachers are enduring an acid test.

However, the institutional support available for teachers to overcome the challenges and enact professional development is far from enough. Additionally, conflicting discourses emerge when ESP teachers fail to perform their designated role and function that are prescribed by the university. Actually, the professional context of ESP teachers is not often a positive one. For one thing, the university’s old activity system has a long-standing centralised management style and hierarchy of power relations which are not well suited for teaching innovation and teacher evaluation. For another, boundaries prevail between different disciplines, which not only make collaboration and collegiality easier said than done, but also lead to the marginalisation of some disciplines like ESP (e.g., Arnó-Macià & Mancho-Barés, 2015). This means that ESP teachers are likely to be located in an under-privileged position in any university activity system where its complex power dynamics are fraught with contradictions.

Varghese, Morgan, Johnston and Johnson (2005) argued that “in order to understand language teaching and learning we need to understand teachers: the professional, cultural, political and individual identities which they claim or which are assigned to them” (p. 22). To date, there has been scarcely any in-depth exploration of Chinese ESP teachers’ professional development and identity (re)formation. Little is known about how they learn to teach ESP, which “is always the process of becoming: a time of formation and transformation, of scrutiny into what one is doing, and who one can become” (Britzman, 1991, p. 8). Taking account of the challenges inherent in ESP per se, as well as the conflicting discourses and complex power dynamics involved in both macro- and micro-contexts, I propose to conduct an empirically-based
investigation of the challenges, needs and pedagogical practices of tertiary ESP teachers in China. In the course of this investigation, I delve further into exploring their lived experiences of learning to become ESP teachers through participating in practice in a socially, culturally, and historically-specific university activity system.

In so doing, I aim to shed light on how Chinese ESP teachers realize their identity transformation through learning in practice, along with exercising their agency in dealing with various discourses and power relations. This study will inform research in ESP teaching and teacher education in China. It will also contribute to the theoretical and empirical understanding of language teacher education, professional development and identity construction in broader contexts.

1.2 Research Questions

Given the body of literature discussing the challenges that ESP imposes on English teachers, little empirically-based research has been conducted to date to identify the nature of the challenges, and the ensuing needs that teachers have. As such, I first address this gap with a quantitative inquiry into Chinese ESP teachers’ perceived challenges and related needs for institutional support. I then move on to an in-depth qualitative inquiry into ESP teachers’ pedagogical practices and lived experiences of switching from GE to ESP. In particular, I focus on exploring the ways in which identity (re)formation is intertwined with professional development in a changing university activity system. In this activity system, ESP teachers, as agentic beings, are doing identity work in the context of various contradictions, conflicting discourses and complex power relations. Specifically, I intend to answer the following questions:
1. What are Chinese tertiary ESP teachers’ current challenges and needs in their professional practices?

2. How do they perform ESP pedagogical practices?

3. How do they (re)form their professional identity and enact professional development in the transition from being a GE teacher to an ESP teacher?

1.3 The Context of the Research

This research is based in mainland China which is now undergoing a new round of English education reforms at all levels. Part One – Stage One of the study, which aims to lead to a general understanding of the challenges and needs encountered by tertiary ESP teachers in China, was oriented to teachers with no more than three years of ESP teaching experience across the country. The rest of the study was set in a focal university in a regional capital in northern China.

Founded in 1926, and as one of the top medical institutions in China, this focal university enjoys a high reputation for its remarkable achievements in medical science and education. Aiming at becoming a robust research and teaching base that is “first-grade in China and well-known in the world” – as is documented in the focal university’s mission statement – the university has made unremitting efforts in pushing forward the education and pedagogy reforms in the past five years. English-Chinese bilingual instruction is advocated for all subject courses, and English as the medium of instruction (EMI) is implemented in the Seven-year Basic Medical Sciences Programme (7-year Programme for short hereafter), which is a combined undergraduate and Master’s degree programme. In response, the English Department has updated the curriculum and syllabus, adopted classified and graded teaching, employed task-based
and content-based instruction, and introduced digital technologies into classroom teaching. Among all these initiatives, the most pronounced is a substantive increase in ESP instruction, which sees the university moving ahead of many other higher institutions in the nation-wide English educational reforms.

In terms of the status of the English curriculum and teaching arrangement, English is mandated as a compulsory credit-bearing course. Undergraduates and 7-year Programme students are provided with GE courses in the first year and ESP courses in the second, whereas postgraduates only get one semester’s ESP learning. Generally in this university, every two years is seen as a complete English teaching cycle. Teachers are divided into three teaching panels responsible for undergraduates, 7-year programme students, and postgraduates, respectively. The member constitution of the first two panels is relatively stable while the postgraduate teaching panel is often made up of teachers selected from the other two. Most teachers teach GE in Year One and ESP in Year Two. While 7-year Programme teachers usually deal with the same student cohorts in each teaching cycle, undergraduate programme teachers may face different students in Year Two as a result of the classified and graded teaching.

The three teaching panels have a total of 54 teachers, all of whom are university graduates from the faculties of Arts, holding degrees in Linguistics, Applied Linguistics or British and American Literature. Aged from 33 to 55, all teachers have been in service for at least 6 years and have a minimum of one semester’s ESP teaching experience. Before 2010, the sole teaching objective was to enhance students’ grasp of GE and raise the pass rate of College English Test Band 4 or Band 6 (CET-4/-6 hereafter). Therefore, except for two or three senior teachers who were assigned to teach postgraduates Medical English Translation, most teachers were only engaged in GE teaching. Since
the university launched an array of curriculum and pedagogy reforms in the disciplinary faculties and promoted university-wide bilingual instruction in 2010 and EMI in 2013, English teachers have become aware of the necessity to switch from GE to ESP, a new terrain that is outside their expertise. Unfortunately, the English Department has seldom received sufficient policy or funding support for the professional development of the individual teachers or the department as a whole. As a consequence, self-training is the primary way by which these teachers prepare for ESP teaching tasks. At one point, the department invited subject matter teachers to give plenary lectures on basic medical knowledge and assigned English teachers to attend several common-core mainstream courses. These are the only formal ESP-related training sessions that the English teachers have received to this point.

1.4 Theoretical Preamble

Theoretically, underlying this research is the central idea that the individual and the social are mutually constitutive. In investigating ESP teachers’ knowledge system and pedagogical practices, I am primarily inspired and guided by theorisations about teacher cognition and teacher knowledge. Richards and Nunan’s (1990) seminal work directs my attention to the idea that teaching involves higher-level cognitive processes. Language teaching is now understood as “a process which is defined by dynamic interactions among cognition, context and experience” (Borg, 2015, p. 157). While the existing typologies and categorisations of teacher knowledge helped to generate a preliminary identification of the nature of the challenges and needs in relation to teachers’ knowledge bases for ESP teaching, in the ensuing in-depth scrutiny of ESP teachers’ knowledge construction and pedagogical practices, I was more influenced by sociocultural and constructivist approaches to teacher learning, which underscore the
key role of contexts and emphasize “teachers’ situated, dynamic, and embodied knowing in action” (Kubanyiova & Feryok, 2015, p. 438).

Grounded in a sociocultural orientation, I anchor my examination of ESP teachers’ professional development and identity (re)formation in the sociocultural theory of situated learning (Lave & Wenger, 1991) and community of practice (Wenger, 1998). By referring to identity as developing a sense of belonging to a community of practice, the sociocultural theory of learning posits that learning and identity are inseparable: they are dual aspects of the same phenomenon. For the purpose of this research, situated learning and community of practice offer significant insights into ESP teachers’ trajectory of professional development and identity formation.

In addition, informed by previous socio-historical studies of individual development (see Tsui, Edwards, Lopez-Real, & Kwan, 2009, for an overview), the interactions among people in communities of practice are structured by the shared activity in a given institution. I thus had a particular interest in scrutinizing the relationship between structural factors, social practices, discourse/semiotic mediation, interpersonal relationships and the individual ESP teacher’s professional experience and growth. To this end, Activity Theory is a powerful conceptual lens. The triangular model of an activity system makes visible the contextual components, the individual actions and the interplay between them. Most importantly, it helps to reveal conflicting discourses and contradictions residing in the university activity system, Therefore, it facilitates identifying and interpreting the interactions between the context and the individual learning and identity (re)formation of ESP teachers (see Engeström, 2016).

Parallel to the sociocultural perspective, I also adopted a poststructuralist view when exploring the (re)formation of ESP teachers’ identity, which recognizes identity
as dynamically evolving, intrinsically related to others, and consisting of multiple sub-identities (Akker & Meijer, 2011; Roger & Scott, 2008). Considering the challenges, tensions, and disturbances that might emerge with the transition from GE to ESP, and the conflicting discourses and contradictions in the university context where ESP teachers operationalise their identity, I was keen on exploring how identity acted as an analytical tool to examine ESP teachers’ perceptions and performance of teaching and learning; how ESP teachers were doing identity work, as agentive beings and amid the various contradictions, discourses and power relations that characterised their activity system; and “how these complexities might be productively leveraged” (Clarke, 2009b, p. 146) so as to make opportunities for ESP teachers’ professional development. To this end, I also incorporated Clarke’s (2009a) notion of the ethico-politics of identity work.

1.5 The Contribution of the Research

Drawing on the guiding theories mentioned above, and adopting a mixed methods design, this research has presented a relatively holistic study of different facets of the professional experiences and identity of tertiary ESP teachers in China. It is believed to contribute to the following aspects and research interests.

First, this research is among only the few contributions to scholarship on ESP teacher knowledge and cognition. To date, most literature on ESP teacher knowledge exists only in the form of theoretical descriptions and discussions. Small data-driven studies have been conducted to investigate the knowledge system of ESP teachers in specific sociocultural contexts. This research, through investigating ESP teachers’ challenges and needs in relation to their knowledge structure and pedagogical practices, has identified some basic domains of ESP teacher knowledge. The ESP Teachers’
Challenges and Needs Questionnaire (ESP-TCNQ) I have developed and validated can be applied as a tool in further investigations. In addition, the close observation and description of ESP teachers’ classroom pedagogical practices provides valuable empirical evidence for understanding ESP teaching and teacher cognition.

Second, through exploring the trajectories of professional learning and the identity (re)formation of Chinese tertiary ESP teachers, this research has produced insights into how language teachers (re)negotiate their professional identities and enact professional development in a time of ongoing educational reforms. Drawing on the sociocultural theories of learning and the concept of community of practice (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Wenger, 1998), this research has simultaneously illuminated processes of ESP teacher learning and identity formation, as well as the intertwined relationship that these two dual aspects share.

Meanwhile, this research is supportive of Activity Theory as an effective analytic lens for identifying systemic contradictions that hinder but also create possibilities for teachers’ individual and collective change. Furthermore, this research enriches existing academic knowledge on the role of language teachers’ ethical agency in making personal and social transformations amid institutional contradictions, top-down authoritative discourses, and asymmetrical power dynamics.

Finally, this research has both theoretical and empirical implications in a number of respects. It suggests a context-specific conceptualisation of ESP teacher knowledge and ESP teachers’ knowing in action. Also, it contributes empirical evidence that may help advance the theory of community of practice (Wenger, 1998), particularly in terms of the theory’s weakness when addressing wider power relations. Additionally, grounded on the findings in relation to ESP teachers’ ethical agency and identity work,
this research has implications for future research on collective identity and agency. A significant empirical implication exists for university leaders and policy makers, who, when informed by the findings of this research, might hopefully feel the imperative to recognize ESP as an independent discipline in its own right, and take measures to facilitate language teachers’ professional well-being and development.

1.6 Role of the Researcher in This Study

I have included this section based on my conviction that, in a mixed methods research project, where a narrative-oriented approach and an ethnographic-case study are taking a predominant position, there should be a focus on the role of the researcher. The reasons are two-fold.

First, the researcher’s identity is important to the relationship between the researcher and participants, the complexity of which has been well documented in a body of research in the field of language education (e.g., Barkhuizen, 2009; Hawkins, 2004; Norton & Early, 2011). This relationship deserves special attention when it comes to a specific cultural context. In this research, for instance, I was highly vigilant with respect to the traditional cultural norms of discourse, and participants’ sensitivity to power relations in terms of the social discourse repertoires and genres. Chinese cultural tradition preaches “谨言慎行, 君子之道”1, which means a gentleman would rather keep silent than talk impulsively. The participants in this study, as cultural beings, are more

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1 This saying is cited from The Caigentan (Chinese: 菜根譚; pinyin: Càigēntán; literally: "Vegetable Root Discourse"), which is a text written by the Ming Dynasty scholar and philosopher Hong Zicheng. This compilation of aphorisms eclectically combines elements from the Three teachings (Confucianism, Daoism and Buddhism), and is comparable to Marcus Aurelius' Meditations or La Rouchefoucauld's Maximes. Retrieved from https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Caigentan
or less influenced by this discursive norm. In this regard, the subtlety of power relations involving the researcher and teachers can never be underestimated. I was thus very concerned to “avoid coercive relations of power and to promote collaborative relations of power” (Norton & Early, 2011, p. 423) between me and the teachers participating in this investigation. To be open with the participants about my background information, as I contemplated, was the best way to build a rapport and thus form collaborative relations.

Second, it is always my belief that there is no absolute “objectiveness” in research, be it quantitative or qualitative. I would like to acknowledge my personal perspectives and research design, engagement of participants, interpretation of the findings, and even my reporting on the whole research project to be a coherent narrative and, as such, is inextricably influenced by my socially, culturally and historically constructed worldview. Therefore, it might be helpful for readers to better understand my own position in and approach to the research if I present a brief account of my experiences as a learner, a teacher and an emergent researcher.

My Trajectory as a Learner and a Teacher

I was born into a working class family, and spent most of my formative years in a regional capital in Northeast China. It is my family legacy that “knowledge can change a person’s fate”. Learning for change and for the better, therefore, has been deeply inscribed into my mind and has, as such, motivated me to work my way all the way through from being a hard-working student who was always ranked in the top three in the class to becoming a tertiary English teacher who was appraised as highly promising and capable in the university.
When I was a middle school student, English was such an important subject that my chance of getting admitted into a top university was largely decided by my marks in English. In the university, as an English major student, I imagined my future as a diplomat, a senior interpreter, or a white-collar worker in one of the world’s top 500 corporations, all based on my English proficiency and the various certificates that I acquired. Because of my excellent undergraduate academic performance, I was granted a scholarship to enrol in the Masters’ programme in applied linguistics. On completing my Masters’, I naturally became – it seemed – an English teacher in a Chinese university.

Being an English teacher in the university was once, and perhaps still is, a job that the general public regard as ideal for a female. In most people’s eyes, this job is stable, less challenging, and romanticised by the exotic cultural flavour that the English language carries with it. However, my impression is that it is always a high-stakes cause replete with challenges, not least in the ever-changing socioeconomic educational landscape.

In the early years of my career, I strived to be a “good teacher”, just as I tried to be a “good student” when I was in school. When English teachers’ performances were assessed against students’ College English Test-Band 4 (CET-4) and –Band 6 (CET-6) pass rate, I focused all my pedagogical activities on these two national English tests, for which I was adored by my students for the manner in which I “coached them for tests”. When the university launched English teaching reforms advocating such and such teaching approaches, which were said to be innovative and popular with authorities in the field, I was often the first to introduce them into my classroom teaching. I was a passionate teacher, a caring friend to my students and a model teacher among my
colleagues. Who I was and what I should do at that time were largely contingent on how others looked at me and my work.

However, how with time, things have changed dramatically! Deepening globalisation has pushed China to join the trends of internationalisation and marketization of higher education. English education has become increasingly utilitarian-oriented. Accordingly, the university mandated an English curriculum focused on English for Specific Purposes (ESP). All the English teachers were required to make a sharp turn to this new curriculum without enough preparation. Like most of my colleagues, due to a lack of specialised knowledge in the content area, the effectiveness of my ESP teaching and my sense of self-efficacy as an ESP teacher was greatly undermined. Meanwhile, as my university had stringent requirements regarding research productivity as the primary benchmark for professional progression, I was thrown by a new dilemma. While I under huge pressure to learn to effectively teach ESP, I also had to struggle to meet the university’s “unrealistically high” expectations for research engagement, which almost took up all my after-work time. Every day, I was juggling multiple tasks and shuttling between different roles as a learner, a teacher and an emergent researcher.

My Motivation for This Project

It was in those days when I wrestled that I began to critically reflect on my professional identity and the institutional context in which I worked. I realised shifting from being a GE teacher to an ESP teacher was a process of identity transformation. “Who I am as a teacher” was in a constant dialogic relation between how I defined myself and how I am defined by others, including my students, colleagues, and the university administrators. And it is in a constant dialogic between my intrinsic agency and extrinsic motivation.
I also realised that when facing the challenges of doing ESP and the stress of professional development, I was not adequately supported or empowered by the university. My voice was seldom attended to in the university’s centralized and top-down hierarchy. Like most of my colleagues, I was a passive and impotent teacher subject in the moment when structural policies, assessment regime, and hegemonic administration changes were made. When our ESP teaching effectiveness was criticized by either our university or our students, I found it hard to defend my own personal commitment to and investment in ESP teaching. How was I to justify that institutional support was indispensable to the constitution of a qualified ESP teacher? I understood already that ESP teachers’ identity construction and professional development are closely related to the effectiveness of ESP teaching. I also believed that the contradictions stemming from problematic power relations and the mismatch between the prescribed ESP objectives and the reality might result in this ambiguity being unresolvable.

These thoughts drove me to explore the lived experiences of the thousands of ESP teachers in China who may or may not empathise with my frustrations, as we are all making a strenuous effort to become effective ESP teachers in similar social, cultural, and historical contexts. I was convinced that there were general challenges and needs concerning the knowledge base of ESP teaching. With regard to our teaching selves and learning trajectories, I recognized the shaping power of the immediate social context, and that this was liable to impose a set of predefined roles and functions leading to a sort of collective and unitary institutional identity. Nevertheless, given the uniqueness of each ESP teacher’s social history and cognitive and affective conditions, each teacher will form his/her own unique teaching self at the intersection of social discourse and practice. Bearing these considerations in mind, I decided to begin my inquiry with a
large-scale quantitative investigation of ESP teachers’ challenges and needs. It then focus on exploring the collective attributes of identity and practice of ESP teachers in one university, with the ultimate intention of exploring in detail the lived experiences of several individual teachers.

Reflecting on my trajectory as a learner, a teacher, and a researcher, I had the sense that what makes who I am as an ESP teacher comprises a series of dots that connect the past and present, and that extend into the future. This sensation led me to recall Bamberg’s (2011, p. 12) words:

At some point in socio- and ontogenesis, life begins to co-jell into important events, events tie into episodes, and episodes tie into a life story—and the use of the term important in this context translates into life-forming.

Curious about other ESP teacher’s life-forming stories, I was eager to conduct an ethnographic case study. I hoped to be able to participate, overtly or covertly, in individual ESP teacher’s lives for “an extended period of time, watching what happens, listening to what is said, [and] asking questions” (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1995, p. 1), with the intention of being able to present an account of their professional experience from an emic perspective. Meanwhile, concurring with the idea that “narratives play a pivotal role in the construction of the self” (Curwood, 2014, p.158), I will co-construct the life stories of the ESP teachers in the investigation, drawing close attention to how participants draw on various narrative resources to position themselves in particular linguistic, social and institutional communities (Pavlenko, 2007).
1.7 Structure of the Thesis

This thesis comprises eight chapters. Following the introductory chapter, Chapter Two reviews ESP teaching and teachers in China, the challenges ESP teachers face, and prior research on language teacher learning and identity. Chapter Three lays the theoretical foundations of the research. The methodology is described in detail in Chapter Four. Chapters Five and Six are the findings chapters with a separate discussion for each part of the investigation. After that, a general discussion based on the findings of all parts of the research is presented in Chapter Seven. Finally, Chapter Eight is devoted to concluding the whole thesis with implications and recommendations for future research.
CHAPTER TWO
LITERATURE REVIEW

Chapter Overview

Based on an assessment of the literature on this topic, this chapter aims to explain the rationale for the articulation of the research questions that address the topic of this research project. The complexity of the phenomenon under study will be elucidated, and the theoretical and methodological approaches used to address these questions will be explained. Furthermore, this chapter positions my research within the wider academic conversations in this field.

In the first section, I review ESP teaching and the profile that ESP teachers have in China with the purpose of raising the argument that while ESP is gaining increasing popularity, ESP teacher preparation and professional development is still largely ignored. This is followed by a focus on the challenges confronting Chinese ESP teachers in relation to the complexity of ESP per se and various contextual factors that characterise their working situation. Finally, I examine prior research on language teacher learning and identity with the intention of setting up the theoretical and methodological orientation for this research project.

2.1 A Review on ESP Teaching and Teachers in China

2.1.1 ESP: A New Trend of Tertiary English Education in the 21st Century

In China, English language teaching spans all primary, secondary and tertiary level syllabi. Since China’s adoption of the reform and opening-up policy in late 1970s, English teaching and learning has boomed, evolving into a mass activity. During the
past three decades, English has fulfilled unique domestic social functions: English for Chinese purposes in Chinese settings (Lo Bianco & Gao, 2009), which is primarily due to the fact that English education has been carried out in a context characteristic of top-down guidelines and centralised standards. The Chinese Government has issued a series of policies promoting English education at all levels. Generally, these policies and requirements have reflected China’s socio-political and economic needs for change and, as such, have shaped the recent landscape of tertiary English teaching and learning. Currently College English Teaching (CET) in China is undergoing a new round of reforms. There is heated discussion about the future of CET: should it still aim at enhancing students’ all-round GE proficiency or should it form a bridge between GE and English for specific purposes or English for academic purposes, with GE still currently dominating the curriculum? A review of the status quo of CET predicts that ESP will become the long-term trend as China extends into the 21st century.

In retrospect, CET has witnessed three stages: restoration, growth and improvement (Liu & Dai, 2004). Among a plethora of policies from 1979 through to 2000, the most influential are two College English syllabi issued in 1985 and 1986, which stipulated the administration of the College English Test-Band 4 (CET-4) and College English Test-Band 6 (CET-6). Since 1987, these two tests have been administered nation-wide and have been “nationally perceived as the key to personal and institutional success” (Feng, 2009), which has had the effect of fueling the burgeoning craze for English language learning. Passing these tests placed tremendous pressure on students, teachers and other stakeholders in tertiary institutions, for the reason that they are linked to gaining of university degrees, assessment of teachers, and the university’s academic reputation. On the job market, many employers in government
sectors as well as those of the private or foreign-owned companies regarded CET-4/-6 certificates as a prerequisite for employment. In the workplace, the certificates continued to play a role in job promotion. To a large extent, it is CET-4/-6 that acted as a spur to the national campaign of English learning.

During this surge of interest in learning English, the MOE issued the *College English Curriculum Requirements* (CECR) in 2004. This document is distinguished from earlier policies in a number of key aspects. In terms of course objectives, the former emphasis on reading ability shifted to developing students’ ability to use English in an all-round way, especially with regard to speaking and listening. Teaching requirements were reformed, from levels one to three, in order to address the diversification of educational conditions and contexts, and, in particular, the individualized teaching model. Being trialled for three years, the CECR 2004 were refined and become the CECR 2007, with minute amendments.

The influence of CET-4/-6 and CECR on China’s higher English education is multi-layered. After years of a national English learning scenario from primary all the way through to tertiary education, people’s English level has been raised resulting in students nowadays having a much better command of English on entrance to university. Nevertheless, CET still largely follows the tradition of teaching English as a discipline in terms of the curriculum (Cai, 2014b), which can hardly satisfy students’ changing needs, nor can it contribute to China’s strategic development in the 21st century.

Since China has opted for a globalized and market-oriented strategy to achieve its economic goals, the longstanding tenet of viewing English as functioning “for Chinese purposes in Chinese settings” has gradually changed (Bolton & Graddol, 2012). The administrative imperative that CET-4/-6 should be a prerequisite for a college degree is
no longer so. This prerequisite has been abolished. Emphasis has now been redirected towards the cultivation of student’s all-round English language competence so as to better equip them for future study, work and social communication (CECR 2007). Given that the ultimate goal of ESP is to enhance students’ English proficiency for both academic and vocational purposes, an ESP-oriented CET curriculum is understood to be more appropriate to today’s needs.

Unfortunately, debates over the legitimate position of ESP in the CET curriculum continue among Chinese English teaching scholars and experts. Intellectuals holding a humanist view of education strongly resist an ESP-oriented curriculum, arguing that “language learning should be part of liberal education” (see Gao, 2010). Those who embrace a more utilitarian view advocate instead that CET should be dominated by ESP (Cai, 2014a). Despite the ongoing controversies between supporters of either side, current English education in China as a whole is still dominated by GE teaching, which is criticized by the general public as being both time-consuming and inefficient.

Beginning to learn English in Grade 3 in primary school, most contemporary Chinese tertiary students have had approximately 12 years of school learning English. Unfortunately, students’ motivation for English learning is largely test-driven, while their English proficiency for communicative or academic purposes tends to be low. Wang’s (2007) nation-wide survey found that 65% of university students spend at least a quarter of their learning time studying English just to pass CET-4/-6 and other English exams. Even in Tsinghua University, the most prestigious higher education institution in China, “the undergraduates who have passed CET-4/-6 find it fairly challenging to do academic reading or writing [in English]” (Sun, 2005). On the other hand, most students complain that they learn little from CET courses. The primary purpose of
attending English class seems to be to obtain credits, to gain high marks, or to win scholarships (see Cai & Liao, 2010; Fan, 2013; Zhao, Lei & Zhao, 2009).

This long-time-low-efficiency syndrome is rooted in the homogeneity of English curricula throughout secondary and tertiary levels. After reviewing the English curricula used by senior high school students, non-English major undergraduates, and English majors, Shu (2004) pointed out that all three documents have regarded a ‘solid English language foundation’ as the primary goal and advocated cultivating students’ cultural awareness. It is reasonable to speculate that the overlapping requirements encountered at these different levels of study may lead to content repetition and the formation of fuzzy boundaries between curricula. According to Cai and Liao (2010), statistics on the optional English courses, provided to non-English major undergraduates in 65 Chinese universities, show that most of the courses are in fact the same as those offered in English majors: American and British Literature, Cultural and Society, Cross-cultural Communication, Morphology, Advanced English, to list a few. Meanwhile, as a result of these similar curriculum goals, CET is perceived by a large number of students as a repetition of senior high school English courses with only slight difference in content. Consequently, their learning motivation is low and attitudes are negative.

In addition, the teaching hours and course credits allocated to General English courses have been compressed. Since the 1980s, CET has prescribed a total of 288 hours of compulsory GE teaching. These hours are to run over four semesters, and account for 16 credits. Though CECR 2007 produces 16 credits, most universities in recent years have begun to reduce the teaching hours and credits allocated to CET. Based on a large-scale survey in 230 universities across 24 provinces in China, the University Foreign Language Education Committee found shrinking of CET in higher institutions to be
prevalent; a trend is particularly salient in top universities (Wang, 2009). For instance, course credits have been reduced to 8-9 credits in Peking University, Fu Dan University, and Sun Yat-sen University, and to 4-6 credits in Tsinghua University, Shanghai Jiaotong University, among others. At the same time, many universities now allow new students to apply for an English course exemption if they manage to pass CET 4/6 or other university-based proficiency tests on entering the university (Cai, 2011).

The shrinkage of course credits and teaching hours is a corollary with both students’ improved English levels and their new learning needs. As senior middle schools have improved their English education, most university freshmen’s GE proficiency is much better than their counterparts in 2007, when the most recent CECR was issued. A considerable amount of a university freshmen’s English ability comes fairly close to meeting the course objectives prescribed by CECR 2007. No wonder then that the traditional programme of two-year GE teaching is often criticized as lasting too long. Students prefer to learn ESP instead of simply mastering the language as a subject (Cai & Chen, 2013).

CET’s *de facto* long-hour-low-efficiency syndrome and the discrepancy between needs and provision cause people to be dubious about the role of GE in the Chinese university curriculum. More and more Chinese English educators and experts are opting for ESP (Liu, 2010, cited in Cai, 2010a). They predict that ESP courses will become the new direction and the core of the CET curriculum in the 21st century (Hu, 2011). However, this view is challenged by a group of scholars, whose opinions are summarised by Cai (2013) as follows. First, ESP teaching requires a certain amount of subject knowledge which most college English teachers do not have. Second, the English competence of most college students is not good enough to enable them to
benefit from ESP. Third, ESP teaching is not an effective way to raise students’ English level. Fourth, ESP teaching is in conflict with CECR’s objective of all-round quality cultivation. Given these criticisms, it is necessary to have a look at the history and status quo of ESP. The next section will critically review ESP in China.

### 2.1.2 Problematising ESP in China: History and Status Quo

ESP research and teaching practice in China lag considerably behind ESP research and teaching practice in the west. The earliest introduction of the concept and relevant teaching materials dates back to 1978 (e.g., Yang, 1978), almost 20 years after its origin in the west in the 1960s. After the introduction of ESP, the first two decades witnessed a slow increase in the number of journal articles in Chinese academia introducing the origin of ESP, its concept, classification, and its theoretical rationales. However, there was little empirical study of ESP teaching practice (Qu, 1999). Since the beginning of the 21st century, with China’s entry into the WTO and the deepening of economic globalization, Chinese society is exhibiting a growing demand for talents among students who are well equipped with disciplinary knowledge as well as advanced English proficiency. As a result, ESP research has begun to grow in both number and dimension. There are emerging topics that cover areas such as the introduction and evaluation of the latest theoretical and methodological developments of ESP in the world (e.g., Yan & Fen, 2007), the analysis of the nature and characteristics of ESP (Qin, 2003), the discussion on the relationship between ESP and CET (e.g., Cai, 2013, 2014; Luo & Li, 2008), investigations of ESP teaching methods, curriculum design and material development (e.g., Liu, 2003), and ESP teachers’ training and education (Chen, 2005). Even so, the development of ESP is still at an early stage in China.
A literature review on ESP teaching in China reveals the existence of several problems. Top on the list is the fact that there is no unitary recognition of weather English teachers are capable of offering quality ESP course. Mentioning ESP, most university English teachers immediately associate it with particularly subject-specific English such as Chemistry English, Business English or Medical English, and the like. They believe that the purpose of ESP courses is to use English to teach disciplinary knowledge, as is the case with bilingual education. This stance supposes that, since English teachers lack the requisite subject knowledge base, it is hard or even impossible for them to offer effective ESP courses (see Chen, 2005; Wang, 2004). A different voice says that ESP should focus either on a specific discipline or on cross-disciplinary common core elements and skills, which are manageable for and should be taught by English teachers (Cai, 2013).

In addition to teachers’ divergent perceptions of ESP teaching, ESP is not definitively positioned in university English curricula. As discussed earlier, since CECR 2007 does not present any explicit statement, ESP curriculum planning and design is usually conducted in a self-regulated way by the university or the language teaching faculty, without consistent national standards. ESP courses in most universities are loosely organized and poorly administered in practice (Gu, 2010; Luo, 2006; Luo & Li, 2008). Wang’s (2004) investigation of ESP teaching in Tong Ji University, which is one of the top 10 universities in China, provides a typical case with respect to how the wider picture can be understood. ESP in that university is offered to students from 42 disciplinary areas. Half of these disciplinary departments regard ESP as a basic subject in their curriculum, 15 as a subject course and six as a common course. There is no interdisciplinary connection in terms of ESP curriculum design, pedagogical exchange
or team teaching. In such a situation, it is hard to execute unitary planning and administration. Meanwhile, since ESP teaching hours tend to be flexible in most universities (Luo, 2006), it is often impossible to guarantee curriculum continuity and efficiency.

Also contributing to the chaos is the selection and development of ESP teaching materials. Since ESP programmes first came to be taught in China in the 1970s, there have never been national standards for ESP textbook selection or development. Given ESP’s varied needs and objectives, it is often the local institutions and ESP practitioners who select or produce ESP materials. For a long time, teaching and learning materials have come mainly from two resources: disciplinary textbooks in the original and English teacher preparation. A number of studies have reported on the prevalent negative evaluation towards ESP materials (e.g., Gu, 2010; Liang, 2006; Luo, 2006; Luo, & Li, 2008). A common criticism is that most current ESP materials are not designed and written in a systematic way, in terms of course objectives, pedagogy, needs-relevance, content-continuity and references. It is even not rare to encounter errors here and there (Gu, 2010).

However, the biggest impediment to China’s ESP teaching practice and development is the lack of qualified ESP teachers. An overview of their profiles is presented in the following section.

2.1.3 A Profile of ESP Teachers in China

For reason that ESP is becoming an increasingly popular catchphrase in China’s tertiary education, the gap between supply and demand, in terms of qualified ESP teachers, has also come under the spotlight. At present, ESP courses are provided mainly by two
groups of teachers. One group is made up of subject matter teachers from the disciplinary departments. They are selected according to an unnamed criterion that can be thought of as ‘good English competence’. Some of these teachers have overseas experience, and some have experience in Chinese-English bilingual instructions. It is undeniable that some of them are very proficient in English. However, the majority are not comparable with English teachers from the English Department in terms of English subject knowledge and pedagogical content knowledge. Classes given by these subject matter teachers are often a site of teacher-centred reading and related translation processes (Liao & Qin, 2000; Wang, 2004).

Another group is constituted by GE teachers, most of whom are English majors holding degrees in Linguistics, Applied Linguistics or British and American Literature. Their expertise in English language and GE pedagogy is always considered to be a merit when offering ESP courses. In practice, however, most of them fall into the subject knowledge dilemma, for they have to deal with subject-specific materials and classroom situations outside their primary areas of expertise (Wu & Badger, 2009). When there is a lack of disciplinary background, English teachers usually invest a disproportionate amount of time and effort in preparing lessons while still finding it hard to meet their students’ expectations. Like the subject matter teacher group, most English teachers also adopt translation and reading as their chief instructional method, but in difference to the latter group, they tend to focus more on disciplinary terminologies and language structure (Wu, 2014).

The complexity and distinctive features of ESP teaching require that ESP teachers have multiple roles: as teacher, course designer and material provider, researcher, collaborator and evaluator (Dudley-Evans & St John, 1998). In this sense, a teacher
simply proficient in English or in specialized subject matter knowledge is not enough to make a qualified or effective ESP teacher. Actually, whatever their pre-service educational background or prior in-service pedagogic experience, Chinese ESP teachers are struggling to “master language and subject matter beyond the bounds of previous experience” (Hutchinson & Waters, 1987, p.160). Compared with Britain, North America and many other countries, China’s ESP teacher preparation is still very limited. Indeed, from the 1970s through to 2000, the provision of ESP teacher education, training and supervision could be considered thin, if not non-existent.

For those in-service ESP teachers, chances of getting professional training are still scarce. Largely because CECR 2007 has not claimed the legitimate position of ESP, ESP teachers’ professional development seems largely ignored by university policy makers and funding programmes. In sharp contrast to the widespread training opportunities available to GE teachers, most ESP teachers rely on self-training (Chen, 2005). In most part of China, ESP teacher education and professional development is still left unattended (e.g., Wang & Wang, 2015; Zhao, 2012).

2.2 Challenges Confronting ESP Teachers

The previous section painted a picture of the general environment and conditions for ESP in China and the status quo of ESP teachers. In this section, I focus on reviewing the challenges posed by the complexity of ESP teaching per se and the various contextual and learner variables that are documented in the literature.

2.2.1 Problematising the Knowledge System of ESP Teachers

As early as 1987, Hutchinson and Waters pointed out that, in ESP contexts, a prominent issue is that ESP teachers “‘have to struggle to master language and subject matter
beyond the bounds of their previous experience” (p. 160). A shared understanding is that the effectiveness of ESP teaching is often undermined by English teachers’ lack of discipline-specialised knowledge (e.g., Atai & Fatahi-Majd, 2014; Campion, 2016). This is labelled by some scholars as the “subject knowledge dilemma” (Wu & Badger, 2009, p. 20). Meanwhile, as students may prove to be more knowledgeable in the subject area in the ESP classroom, “the nature of the communication is made very distinctive by the difference in the subject knowledge between the students and the language teachers” (Dudley-Evans, 1997, p. 60). For new ESP teachers who have limited experience in this field, the ESP classroom is probably a “strange and uncharted land” (Hutchinson & Waters, 1987, p. 158) that abounds with challenges.

While I agree that the subject knowledge dilemma is a principal contributing factor to the challenges ESP teachers are confronting, it is only part of the knowledge system of ESP teachers. In the field of language teacher education, it is well accepted that teaching requires several types of knowledge (Borg, 2011). An understanding of ESP teacher knowledge is essential as it is this that provides the foundation for ESP teachers to fulfil their combined roles as “needs assessor, specialized syllabus designer, authentic materials developer, and content-knowledgeable instructor” (Belcher, 2006, p. 139).

Historically the knowledge base of language teaching is broadly dichotomised as knowledge of/about the language and knowledge of the skills/methods/pedagogy, with demarcation lines between the two recently becoming increasingly blurred (Graves, 2009). Particular attention has been given to teachers’ content knowledge (CK), understanding of the subject matter taught, pedagogical content knowledge (PCK), and knowledge of how to make subject matter accessible to students (Shulman, 1986a). With
respect to ESP, there is little written about the conceptualisation of the knowledge system that ESP teachers are expected to have (see Górska-Poręcka, 2013). There has also been little investigation in the correlation between the challenges teachers have in practice and their ESP teaching knowledge.

What is more frequently mentioned in the literature (see Basturkmen, 2014; Belcher, 2006; Wu & Badger, 2009) is ESP teachers’ specialised knowledge put forward by Ferguson, who identifies three types of specialised knowledge (Ferguson, 1997, p. 85):

- Knowledge of disciplinary culture, which emphasises the sociocultural aspects of a discipline.
- Knowledge of the epistemological basis of different disciplines, which concerns the discipline’s cognitive structure, modes of inquiry and criteria for validating knowledge claims.
- Knowledge of genre and discourse, which highlights the genre and discourse skills needed to conduct genre and text analyses.

This typology can be applied as a starting point to frame the investigation of potential challenges in relation to ESP teacher knowledge. However, the specialised knowledge as Ferguson proposed still belongs to the domain of CK. Further contextualised empirical research needs to be conducted to delineate the challenges associated with this and/or other knowledge domains of ESP teaching.

2.2.2 Challenges Concerning ESP Needs Analysis and Specificity

Since its emergence internationally in the 1960s, ESP has been viewed as a needs-based, learner- and learning-centred approach to English language teaching (see Belcher, 2006;
Hutchinson & Waters, 1987; Robinson, 1991). It is imperative that ESP teachers be needs-responsive and learner-sensitive (e.g., Basturkman, 2010; Belcher, 2009). As a result, ESP first and foremost demands that teachers be good at needs analysis. Needs assessment is regarded as the foundation and starting point in ESP practice, followed by course design, material provision, pedagogical approaches, assessment and evaluation (Flowerdew, 2013). However, assessing needs in ESP is a highly complex process, which, instead of proceeding in a linear fashion, constantly evolves and redefines itself. Based on an historical review of ESP’s development, Basturkman (2010, p. 19) summarises needs analysis as involving the following:

- Target situation analysis: Identification of tasks, activities and skills learners are/will be using English for.
- Discourse analysis: Descriptions of the language used in target situations
- Learner factor analysis: Identification of factors such as learners’ motivation and perceptions
- Teaching context analysis: Identification of environmental factors which can affect the running of the course.

This observation has encapsulated two basic foci of ESP needs assessment. One is termed target situation analysis, which is regarded as goal-oriented; and the other is referred to as present situation analysis, which aims to address learners’ lacks and wants, and therefore is more process-oriented (see Flowerdew, 2013). Whether the emphasis is on either or both, ESP needs analysis clearly requires “research skills and creative approaches to novel situations” (Belcher, 2006, p. 135), which will likely pose challenges to novice ESP practitioners.
Another concern that arises in tandem with needs analysis is the specificity of the course design. The ESP curriculum can take a wide-angled approach that addresses common-core language skills and learning strategies, which may go beyond the immediately perceived needs of students. It can also adopt a narrow-angled approach that is centred primarily on subject area contents and a list of target situations (Brunton, 2009). Given the long-standing debate on the wide versus narrow orientations of course design, Basturkmen (2010) argues that these two aspects should be seen on a continuum. Then the decision is left to ESP teachers, which is contingent on multiple internal and external factors, such as their cognition, knowledge, beliefs, as well as their judgement of immediate learners and teaching contexts, among others. Again, this is incontestably no easy task for beginning ESP teachers.

### 2.2.3 Potential Difficulties and Constraints Derived from Learner-centeredness and Contextual Factors

Alongside debates on target situation analysis versus present situation analysis, and wide-angle versus narrow-angle course design, we should always be aware that ESP is a learner-centred approach. As Hyland (2006) points out, ESP teachers are expected to continuously modify teaching as they learn more about their students. Students’ goals and backgrounds, their language proficiencies, their ESP learning motivations and needs, their teaching and learning preferences, among others, are all variables that ESP teachers are expected to address. Especially in classroom practices, ESP teachers may have difficulties modifying teaching methods, activities and classroom management according to the needs of students who may be highly heterogeneous in terms of the aforementioned aspects. And the situation may well be further complicated in non-native English speaking contexts. In a research and discussion note on the innovation of
an ESP curriculum in the Chinese context, Wang (2007) observes that in addition to the subject knowledge dilemma, challenges also occur on account of the ESP instructor’s inadequate ESP pedagogical content knowledge and students’ GE deficiencies. This provides a good case for drawing scholarly attention to the potential difficulties ESP teachers have in specific linguistic circumstances.

Also noteworthy are contextual factors that may constrain ESP practice. Since the earlier days of ESP practice, scholars have cautioned that cultural, socio-political, logistical, and administrative factors might impinge on ESP syllabus design (see Flowerdew, 2013). For the reason that English has an established status worldwide as the academic and professional lingua franca, ESP has been espoused and implemented as a dominant tertiary English curriculum in many English-as-foreign-language countries like China (e.g., Cai, 2014a). Nonetheless, it is not clear what novice ESP teachers’ expectations are with regard to institutional, administrative and logistical support.

As previously mentioned, the existing literature has collectively foregrounded the challenges confronting ESP teachers. However, no data-based research has been conducted to systematically look at these aspects in relation to the Chinese context. I will therefore, attempt to address this gap with an evidence-based study.

2.3 Prior Research on Language Teacher Learning and Identity

In the sections that follow, I critically examine literature related to language teacher learning and identity with the purpose of formulating the theoretical and methodological perspectives that will underpin this research project.
2.3.1 Learning for Professional Development and Learning as Identity

Quality ESP teaching needs quality ESP teachers. Teacher development, as an important intervention for improving teacher quality (Goldschimidt & Phelps, 2010), should draw due attention from a broad section of stakeholders, including university leaders, policy makers, teacher educators, and ESP teachers themselves. The term “professional development” is generally understood as concerned with “teachers learning, learning how to learn, and transforming their knowledge into practice for the benefit of their students’ growth” (Avalos, 2011, p. 10). Stemming from this notion, continuing professional development can be viewed as referring to all activities in which teacher learning for improvement occurs during the course of a teacher’s career (see Day & Sachs, 2004).

A substantial amount of current research on teachers’ professional development is dominated by a post-positivistic approach, which views teacher learning as a complex cognitive and emotional process embedded in teachers’ engagement in particular educational environments and cultures, and is conditioned by multiple contextual and psychological factors, both individually and collectively (e.g., De Neve, Devos & Tuytens, 2015; Golombek & Doran, 2014; Gorozidis & Papaioannou, 2014; Jurasaite-Harbison & Rex, 2010).

Among diverse post-positivistic theories, sociocultural theories are particularly influential. From the sociocultural perspective, teacher learning is a mutually constitutive process of the individual and the social (see Tsui, Edwards, Lopez-Real & Kwan, 2009). Learning, as proposed by Lave and Wenger (1991), is “the very process of being engaged in, and participating in developing, an ongoing practice” (Wenger,
And it is in the course of participating in such ongoing practice that teacher development occurs (Rogoff, 2003).

Marking the “sociocultural turn” in the human sciences (Johnson, 2006), sociocultural theories of situated cognition and the participation model of learning (Lantolf, 2000; Lave & Wenger, 1991; Vygotsky, 1978; 1986; Wenger, 1998) have challenged the traditional positivistic view which sees learning as an individual, cognitive process of knowledge acquisition (see Fuller, 2007).

An important inspiration that the sociocultural turn brings into being is that it foregrounds the crucial role of social activities that the individual teacher engages in. Johnson (2006, p. 238) summarises this inspiration as follows,

Learning, therefore, is not the straightforward appropriation of skills or knowledge form the outside in, but the progressive movement from external, socially mediated activity to internal mediational control by individual learners, which results in the transformation of both the self and the activity.

This highlights that social activities are at once the venue and source, as well as the effect, of the progressive development of individual learners. The progressive development of the individual occurs along with the progressive development of social practices. Activity Theory, also known as cultural historical activity theory (CHAT for short) (Engeström, 2001; Leont’ev, 1978; Vygotsky, 1978), is of significant use when addressing such progressive development as that found in social practices. CHAT has been widely adopted in practices of organizational improvement (e.g., Engeström & Kerosuo, 2007), cross-boundary learning in school-university partnership (e.g., Tsui &
Law, 2007; Tsui et al, 2009), work-place teacher education (e.g., Gagne & Valencia, 2014), collaborative practices in universities and schools (e.g., Daniels, 2004; Stuart, 2014), and so forth.

Along with CHAT, the idea of Community of Practice (CoP) plays a powerful role in shaping research on the participation model of learning (see Daniels, 2016), which has, in turn, informed research on teachers’ professional development. Adopting CoP as an analytical tool, a number of studies have examined how learning can be nurtured and shared within a community of teachers (e.g., Goodnough, 2004; Vescio, Ross & Adams 2008; Wood, 2007). Following CoP, teachers are treated as active learners who construe knowledge and skills through the mediation of individual, social and institutional factors (see Mak & Pun, 2015). In terms of mediations through facilitation and collaboration, the ideas of teachers’ professional learning communities, workplace partnerships and collaborative networks have been widely studied with respect to their effect on teacher learning and teaching practice (e.g., Graham, 2007; Gallagher, Griffin, Parker, Kitchen & Figg, 2011; Martin, Snow & Torrez 2011; Tsui & Law, 2007).

Along this line of research, there are also concerns about the formation and sustainability of various forms of communities of practice for the purpose of teachers’ professional development (e.g., Chalmers & Keown, 2006; Stoll & Louis, 2007; Talbert, 2010). To address this issue, substantial research has reported on the positive impact of collegiality (e.g., Little, 2002; Richmond & Manokore, 2011), the need for teachers’ individual commitment, external facilitation, and support both within and outside the institution (e.g., Mak & Pun, 2015), the assets of developing a collaborative relationship and the shared group identity of community members (e.g., Stoll & Louis, 2007, van Es,
Apart from presenting CoP as an analysing tool to understand teachers’ learning and professional development, the biggest contribution CoP makes relates to its conceptualisation of learning as identity (Fuller, 2007).

Education, in its deepest sense and at whatever age it takes place, concerns the opening of identities – exploring new ways of being that lie beyond our current state... Education is not merely formative – it is transformative... issues of education should be addressed first and foremost in terms of identities and modes of belonging and only secondarily in terms of skills and information.

(Wenger, 1998, p. 263)

Wenger (1998, p. 4) theorised learning as “an encompassing process of being active participants in the practices of social communities and constructing identities in relation to these communities”, where “the formation of a community of practice is also the negotiation of identities”. In the next section I focus on language teacher identity.

2.3.2 Language Teacher Identity

The last two decades have witnessed a surge of research interest in identity in the areas of teacher education and professional development (Alsup, 2006; Beauchamp & Thomas, 2009; Clarke, 2008; Curwood, 2014; Olsen, 2008; Sachs, 2005; Trent, 2010; Tsui, 2007; Varghese, Morgan & Johnson, 2005; Beijaard, Meijer & Verloop, 2004). For one thing, teachers make sense of themselves through reflecting on their identity (Pillen, Beijaard & Brok, 2013). “Who am I as a teacher?” and “Who do I want to
become” are marked questions for teachers’ professional development (Akkerman & Meijer, 2011). Sachs (2005) argues,

Teacher professional identity then stands at the core of the teaching profession. It provides a framework for teachers to construct their own idea of “how to be,” “how to act” and “how to understand” their work and their place in society. Importantly, teacher identity is not something that is fixed nor is it imposed; rather it is negotiated through experience and the sense that is made of that experience (p. 15).

For another, researchers have also used identity as an analytic tool to understand teachers’ learning and professional development (e.g., Kanno & Stuart, 2011; Olsen, 2011; Rogers & Scott, 2008; Xu, 2013; Yuan & Lee, 2015).

Based on a systematic investigation of the works on teacher identity from 1998-2000, Beijaard, Meijer and Verloop (2004) have articulated some key features of professional identity. It is an ongoing, complex and dynamic process of integration of the personal and the professional sides of the self, which involves a teacher’s agency in seeking for the equilibrium. In addition, professional identity is multifaceted as it is subject to the influence of historical, sociological, psychological, and cultural factors. Furthermore, around the overall identity there are sub-identities which may conflict or align with each other. Based on a review of more recent literature, Akkerman and Meijer (2011) highlight the existence of three recurring properties of teacher identity: the multiplicity of identity, the discontinuity of identity, and the social nature of identity. From here they propose a dialogical approach to conceptualizing teacher identity that combines the multiplicity, the discontinuity and the social nature of teacher identity, with the unitary, continuity, and individual nature of teacher identity. This approach is
particularly valuable to my research and I will come back to this point later in the discussion.

The following sections will thus revolve around identity-in-practice, with a focus on the sociocultural perspective, and identity-in-discourse, with a focus on the narrative and discursive aspects of identity. In addition, I will highlight some core issues in identity: agency, power, ethics, which all point to the importance of ethical identity work.

2.3.2.1 Identity-in-Practice: the Sociocultural Perspective

With regard to the sociocultural approach to identity research, it is simpler to begin with social identity theory. Emphasizing group membership and self-perception, this theory posits the concept of “social identity”. Individuals derive social identity or self-concept in the greater part from the social categories—nationality, race, gender, sexuality, class, educational background, etc.—to which they belong. The status, power and stability of different groups can affect individuals’ intergroup mobility and behaviour.

As a consequence, teachers may face marginalisation, disadvantage and discrimination in their professional development. Typical examples can be seen in published studies illuminating the marginalisation of teachers’ positions in the dichotomous native-English speakers (NES)/non-native-English speakers (NNES) contexts (e.g., Braine, 2010; Holliday & Aboshiha, 2009; Zhang & Zhang, 2015). In a widely cited scholarly work by Varghese, Morgan, Johnston, and Johnson (2005), the authors looked at the language teacher identity through a distinct theoretical lens. The subject of Varghese’s investigation is a NNES graduate student in a US-based MA TESOL program. This study reveals that the development of identity as being operationalised against the marginalisation of the profession and tensions between one’s
“claimed identity” and “assigned identity”. Such a NES/NNES categorical distinction is marked with power and status discrepancies. In the same paper, Johnson analysed how an NNES teacher perceived her self-identification and group membership as an identity that was saliently opposite to that of her NES counterparts. The salience of the NNES group membership lurked predominantly throughout the teacher’s struggle to balance her overlapping identities as a TESOL graduate student/ESL teacher/English language learner. Finally, it was her desire for positive self-esteem that compelled her to establish an identity that was both positive and supporting.

These studies have demonstrated the prominence of social identity theory in offering useful insights into teacher self-perceptions, the situated nature of identity, the interweaving between the personal and professional self, and the influence of social identifications and self-categorizations. Overall, social identity theory has a positivistic bent, for it requires us to specify what multiple identities are and which social groups we are talking about. As a concrete way of conceptualizing the unequal power and status relations inherent in conflicting identities, it is a “useful tool in handling a marginalized and disempowered profession such as language teaching” (Varghese et al., 2005). However, due to reliance on oppositional and static social categories, this framework is not suitable for addressing the evolution of identity, nor is it effective in examining how intergroup-interactions may influence an individual’s perceived professional identity.

argued: “As an aspect of social practice, learning involves the whole person… it implies becoming a full participant, a member, a kind of person” (p. 53). In this sense “learning to become” (Kanno & Stuart, 2011, p. 239) is the “telos” of learning (Lave, 1996, p. 156). Considering that both learning and identity formation happen in and through participation in practice, the development of learning can also be understood through and as the development of identity.

The dialectic between identity and learning is also supported by Sfard and Prusak (2005), who argue that while identity plays a critical role in guiding and determining the process of learning, “learning is often the only hope for those who wish to close a critical gap between their actual and designated identities, particularly in these times of incessant change and pervasive fluidity involving social memberships and identities” (p. 19).

According to Wenger (1998), there are five parallels between identity and practice: (1) negotiation of meaning in terms of participation and reification, (2) emphasis on community and membership, (3) learning trajectory, (4) boundary and multi-membership, and (5) involvement in local and global contexts (also see Beauchamp & Thomas, 2009). These five parallels have suggested a mutually constitutive relationship between identity and practice, meaning language teacher identity is seen to be constituted by the practices in relation to a group and also by the process of individual identification or non-identification with the group (Varghese et al., 2005).

As I will come shortly to the details of the sociocultural theory of learning and identity in the theoretical framework (see Section 3.2.2), I will limit my attention here to empirical research informed by the core concepts of identification and negotiation. The process of identification can explicate how an individual invests the self in a certain
identity, whereas negotiation of meaning can illuminate the individual’s understandings, beliefs, attitudes and perceptions towards his or her behaviour. These aspects are inwardly-directed and closely related to one’s agency and subjectivity, as is implied in a number of studies allied with sociocultural theory in the areas of pre-service/novice teachers’ professional development (e.g., Xu, 2013a), teacher education and school-university partnership programs (e.g., Tsui, 2007; Tsui et al, 2009), and the complexities of teacher’s identity negotiation in the context of curriculum or pedagogical reforms (e.g., Liu & Xu, 2011). In all the communities of practice delineated in these studies, there are traces of unequal power and status relations, either explicit or implicit.

2.3.2.2 Identity-in-Discourse: the Narrative and Discursive Aspects

Parallel to identity-in-practice is the notion of “identity-in-discourse”, which highlights the narrative and discursive aspects in teacher identity. This notion is rooted in Bakhtin’s works. Central to Bakhtin’s theory is the idea that languages are never unitary, but always sites of struggle between ways of speaking that correspond to different social groups. “Languages represent specific points of view on the world, for conceptualizing the world in words” (Bakhtin, 1981, p. 292). Bakhtin saw the self “constituted as a story, through which happenings in specific places and at specific times are made coherent” (Menard-Warwick, 2005). Such conceptualization underscores the linguistic and discursive construction of reality and identity.

Actually, “the narratives of teachers about themselves and their practice, as well as the discourse in which they engage, provide opportunities for exploring and revealing aspects of the self” (Beauchamp & Thomas, 2009, p. 181). In this light, narrative inquiry, with its primary interest in the personal and practical experience of the teacher, is regarded as a social phenomenon as well as a powerful means for exploring identity.
construction (Xu & Connelly, 2009). Narratives are regarded as prime settings for identity construction (e.g., Elliot, 2005; Schiffrin, 2006). Through telling and retelling the stories of teachers, experiences embedded in the stories are lived and relived, in relation both to the other and to a social context (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Furthermore, narratives carry a sense of “expansiveness and the possibility of being filled with diverse people, things, and events in different relationships” (Clandinin, Connelly & Craig, 1995, p. 4).

According to Connelly and Clandinin (1999), a teacher’s personal practical knowledge is intertwined with identity and is both personal and social. They conceptualise the dialectic between teachers’ personal practical knowledge and the social contexts as the “professional knowledge landscape”. Thereby, “a narrative way of thinking about teacher identity speaks to the nexus of teachers’ personal practical knowledge and the landscapes, past and present, on which teachers live and work” (Clandinin, Downey & Huber, 2009, p. 141). Drawing on this construct, ongoing English teaching reforms can be viewed as shifting landscapes which will inadvertently shape each teacher’s knowledge and identity. As such, narrative inquiry appears well suited to investigating teachers’ knowledge and identity development in the course of language teaching reforms.

In addition, narrative has the power to connect the fragmented, multiple sub-identities. This is echoed by Dyer and Keller-Cohen’s (2000, p. 285) explanation:

Narrative…unites the selves of our past with those of the present, and even with the projected selves of the future…bringing together in a coherent fashion different versions, each narrative providing the authors with a deep sense of understanding. This characteristic of narrative is an important
means of (re)construction of identity, an outward manifestation of the “reflexive project of the self”…which is sustained through a continuous process of reflection and revision.

Inseparable from the narrative aspect of identity is that of discourse. The study of teacher discourse is revelatory of identity and the way in which identity is negotiated (Beauchamp & Thomas, 2009). For instance, Cohen (2010) examined how teachers engaged in reflective talk in the context of professional development. With discourse as a tool for organizing social relationships, Cohen argued that in daily talk with colleagues, teachers recognize and then (re)construct and maintain their professional identity. She added, “[a]ttention to conversational exchanges among teachers contributes to our understanding of the process itself in terms of how teachers negotiate local significances for teacher professional identity through daily practices” (p. 474). As with narrative stories, discourse also has a powerful impact in the shaping of identity. Alsup (2006, p. 187) used the term “borderland discourse” to show that both the personal and professional identities of pre-service teachers were expanded through engaging in discourse that provoked transformation in their thinking. The author considered such discourse “affect related” in the form of “language, actions, emotions, feelings, ideas and appearances” (p. 187).

2.3.2.3 Identity, Agency, Power and Ethics

As stated in Section 2.3.2.1, the foregoing review of identity-in-practice identifies the complexities of teacher’s identity negotiation in the context of curriculum or pedagogical reforms (e.g., Liu & Xu, 2011) and the traces of unequal power and status relations, either explicit or implicit. In Section 2.3.2.2, the narrative approach to identity research highlighted the personal and professional self and knowledge as “unfolding
within wider socially culturally historically and politically shaped discursive contexts” (Clarke, 2009b, p. 145). Grounded in a holistic combination of sociocultural and poststructuralist perspectives, Clarke (2009a, p. 189) argues,

Thus identity is at once a complex matter of the social and the individual, of discourse and practice, of reification and participation, of similarity and difference, of agency and structure, of fixity and transgression, of the singular and the multiple, and of the synoptic and the dynamic.

With regard to the paradoxical nature and multiple dimensions of identity depicted above, and taking account of the tensions and conflicts that may emerge in teachers’ realisation of identity in multiple and fast evolving discourses and practices that comprise the social contexts of people’s lives (Wenger, 1998), it is not unreasonable to question how and to what extent teachers operationalize their agency in learning and identity construction.

Across the literature on identity in education and the social sciences, agency is closely linked with identity (Morgan & Clarke, 2011; Parkison, 2008). Sfard and Prusak (2005, p. 15) state for example: “human beings are active agents who play decisive roles in determining the dynamics of social life and in shaping individual activities”. Although teachers may wish to construct and perform an identity in changing professional landscapes, the space of self-formation is defined by the various discursive practices they participate in. As the institutions value and maintain their distinct power relations and interests (Connelly & Clandinin, 1999; Lacasa, del Castillo & Garcia-Varela, 2005; Zembylas, 2003a), teachers need to create and legitimate their identity within the institutional context through getting involved “in a continual dialectic of resistance and acceptance, identification and recognition of difference... This dialectic,
occurring within a dynamic social space, is a discursive system vying to construct an authentic identity” (Parkinson, 2008, p. 52; also see Britzman, 1992; Zembylas, 2003b).

To take the poststructuralist stance in thinking about identity construction, Foucault’s ideas offer useful insights into the relations that exist between power, agency and identity. Based on the contention that identity is fractured, multiple, contradictory, contextual, and subject to constant historical constitution, Foucault used the term “subjectivity” rather than “self-identity” (Zembylas, 2005). And he used the idea of technologies of the self to indicate the individual’s potential to exercise control in the relations the individual has with the self, as these technologies “permit individuals to effect by their own means or with the help of others a certain number of operations on their own bodies and souls, thoughts, conduct, and way of being” (Rose, 1988, p. 18, quoted in Zembylas, 2005, p. 938). Foucault (1990, p. 95) contended that “where there is power there is resistance”, suggesting that agency presents itself in the interplay between power and resistance. In this sense, teachers take agentive roles in choosing among various discourses and practices within the power-laden institutional context and make decisions of acceptance or resistance. Meanwhile, they also define who they are by identification and differentiation (see Clarke, 2009a). This is how agency, power and identity are connected together.

Influenced by Foucault’s conceptualisation of power, agency and subjectivity, and embracing the idea that identity is a matter of “arguing for you” (MacLure, 1993, cited in Clarke, 2009a), Clarke (2009a) called for scholarly attention to ethics and ethico-political agency in identity research. Foucault saw ethics as care of the self. In his terms, “ethics is the considered form that freedom takes when it is informed by reflection” (Foucault, 1997a, p. 284). Since the pervasiveness of power relations also entails the
pervasiveness of freedom of choice (Foucault, 1997a), an ethical self-formation is imperative (Clarke, 2009a).

In effect, recent identity research has demonstrated the turn towards values, morals and ethics in teachers’ work in relation to their reaction to language teaching policies, gender issues, and equity (see Ramanathan & Morgan, 2007), as well as teacher-student interpersonal relationships (e.g., Richards, 2006). In particular, the Foucauldian notions of “ethical self-formation” and “care of the self” are valuable in excavating the role of teacher agency in identity (re)construction. Drawing on Foucault’s framework of ethical formation, Clarke (2009a) proposes the ethico-political diagram of identity work to investigate discursive determination and ethical agency in teacher identity. Clarke (2009b) also explores the ways in which teacher agency is exercised when confronting the pressures to conform to the dominance of the nationalist discourse and establishes professional beliefs maintained and monitored by peers. In mainland China, He and Lin’s (2013) research shows how Clarke’s model has proved to be effective in framing pre-service EFL teacher identity construction vis-à-vis the tensions caused by conflicting discourses in school-university partnership. Their research has consolidated my rationale for drawing on this model for my research purposes, because the ESP teachers in this study are also doing their identity work amidst conflicting discourses in a Chinese institutional context.

Chapter Summary

The literature suggests that tertiary English education in China has developed to a stage where traditional GE teaching is giving way to ESP teaching. However, controversies about the legitimacy of an ESP-oriented college English curriculum continue to prevail in the academic field. On top of a number of issues related to the implementation of ESP,
there is a common concern about the accountability and qualifications of ESP teachers. However ESP teachers, especially those who are still transitioning from teaching GE to ESP, are facing diverse challenges that has to do with the complexity of ESP teaching itself and the teaching context. While these challenges are intimately linked to teachers’ knowledge bases and pedagogical practices, little empirically based research has yet been done to identify the nature and dimensions of these challenges.

Prior research on teachers’ professional development has proved the value of sociocultural theories when addressing the issues related to language teacher learning and identity. For the purpose of exploring how English teachers, who used to teach GE, learn to become and develop as ESP teachers, Activity Theory (Engeström, 2001) and the theory of community of practice (Wenger, 1998) are of particular relevance to my project. The former proves a powerful analytic tool when examining the contextual factors within the university activity system, whereas the latter guides us to illuminate the dual process of ESP teachers’ learning and identity-in-practice. Along with the sociocultural perspective on identity, the poststructuralist perspective foregrounds the notion of identity-in-discourse, which extends the theoretical dimension of the research and inspires the methodology that I have adopted. The idea that identity and knowledge unfold within a wider socially, culturally, historically and politically shaped discursive context directs my attention to issues of agency, power and ethics in ESP teachers’ lived experiences. In this light, the conceptualisation of the ethico-politics in teacher’s identity work (Clarke, 2009a) is also drawn upon. The next chapter is devoted to an explanation on the theoretical framework for the research.
CHAPTER THREE  
THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Chapter Overview

In Chapter One, I laid out three research questions. The conceptual underpinning to address these questions is the idea that the individual and the social are mutually constitutive. In this chapter, I elaborate on two key theoretical strands. One strand is pertinent to teacher cognition and teacher knowledge, which underlies my investigation of the knowledge structure of ESP teachers and the interaction between cognition, context and pedagogical practices. The other strand consists of an elaboration on the significance of Activity Theory (Engeström, 2001), the theory of communities of practice (Wenger, 1998) and the ethico-politics of teachers’ identity work (Clarke, 2009a) to my project. I conclude this chapter with an explanation on how these theories are used to frame the research and interpret the data in this study.

3.1 Teacher Cognition and Teacher Knowledge

Teaching combines public activity—classroom actions, routines, interactions and behaviours, which are publicly accessible through observation (including video and audio recordings)—with private mental work—planning, evaluating, reacting, deciding, which remain invisible to outsiders and beyond the reach of researchers.

(Burns, Freeman & Edwards, 2015, p. 585)
In the development of language teacher education as a field, Richards and Nunan’s 1990 seminal work directs my attention to the fact that teaching involves higher-level cognitive processes. Learning to teach, therefore, is never a linear, one-stop action of obtaining established knowledge and applying existent theories to practice. Instead, it is a constructivist process of developing concrete, relevant linkages between theory and practice (Crandall, 2000). Also, learning to teach is an ongoing process of knowledge accumulation for both pre-service and in-service teachers. For those who are new in the ESP field, I argue for a professional trajectory of being, becoming and developing as ESP practitioners. I am convinced that an exploration of the cognitive change and restructuring of the knowledge system will hopefully produce important indicators of how novice ESP teachers develop in their new professional role. In the following section, I will review ideas and theories on teacher cognition and teacher knowledge in general.

### 3.1.1 The Dynamics of Language Teacher Cognition, Context and Practices

Language teaching, as summarised by Borg (2015), is a process which is defined by “dynamic interactions among cognition, context and experience” (p. 157). First, teacher cognition, which concerns teachers’ thoughts, beliefs and knowledge, is a fundamental factor influencing teacher behavior. “Teachers are active, thinking decision-makers whose actions are influenced by the unobservable cognitive (and affective) dimension of teaching” (Borg, 2011, p.218). Language teacher pedagogical practices are “underpinned and influenced by a range of pre-active, interactive, and post-active cognitions which they have” (Borg, 2015, p.324).

Meanwhile, there is neither a linear nor a unidirectional relationship between teacher cognition and their classroom teaching practices (Borg, 2015). The concurrence of cognitions and practices will often be mediated by the contextual factors such as
wider institutional and social realities. Both sociocultural and constructivist conceptualisations of teacher learning endorse the idea that “teachers’ prior experiences, their interpretations of the activities they engage in, and most important, the contexts within which they work are extremely influential in shaping how and why teachers do what they do” (Johnson, 2006, p. 236). Therefore, understanding teacher cognition in a specific social-historical context is central to understanding teacher practices and learning, and, as such, to understanding “what it means to be, become and develop as a teacher” (Borg, 2011, p.218).

### 3.1.2 Emergent Sense-Making in Action: An Alternative and Powerful Lens

In the field of research on teacher cognition, one of the key issues that still challenge researchers is the relationship between teacher cognition and student learning (Borg, 2015). In *The Modern Language Journal*’s special issue on teacher cognition in 2015, Kubanyiova and Feryok, the co-editors of this special issue, raise the questions: “How do language teachers create meaningful learning environments for their students? How can teacher education, continuing professional development and the wider educational and sociocultural context facilitate such learning in language teachers?” (Kubanyiova & Feryok, 2015, p.435).

Their questions lead to the proposal that the conceptual and epistemological scope for understanding teacher cognition should be extended. This involves, for them, moving beyond a cognitivist paradigm, which views teacher cognition as “reified mental constructs, that is, static and discrete entities that are typically dissociated from action and context, as well as other dimensions of teachers’ inner lives (e.g., emotions, motivations, values)”(Kubanyiova & Feryok, 2015, p.437). While acknowledging the value of such an epistemological perspective, they alternatively suggest a more
participation-oriented lens which they term as “emergent sense making in action” (p.436).

This alternative epistemological view of cognition is complementary to the cognitivist approach, as it emphasizes “teachers’ situated, dynamic, and embodied knowing in action” (p.438). More aligned with a sociocultural approach, this lens encourages researchers to place the study of teacher cognition in the contexts of participation in practice, and to take a dialogical attitude towards their own etic-emic position in the study.

A crucial purpose in redrawing the boundaries of current research on teacher cognition, according to Kubanyiova and Feryok (2015), is to make related inquiry more encompassing and inclusive with respect to the relationships between language teacher cognition, emotion, motivation, and identity. The ultimate goal of this initiative is to take steps forward toward a more ecological and ethical vision of language teacher cognition.

Briefly, the ecological perspective focuses on teachers’ inner lives, including their thinking and all intentional mental processes, as well as purposeful actions at the individual level. Meanwhile, it also situates teachers’ inner lives within larger environments at different levels, such as classroom settings, the wider institutional, local and national educational environments, as well as even larger social, cultural and historical environments.
3.1.3 Teacher Knowledge: Situated and Multifaceted in Nature, Integrated in Practice

The theorisations of teacher knowledge can be categorized in various ways. Emphasizing the practical aspect, Elbaz (1983) identifies five categories of knowledge: self, the milieu of teaching, the subject matter, curriculum development, and instruction. These constructs see teacher knowledge as a function of a teacher’s response to the situation. Clandinin and Connelly (1987) added a “personal” perspective on Elbaz’s work, arguing that “it is knowledge that reflects the individual’s prior knowledge and acknowledges the contextual nature of that teacher’s knowledge” (Clandinin, 1992). The personal practical knowledge has been frequently related to Lave’s (1988) and Lave and Wenger’s (1991) conception of “situated knowledge” with the emphasis on knowing-in-action and reflective practice. These notions have highlighted the situated and experiential nature of teacher knowledge.

There are several contemporary typologies of teacher knowledge. From a conceptual and analytical perspective, Shulman (1986a, 1987) identifies seven categories: subject matter content knowledge, pedagogical knowledge, curricular knowledge, general pedagogical knowledge, knowledge of learners and their characteristics, knowledge of educational contexts, and knowledge of educational ends. Grossmann (1990) identifies four: general pedagogical knowledge, subject matter knowledge, pedagogical content knowledge, and knowledge of context. Richards (1998) proposes a scheme consisting of six types of knowledge: theories of teaching, teaching skills, communication skills, subject matter knowledge, pedagogical reasoning and decision-making skills, and contextual knowledge.
As is apparent above, there is more than one way to conceptualise teacher knowledge, which is contingent on different perspectives and dimensions. In an attempt to reconceptualise teacher knowledge, Tsui (2003a) raises the issue of how to delineate or distinguish the boundaries of teacher knowledge domains. Informed by previous studies of how subject matter knowledge influences teacher pedagogic practice, and in line with some other scholars in the field (Feiman-Nemser & Parker, 1990; Grossman, 1990), Tsui (2003a) points out that rather than having a clear-cut categorization, different types of teacher knowledge are actually integrated in practice. She advocates the integration of explicit and tacit knowledge and a dialectical approach to the relationship between theory and practice in teacher knowledge development (see Tsui, 2012).

3.2 Theories of Development, Learning and Identity

Manifested in the previous section is the critical influence that context and social practice have on the development of teacher cognition and knowledge. When it comes to ESP teacher professional development and identity (re) formation, context and social practice are still at the forefront. The idea of the mutual constitution of the individual and the social, which constitutes the conceptual underpinnings of this research as mentioned at the outset of this chapter, owes heavy inspiration and enrichment to the work of the Vygotskian scholars and the Soviet Sociohistorical School (see below; also see Tsui et al., 2009). As for ESP teachers—both individually and collectively—the university is where their development, learning and identity construction are taking place. Therefore, the university can be conceived of as an activity system, or in Vygotsky’s term, the social unit of activity, which hosts the development of individuals.
In the following section, with the purpose of analysing the interactions between the personal, institutional and societal conditions for ESP teacher development, I have chosen to draw on Activity Theory. My focus will be on exploring the impacts of these wider contexts, the basic unit that shows the relations of the system, and the potential contradictions that may act as a catalyst (see Fleer, 2016) for the development of ESP teachers. For the inquiry into the dynamics between elements within a certain activity system, particularly how individual ESP teachers learn through participation in communities of practice and “argue for themselves” in an ethical and manner, I turn to Wenger’s (1998) sociocultural perspective of learning and Clarke’s (2009a) Foucauldian construct of the ethico-politics of identity work.

3.2.1 Activity Theory

Cultural-Historical Activity Theory is applied around the world in various disciplines and domains of practice. However, its historical roots since the pioneering work of Vygotsky and Leont’ev are closely intertwined with transformations in education… Activity Theory is probably most commonly used in educational investigations as a conceptual lens through which data are interpreted.

(Engeström, 2016, p.vii)

Activity theory (AT), as an important legacy of Soviet philosophy and psychology, is increasingly used as a fertile paradigm in educational research worldwide. Despite the lack of a settled view about the nature and significance of the concept of activity, three theorists have significantly contributed to the development of this theory. The first is Lev Vygotsky, who created a mediated action triangle, which represents the first
generation of AT (see Figure 3.1). According to Vygotsky’s (1978) illustration, the Subject is a participant in an activity, the Tool is the artefact or the participant’s prior knowledge that mediates the action, and the Object is the goal of the action. Through use of this model, Vygotsky explains that it is through mediated actions, where participants make meaning through interactions with tools and people, that human beings realize the semiotic process of the development of their consciousness.

![Figure 3.1 Vygotsky's Triangular of Mediated Action](image)

What Vygotsky left unattended, however, is the collective nature of an activity, which was picked up by Leont’ev (1981). Leont’ev produced a three-level model of activity (see Figure 3.2), where conscious actions occur on the basis of a series of operations, that lead to a higher level of activity, and which is related to goals and motives. This model is significant in that it makes a distinction between “action” and “activity”. An action is performed by an individual or a group, whereas an activity is undertaken by a community. Both action and activity are driven by goals and objects. The point is that the individual, as a social being, inevitably embeds his or her action in social activities and in this manner contributes to an end which he or she cannot realize alone. In other words, the meaning of one’s action depends upon its relation to the broader social
activity, which in turn draws its sense from the constituent individual actions (see Bakhurst, 2009).

Figure 3.2 The Hierarchical Structure of Activity (Leont’ev, 1981)

Following Leontjev, Engeström offered a new model for activity system (see Figure 3.3).

Figure 3.3 The Structure of a Human Activity System (Engeström, 1987)

The upper part of the triangle represents the tools which are also understood as the mediating artefacts or the individual actions embedded in an object-oriented activity system. The lower part denotes the division of labour between members of a community.
and the rules that regulate the action. This model provides a more holistic approach to locating the examination of human activities within the wider socio-cultural context (Lim, 2002).

What is more, this model recognizes internal contradictions as the driving force of change and development in activity systems (Engeström, 2001). This position – derived from Marxism – has “a resonance with those theorists who are interested in social change and transformation of practices” (Avis, 2009). For Engeström, Marxists, when analysing capitalism, distinguish between the use value and the exchange value of commodities. They argue that these two values are in primary contradiction to one another. When a new element is adopted from the outside, an aggravated secondary contradiction is caused due to the collision between the new and the old elements. To resolve the contradiction, people come up with innovations and new practices that lead to change and transformation (Engeström, 1999).

In what is now commonly referred to as the third generation of Activity Theory, relationships between activity systems are examined. As is illustrated in Figure 3.4, at least two interacting systems are addressed in the new model incorporating the previous models. The oval representations serve to indicate the “ambiguity, surprise, interpretation, sense-making and potential for change” (Engeström, 2001) that characterize the actions of separate systems. Aware of the complexity and multiplicity of social structure, Engeström claims that we should view society as a “multilayered network of interconnected activity systems” rather than as “a pyramid of rigid structures dependent on a single centre of power” (1999, p. 36).
With its discernible Marxist and Vygotskian origins, Engeström’s version of Activity Theory, also known as Cultural Historical Activity Theory (CHAT) is useful for addressing the progressive development of social practices (See Section 2.3.1 for examples). Obviously when reified as a concrete subject matter located in a specific sociocultural setting, the “triangular model” links together the agentive actors, the visible artefacts with the desired object, and the invisible rules. Such links facilitate my inquiry into the interactions between the elements, in particular, the interaction between the individual ESP teachers and the rest of the university’s activity system involved in English education.

Engeström (2001) summarises the current shape of AT with the help of five principles. They are: (1) a collective, artefact-mediated and object-oriented activity system; (2) the multi-voicedness of activity systems; (3) historicity; (4) the central role of contradictions as sources of change and development; and (5) the possibility of expansive transformations in activity systems.
When AT is utilized to scaffold my inquiry into the individual ESP teachers’ professional development and identity (re)formation, I first focus on the role of contradictions. Engeström postulates that contradictions need to be analysed both historically and actual-empirically, and they can be resolved by rational dialogue among diverse voices. For Engeström, human agency is located in such collective and dialogical practices (Avis, 2009). When participants of an activity system begin to question current practices, they may actively identify and analyse the contradictions that result in attempting resolutions. As primary contradictions turn into secondary ones, resolutions are modelled, implemented and remodelled in a spiral process until the contradictions are ultimately resolved and a new activity system comes into being. This ongoing process of contradiction resolution results in expansive learning which contributes to innovation, as well as the development of new knowledge and identity.

The principles of *multi-voicedness* and *historicity* also deserve our attention. Participants of an activity are given different positions due to the division of labour. As every participant carries his/her own diverse histories, the system as a whole incorporates multiple strands of history, which creates a scenario with various tensions, contradictions and conflicts caused by a variety of individual voices. Meanwhile, the activity system itself also has its collective historicity, which refers to the timeline of the system’s transformation. Just as it takes time for an individual to change, it also takes time for a system to morph its shape and transform itself. It is interesting to examine the way and the extent to which the historicity of a system bears on the history of the individual, especially when contradictions arise within the system.

AT provides a powerful way of focusing on aspects of the wider context which serves as the mediating structure binding the individual and social worlds. However, it
has left certain issues underexplored. For instance, Tsui et al. (2009) note that AT does not address how people get legitimate access into the activity system, what their trajectory of participation is like, and how their identities are constituted in this process. As to my research, AT alone does not do enough to provide an adequate guide for the investigation of the interplay between ESP teachers’ identity (re)formation and professional development. As such, I incorporate the sociocultural theory of learning, in particular, Lave and Wenger’s (1991) notion of communities of practice. This theory shares a family resemblance with Engeström’s interest in socially situated practice and the spaces such practice provides for progressive development but also addresses some key issues neglected by AT. The next section will turn to some important concepts in the sociocultural framework of learning.

3.2.2 Sociocultural Theory of Learning and Identity

Wenger’s social theory of learning is built on his work with Lave, and together they propose the conception of learning as a social process (Lave & Wenger, 1991). Instead of viewing learning as an isolated time-bound activity, they conceptualize learning as both “the very process of being engaged in, and participating in developing, an ongoing practice” (Wenger, 1998 p. 95) and as involving the “changing participation and identity formation in a community of practice” (p. 11). Therefore, participation is at the core of learning and it is “in a participation framework” that learning takes place and is mediated by the various perspectives of its co-participants.

For Wenger (1998), a social theory of learning is mainly set against two perpendicular axes of intellectual tradition. On the vertical axis, learning as participation is centred in theories of social structure and theories of situated experience. The former theories give primacy to institutions, norms and rules, and the latter theories give
primacy to local actions and the interactive relations of people. On the horizontal axis, learning is mediated by theories of social practice and theories of identity. Wenger’s concern is largely with the horizontal axis. The section that follows will focus on key concepts central to this framework.

**Community of Practice**

The notion of “community of practice” is useful for my purposes because it has integrated “meaning”, “practice”, “community” and “identity”. Essentially “community of practice” is viewed as a unit where coherence is achieved by “practice”. Here “practice” goes beyond its literal meaning to the connotation of doing “in a historical and social context that gives structure and meaning to what we do” (p. 47). In this regard, Wenger (1998) refers to practice as social practice that includes both explicit and tacit knowledge, what is said and unsaid, what is codified and assumed. Such duality of practice is implied in the social and negotiated character of our daily activities.

Though the construct of “practice” is finely delineated, Wenger (1998) argues that the association of “community” and “practice” does not mean that the former is defined by the latter. Three dimensions are employed to describe characteristics of practice as the source of the coherence of a community.

The first dimension is the **mutual engagement** of participants. In a community of practice, participants are engaged in actions with meanings that are the result of constant negotiation. Therefore, the participants’ membership does not merely involve a declared allegiance or belonging to, but is rather a matter of intense mutual engagement in collective actions. Moreover, as every participant acquires a unique status and identity
in practice, mutual engagement does not lead to homogeneity but rather leads to diversity.

What mutual engagement also brings about are the complementary or overlapping contributions of competence. That is to say, while drawing on his/her own knowledge and competence, a participant in mutual engagement also needs to connect with the knowledge and competence of others. In this sense, “mutual engagement is inherently partial” (Wenger, 1998, p. 76). Both diversity and partiality, as Wenger maintains, are productive and resourceful for a community of practice.

The second characteristic is the negotiation of a joint enterprise. As much as mutual engagement does not require homogeneity, an enterprise is a joint one not with respect to unanimous agreement or concordant beliefs, but in relation to being “communally negotiated” (p. 78). In practice, an enterprise is complex, as it may include the instrumental, the personal and the interpersonal aspects of people’s lives. However, instead of being fixed or prescribed, the enterprise is always defined by the participants’ collectively negotiated response to their situation, which can only be arrived at through a process that is dynamic. Through creating relations of mutual accountability among participants, the joint enterprise keeps a community of practice together.

The third element of practice, as a source of community coherence, is the development of a shared repertoire. “A repertoire” is the term Wenger (1998) applies to a set of shared resources that are accumulated over time. The elements of the repertoire can be heterogeneous, spanning specific activities, words, routines, artefacts etc. However, as the repertoire belongs to all participants of a community who are in the pursuit of a joint enterprise, the repertoire is broadly shared and coherent. Wenger holds that for any community of practice, a shared repertoire is crucial for meaning negotiation
considering that it not only reflects a history of mutual engagement but can also be reengaged in new situations. As such, a shared repertoire is inherently ambiguous because it remains open to negotiated and renegotiated interpretation, despite its recognizable histories of meanings.

Negotiation of Meaning, Participation and Reification

In the previous discussion, the idea of practice functioned as a source of coherence for a community. When it comes to the experience of everyday life, Wenger posits that “practice is about meaning” (Wenger, 1998, p. 52). He goes further to explain that the experience of meaning is not generated from routinisation. On the contrary, it is the renewal of old patterns that gives rise to an experience of meaning in our engagement in practice. In this vein, “living is a constant process of negotiation of meaning” (p. 53). Extending the usual denotation of negotiation as reaching an agreement, Wenger intends the term “negotiation” to convey continuous and ongoing interaction and achievement through which meaning is generated.

It is important to remember that “negotiated meaning is at once historical and dynamic, contextual and unique” (Wenger, 1998, p. 54) and it is in the process of participation that meaning is constructed and negotiated. Participation is both personal and social as it implies both membership in a community of practice and active involvement in a joint enterprise. When doing social practice in a community, participants get recognized by each other; also they recognize something of themselves in each other. Such mutual recognition provides the context for negotiating meanings. What is worth noticing here is that participation does not necessarily lead to harmony, relations that are conflictual, political and competitive may arise as well. In this manner,
participation has transformative potential both for the community of practice and for its participants.

Complementary to participation as part of meaning, reification refers to “the process of giving form to our experience by producing objects that congeal this experience into thingness” (Wenger, 1998, p. 58). To put it another way, reification enables us to perceive our projection of meaning to the world in a concrete way; so that, via fixed forms, such as objects, we attribute an independent existence to our meanings.

Participation and reification comprise a dualism. They are in constant interplay and neither one can dispense with the other. Participation gives the context for reification to be produced and interpreted. In turn, reification enables people to make sense of participation. In fact, it is in the interplay of participation and reification that “our experience and our world shape each other through a reciprocal relation that goes to the very essence of who we are” (Wenger, 1998, p. 71).

**Boundaries and Boundary Crossing**

In Wenger’s framework, there can be multiple and overlapping communities of practice. They are neither isolated from the rest of the world nor independent from other practices. On the contrary, their various enterprises are closely interconnected. As a result, people can participate in multiple communities of practice at the same time and furthermore they fluidly move from one community to another. However, the shared histories of a community will create discontinuities between participants and nonparticipants. Consequently, boundaries are formed in the process of practice.

Wenger (1998) points out that boundary relations have the duality of discontinuity and continuity. Whereas participation and reification can give rise to the need to
emphasize the confines of boundaries, participation and reification also create continuities across boundaries. The products of reification, which are termed “boundary objects”, can traverse boundaries and enter different practices. Connections can also be established by people introducing elements of one practice into another. This process is known as “brokering”.

Boundaries are pivotal for communities of practice in providing learning opportunities for both insiders and outsiders in their own right. As Wenger (2003, p. 85) puts it:

In social learning systems, the value of communities and their boundaries are complementary. Deep expertise depends on the convergence between experience and competence, but innovative learning requires their divergence. In either case, you need strong competences to anchor the process. But these competences also need to interact. The learning and innovation potential of a social learning system lies in its configuration of strong core practices and active boundary processes.

**Dual Process of Identity Formation**

Wenger’s concept of identity departs from the idea that identity, as an integral aspect of a social theory of learning, is inseparable from issues of practice, community and meaning. In this context, he is focusing on the individual from a social perspective. It is thus proposed that identity is formed in the “kind of tension between our investment in various forms of belonging and our ability to negotiate the meanings that matter in those contexts” (p.188). It is a dual process of identification and negotiability. By identification, Wenger means identity is built through an investment of the self in
relations of association and differentiation. Negotiability, on the other hand, determines the extent to which we have control over the meanings we own.

**Identification**

Three modes of belonging are proposed by Wenger (1998) as the sources of identification: engagement, imagination, and alignment. Identification is realized in engagement because engaging in practice enables us to work out our relations with each other and with the world, and in this process we gain a lived sense of who we are. Through engagement, we mutually recognize each other as participants, and in this way we are directed to know our social selves. Such mutuality in the course of engagement is at the core of identification. However, Wenger also observes that “a lack of mutuality in the course of engagement creates relations of marginality that can reach deeply into our identities” (p.193).

Imagination is another source of identification. Wenger (1998) describes imagination as “a process of expanding our self by transcending our time and space and creating new images of the world and ourselves” (p.176). Antithetical to identity built in practice, identity constructed in imagination addresses the relationships between one’s self and other people and things that he or she has no direct interactions with (Anderson, 1991; Norton, 2001, cited in Xu, 2013b). As such, identification in imagination is a process of relating ourselves to the world beyond immediate engagement in the community of practice.

The third source is alignment through which participants become connected by bringing their identities and practices in line with the identity and enterprise of larger groups of practice. Alignment affords us a collective perspective to define ourselves.
beyond our individual engagement. However, because alignment involves power, it is often achieved by a combination of allegiance and compliance.

**Negotiability**

“Negotiability refers to the ability, facility, and legitimacy to contribute to, take responsibility for, and shape the meanings that matter within a social configuration” (Wenger, 1998, p.197). While identification defines the kind of meanings that matter to us, negotiability determines our ownership of meanings with respect to the broader social structure and our positions in it. Negotiability is deemed fundamental in identity formation. In the process of participation, various meanings are produced. Not all meanings enjoy equal currency on account of asymmetry that power relations take on as a product of their producers (also see Freeman & Johnson, 1998; Tsui, 2007). Wenger points out the inability to negotiate and claim ownership of meanings can lead to an identity of nonparticipation and marginality.

In sum, identification and negotiability, as dual processes of identity formation, present a complex and subtle way of discussing the social construction of the person. Foregrounding the social aspect of learning, Wenger’s (1998) social theory is not a displacement of the person. Rather, it focuses on the person as a social participant and as a meaning-making entity through ongoing identification and negotiation when engaging in communities of practice.

### 3.2.3 The Ethico-Politics of Teachers’ Identity Work

Wenger’s (1998) words indicate identity can function as “an organizing element for teachers’ professional lives” (Bilgen & Richards, 2014, p. 62), a source for teachers to justify and make sense of themselves in relation to others in the workplace. Echoing a
post-positivistic reconceptualization which regards knowledge and language as contingent and socially constructed (Morgan & Clarke, 2011), the poststructuralist approach sees identity as “multiple, shifting, negotiated, and contingent on external factors and protagonists” (Cheung, Said & Park, 2014, p. xvi).

As I anchor ESP teacher learning and identity within a specific activity system, I recognize identity’s dependence on the repertoire of communicative resources through participation and reification in the community of practice. On the other hand, I also underscore ESP teachers’ professional agency and subjectivity considering the negotiated attributes of identity formation. As an emerging focus of international research on teaching and teacher education (e.g., Billett, 2014; Marz & Kelchtermans, 2013; Priestley, Edwards & Priestley, 2012), teachers’ professional agency becomes pivotal for teachers to meet the various challenges they face in their practice and for negotiating their professional meanings when navigating the current stream of educational reforms. However, given the social shaping of one’s identity, the scope for exercising agency in identity (re)formation is not unlimited. It is thought to be an ethical imperative (O’Leary, 2002). I am thus curious about the dialectic relationship between the unitary, continuous and individual aspects and the multiple, discontinuous and social aspects of ESP teacher identity.

As a dual entity of reification and participation, of similarity and difference, of agency and structure, identity is not a pre-given reality. Rather, it is a hard-won effect to be claimed. Drawing on Derrida’s idea of the undecidability of meaning, Clarke (2009a) views identity as a process of teachers arguing for themselves. He is particularly concerned with people’s limited agency of identity construction in the face of structural politics and unbalanced power relations.
Figure 3.5 Diagram for Doing Identity Work (Clarke, 2009a)

Drawing on Foucault’s notion that self-formation involves both games of truth and practices of power (1997b, cited in Clarke, 2009a). Clarke argues that identity formation is political work as well as ethical work. He goes further by raising the concept of “Identity work” as a “plane of constitution of historically specific forms of truth, power and subjectivity” (Prozorov, 2007, p.6, quoted in Clarke, 2009a, p.190), and provides a diagram showing the composite elements of this work (see Figure 3.5).

This diagram consists of four axes: (1) the substance of teacher identity, or the aspects of the teachers’ selves that they utilize to constitute their teaching selves; (2) the authority-sources of teacher identity (mode of subjection), or the attitudes, beliefs and codes of behaviour and discourses that teachers consider to be sources of authority that inform them as to how to be a teacher; (3) the self-practices of teacher identity; and (4) the telos of teacher identity, or the goals and purposes that teachers have concerning their teaching selves (Clarke, 2009a).

The ethico-political approach is an enticing approach to take in the context of this research project in that it interrogates teacher identity through the centrality it places on
ethics in the work of teachers (Clarke 2009a, 2009b). In this framework, the notions of morality and the ethics of teachers are reconceptualised in terms of Foucauldian notions of “ethical self-formation” and “care of the self” (Morgan & Clarke, 2011). In so doing, this approach is sensitive to the values, morals and ethics that inhabit teachers’ work. These aspects of teacher identity are closely related to teachers’ decision-making (e.g., Farrell & Tan, 2008), managing relationships with students (Richards, 2006), and agency in the face of pressure and tensions (Clarke, 2009b).

What is particularly informative about this approach in relation to my research is its focus on the dialectics related to identifications and differentiations in identity construction.

Identity is always connected to a series of differences that help it to be what it is…there is a drive to diminish difference and to complete itself inside the pursuit of identity…a pressure to make space for the fullness of self-identity for one constituency by marginalizing, demeaning, or excluding the differences on which it depends to specify itself.

(Connolly, 2002, pp. xiv-xv, quoted in Clarke, 2009b, p. 147)

Through the process of identifications and differentiations, teachers reflect on and identify who and what they are, as distinct from who and what they are not. This idea echoes Wenger’s (1998) notion of the duality of identity formation, which posits that identity is built through identification – an investment of the self in relations of association and differentiation. Since “every relationship of power puts into operation differentiations which are at the same time its conditions and its results” (Foucault, 1982, p. 223, quoted in Clarke, 2009b, p. 147), identity formation is implicated in ethical and
political issues of power (Clarke, 2009b). On this basis, I can explore how ESP teachers in this study enact “identity work” productively to leverage the complexities in socially organized human life which is inevitably paradoxical and contradictory in nature (Clarke, 2009b).

Chapter Summary

The ideas and theories on teacher cognition and knowledge as elaborated in Section 3.1 have set up the conceptual underpinning for the investigation of ESP teacher knowledge, learning, and pedagogical practices. Given the dynamics relating to teacher cognition, context and practices, I pay special attention to the mediating role of contexts in researching ESP teacher cognition and practices. The idea of emergent-sense-making-in-action directs me to focus on ESP teachers’ situated and dynamic learning in the contexts of participation in practice. The categorisation of teacher knowledge guides me to identify and delineate ESP teacher knowledge.

In addition, given the changing landscape of tertiary EFL teachers’ professional context in contemporary China, as described in Chapters One and Two, the complexity of the context deserves special attention. Since AT refers to the environment, the history of the person, culture, motivations, and the complexity of real life activity, it has the strength, as an idea, to bridge the gap between the individual subject and the social context. This theory can therefore be used as a tool to analyse multiple interacting factors within ESP teachers’ working environments. In particular, AT guides my analysis of the contradictions revealed at different levels of the university activity system. I first examine the individual ESP teacher’s activities at the action level in order to unveil the contradictions, disturbances, misalignments, or differentiations that are individually experienced. The insights from such analyses contribute to the formulation of a picture
of the systemic contradictions within the wider university activity system. This process also elucidates how ESP teachers’ individual actions lead to the development of the wider activity system. Figure 3.6 demonstrates the relationship between the individual and the university activity system in terms of contradictions and activities.

Figure 3.6 The Relationship between Individual Actions and the University Activity System

Within the university activity system, Wenger’s (1998) theory informs the scrutiny of ESP teachers’ lived experiences of the dual process of learning and identity-in-practice. Learning and identity (re)formation are viewed as “being engaged in, and participating in developing, an ongoing practice” (Wenger, 1998, p. 11). It is in the course of participating in such ongoing practice that ESP teachers realise their professional development. In parallel to the sociocultural perspective on identity, the poststructuralist perspective foregrounds the notion of identity-in-discourse, which extends the theoretical dimension of the research and inspires the methodology which I have adopted for this project. Finally, I also draw on the conceptualisation of the ethico-politics in teacher’s identity work (Clarke, 2009a).
Powerful as Wenger’s (1998) theory is, in addressing the complexity of language teachers’ identity formation, it needs to be said that this theory does not include the concepts of “values, morals and ethics” (Clarke 2009a; Crookes, 2009), which represents an orientation of the “most significant development” in language teacher identity research (Morgan & Clarke, 2011). As mentioned in the previous chapter, identity and knowledge unfold within a wider socially, culturally, historically and politically shaped discursive context. In this sense, the issues of agency, power and ethics in ESP teachers’ lived experiences then come within our research interest. To bridge this gap and to build my study on a more concrete and workable theoretical framework that connects identity, ethics and agency, I also adopt Clarke’s (2009) idea of the ethico-politics of teacher identity.

In Chapter Four, I will elaborate on how these theories are used to guide the research design and data analysis in this study. I will return to the theoretical discussion in Chapter Seven.
CHAPTER FOUR
RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Chapter Overview

This chapter begins with an explanation of why the mixed methods paradigm has been adopted for this research project. What follows is an overview of the research design and the ways the data are analysed. This is followed by an articulation of the ethical considerations that needed to be engaged with. Details of instruments development, participants, data collection and the analysis of each part of the research are then presented in Sections 4.4, 4.5, and 4.6 respectively.

4.1 Research Paradigm

Mixed methods research refers to studies that specifically combine qualitative and quantitative research methods (see Dörnyei, 2007), or approaches “for the purpose of breadth and depth of understanding and corroboration” (Johnson, Onwuegbuzie, & Turner, 2007, p.123). The philosophical underpinning of this paradigm is the pragmatic worldview, which derives from “actions, situations and consequences rather than antecedent conditions” (Creswell, 2014, p.10). Because this worldview concerns the applications and solutions to problems, pragmatic researchers focus attention on the research problem and use all approaches available to address the problem (Creswell, 2014). Given the focus of this study was on the complexities of ESP teachers’ lived experiences, the pragmatic worldview was best suited as it endorsed the use of a number of complementary approaches available and appropriate to address the varied research questions raised earlier in the Introduction.
At the initial stage of the research, the purpose was to form a general and preliminary understanding of the first research question, which concerns the challenges and needs that Chinese ESP teachers are faced with. A quantitative method was adopted, because the more responses available via the survey instrument, the more generalizable understandings I was able to gain. This preliminary quantitative investigation was supplemented and enriched by follow-up qualitative interviews, which sought to provide a more detailed understanding of participants’ needs for institutional support to overcome corresponding challenges. Findings of this initial mixed methods research provided some baseline data for final triangulation, as well as guidance for the in-depth exploration of individual ESP teachers’ experiences that was subsequently conducted.

To address the second and the third research questions, a case study approach was deemed most appropriate. Following Yin (2014), a case study design should be considered when: (a) the main research questions are “how” or “why” questions; (b) a researcher has little or no control over behavioural events; and (c) the focus of study is a contemporary (as opposed to entirely historical) phenomenon. The second and third questions are exactly the “how” and “why” questions by definition. On the other hand, informed by the theoretical underpinnings in Chapter Three, I recognised that ESP teachers’ learning/professional development should be examined within the focal university activity system. Their identity is dynamic, multifaceted, and contextually constructed through participation in the community of practice, and their pedagogical practices are “defined by dynamic interactions among cognition, context and experience” (Borg 2015, p. 157). In this sense, I have no control over their contemporary lived experiences which involve constant interaction with internal and external factors. These reasons, taken together, justify the adoption of the case study approach.
In addition, this study followed a mixed methods paradigm also for the reason that it can “draw on the strengths and minimise the weaknesses of both types of research” (Connelly, 2009, p.31). Quantitative methods are merited for their strengths of “conceptualizing variables, profiling dimensions, tracing trends and relationships” (Punch, 2009, p. 290). However, the downside is their weakness in understanding the context or setting where people talk (Creswell & Clark, 2011), and “it is [thus] impossible to do justice to the subjective variety of an individual life” (Dörnyei, 2001, p. 193). These weaknesses of quantitative analysis can be remedied by the addition of qualitative methods. Qualitative methods emphasise people’s contextually embedded lived experiences, and thus have strong potential for revealing their full complexity via thick and rich data (Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña, 2014).

4.2 Research Design

4.2.1 An Overview of the Research Design

Overall, this mixed methods study spanned four months and encompassed two parts. Table 4.1 provides a visual model of the investigative procedures of the whole study.
### Table 4.1 Mixed Methods Procedures

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Timeline</th>
<th>Procedure</th>
<th>Participants</th>
<th>Instruments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>February, 2015</td>
<td>Instrument piloting and validating</td>
<td>3 experts and 3 ESP practitioners 58 ESP teachers</td>
<td>ESP-TCNQ</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Part One</td>
<td>208 ESP teachers 6 out of the 208 ESP teachers</td>
<td>• ESP-TCNQ</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Quantitative data collection</td>
<td></td>
<td>• Semi-structured interviews</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Qualitative data collection</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Part Two-Stage One</td>
<td>2 ESP teachers and 2 researchers (instrument piloting)</td>
<td>The Survey of Narrative Frames</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Qualitative data collection</td>
<td>54 ESP teachers in the focal university</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Part Two-Stage Two</td>
<td>3 ESP teachers in the focal university</td>
<td>• Semi-structured interviews</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Qualitative data collection</td>
<td></td>
<td>• Reflective journal writing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Field observations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Documents</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Part One was designed to elucidate a general understanding of the challenges confronting ESP teachers and their needs for institutional support. An explanatory mixed methods design (Creswell & Clark, 2011) was adopted. First, the *ESP Teachers’ Challenges and Needs Questionnaire* (ESP-TCNQ) was developed by the researcher and administered to participants recruited through convenience sampling and snowball sampling. Then a more detailed picture of teachers’ needs was generated through follow-up individual interviews with six participants randomly selected from the previous sample. The findings were then used to inform the rest of the research and for the purpose of data triangulation in the end. Table 4.2 presents an outline of this part, while the details of the investigation are presented in Section 4.4.

**Table 4.2 Research Design for Part One**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Part One</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Objective</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Participants</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Data collection</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Data analysis</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Part Two was a two-stage case study intended primarily to answer the second and third research questions, and to supplement understandings of the first question. Overall, a qualitative perspective was adopted in this part in accordance with the nature of the second and third research questions. These two questions aimed at investigating how ESP teachers’ identity is (re)formed through their lived experiences and how their
professional development is realised in this process. A major advantage of the qualitative perspective, as described by Denzin and Lincoln (2011), is its naturalistic and interpretative perspective, allowing the researcher to “study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or to interpret, phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them” (p.3). Besides, the qualitative perspective focuses on context and process, rather than on outcome and product (Cresswell, 2014; Maxwell, 2012). My conceptualisation of teacher identity as inextricably formed in, by and against the social interactions required attention to the context where the participants make meaning of their experiences and shed light on the process of their experiences. Therefore, a qualitative approach was most appropriate for the case study dimension of the research.

Table 4.3 Research Design for Part Two – Stage One

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Part Two – Stage One</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Objective</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Participants</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Data collection</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Data analysis</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In Part Two – Stage One, a survey study was conducted to investigate the collective identity work of all the ESP teachers of the English Department in the focal university. To this end, the ESP teachers who participated in the study were defined as the unit of analysis, or a case. Data collection and analysis for this study are laid out in Section 4.5. The outline of the design is showcased in Table 4.3.
In Stage Two, three ESP teachers from the focal university were purposively selected with their approval and defined as three cases for the reason that each teacher is unique in their own way. They were invited to participate in a 17-week multiple-case study. An overview of the design for this part can be seen in Table 4.4.

Table 4.4 Research Design for Part Two – Stage Two

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Objective</th>
<th>To obtain insights particularly into the second and third research questions.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Participants</td>
<td>Three ESP teachers in the focal university.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Data collection</td>
<td>1. Six rounds of one-on-one narrative interviews with each participant.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2. Journal writings (including online blog writings and diaries) by each participant on regular basis.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3. Field observations: classroom observations, meeting observations.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4. Documents: Institutional policy documents, The University Newsletter, etc.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Data analysis</td>
<td>Qualitative narrative analysis, conversation analysis, discourse analysis, short/small story analysis.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

To a large extent, my approach to the multiple-case study was influenced by narrative inquiry, which proves particularly fruitful in research on teachers’ professional identity (Bathmaker & Harnett, 2010; Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Webster & Mertova, 2007).

Though the term “narrative” is “notoriously hard to define” (Barkhuizen, 2013, p.2), since it may have multiple meanings in various forms when used in different disciplines, the following definition was adopted which captures the core elements of narrative:

Narratives (stories) in the human sciences should be defined provisionally as discourses with a clear sequential order that connect events in a
meaningful way for a definite audience and thus offer insights about the world and/or people’s experiences of it.

(Hinchman & Hinchman, 1997, p. xvi, quoted in Elliott, 2005, p.3)

As Elliott (2005) comments, this definition underscores three key features that are recognized in social science: the temporal, meaningful and social dimensions of narrative. These three dimensions are essential to the understanding of ESP teachers’ professional life. Especially, when relating the second and third research questions to the situated nature of teacher cognition and knowledge, the dialectics between continuity and discontinuity of identity over time, as well as the construction of identity in a specific social-historical and cultural activity system, I was convinced of the value of narrative inquiry for its advantage in investigating ESP teacher identity, professional development, the social context, and the interplay among them.

With the importance I attached to the temporal, social and contextual dimensions of the phenomenon under study, I drew on the “three-dimensional space narrative structure” (Ollerenshaw & Creswell, 2002), and developed a framework for collecting and analyzing part of the narrative data obtained in Part Two (see Table 4.5).
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Temporality/Continuity</th>
<th>Sociality/Interaction</th>
<th>Context/Situation/Place</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Past:</strong></td>
<td><strong>Personal:</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Look backward to</td>
<td>Look inward to internal</td>
<td>Look at context, time and</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>remembered experiences,</td>
<td>conditions, feelings,</td>
<td>place situated in a physical</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>feelings, stories from</td>
<td>hopes, aesthetic</td>
<td>landscape, or setting, with</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>earlier times.</td>
<td>reactions, moral</td>
<td>topological and spatial</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>dispositions.</td>
<td>boundaries, with characters’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Present:</strong></td>
<td><strong>Social:</strong></td>
<td>intentions, purposes and</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Look at current</td>
<td>Look outward to</td>
<td>different points of view.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>experiences, feelings</td>
<td>existential conditions</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>and stories, relating</td>
<td>in the environment,</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>to actions or an event.</td>
<td>with other people and</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>their intentions,</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>purposes, assumptions</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>and points of view.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Future:</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Look forward to implied</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>possible experiences</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>and plot lines.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The first element, temporality refers to the idea “that experiences grow out of other experiences, and experiences lead to further experiences” (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 2). I focused on the temporality of my ESP teachers’ narratives, because it relates to the historicity in Activity Theory. As stated in Chapter Three, the historicity of and in an activity, either at the individual level or the collective level, is an important indicator of change and transformation. In addition, tracking the temporal dimension of teacher life is also congruent with the sociocultural conceptualization of learning as “the very process of being engaged in, and participating in developing, an ongoing practice” (Wenger, 1998 p. 95) and as “changing participation and identity formation in a community of practice” (p. 11).
The necessity to pay attention to the second dimension, sociality, or the interaction between the social and the personal elements, as well as the third element of context, is consistent with the conceptual underpinning that the individual and the context are mutually constitutive (see Chapter Three). When exploring how the participants negotiate meanings through participation in a community, I was actually trying to formulate how identity is (re) formed by and in each individual in the unique historical and cultural context. In this regard, the personal element received special attention as I was keen on making visible the agency and ethical sense of individual ESP teachers, admitting the contradictions and misalignment inherent in the broader activity system.

4.2.2 The Quality of the Research

To date, there seems no one set of established criteria to evaluate the quality of a mixed methods study. Irrespective of this, I was mindful that my primary goal was to present the audience with a “coherent story in a consistent point of view” (Creswell & Clark, 2011, p. 270). To this end, I first ensured the quality of each part of the study separately, drawing on available standards of assessment in literature. Finally, the quality of the mixed methods research as a whole was assessed.

In the quantitative research in Section 4.4.1, in order to answer the first research question, the questionnaire was developed on the basis of a qualitative exploration, a systematic review of the literature and reference to relevant instruments. Data collection and the ensuing statistical analysis were carried out against rigorous standards commonly followed by quantitative researchers. In this way, validity and reliability were ensured (for details see Instrument development and validation in Section 4.4.1).
The trustworthiness of the qualitative studies of the study was ensured in the following ways. Grounded in the post-modern paradigms of qualitative study evaluation, I first sought to meet the standard of authenticity (Lincoln & Guba, 2000). To achieve authenticity, researchers are expected to “be honest (both to readers and to themselves) regarding their value systems, possible biases, and stances and how these might affect what they see and how they interpret what they see” (Friedman, 2011, p. 194). In Section 1.6, I highlighted my own research reflexivity with an account of my positioning in the research process and via a disclosure of my personal motivation assumptions, beliefs, values, and biases that might affect the inquiry (see Creswell & Miller, 2000 for “researcher reflexivity”). Meanwhile, I held to the procedural/methodological criteria (Creswell & Clark 2011) through stressing persuasive data collection, framing the study within an appropriate theoretical framework, and using a case study, which is an accepted approach for similar research topics.

In the course of qualitative data collection and analysis in this research, once the transcription was finished, I sent the transcripts to the corresponding participants for verification in the first instance. Once the codes and themes were identified, they were cross-checked both within and between cases. After that, participants were invited to review the draft of data analysis, and their opinions helped the refinement of the final analysis. In the end, in order to enhance the accuracy of the account, peer debriefing (Creswell, 2014) was applied. A colleague who is an experienced qualitative researcher in the field of English language teacher education was invited to be a peer debriefer. In this role, she added to the validity of the research through reviewing the qualitative study, raising questions, and offering different interpretations of the data.
Overall, I drew on Creswell and Clark’s (2011) methods-oriented framework to evaluate the mixed methods study. I believe the quality of this study was guaranteed as it responded to the checklist below:

- Collects both quantitative and qualitative data
- Employs persuasive and rigorous procedures in the methods of data collection and analysis
- Integrates or “mixes” (merges, embeds, or connects) the two sources of data so that their combined use provides a better understanding of the research problem than one source or the other.
- Includes the use of a mixed methods research design and integrates all features of the study consistent with the design
- Frames the study within philosophical assumptions
- Conveys the research using terms that are consistent with those being used in the mixed methods field today.

(Creswell & Clark, 2011, pp. 267-268)

### 4.3 Ethical Considerations

This study was conducted after obtaining the approval from the University of Auckland Human Participants Ethics Committee on 15 December 2014 (Reference Number 013415). Since a large part of this research was set in the focal university and involved regular contact with the teachers, especially in the course of the multiple-case study, addressing ethical issues effectively was a paramount concern. The ethical considerations are articulated next.
4.3.1 My Insider-Outsider Role as the Researcher

I have to admit that, as I have previously undertaken primarily quantitative research, I felt the strong pull of positivist notions like replication and generalization. But I understood that qualitative inquiry requires different approaches and standards of judgements. Hence, for a large part of the research process, I was prudent about the paradoxical role a qualitative researcher has to play.

Maykut and Morehouse (1994, p. 123, quoted in Dwyer & Buckle, 2009) offer a vivid description of this tricky perspective: “it is to be acutely tuned-in to the experiences and meaning systems of others – to indwell – and at the same time to be aware of how one’s own biases and preconceptions may be influencing what one is trying to understand.”

To some extent, I was an insider of the researched scenario, taking account of my own professional experience of switching from an GE teacher to an ESP teacher in a university located in the same socioeconomic region, and my personal engagement with ESP and their activities (e.g. lesson demonstration, conference, workshops, etc.) in the focal university. The interpersonal relationship that had been built between myself and the research participants before the commencement of the research, together with my own experience provided an attunement with the teachers in terms of similar professional identities, experiential base, needs and feelings. This status allowed me easier and more rapid access and acceptance. On the common ground of professional practice, we thus had a higher level of mutual trust and openness; hence the participants felt safer and more comfortable to respond to the survey, interviews, observations and other means of data collection. I fully appreciated the legitimacy and benefits brought by such “insider” status, which might have otherwise been closed to “outsiders”.
However, I was also cognisant of the drawbacks of this position. Perhaps because I knew too much and was potentially too close to the research, questions about the objectivity, reflexivity, and authenticity of the research might be compromised (Kanuha, 2000). For instance, during data collection, it was possible that I might neglect some important aspects of the participants’ experience because of my empathy. Relatedly, my participants might give insufficient expression or explanation of their personal experience, as they might perhaps have assumed that since I was familiar with the situation and their psychological state, my understanding could be automatically triggered without verbal hint. What is more problematic is that the interpretation of the data might be affected by my undue subjectivity.

Aimed at offsetting the negative aspects of the insider view aforementioned, I tried to integrate an outsider stance, hoping the outsider stance and distant perspectives helped to appreciate the wider perspective, with its connections, causal patterns, and influences, than one also internal to the experience (Fay, 1996). This was realised in several ways. When the transcription of the interviews and records of the codes/themes were sent to the case study participants to verify the authenticity in an ongoing manner, I would also ask them to consistently provide whatever comment, reflection, correction and modification that they regarded necessary. After teachers’ narratives and stories were written and rewritten, I sent them back again to the corresponding participants to verify, provide more information or make alterations for me to rewrite relevant texts. In addition, I consulted my supervisors and PhD colleagues to interpret and judge my work during the coding process, and to read the stories and narratives I constructed.

As for me, I finally decided to place my researcher role in the “space between” (Dwyer & Buckle, 2009)an insider and outsider, as it was my conviction that dealing
with the fluidity and multi-layered complexity of human experience, the binary alternatives between the insider role and outsider role would be more effective and rational than restrictively locking into either one. Such a position constantly reminded me to stay intimately and closely involved with the researched while being cautious not to be too “close” to lose objectivity and reflexivity. Taking on the dual role of an insider-outsider, I tried to be committed to authenticity, accuracy and adequacy in data collection and analysis throughout the course of the research.

4.3.2 Relationship between the Researcher and the Participants

Positioning myself as an insider-outsider of the research, I embraced Cameron, Frazer, Harvey & Rampton’s (1992) concepts of ethics and empowerment during the multiple-case study. To remain ethical I was mindful that my participants did not suffer damage or inconvenience while participating in the research, and that their contributions were adequately acknowledged. To make my research empowering, I observed three tenets proposed by Cameron et al. (1993): (1) Persons are not objects and should not be treated as objects. Researcher should be mindful of their feelings, values and needs. (2) The participants’ own agendas should be addressed. (3) Knowledge that is worth having is worth sharing. Not only were the research goals and procedures explicitly stated to the participants, but also the research was conducted in an open, interactive and dialogic manner. The findings were shared with the participants whose divergent interpretations were encouraged and acknowledged.

4.3.3 Obtrusiveness in Classroom Observations

In the focal university, as in most universities in China, classroom observations are usually conducted for two purposes. One is for teacher evaluation and the other is for
teachers to learn from role models. The observers for the former purpose are often school administrators and teaching quality evaluators, while for the latter are colleagues of the model teacher. The two kinds of observations have the commonality that they invariably entail pressure on the teacher being observed, for no one wants to fail either the evaluation or as a role model. Gradually the recognition has taken root in teachers’ minds that it will harm one’s reputation if one does not perform perfectly in front of any observation. Well aware of such stereotypical attitudes my participants may have towards my observations, and in order not to invoke any distress or loss of face, I first explained my general purpose and consulted with each of them about the timetable for all the observations during the data collection period. Then every time before I went to their class, I would contact them two days earlier to confirm their permission and informed them of the specific purpose and means that I was going to use to collect data in their class. Usually, I would stay at the back corner and behave in an unnoticeable manner so that my presence and actions in the classroom would not disturb the students. In sum, I tried to ensure that my presence in the classroom was as least obtrusive as possible.

4.3.4 Benefits and Reciprocity

However, getting my participants to identify with the value of the research was not enough, I also tried to ensure they were able to benefit from their participation. Since ESP teachers’ professional development was a key concern of every participant, I shared my ideas and literature resources with them, kept them informed of the research proceeding, and provided advice and comments on their requirements.

Teachers who responded to the survey of narrative frames would benefit through completing the survey (see Carter, 1993; Doecke, 2004; Golombek & Johnson, 2004).
When telling their stories, the teachers inevitably reflected on their experiences and made meanings of them. Thereby they gained an understanding of their teaching knowledge and practice (Freeman, 2002).

To the multiple-case study participants, I offered assistance in relation to collecting and sorting teaching materials, making PowerPoint slides, designing classroom activities, etc., as I knew preparing for ESP teaching is quite demanding. I also shared my own ESP teaching and research experience. In this way, I hoped my participants could gain something substantial both in theory and in practice, thus making the research a mutually beneficial activity.

### 4.3.5 Anonymity and Confidentiality of Records

In order not to cause discomfort or the potential risk of disclosing any privacy, I preserved the anonymity of the teachers, the students and the schools by using pseudo names or numeric indexes in data collection and findings report. The sources of the records, tapes, transcripts and any other materials that might expose the identity of the participants were kept confidential during the research period. In so doing it guaranteed that the materials collected for the study would not be used for any institutional teaching or learning evaluation about the individual teacher or student.

### 4.4 Part One: Investigating Chinese ESP Teachers’ Perceived Challenges and Needs

In this part, I aimed to form a general understanding of the challenges confronting ESP teachers and their needs for institutional support. Specifically, I sought to answer the following aspects:

1. What are Chinese ESP teachers’ perceived challenges?
2. What institutional support do they need in order to overcome these challenges?

4.4.1. Instrument Development and Validation

Given that no existing questionnaire is available to assess ESP teachers’ challenges and needs, I developed the instrument following Dörnyei and Taguchi’s (2010) proposal of questionnaire development. Three steps were involved, namely, item generation, initial piloting, and psychometric evaluation.

The process of item generation began with a qualitative exploration. It commenced with my personal encounters with some ESP practitioners from different universities, with whom I had built up connections through attending conferences and other professional training events. Occasions of such encounters included face-to-face meetings, Skype interviews, WeChat\(^2\) conversations, or reading their blogs posted in their Qzones\(^3\). An overarching topic is: what are the challenges in your ESP practice and what are your expectations for institutional help in order to optimize your ESP practice? The online blogs they directed me to read were pertinent to this topic too. A cursory analysis of the verbal and textual information collected in this way presented some recurrent themes, including “lack of subject knowledge”, “low self-efficacy in classroom teaching”, and “insufficient expertise in teaching ESP”. These difficulties

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2 WeChat is a mobile text and voice messaging communication service developed by Tencent in China, first released in January 2011. It is one of the largest standalone instant messaging apps by monthly active users. Retrieved from https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/

have echoed some of the challenges reviewed in Section 2.2. This qualitative exploration, combined with the challenges and difficulties identified in the literature review, led to the generation of ten candidate questions.

I then referred to instruments that were designed to reflect teachers’ perceptions of their abilities to perform specific teaching tasks. Among the various instruments available (e.g., Dellinger, Bobbett, Olivier & Ellett, 2008; Friedman & Kass, 2002; Paneque & Barbetta, 2006; Tschannen-Moran & Woolfolk-Hoy, 2001), Dellinger et al.’s (2008) *Teacher’s Efficacy Beliefs System-Self Form* (TEBS-Self) is most relevant to this research. This instrument was developed and validated in close accordance with Bandura’s (1997, 1986) concept of efficacy expectations, which focus on beliefs about whether behaviours can be performed. In a university context, teachers’ efficacy expectations are understood as their judgement of their own capabilities to execute task- and context-specific activities (Dellinger et al., 2008). In this study, when teachers shift from teaching GE to teaching ESP, they are faced with new tasks and situations, where challenges brought by ESP teaching will inexorably affect their self-efficacy expectations. It is presumably true that the level and strength\(^4\) of their self-efficacy judgement, in turn, can be an indicator of the level of challenges they are handling. It is on this account that I decided to draw on this instrument for initial questionnaire development.

Taking account of cultural and situational suitability, 14 questions were selected and adapted from TEBS-Self to represent the research focus on teachers’ ESP

\(^4\) Self-efficacy judgement differs in terms of strength, level and generality. Here strength refers to the certainty of one’s ability to perform a task; level relates to the difficulty level of a task; generality pertains to the transferability of one’s self-efficacy across different tasks (Zimmeran & Cleary, 2006).
pedagogical content knowledge and practices. Sample items involved changes to wordings to match the context, such as the following: the original item “adjust teaching and learning activities as needed” was revised to “adjust ESP teaching and learning activities and materials as needed” in the questionnaire. In addition, another 10 items were added to the questionnaire pool. These 10 items were relevant to the disciplinary subject knowledge and ESP needs analysis based on my initial qualitative exploration. In this way, an initial list of 24 questionnaire items was generated.

Two important measures were then conducted to ensure the content validity of the questionnaire. First, given their familiarity of ESP teaching in Chinese universities, the questionnaire was immediately emailed to three of the aforementioned ESP practitioners I communicated with during the initial qualitative exploration. They were invited to scrutinize the initial pool to check the wording of each item for clarity and readability. Second, three experts, who possess expertise either in ESP teaching, English teacher training or ESP theoretical and empirical inquiry were invited to assess the content of the questionnaire. Particularly, they were asked to evaluate the theoretical rationale, the construct being measured, and the logical sequence of the clusters of the subcategories. Following this, three items were deleted due to unimportance, redundancy and potential ambiguities. The revised version of the questionnaire was a 5-point Likert scale rating from 1 (no challenge) to 5 (very strong challenge) with 21 items. Given that the second research question is to examine teachers’ needs in response to the identified challenges, the same items were used to form the second section of the questionnaire, with the rating being from 1 (no need) to 5 (very strong need). The initial instrument, ESP Teachers’ Challenges and Needs Questionnaire (ESP-TCNQ), was thus developed for trialling.
Following Dörnyei and Taguchi (2010), the validity and reliability of the instrument was ensured by taking the subsequent steps. The questionnaire was piloted with 58 ESP teachers online in an ESP-teacher QQ group. Because ESP-TCNQ is made up of two parts, targeting separately participants’ self-reported challenges and needs, the internal reliability of the questionnaire was examined part by part. The overall reliability coefficient of the challenges part was found to have a Cronbach’s Alpha of .908 as a whole and the value of Cronbach’s Alpha in the needs part was .915. Both of the two parts indicated a high degree of reliability (Dörnyei & Taguchi, 2010).

4.4.2 Participants

Convenience sampling and snowball sampling were used in recruiting participants for the questionnaire survey. Initially, 67 attendees of a three-day ESP teaching workshop were invited to be participants on the basis of convenience sampling. This workshop was organized by a university in Northeast China to provide training to English teachers with less than three years’ ESP teaching experience. I then asked these participants to identify their peers who also had less than three years’ ESP teaching experience. The participation information sheet and consent form was sent to potential participants via email. 141 teachers responded and agreed to participate. From the attendees of the workshop, six teachers were randomly selected to participate in the individual interview.

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5 This ESP-teacher QQ group was launched by a local English teaching association. Teachers who join this group mainly come from different universities within the province. QQ is an instant messaging (IM) platform for PC and mobile and has become the one of the favourite social platforms for young Chinese users with its diversified functions and services. QQ allows its users to communicate with each other through text, video, pictures and stickers, as well as decorate their personalized avatars, chatting bubbles and profile photo widgets. Retrieved from https://www.tencent.com/en-us/system.html.
sessions after receiving their consent. Table 4.6 provides the information of the respondents’ years of ESP teaching experience and subject area.

Table 4.6 Participants’ Profiles

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Questionnaire survey participants</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Years of ESP teaching</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0.5-1.5</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.5-3</td>
<td>156</td>
<td>75%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Subject area</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Law English</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>17%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Business English</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>31%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Medical English</td>
<td>108</td>
<td>52%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Interview participants 6

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year of ESP teaching</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subject area</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Business English</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Medical English</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

4.4.3 Data Collection

The questionnaire was first administered to the attendees of the workshop in hard copy. Then the link to the online questionnaire, together with the digital information sheet and consent form, was sent to the attendees via email who in turn forwarded them to people they identified as appropriate for participation (i.e. with no more than three years’ ESP teaching experience).

After the administration of the questionnaire, a 30-minute one-on-one semi-structured interview was conducted with each of the six randomly selected participants. These interviews were in Chinese and audio-recorded. The data were later transcribed
and translated into English by the researcher, and then sent to the relevant participants for modification and verification.

Interview questions comprised the following:

1. What are your major concerns in terms of handling content-specific subject matter knowledge in teaching ESP?

2. What is your biggest difficulty in conducting ESP needs analysis and addressing student variables (such as those listed in the questionnaire)?

3. Can you briefly comment on your pedagogical practices as an ESP teacher? What are the challenges in this respect?

4. What institutional support are you expecting in order to cope with the challenges in relation to (1) subject matter knowledge, (2) knowledge of needs analysis and students, (3) ESP pedagogical content knowledge, and (4) GE pedagogical content knowledge⁶?

4.4.4 Data Analysis

With regard to the data collected through the questionnaire survey, initial data imputation revealed that the data were normally distributed and demonstrated homogeneity of variance. The examination of KMO measure (sample adequacy measurement), Bartlett’s test and inspection of the correlation matrix indicated that both parts of the ESP-TCNQ were appropriate for performing factor analysis (Part I: Challenges, KMO= .884; χ²=1223.950, df =210, p<.001; Part II: Needs, KMO= .878; χ²=1835.769, df=406, p<.001).

⁶ The term “pedagogical content knowledge” was explained by the researcher to the respondents.
The data were then subjected to an exploratory factor analysis (EFA), using solutions with non-orthogonal rotation (Direct Oblimin, $\delta=0$). Given that no previous study has attempted to systematically construct Chinese tertiary ESP teachers’ challenges and needs inventory from the EFL context, such factor analysis, as a data-reduction technique, allows for capturing most of the variability in the pattern of correlations. This was achieved by extracting possible latent factors so that the construct validity of the $ESP-TCNQ$ was given the chance to be examined (Pallant, 2016). Meanwhile, a set of underlying latent constructs were expected to be uncovered so that the current Chinese ESP teachers’ challenges and needs could be better understood. The EFA was repeated several times until no further items could be removed in the analysis. Decision criteria for selecting the number of factors were to retain the fewest number of factors while accounting for the greatest amount of variation. To this end, a number of techniques were used to assist the decision, including Kaiser’s eigenvalues greater-than-one (K1) rule, Catell’s scree test, and Horn’s parallel analysis (Pallant, 2016). The factor loadings of all items were greater than or equal to $\pm .40$ based on a sample size of at least 200 cases (Field, 2013). Further assessment resulted in the elimination of one low loading (Item 9: plan activities that accommodate the range of individual differences among the students) and one complex cross-loading (Item 16: provide a learning environment that accommodates students with special needs).

The interview data were analysed using thematic analysis typical of qualitative inquiry (Barkhuizen, Benson & Chik, 2014; Milles & Huberman, 1994; Risseman, 2008). Transcripts were read and reread to identify emerging codes and themes. Afterwards, all identified themes were compared and juxtaposed both within and across the participants.
4.5 Part Two-Stage One: The Survey of Narrative Frames on ESP Teachers’ Collective Identity Work

4.5.1 Instrument Development

Rationale for Using Narrative Frames

A narrative frame refers to a written story template consisting of a series of incomplete sentences and blank spaces of varying lengths. It is structured as a story in skeletal form. “The aim is for participants to produce a coherent story by filling in the spaces according to their own experiences and their reflections on these” (Barkhuizen, 2011, p. 402). A primary reason for adopting this tool here is that it well serves the exploratory purpose at this stage of the research, because, as Barkhuizen (2014, p. 13) suggests, narrative frames “are useful for entry into a new or unfamiliar research context” (in this research, ESP teachers in mainland China remain largely under-researched) and “provide an introduction to that context”.

Unlike the questionnaire which was administered among ESP teachers from different institutions, this narrative frame was only conducted in the focal university. This is because I was most interested in the institutional circumstances under which the case study participants construct their identity. As narrative inquiry would bring researchers into the “three dimensional life space” (Xu & Connelly, 2009, p. 223) of the teachers, the contextual implications drawn from the survey would set the background for the multiple-case study in the subsequent stage.

In addition, compared with other approaches utilized in narrative inquiry which usually involves a small number of participants, narrative frames can be administered to
a relatively larger sample. Each respondent contributes one piece of storied snapshot based on his or her reflection of experience. Many such snapshots come to comprise a substantial database for the researcher. Therefore, this tool is intended to generate a small corpus of “factual statements” (Barkhuizen & Wette, 2008, p. 383) which would help to paint a general picture of teachers’ narratives on their professional identity. The themes identified from stories of the ESP teachers in this focal university help to create an overview of how teachers who used to teach GE reconstitute themselves as ESP teachers. This overview then serves as a point of departure for the subsequent in-depth investigation of the individual teacher experience.

Another reason for using narrative frames is that the researcher can have better control of the information to be elicited. As guidance and support will be provided in terms of both structure and content (Barkuizen & Wette, 2008), narrative frames collect information closely pertinent to what the researcher wants. Usually thematic analysis is carried out, as the templates are designed with predetermined sub-themes. In this sense, “the structured nature also makes for easier analysis” (Barkuizen, 2014).

**A Note of Caution for Designing Narrative Frames**

Narrative frames have ten essential features both in design and in administration (see Barkhuizen, 2014), among which three will be specifically attended to when designing the instrument for my research.

First, both a spatial and a temporal dimension were included so as to locate participants’ stories in a particular place (i.e., a medical university in Northeast China) and at particular times (i.e. a period of ongoing English education reforms). The temporal dimension was further extended chronologically to take in the past, the present
and the future; hence the respondents’ past educational and teaching experience, their current performance, as well as the ideal professional self/SELVES he or she hopes to fashion can be captured.

Second, “once the frame has been completed, the narrative should read like a coherent story” (Barkhuizen, 2014, p. 21). Therefore, various coherence devices will be applied to weave the sub-themes into a coherent story skeleton rather than a list of disconnected sentence completion questions.

Last but not least, narrative frames can have typical design flaws. The content structure of the frame and limited writing space following the prompts may constrain participant responses. To some extent, this problem is inherent and cannot be mitigated. The structured writing scaffolds are the guarantee for the researcher to obtain targeted narrative data. Even the size of the limited space may serve as an indication of expected length of response. Nevertheless, respondents may at times need more freedom and space to tell their stories. The solution to this problem in my design was to add more lines in brackets following each prompt and to explain in the instruction that these extra lines are for personalized needs.

Another problem that has to be well addressed is that the prompts in the frame might not be interpreted in the way intended by the researcher. To a large extent, this is because the prompts fail to provide adequate or clear enough cues for the respondent to figure out what is required of them. Confusion may also be caused by ineffective or misleading instructions (see Barkhuizen, 2014). To reduce such potential pitfalls, an earlier pilot study was conducted with two ESP teachers and two teacher identity researchers outside the focal university. Modifications were done taking account of their
feedback and suggestions. In so doing, I hoped to iron out any weaknesses of the design and increase the validity of the research.

**The Design of the Survey**

As mentioned in Section 3.2.3, the conceptual underpinning for the design of this narrative frames survey is Clarke’s (2009a) ethico-political diagram for doing “Identity work” (p. 190). Highlighting the kernel role of individual agency and the nexus of self-reflection and social recognition, this diagram proposes four combined elements in one’s identity formation. Drawing on this diagram, the survey is structured to include two sections (The complete version is also presented as Appendix II).

Part 1 is a general inquiry into demographic information. This part used sentence starters to obtain participants’ background information about their gender, name of graduated university, degree qualifications, years of GE and ESP teaching, and their professional title
Part 1 Demographic Information

1. I am a____ (gender) teacher.
2. I got my____ (degree qualifications) in ____ (name of graduated university).
3. I have been teaching General English for ___year(s) and ESP for____ year(s).
4. Now I am a (n) _____ (professional title) in my university.

Part 2 is made up of three templates. The sentence starters were designed to cover four categories in accordance with the four axes of components of the ethico-political diagram of identity work (Clarke, 2009a). They are: 1) the substances of teacher identity; 2) the rationale for cultivating certain identities, attitudes and behaviours, as well as the authority sources of teacher identity; 3) self-practices of teacher identity; and 4) the telos of teacher identity. Spatial and temporal elements were also included in the design. I now move on to an illustration of the three parts.

Respondents were at first guided to reflect on the substances of their professional identity. According to Clarke (2009a), the substances of teacher identity address issues of what part of a person’s self/selves is used to constitute his/her teaching identity and how it is used. In this light, the beginning sentence is designed to elicit respondents’ overview of the way they make sense of their role as an English teacher based on a retrospect of their career to date. In order to ground the respondents onto this relatively abstract concept, a written illustration combined with some optional responses graphically presented was offered, together with the sentence starter as prompts for the first blank space (see below).
Template 1 Substances of English Teacher Identity

5. Reflecting on my professional experience, I think I have constituted myself as an English teacher with…

Template 2 taps into the authority-sources and self-practice of teacher identity. With an attempt to uncover the differences, if there are any, between being a GE teacher and being an ESP teacher in this respect, I designed two sets of sentence prompts with explicit temporal markers. These were used to direct respondents to provide an elaboration on the rationale for cultivating certain identities, attitudes and behaviours, as well as their perceived authority sources that endorse their self-recognition of their identity shift from being a GE teacher to becoming an ESP teacher. The first set consists of Starters 6 to 8, where teachers were invited to recount their GE teaching practices, and to come down to an understanding of his or her identity. Starters 9 to 16 have to do with the identity that teachers fashioned in doing ESP, especially in terms of addressing challenges. After a summary of the perceived issues arising in ESP (i.e. Starter 9), teachers were encouraged to tell a short story of an ESP classroom problem through completing Starters 10 to12, which were intended to draw out their reactions and perceived needs. Subsequently, they were led to making meanings of themselves as ESP teachers, which was followed by an account of their attitudes
towards ESP and beliefs about the authority sources and conditions of becoming a qualified ESP teacher, as highlighted in Starters 14, 15, and 16. Detailed sentence starters of this template are showcased below.

**Template 2 Mode of Subjection, Techniques, and Practices**

6  When I taught general English, I used to focus on…
7  At that time I was a teacher who…
8  This is because I believed …
9  Since I started to teach ESP, the challenges confronting me could be summarised as…
10 I remember once in my ESP classroom I had a difficult time trying to…
11 I tried to solve the problem by…
12 It would have been very helpful if…
13 In relation to this sort of problems, what I need is…
14 Now I see myself as…
15 My attitudes towards ESP are…
16 I believe that in order to be a qualified ESP teacher, I…

At the end of the whole story, respondents were offered a chance to reflect on goals and objectives as an English teacher in the past and at present, as well as to envision the future aims of their professional life (see Template 3).

**Template 3 The Telos of English Teacher Identity**

17 Thinking about my own professional trajectory, in the past, I aimed to…
18 Now my goal is…
19 I hope in the future I can…

**4.5.2 Participants and Data Collection**

An invitation email with a brief introduction to the project and an explanation of ethical issues was sent to all the English teachers in the English Department of the focal
university. With their consent, the survey of narrative frames with a summary of instructions (all written in Chinese - the native language of the respondents) was sent out. Fifty-four teachers completed the survey, with a return rate of 87.1%. Their demographic information is reported in Table 4.7. Here, the universities which the participants graduated from were categorized roughly into three tiers: Project 985 and/or 211 universities\(^7\); national universities directly administered by Chinese MOE; and provincial universities.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Male</th>
<th>3</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>51</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B.A.</td>
<td>12</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>M.A</td>
<td>42</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Project 985 and/or 211 universities</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>National universities</td>
<td>15</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Provincial universities</td>
<td>36</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6-10</td>
<td>7</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11-15</td>
<td>38</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16-25</td>
<td>9</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2-3</td>
<td>50</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4-5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### 4.5.3 Data Analysis

The responses to Part 2 were analysed in the following ways. First each teacher’s responses to Part 2 were extracted and combined to a complete story. These stories

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\(^7\) Project 985 is a constructive project for founding world-class universities in the 21st century conducted by the government of the People’s Republic of China. Launched in 1998, only 9 universities were included in the project in the initial phase. It has now reached almost 40 universities. Project 211 is another endeavour of the Chinese government aimed at strengthening about 100 institutions of higher education and key disciplinary areas as a national priority for the 21st century. Retrieved from http://www.chinaeducenter.com/en/cedu/ceduproject211.php.
represented how teachers have (re)formed their identity shifting from being a GE teacher to being an ESP teacher, especially in relation to their perceptions and practices when addressing the challenges in ESP. In this manner, 54 stories were obtained, transcribed and translated into English by the researcher. I read the stories one by one to get an overview of each teacher’s storied experience. As the design of the frames is based on Clarke’s (2009a) diagram as aforementioned, I adopted an analytical strategy which relies on theoretical propositions (Yin, 2009), meaning that a priori analytical categories were defined drawing on the ethico-political diagram of teacher identity and the way the narrative frames were designed, which were then applied to the data (see Table 4.8).

Table 4.8 Analytical Categories of ESP Teacher Identity

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The substances</th>
<th>The authority sources and self-practice</th>
<th>The ultimate goals</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Respondent</td>
<td>GE experience</td>
<td>Starters 17-19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Starter 5</td>
<td>Starters 6-8</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher 1</td>
<td>Starters 9-16</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher 2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Aimed at seeking commonalities and similarities among the teachers, I pulled out responses to relevant sentence starters and placed them in a row into the separate columns as shown in Table 4.8. Data in each column were then subjected to thematic analysis typical of qualitative narrative inquiry (Barkhuizen et al., 2014; Milles & Huberman, 1994; Risseman, 2008). I read and re-read the data to uncover themes. Codes were consistently applied to themes. For example, any mention such as “engaging students in an enjoyable English learning environment” was coded as “pedagogical content knowledge”, whereas “ESP practitioner who is struggling to complete a
transition” was coded as “a struggling adapter”. The emerging themes then guided the ensuing coding. As I went through the responses, I noticed ostensible linguistic strategies teachers used to construct their professional identities and described lived experiences. In particular, I looked at the evaluative and affective adjectives (e.g., “resourceful”, “frustrated”); various forms of modality (e.g., “must do”) and metaphors (e.g., “students were like my children”). This procedure continued until themes were saturated. Following that, all the surfaced themes were re-examined and resembled to form meaningful connections with the prior categories. In this way the categories were fleshed out into a coherent scheme (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Frequencies of various themes were calculated. The frequencies represent the number of times that a specific theme was mentioned by the teachers. Sometimes more than one theme could be found in responses, or only one theme was evident in several responses, therefore the number of frequencies do not add up to the number of respondents (n=54).

4.6 Part Two-Stage Two: The Multiple-Case Study

4.6.1 Participants

In order to select information-rich cases, purposive sampling techniques were utilised to choose participants for this multiple-case study. Specifically, I adopted maximum variation sampling, hoping to explore the variation within the ESP teacher cohort in the focal university and seek potential commonalities which are reasonably stable across the sampled diversity (Dörnyei, 2007). Referring to the demographic information of the 54 ESP teachers who formed the potential sample pool (see Table 4.7), I took account of the attributes of gender, degree qualification, graduated university, years of GE and ESP teaching, as well as their students composition. The availability and willingness to
participate are also considered. Participants of Stage One are scrutinized according to the above attributes. Finally five ESP teachers are highlighted as possible candidates. An invitation letter for participation was then sent to them via email. Three of them replied with consent and interest in participating. These three participants were thus selected to take part in the multiple-case study. Table 4.9 displays their individual profiles.

Table 4.9 Participants’ Profiles (Names are Pseudonyms)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Degree Qualification</th>
<th>Graduated University</th>
<th>Years of GE teaching</th>
<th>Years of ESP teaching</th>
<th>Students composition</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ru</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>M.A.</td>
<td>Project 985 university and National university</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Undergraduates 7-year Programme students Postgraduates</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alice</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>M.A.</td>
<td>Project 985 and 211 university</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>7-year Programme students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frank</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>M.A.</td>
<td>Pro vincial university</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Undergraduates 7-year Programme students</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

4.6.2 Data Collection

The principal means of collecting data was through a series of semi-structured interviews with each of the participants over one academic semester from March 2015 to July 2015. This was complemented by other sources of data, including participants’ regular reflective journal writings, audio-recorded field observations, various documentation, students’ comments, as well as the first researcher’s field notes.
Semi-structured Interviews

With each of the three case-study teacher participants, six rounds of lengthy semi-structured interviews lasting from 25 to 40 minutes were conducted on a regular basis, which became the major source of data. Because the teachers were usually busy before and after class, some post-observation interviews were in the form of short conversations. An important reason for opting to focus on the interviews is that they provided rich information about the participants’ life experience, which not only described the current circumstances, but also revealed their personal history, cognition and emotion.

As set out in Section 4.2.1, I employed a narrative-oriented approach in designing and conducting the interviews. By “semi-structured”, I do not mean to have a list of pre-designed questions. Rather, I prepared a range of topics or issues to be covered. Framed around and guided by the overarching research questions stated in Chapter One, I interviewed my participants regarding their life history about education and working experience, the challenges and needs they have confronted in the past and at present as ESP teachers, including their knowledge and expertise, as well as their reflections and thoughts on their professional identities, practices and development. Based on these fairly general topics, I used interview protocols that varied somewhat between participants, in line with each of their specific experiences and situations. Rather than strictly followed the protocols, I allowed the conversation to develop in unexpected directions with the purpose of facilitating a smooth flow of thoughts and encouraging genuine sharing (see Appendix III for example questions in the interview protocols).

Inspired by the “three-interview series model” and the progressive focus approach (see Seidman, 2006), these interviews were organized to put the participant’s experience in context initially, then to concentrate on the concrete details of the specific events or
observations, and finally to ask the participants to reflect on the meaning of their experiences. The first interview was carried out at the beginning of the semester (March 2015), with the purpose of collecting information of the family background, life and educational history, and an overview of teachers’ GE and ESP teaching experiences, attitudes and beliefs. The follow-up interviews focused on the issues and themes both within the topic range, and emerged from previous interviews or conversations, and from field observations. From mid-March to mid-July in 2015, I conducted four lengthy post-lesson interviews after field observations with each participant. The last interview was carried out at the end of the semester, which zeroed in on participants’ reflections on their ESP pedagogical practices, identity (re)formation and professional development.

Influenced by a number of leading narrative researchers’ idea that storytelling in interviews is co-constructed between the interviewer and the interviewee (see e.g., Barkhuizen, 2011, 2013; Palvenko, 2002), I took a participant-centred stance in the interview process. In light of Atkinson (1998)’s comment on the importance of interview settings, the interviews took place where it was convenient for the participants, including their office, the corridor of the teaching building, the university canteen, or the garden on campus. Participants were given the choice of responding in Chinese and/or in English. I would follow their choice and talk in the selected language. Ru would like to have the interviews in her office, and to speak in Chinese. Alice preferred the campus garden or the hallways of the teaching building, whereas Frank often chose the canteen and the classroom when there was no class. Like Ru, Frank and Alice talked mostly in Chinese, with occasional translanguaging to English. During the interview process, I always tried to maintain extended, relaxed and open conversations in various practical ways.
The interviews were complemented by the field observations. While interviews greatly contribute to the construction of the individual teacher’s experiences and feelings, other sources of data are inextricably needed to build a richer story of the phenomena of research interest. As Casanave states:

Like other kinds of qualitative research, narrative inquiry also depends on close observation of people in their settings, detailed descriptions, and the writing and collecting of many kinds of field texts such as notes, journals, letters, and transcripts of interviews. However, the intent is to listen, to record, and to construct stories of lived experiences within the narrative dimension of time, place and personal-social relationship

(Casanave, 2005, p. 22)

**Other Sources of Data**

Considering the complexity of people’s lived experiences, it is impossible to use any single method to collect data and interpret the phenomenon in question. As such, I also collected data through the following methods.

**Reflective Journal Writing**

Informed by research in teacher education, reflective practice has become a paradigm that helps teachers to enact a constructivist approach to professional development. Through reflection, Cochran-Smith and Lytle (2001) point out that “both prospective and experienced teachers bring prior knowledge and personal experience to bear on new learning situations” (p.45). On this basis, participants were encouraged to write
reflective journals to record their feelings about and reflections on their teaching and life as ESP teachers at regular intervals.

At the outset, as I was not sure whether the participants had an idea of what to write about and how, I decided to provide a model as a reference. Drawing on the methods commonly used in teacher education, I encouraged, but did not restrict, the participants to contribute three types of reflective journals: teaching journals, response journals and dialogue journals (see Lee, 2007). Teaching journals are written reflections related to classroom pedagogic practices. Response journals are accounts of how teachers reflect on the issues raised in practice. Dialogue journals provide opportunities for participants to exchange with the researcher over whatever topic they are concerned with. Instructions were offered to participants on the differences and purposes of the three journals. They were given the freedom to write whichever type they preferred, or any combination (or all) of them.

Later on, the participants were encouraged to write reflections on their teaching practices, teaching contexts, emotions, professional development, knowledge updates, or whatever topics they were willing to share. In other words, the topics were entirely open-ended and up to the teachers, as I was interested in what they were concerned with at the time. Equally open were the genre and style of writing. Most of the journal writings I received were reflective narratives, whereas some are prose and argumentative. There was even one poem. Actually, apart from the journal writings completed according to this requirement, I also received their diaries or online blogs on relevant topics which were written prior to this study (e.g., Alice’s blog excerpt of 01/01/2013 on p.158).

These written narratives were requested to be submitted on a regular monthly basis, but I also welcomed spontaneous correspondence at any time and in any form, either
through email, online blogs, WeChat texts, or traditional paper and pen writings. The participants were free to choose the language for writing up the journals, and they predominantly used Chinese, though some of them occasionally wrote in English or mixed the two languages in one piece of writing.

Field Observations

In this study, field observations include formal classroom lesson observations and informal observations on other occasions and sites, such as faculty meetings, staff room pedagogic discussions, and other relevant activities.

Classroom observations were audio-recorded and supplemented by field notes taken by me while observing the lessons, on aspects of the classroom that are likely to be missed by the recorder. Lesson observations happened on a monthly basis in order to investigate how teachers engage with the teaching contents and the students. I would negotiate a proper time for observation with each participant following their teaching plan so that different types of lessons could be observed.

In addition, I also attended their departmental and panel meetings for interviews and informal observation, with an intention to look at how they interact with colleagues and played their role in the community.

Thanks to the rapport I established with the faculty and the participants, I got the approval to participate in regular faculty meetings, and other group meetings or discussions on ESP teaching, which were usually held among the panel members in their staff office. Not only was I allowed to audio-record these activities, but I was also provided with related policy documents, meeting briefings, activity memoirs, materials for teaching discussions, and other artefacts.
Documents

The documents I have referred to included institutional policies, educational directions and guidelines, ESP syllabus and curriculum directions, teaching plans provided by the participants, and other text materials related to English teaching and learning.

In addition, I gave special attention to the *The University Newsletter*, which is an internal publication that aims to inform and help staff feel connected with the university. It is produced monthly, keeping staff informed of the results of monthly teaching assessments; reporting on new developments and achievements in research and teaching, as well as and inspiring staff with what people are doing at all levels across the institution. There is a special column entitled “Teachers and Teaching Excellence”, where names of excellent or the most popular teachers nominated by university supervisors, peers and students are listed, with a snapshot of their teaching performance reported either by student journalists or by supervisors. This column drew my interest for the reason that it was highly regarded by teachers as an honour and official recognition of their teaching expertise and competence, as well as their popularity among students. A copy of the newsletter is kept in the conference room of the faculty, and stories of English teachers found there were often retold and appraised at faculty meetings.

In tandem with data collection, I also carried out data preparation. The data from the interviews were all transcribed and translated into English. Recordings of field observations, field notes, reflective journal writings, and various documents were reviewed first by me and pertinent sections were summarized, transcribed and translated into English with the help of a colleague. In order to increase accuracy, the transcriptions
were reviewed and double-checked by the research assistant, whereas the translation was cross-checked by a bilingual colleague.

4.6.3 Data Analysis

Qualitative analysis is largely a language-based analysis (Dörnyei, 2007). The transcripts were in different forms, some being monologues, some being conversations, and some being verbal interactions among different speakers. These texts were rich not only in content and themes, but also in linguistic and non-linguistic features. Given such textual variety, any single analyzing method cannot do justice to all. Aiming at addressing a specific text type with a method that can best excavate the valuable message from it, I opted for using different qualitative methods for different text types.

Analysis of the Narrative Data

Before the analysis, the data of each participant were kept in an independent raw data file in common format (e.g., font size, margins). Afterwards, the analysis was conducted in a recursive and iterative manner as I moved between the data and the research questions and the theoretical framework. Drawing on a general analysis procedure which is endorsed by a number of researchers (e.g., Creswell, 2013; Merriam, 1998; Miles & Huberman, 1994; Punch, 1998), I took the following steps:

Step 1: Preliminary reading and re-reading

In this stage, I read and re-read the texts in each file until I gained a general sense of the data. Reflective notes and memos were put down in the margins recording the key concepts and ideas that occurred to me. This was done in a free flowing manner, meaning without being restrained by the predetermined questions or theoretical framework. I also
looked over the transcripts of field observations and notes, moved between these data and the interview data to formulate larger thoughts. I reflected on the larger thoughts and formed a number of initial categories. Then as the data reading and reflection moved on, multiple forms of evidence were found to support the categories or expose new ones.

Step 2: Identifying codes and themes

During the initial categorization, the data were gradually segmented into meaningful chunks. During the process of creating codes, I combined deductive and inductive coding (see Miles, Huberman & Saldaña, 2014). Initially a list of a priori codes/themes/categories was developed, drawing on the theoretical framework, literature review, the research findings of the previous stages, and the three dimensions of narratives as earlier described (see Table 4.5 in Section 4.2.1). This list (with examples shown in Table 4.10) then served as a reference for coding, comparison and categorizing codes/themes into larger meaning units.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Prior education</th>
<th>Boundary-crossing activity</th>
<th>Meaning negotiation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>GE experience</td>
<td>Identification/differentiation</td>
<td>Engagement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coping strategy</td>
<td>Designated identity</td>
<td>Alignment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marginalisation</td>
<td>Identity in discourse</td>
<td>Learning in practice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relationships with colleagues</td>
<td>Identity in practice</td>
<td>Motivation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relationship with students</td>
<td>Identity change over time</td>
<td>Agency</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Meanwhile, I also adopted an inductive coding approach, allowing other codes to emerge progressively. As the codes identified from the data grew in number, I began to scan and compare them more closely so as to classify, combine and sort them into themes. Again, this was a recursive and iterative process involving ongoing engagement with the data, the codes and the emerging themes.
The assignment of codes to data chunks was guided by the coding methods introduced by Miles et al. (2014). These authors have described a number of approaches, but suggested a selective, mixed and matched application as the most pertinent. Table 4.11 summarises the major methods used in this research.

Table 4.11 Major Coding Methods and Description

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Coding method</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Descriptive coding</td>
<td>To provide a basic topic of a passage, most appropriate for indexing contextual information.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Process coding</td>
<td>To use gerunds to imply that the processes are intertwined with the dynamics of time.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In vivo coding</td>
<td>To use the participant’s own language to name codes as a way to prioritise and honour their voice.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emotion coding</td>
<td>To label the emotions recalled by the participant or inferred by the researcher.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Values coding</td>
<td>To apply codes that can reflect a participant’s values, attitudes and beliefs.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Causation coding</td>
<td>To label the pathways of the generation of a particular outcome</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

These coding methods greatly facilitated the first round of coding. The following examples are taken from coded interview transcripts about different participants’ experiences. Figure 4.1 provides examples of the coding process.
As a young mother still breast feeding my baby, a young wife looking after the household, a young teacher whose career just took off, and a postgraduate student of a university in another city, life was like a battlefield to me and I tried so hard to get things to work (Interview excerpt 20/04/2015 from Ru).

I wasn’t quite keen on fitting into the workplace culture in the first few years (Interview excerpt 06/03/2015 from Frank).

When I saw my students underperformed in their EMI oral exams because of their deficient English, my face flushed (Interview expert 29/06/2015 from Alice)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Step 3: Connecting the Data and Going beyond</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Creswell (2013, p. 187) states, “interpretation in qualitative research involves abstracting out beyond the codes and themes to the larger meaning of the data”. Keeping this purpose in mind, I searched for relationships between the codes and themes first within each case, and then between cases. This is both an inductive and deductive process that required an intimate engagement with the data. The themes were investigated against the theoretical framework and existing literature in related fields. In so doing, larger categories were identified and used to answer the research questions and draw implications from them. An example of my analysis in this step is presented in Figure 4.2.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Some Supplementary Analysis Methods

Apart from the above qualitative approach which was principally oriented to analyzing the interview data, I also employed some supplementary methods to address different types of qualitative data. One is conversation analysis which was primarily used to analyse classroom interactions, as in the sections in relation to the pedagogical practices of each participant (see Section 6.1, 6.2, 6.3). I also employed discourse analysis, which mainly helped interpret discursive data from meeting observations, as in Section 5.3. In addition, I applied small /short story analysis (see Barkhuizen, 2010, 2016) to some narrative data. For instance, in Section 6.1, Ru related a small story about her learning experience for preparing for Medical English writing instruction. Through small story analysis, I identified the temporal dimension of the story and various stakeholders (e.g., Ru’s fellow ESP teachers and students) involved, thus coming to the judgement that the ESP enterprise was taking shape with time and progressively transformed from a “one...
man game” (in Ru’s term) to a collective learning and teaching activity. There are small stories in Alice and Frank’s narratives too.

Transcription conventions used in this study are based on Jefferson (2004), as listed below.

Table 4.12 Transcription Conventions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Capitalised WORD</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Capitalised WORD</td>
<td>especially emphasised compared to surrounding talk</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>…</td>
<td>intervening material has been omitted</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>()</td>
<td>author’s descriptions, comments, as well as explanation or translation of the receding text.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>=</td>
<td>a continuation of talk</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(pause)</td>
<td>a notable pause</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>::</td>
<td>elongated speech, a stretched sound</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>↑</td>
<td>rising intonation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>↓</td>
<td>falling intonation</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Chapter Summary

This chapter has provided an overview of the mixed methods design and a detailed exposition of data collection and analysis of each part of the research. In the next chapter, I report on findings of Part One and Part Two-Stage One. Findings of the multiple-case study are reported on in Chapter Six.
CHAPTER FIVE

FINDINGS AND PRELIMINARY DISCUSSIONS OF ESP TEACHERS’ PERCEIVED CHALLENGES AND NEEDS, THE SURVEY OF NARRATIVE FRAMES AND A UNIVERSITY MEETING OBSERVATION

Chapter Overview

In this chapter, I first present the findings and a brief discussion relating to Part One and Part Two-Stage One. I also include a section where I report on observations made at an English teaching reform meeting in the focal university, which took place at the beginning of the multiple-case study. The purpose is to provide contextual information about the focal university’s administrative and managerial style, the power relations, the status of ESP teachers and their professional commitments. I conclude this chapter with a brief discussion of the implications for the multiple-case study, which will be presented in Chapter Six.

5.1 Findings and Discussion of Chinese ESP Teachers’ Perceived Challenges and Needs

5.1.1 Questionnaire Survey Findings

Based on the information of the pattern matrices from the EFAs, a four-factor solution was concluded in the Challenges Section, accounting for 50.35% of the total variance. Examination of the item retention patterns clustered around each factor. Table 5.1 shows the final results of EFAs of the Challenges scales. Factor 1 consists of 4 items, which
reveal the challenges associated with ESP teachers’ subject matter knowledge in the content areas. Thus this factor is labelled as *Subject Matter Knowledge*.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Factor</th>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Factor Loading</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>α</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>SMK1</td>
<td>.832</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>.747</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SMK2</td>
<td>.759</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SMK3</td>
<td>.488</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SMK4</td>
<td>.547</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>KoNA&amp;S1</td>
<td>.675</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>.727</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>KoNA&amp;S2</td>
<td>.743</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>KoNA&amp;S3</td>
<td>.509</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>KoNA&amp;S4</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ESP-PCK1</td>
<td>.671</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>.744</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ESP-PCK2</td>
<td>.467</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ESP-PCK3</td>
<td>.457</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ESP-PCK4</td>
<td>.454</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ESP-PCK5</td>
<td>.674</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ESP-PCK6</td>
<td>.717</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>G-PCK1</td>
<td>.492</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>.779</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>G-PCK2</td>
<td>.442</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>G-PCK3</td>
<td>.683</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>G-PCK4</td>
<td>.748</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>G-PCK5</td>
<td>.788</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note. α = Cronbach’s Alpha*

Factor 2, labelled as *Knowledge of Needs Analysis and Students*, also has 4 items, referring to problems brought up by ESP needs analysis and students’ variables. Six items constitute Factor 3, which is named as *ESP Pedagogical Content Knowledge*. This is because this factor identifies skills specific to ESP classroom tasks/activities.
management, accommodation and attendance to students’ individuality, as well as flexible adoption and adaptation of teaching methods and materials. Factor 4 is composed of 5 items, encompassing mainly general communication skills that are applicable across teaching activities, and is thus labelled as *General Pedagogical Content Knowledge*.

Table 5.2 Results of EFAs and Reliabilities of the Needs Section

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Factor</th>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Factor Loading</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>SMK1</td>
<td>.428</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>SMK2</td>
<td>.728</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>SMK3</td>
<td>.483</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>SMK4</td>
<td>.633</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>KoNA&amp;S1</td>
<td>.586</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>KoNA&amp;S2</td>
<td>.444</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>KoNA&amp;S3</td>
<td>.730</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>KoNA&amp;S4</td>
<td>.446</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>ESP-PCK1</td>
<td>.683</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>ESP-PCK2</td>
<td>.473</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>ESP-PCK3</td>
<td>.763</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>ESP-PCK4</td>
<td>.728</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>ESP-PCK5</td>
<td>.493</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>ESP-PCK6</td>
<td>.505</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>G-PCK1</td>
<td>.478</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>G-PCK2</td>
<td>.596</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>G-PCK3</td>
<td>.726</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>G-PCK4</td>
<td>.814</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>G-PCK5</td>
<td>.806</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note. α = Cronbach’s Alpha*
In accordance with the Challenges scales, the four-factor solution, which was generated in Section II of the questionnaire, was also named with the same labels but within the needs field. Data show that the four-factor solution accounted for 55.43% of the total variance. Table 5.2 shows the final results of EFAs of the Needs scales in Part Two. Subsequently, the internal consistency reliability of each extracted factor was conducted using the Cronbach Alpha coefficient. The Cronbach’s Alpha value of each subcategory in the ESP-TCNQ scales was all above the .70 threshold value based on the sample size (Pallant, 2016), corroborating the internal consistency reliability of the instrument.

In addition, descriptive statistics have shown that there is a difference among the four factors within Challenges and Needs by means of the mean scores and standard deviation, with Factor 2 being the highest and Factor 4 being the lowest in each section. A closer examination was conducted to check whether the difference did exist among the four factors, followed by multiple comparisons of the post-hoc analyses to detect which pairs of means were significantly different. In this process, a one-way ANOVA was applied and post-hoc Tukey tests were also conducted.

Through pre-examinations, assumptions of the ANOVA, including normality, homogeneity of variances, and multicollinearity were all met for performing the ANOVA. Results revealed that significant differences in the mean scores were found among the four factors of challenges and needs ($F=13.293, p<.001; F=25.197, p<.001$, respectively). On the premise of the significant differences derived from ANOVA, pairwise comparisons were further performed to detect which pairs of means were significantly different within each dimension of Challenges and Needs through post-hoc Tukey tests. In Challenges, the mean scores of Factor 2 that I clustered were significantly higher than that measured in Factor 1 (KoNA & S> SMK, $p < .05$). The mean scores of
Factor 1 also significantly outperformed that measured in Factor 3 (SMK>ESP-PCK, \( p<.05 \)). Subsequent measures showed a significantly higher mean score of Factor 3 than that measured in Factor 4 (ESP-PCK>G-PCK, \( p<.05 \)). These results are presented in Table 5.3.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Factor</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Challenges</th>
<th></th>
<th>Needs</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>M</td>
<td>SD</td>
<td>LB</td>
<td>UB</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(a) SMK</td>
<td>208</td>
<td>3.48</td>
<td>.674</td>
<td>3.389</td>
<td>3.578</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(b) KoNA&amp;S</td>
<td>208</td>
<td>3.58</td>
<td>.614</td>
<td>3.473</td>
<td>3.679</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(c) ESP-PCK</td>
<td>208</td>
<td>3.46</td>
<td>.772</td>
<td>3.349</td>
<td>3.565</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(d) G-PCK</td>
<td>208</td>
<td>3.20</td>
<td>.783</td>
<td>3.092</td>
<td>3.310</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

ANOVA (Wilks’ Lambda )
\( F=13.293, p<.001, \text{ Partial } \eta^2 = .168 \)
\( F=25.197 , p< .001, \text{ Partial } \eta^2 = .277 \)

Post-hoc Tukey
(b)>(a)*, (a)>(c)*, (c)>(d)*

Through exploratory factor analyses (EFAs), four dimensions representing major challenges and needs respectively are identified. I then subjected the data to conducted within-group comparisons. The interviews with six selected participants generated typical patterns of their needs. The findings show that the challenges novice Chinese ESP teachers faced are closely related to their professional knowledge and skills. Such knowledge and skills mainly comprise: 1) discipline-specific subject matter knowledge, 2) knowledge of needs analysis and students, 3) ESP-specific pedagogical content knowledge, and 4) general pedagogical content knowledge.
5.1.2 Semi-Structured Interview Findings

On the whole, a high level of concern about the subject matter knowledge dilemma was expressed by all the respondents. Largely due to limited subject matter knowledge, teachers found it hard to go beyond focusing on linguistic knowledge to elaborate more on the content, as revealed in Excerpt 1.

Excerpt 1

When teaching GE, I’m quite confident in my English proficiency, and I have adequate knowledge to handle various contents and topics in the teaching materials. Comparatively, mostly I’ll stay closely to the content of the teaching material with almost no elaboration, as I’m afraid of being misleading or exposing fallacies…

Apart from impacting on the depth of teaching content, the subject knowledge dilemma teachers faced also contributed to their limited flexibility in deploying appropriate teaching methods. In particular, they found it hard to control and manage classroom activities. The following account is from a teacher whose department was espousing task-based learning approach in ESP teaching.

Excerpt 2

We’ve been implementing a task-based approach, but only in a limited manner. Sometimes it’s hard to design motivating and engaging tasks and manage classroom activities well. Sometimes, I can’t but resort to the old grammar-translation method when the material involves too much content subject knowledge.
Regarding the difficulty related to conducting needs analysis, teachers mainly mentioned two elements. One is their insufficient skills in doing ESP needs analysis. For instance, one teacher cited how much effort she was investing into learning corpus-based methodology to analyse the genre and register features of the disciplinary texts and discourses. The other problem concerns the human and material resources needed for doing systematic needs analysis, as can be seen in the statement below:

Excerpt 3

If we ((teachers)) only aim to know students’ short term learning needs, we can easily do a survey with all the students of the same grade at the beginning of a semester. However, needs analysis for curriculum design is more complicated. We need to investigate needs of the students, of the target academy or professional workplace, and of the university. Apart from English teachers, disciplinary teachers, university administrators and professional staff should also play active roles in this endeavour.

When asked to comment on their own pedagogical practices with reference to Items 9 to 21 in the questionnaire, teachers responded that their skills and knowledge accumulated in teaching GE were still applicable and useful in ESP teaching. However, they admitted that ESP was compelling them to update, refresh and accommodate their teaching skills and knowledge when attending to the specificity and authenticity of the target language and community. The quote below reveals the obstacles and concerns teachers had when designing and managing ESP learning tasks.
When I design a classroom ESP task, I need to do a lot of research in the subject area to ensure that the task can replicate more of real life conditions. However, this is time consuming and I often find it hard to evaluate the authenticity and effectiveness of the tasks. I often find it hard to manage classroom activities as well as I could when I taught GE.

Table 5.4 Themes and Selected Examples

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Challenges</th>
<th>Themes</th>
<th>Examples from teachers’ interview response</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>Policy support:</em></td>
<td>T2: The university should mandate regular</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Interdisciplinary consultation</td>
<td>meetings for us ((ESP teachers)) to consult subject</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>matter teachers about the subject matter issues.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>T4: When we have questions, we can seek help</td>
<td>from subject matter teachers without adding to</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>their workload</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>Funding:</em></td>
<td>T3: The university can allocate funds for us to buy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Self-directed learning</td>
<td>learning materials or attend paid workshops</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>KoNA &amp; S</td>
<td><em>Policy support:</em></td>
<td>T1: We should be authorised and encouraged to</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Liaison with target language-use communities</td>
<td>touch base with disciplinary teachers and workplace professionals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Guidelines, logistic support, paid extra working hours</td>
<td>T5: It is necessary to issue guidelines with respect to the time, place and manner of doing needs analysis.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>Funding:</em></td>
<td>T6: The time spent on needs analysis should be counted as paid workload</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ESP-PCK</td>
<td><em>Policy support:</em></td>
<td>T2: Specific funding should be set up for doing research in this respect</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>G-PCK</td>
<td>pedagogical learning opportunities</td>
<td>T1: More ESP pedagogical activities such as “demonstration lesson” should be organized.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
5.1.3 Preliminary Discussion of Findings

Through the questionnaire survey and the follow-up interviews, a general picture of Chinese ESP teachers’ perceived challenges and needs was formed.

The results of EFAs of the Challenges Section lead to a categorisation of the identified challenges which are closely connected to the broader concept of language teacher knowledge. Referring to Shulman’s (1986a) classification of CK and PCK, Factor 1 can be viewed as belong to CK, whereas Factors 3 and 4 should be defined as PCK. A scrutiny of the items in Factors 3 and 4 concludes that Factor 3 is more associated with the knowledge that functions especially for ESP teaching tasks, whereas Factor 4 relates more to what Richards (2010) termed as teaching skills applicable to English teaching in general. Comparatively, Factor 2 comprises the competence that is, according to Richards (2010), based on a sound grounding in relevant PCK. As such, it is proposed that ESP teacher knowledge system should comprise primarily the four identified dimensions, namely, (1) discipline-specialised subject matter knowledge, (2) knowledge of needs analysis and students, (3) ESP-specific pedagogical knowledge, and (4) general pedagogical knowledge.

The fact that Factor 4 of the Challenges section carries the lowest mean (M=3.2) among the four factors indicates that the knowledge and skills that have already been established are assumed to be transferable in the ESP teaching contexts. This confirms the value of prior GE teaching experience (Campion, 2016). In addition, the result in the Challenges section that Factor 3 has a higher mean value (M=3.46) than Factor 4 suggests that the distinctness of ESP vis-à-vis General English adds to the complexity of ESP-specific PCK components, which deserve further investigation.
The follow-up interview findings demonstrate that respondents’ concern with insufficient subject matter knowledge (i.e. Factor 1) is mainly associated with several constraints it imposes. For one thing, teachers’ engagement with subject content in teaching is limited (see Excerpt 1). For another thing, the lack of subject matter knowledge constrains their deployment of teaching approaches (see Excerpt 2), and affects their design and management of learning tasks (see Excerpt 4). These findings have shown how CK affects PCK in ESP teaching.

As summarised in Table 5.4, to address the challenges in relation to the ESP-specific teacher knowledge, institutional policy and funding support is needed to facilitate self-directed learning and collaboration with peers. These results are similar to those found by researchers like Campion (2016) and Martin (2014) in their UK-based studies. Moreover, the results also reflect the participants’ inclination for acquiring ESP teacher knowledge through an apprenticeship process (see Basturkmen, 2014). This can be seen in this research where teachers wanted to observe a model ESP “demonstration class” (see T1’s quote in Table 5.4).

Among the four Challenges factors, the mean value of Factor 2 is the highest (M=3.58), and correspondingly the mean value of Needs in this respect (M=3.74) is also the highest. These results collectively suggest that conducting needs analysis and dealing with student variables turn out to be the primary difficulties, and is where more institutional assistance is expected, as evidenced also by the interview response (see Table 5.4). These results differ from Campion’s (2016) research where the subject matter knowledge is rated most challenging by beginning ESP teachers in the UK.

A plausible explanation for why Factor 2 is the highest is that clarifying the target needs of ESP itself is a complex endeavour which inexorably involves dealing with
people of different parties with divergent perspectives and wants. Apart from prioritising
students’ centrality in needs analysis (see e.g., Ananyeva, 2014), ESP professionals are
expected to integrate more perspectives and engage more participants. Fundamental
among all possible factors to consider are the interactions between students’ perceived
needs and the expectations of educational institutions, target disciplinary communities
and real-life professional contexts (e.g., Carroll & Dunkelblau, 2011; Silva & Matsuda,
2001). Though it is asserted that it is beneficial for ESP teachers to collaborate with
content specialists in needs analysis (Chen et al., 2008), networking with various parties
is more easily conceived in rhetoric than realised in reality. This is largely due to a
traditional lack of interdisciplinary interaction (Arnó-Macià & Mancho-Barés, 2015), or
institutional constraints and individual unwillingness (Belcher, 2006). From the
interview response in this study, the theme of asking for support for liaison with target
language-use communities has confirmed the necessity of institutional policy and
administrative mediation, which are essential to the initiation and maintenance of cross-
disciplinary collaboration.

Apart from a request for more collaboration with professional or disciplinary
communities, the theme of funding for research derived from the interview data indicates
that teachers are aware of their designated role as researchers (Basturkmen, 2010; Hall,
2013). This is actually in line with both the Ministry of Education and the university’s
promulgation of English teachers’ research engagement (see Xu, 2014). However, as
implied in T2’s articulation hoping for ESP-specific research funding, there seems to be
a lack of a vigorous research culture and activities which effectively inform ESP
pedagogical practices in universities in China.
5.2 Findings and Discussion of the Survey of Narrative Frames

The analysis of the responses revealed a total of 22 themes. Most of the themes were organized within the four prescribed categories that hinge on the ethico-politics diagram of identity work, as discussed in Section 3.2.3. Some themes which emerged unexpectedly in one part were relocated to the most appropriate category elsewhere. Findings are reported and discussed by categories in the remainder of this section. My research purpose at this stage, first and foremost, is to portray a sort of “collective identity”. Premised on the idea that identity is the product of, as well as a lens to examine, the historical and sociocultural components of the local context, I hope to elicit relevant contextual factors that may shape the identity and behaviours of the participants of the multiple-case study. As such, instead of having a separate discussion here, I will refer back to this point in the general discussion in Chapter Seven.

Under the first category, three themes (see Table 5.5) were identified on respondents’ perceptions of what part of themselves pertains to English teaching and is used to constitute their identity as an English teacher. This is a general inquiry with no distinction between teaching GE and ESP.

The first theme is coded as “knowledge of English language and teaching”, which is closely related to a teacher’s rational and intellectual self. Rationality, intellect, and emotion are assumed to be among the common components of a person’s identity, irrespective of disciplinary differences (see Clarke, 2009a).
Table 5.5 Substance of English Teacher Identity

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Themes</th>
<th>Selected responses to S5</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Knowledge of English language and teaching</td>
<td>T#7...my solid knowledge foundation of English language and my own English proficiency.</td>
<td>45 (59.2%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>(Rational/intellectual self)</strong></td>
<td>T#11…my capability to teach English well. I have the ability to make my teaching appealing, much as I know how to cater to the diverse tastes of my students. T#27…my expertise in applying various teaching methods according to the needs of the curriculum”</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-concept</td>
<td>T#13…my faith in myself as a good English teacher and my love towards the students. T#28…my enthusiasm about this career and a belief that I’m doing something meaningful.</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal history and social influence</td>
<td>T#3…I have been trained to be an English teacher all the way from undergraduate to graduate study. T#21... a sort of family legacy. My father used to be an English teacher, and my mother worked in the foreign trade sector, it seemed natural for me to be an English teacher too T#47…probably the product of the times. To become a university English teacher was a desirable profession people looked up to in the days when I graduated from university.</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>(Social self)</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**TOTAL 76**

*Note.* The number with the sign “#” in the tables and the questionnaires is only for the purpose of counting replies and avoiding duplication. It is not traceable back to any individual.
Responses (with a response rate of 59.2%) here basically have to do with the subject matter knowledge and the pedagogical content knowledge (Shulman, 1986a) of English teaching. These results suggest that, whether teaching GE or ESP, teacher knowledge is always a core substance for a teacher to construct his/her professional identity. Relating this finding with the finding in Section 5.1 that ESP teachers are facing challenges pertaining to their knowledge base, it is hypothesised that successful identity (trans)formation can be hampered by a teacher’s insufficient knowledge for ESP teaching.

The second theme was labelled as “self-concept”\(^8\), which primarily refers to what a teacher believes about him/herself, including attitudes, emotion, motivation, and values. The two selected responses in Table 5.5 shed light on some deeply rooted teacher values that survive ongoing curriculum reforms. The feeling of “love towards students” (see T#13) and viewing teaching as “doing something meaningful” (see T# 28) demonstrate a strong moral sense in a teacher’s identity work. Some related research has proved the power of such moral sense in motivating a teacher’s agency, which enables the teacher to argue for the meaning of their identity and practices when confronted with contradictions, tensions or taken-for-granted social or institutional values (e.g., Clarke, 2009a; He & Lin, 2013). The following findings of this survey study suggest a close

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\(^8\) When coding this theme, I drew on Neisser’s notion of the “conceptual self”, which is summarized by van Lier (2004) as something “that draws its meaning from the network of assumptions and theories in which it is embedded…Some of those theories concern social roles…some postulate more or less hypothetical internal entities…and some establish socially significant dimensions of difference…” (van Lier, 2004, p.116). This notion is “central to an ecological view of identity, referring to how we perceive ourselves, how we think others perceive us, our roles and status, and beliefs about ourselves” (Edwards & Burns, 2016, p. 736).
connection between this kind of substance and the telos of teacher identity such as “to serve the students” and “to realize self-worth”, among others (see Table 5.10).

In terms of the sources of authority and practices in English teaching, I first report on the findings related to GE and ESP separately, before making a comparison between them.

Table 5.6 Authority-Sources for a GE Teacher

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Themes for Authority Source</th>
<th>Selected responses to S7-8</th>
<th>Frequency N=54</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Knowledge transmitter</td>
<td>T#1-S7: I was a teacher who transmitted English language knowledge and cultural tips</td>
<td>45 (47.9%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>T#1-S8: I believed my function was to transmit language knowledge in a way that was easy to understand and remember</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Primary knower of knowledge</td>
<td>T#5-S7: I was a teacher who could impart a lot of what my students had never learnt before. T#13-S8: I believed that students benefit from my solid knowledge foundation accrued through years of ESL learning and teaching. T#40-S8: I believed my teaching could give students more language and cultural experience than other means.</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Director of learning</td>
<td>T#12-S7: I was a teacher who was responsible for directing student to learn necessary English skills. T#15-S8: I believed students needed the teacher to guide them with regard to the learning content and methods.</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Well-recognized teaching expert</td>
<td>T#20-S7: I was a teacher who was highly appraised by my colleagues and the university leaders T#31-S7: I was often invited to give demonstrative class. T#32-S8: I believed positive comments from students and colleagues are the best proof of my expertise</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL 94</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
From teacher’s perceptions of their GE teaching, I identified four themes indicating the sources of authority. As demonstrated in Table 5.6, the majority of the teachers valued the idea of “knowledge transmitter” (with a 47.9% response rate) as a justification of the worth of their work (e.g., T#1). Some other teachers viewed themselves as the “primary knower of knowledge”, which is the second theme identified. They believed they were able to, or were obliged to, function as the main source of knowledge, as showcased in the statements of T#5, T#13 and T#40. Still others established themselves as “director of learning”, who could orient students to the right learning content and approaches (e.g., T#12, T#15). The last theme in this category was coded as “well-recognized teaching expert”. This theme echoes the theme of “personal history and social context” in the substance category (see Table 5.6) in that both are subject to the normative justifications and evaluations of the social/institutional context. Here I raise a question: if social norms, regulations and values become an individual’s sources of authority, how is the ethical formation of teacher identity to be realized if an individual teacher’s actual performance is not recognized by the established social norms, regulations and values?

Table 5.7 Self-Practices as a GE Teacher

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Themes for practices</th>
<th>Selected responses to Sentence 6 I used to focus on…</th>
<th>Frequency N=54</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Linguistic knowledge</strong></td>
<td>T#1: grammatical and textual knowledge</td>
<td>45(51.7%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>T#13: reading and writing skills</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>T#20: vocabulary and reading comprehension</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Communicative skills</strong></td>
<td>T#25: listening and speaking skills</td>
<td>32(36.8%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Practical skills</strong></td>
<td>T#16: translation and writing</td>
<td>10(11.5%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>TOTAL 87</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 5.7 shows the themes concerning teachers’ GE practice. It is not unexpected to see a focus on teaching “linguistic knowledge”, which is ranked the highest (51.7%), and on fostering students’ “communicative skills”, which is ranked second highest (36.8%), considering that both are mandated by CECR 2007. A few teachers mentioned “practical skills”, which refer to the skills that they regarded as useful for students’ short-term needs such as passing exams.

Table 5.8 Authority-Sources for an ESP Teacher

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Themes for Authority Source</th>
<th>Selected responses to S13-16</th>
<th>Frequency N=54</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Teaching for utilitarian purposes</td>
<td>T#47-S15: Our teaching objective is to help students to develop a survival skill.</td>
<td>48(46.2%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>T#28-S15: Students should be able to use English for study and work after attending the ESP courses.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teaching as an cross-disciplinary and well-facilitated enterprise</td>
<td>T#50-S13: ESP needs collaboration between English teachers and subject matter teachers.</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>T#36-S13: We need institutional support and facilitation in terms of policy, funds, and training opportunities.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teaching as service</td>
<td>T#49-S14: I see myself as a language consultant.</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>T#33-S14: I see myself as facilitating students to know how to learn ESP.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>T#38-S15: ESP curriculum should serve the needs of content learning in the disciplinary areas.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teaching and learning as mutually-constructive</td>
<td>T#12-S15: Teachers are also learners when teaching ESP, whereas students can be teachers in some aspects.</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>T#47-S13: I’ll need to take a heuristic approach to learning subject matter knowledge.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>T#27-S15: ESP should activate students’ agency and encourage their active participation in curriculum design and enactment.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**TOTAL 104**
In comparison, quite different themes were identified under the same category when it comes to ESP teaching. As can be seen in Table 5.8, “Teaching for utilitarian purposes” was advocated by most of the teachers (46.2% response rate) as a justified cause to organize teaching activities. T#47 and T#28’s responses indicate most teachers recognized that ESP teaching was meaningful for students’ present study and future career.

The second source of authority is “teaching as a cross-disciplinary and well-facilitated enterprise”, which is explicit in the articulations of T#50 and T#36. Contrary to seeing teaching as transmitting knowledge and directing learning when teaching GE, some of the teachers valued the ideas of “teaching as service to the students, and of “teaching and learning as a co-constructive process”. I assume such sources of authority are, to some extent, prescribed by the signature attribute of ESP – “specific-learner-centred language instruction” (Belcher, 2009, p. 2) tailored to the target needs, which is well documented in the literature (e.g., Belcher, 2006; Brunton, 2009). T#49’s positioning as a language consultant and T#38’s orientation to facilitate students in disciplinary content learning are good illustrations of this point.

Also, as discussed in Section 5.1.3, the subject knowledge dilemma proves to be a major impasse for ESP teachers to willingly enter into unfamiliar academic and occupational areas (Belcher, 2009). Given these circumstances, it can be positive to fashion an ESP teaching identity through respecting students’ agency and recognizing their advantage in terms of knowing more of the content knowledge (e.g., T#12, T#27), and actively conducting self-learning on the part of the teacher (e.g., T#47). Table 5.9 demonstrates teachers’ ESP teaching experience, especially with regard to how they handle the challenges in practice and their (imagined) solutions. Five themes emerged
from the responses. “Struggling to handle contingencies” is ranked the highest (28.8% response rate). A main cause is teachers’ inadequate ESP teacher knowledge, as can be seen from T#9 and T#19’s accounts. To address this issue, a desirable solution is getting university support in the form of funds or policy-mandated interdisciplinary collaboration (see T#3, T#21). Actually, some teachers have already been seeking help from their colleagues in the disciplinary departments, which is evident from the theme of “consulting subject matter colleagues”. In addition, some teachers expressed their faith in seeking improvement through personal effort such as self-learning (e.g. T#26).

Table 5.9 ESP Practices and (Imagined) Solutions to Challenges

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Themes</th>
<th>Selected response to S10-12</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Struggling to handle contingencies</td>
<td>T#9-S10: I often find it difficult to elaborate on a topic in the oral class.</td>
<td>49 (28.8%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>T#19-S10: There is often tension when I couldn’t answer a language question that is loaded with subject matter knowledge.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Applying new pedagogies</td>
<td>T#12-S11: I would try pedagogies that I wouldn’t use for teaching general English, such as PBL.</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Consulting subject matter colleagues</td>
<td>T#17-S11: I will consult subject matter teachers about subject knowledge, asking them to verify my understanding or direct me to learning materials.</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seeking improvement through personal effort</td>
<td>T#26-S13: I need to learn related subject matter knowledge by myself.</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Expecting university support</td>
<td>T#3-S13: If the university can allocate more funds for teacher development projects…</td>
<td>45(26.5%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>T#21-S13: If regular collaboration between language teachers and subject matter teachers could be stipulated by the university</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

TOTAL 170

Under the category of the telos of teacher identity, I found three themes, or three lines suggesting the evolution of teachers’ goals (see Table 5.10). For the majority of the
teachers (66.7% response rate), the ultimate goal is always to be an expert teacher, no matter whether it is teaching GE or teaching ESP. This ideal is actually in tune with the university discourse that encourages teachers to become experts in their field. Facing various challenges attendant with the ESP curriculum, these teachers were aware that they could not turn into an expert ESP teacher straight away. Therefore, they were holding a more realistic attitude through aiming at becoming a qualified ESP teacher first.

Table 5.10 Telos of Teacher Identity along Time

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Themes</th>
<th>Selected responses to S17-19</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>An expert GE teacher → a qualified ESP teacher → an expert ESP teacher</td>
<td>T#5: In the past, I aimed to become an expert in teaching college English; now my goal is to provide qualified ESP teaching to my students, and in the future, with years of experience I can make an expert ESP teacher.</td>
<td>36 (66.7%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To gain external recognition → To realize self-growth → To maximize self-worth</td>
<td>T#13: In the past, I aimed to consistently obtain positive evaluation and praise from university authorities and the students; now my goal is to improve my capacity as an ESP teacher through learning; I hope in the future I can play my role as an ESP teacher.</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To serve the university → To serve the students → To play a role more than merely being an ESP teacher</td>
<td>T#52: In the past, I aimed to meet various criteria stipulated by the university; now my goal is to best cater to students’ learning needs; in the future, I hope I can play a larger role for the development of ESP as a discipline.</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Comparatively, the second line of goals reveals more subjective recognition of the value of being an English teacher. Instead of relying on the guidance of university policies,
these teachers related their goals to their professional experiences and how such experiences were reflective of their self-worth. This point is exemplified by T#13, who first drew on the recognition of his peers and fellow teachers as an indicator of his fulfilment, and then moved on to focus more on his own potential so that in the future he could realize his self-worth to the fullest extent.

The third theme indicates that some teachers are more self-critical about their professional objectives. They have moved their goal from just working for the university and doing what is incumbent on them as a university teacher, to actually serving the students. This probably results from their understanding that English education has become more student-centred in contemporary times (see Wang, 2014; Wang, 2016). They might also see the possibility of engaging in activities outside the conventional realm of a university English teacher’s teaching practices (see T#52).

5.3 A Close-Up Shot of a University Teaching Reform Meeting on 4 March 2015

In the first week of Academic Semester 1, 2015, I was kindly allowed to attend a university-wide meeting with its theme being “Reflection and Discussion on the Problems in Curriculum and Pedagogy Reform”. It was a university-wide meeting convened by the Vice-Chancellor who was in charge of Education, Research &
Attendees included the Director of Academic Affairs, the Director of Research, the Director of Health Education Research Centre, school heads, department deans, and teacher representatives. On the part of the English Department, apart from the Dean, three teaching panel leaders were also invited to participate. This meeting not only offers some information about the implementation of educational reform, but also reveals the hierarchy and power relations. The record of the meeting below may provide an idea of the institutional context, the generic views on English teaching and learning, as well as the status of the ESP teachers.

Meeting record 04/03/2015

**Vice-Chancellor:** It’s been almost two years since we initiated our educational reform, driven by our university’s strategic objective: “a medical university that is first-class nationally and competitive internationally”. It’s time that we should identify the problems and discuss about our future direction. Also we hope that through educational reforms, our teachers, especially young teachers and emerging academics, can seek for your professional and academic growth. Looking back, we’ve been applying PBL approach in teaching medical courses, and the English Medium Instruction programme is taking off. However, problems have also

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9 The Office of the Chancellor consists of four Vice-Chancellors and their secretaries in support of the role of Chancellor and relative affairs. Each of the Vice-Chancellors is responsible in different areas of academic affairs, including Education, Research & Development, Academic-Industrial Cooperation, Campus Development, and Global Networking for the promotion of university development. Chief Secretary and secretaries, in support to the Office of the Chancellor, are mainly responsible for campus-wide administrative affairs and inter-units relationship, in order to establish an effective communication channel and a harmony work environment for the promotion of higher quality administrative services to facilitate university development (Translated from the University’s Administration Guidebook)
emerged. In general, our students’ insufficient English proficiency, especially in terms of communicative competence, is compromising their academic performance and competitiveness in the job market=

**Director of Academic Affairs:** Indeed. When our university and our affiliated hospitals held recruitment interviews, I noticed that candidates graduating from 985/211 universities tend to have a better command of communicative English=

**Director of Research:** Indeed. Besides, our graduates, young teachers and researchers frequently express to us that they find English deficiency an obstacle in publishing SCI articles and international research collaboration.

((Some agreeing voice arose from the attendees)).

**Vice-Chancellor:** We have being renewing our teaching for years, and our focus for the past two years has been on English teaching reforms. While we acknowledge that our English teachers have done substantial work, it seems we are far from realizing our objective: to enhance students’ knowledge and skills in subject areas as well as in English. ((Line 1)) We must think how to crack the shell. The Chancellor and we ((here he meant school leaders)) want to hear your ideas and proposals.

After the Vice-Chancellor opened the floor to the heads of schools and teachers, there was a moment of silence. The Dean of the English Department was wearing a solemn look, while her fellow colleagues were lowering their heads. About two minutes later, Head of the School of Basic Medicine, an outstanding scholar who had years of overseas
study and research experience, broke the silence. For the sake of keeping anonymity, here I use Head A, Head B… Teacher A, Teacher B…to label the speakers.

**Head A:** According to my own educational and research experience, the best way to acquire a foreign language is to use it. What I learned in English class only set the grounding for further study. It is when I used it for study and research purposes overseas that I began to make real and substantial progress. Therefore, I’m convinced that, for university students, authentic language environment is more essential than classroom teaching. I think we need to stress and enhance the role of English in the disciplinary subject curriculum. Say, we stipulate that more pedagogical activities be carried out using English, such as increasing the proportion of bilingual teaching, encouraging using learning materials in the original, stipulating a fixed amount of home-assignments and tests done in English.

**Head B:** I agree to these initiatives. However, a precondition is that most of our subject matter teachers need to improve their academic English before they can efficiently use it in teaching. My fellow teachers often request for in-service training opportunities.

((This statement was greeted by the subject matter teacher representatives.))

**Teacher A:** Thanks Head B, you spoke our mind! ((Line 2)) As young teachers, my colleagues and me have strong desire to improve our English for teaching and research purposes. We wish university leaders may consider to offer us more training or learning opportunities, even if not all
of us can go overseas, it’s still helpful to learn from more experienced and successful universities.

**Vice-Chancellor:** Of course, staff training is on our agenda. But it is not feasible to afford every teacher’s demands in short term.

**Head C:** We do understand the difficulty and we are grateful to university leaders for your concern. To add to Vice-Chancellor, maybe it is more practical to organize in-house training, or to employ contract professionals to teach some courses. ((Line 3))

((People began to whisper.))

The discussion went on for about 20 minutes, with people from disciplinary departments exchanging their concerns, demands, and solutions. However, English courses and the role of the English Department were not mentioned. The Vice-Chancellor then turned to the Dean of the English Department, saying:

What was said is very valuable. However, in terms of English teaching, I think we’d better listen to English teachers. Anyway, they are the experts.

Hearing this, the crowd quieted down and almost all the faces were turned towards the Dean and the English teachers. The Dean started her response with a summary of the important initiatives and actions that English teachers had been undertaking, including changes of syllabus and curriculum, introduction of new teaching materials, the adoption of the *Graded and Classified teaching model*, etc. But above all is the trial
implementation of an ESP-dominant curriculum, first among medium to high level students\textsuperscript{10}, and later among all the students. She then went on to state:

**The Dean of the English Department:** The problems raised by Vice-Chancellor, Directors and Heads of Schools and subject matter teachers are exactly what we English teachers are continuously seeking to address. It is because we are deeply aware of students’ and staff’s needs of using English for academic and professional purposes that we embarked on an ESP-dominant curriculum. However, doing ESP is a big challenge to most of us ((English teachers)), as we lack subject matter knowledge, you know, and it takes time to equip English teachers with ESP teaching knowledge and skills. We also crave for the university’s financial and policy support...

At that point her talk was interrupted by a Head of School who is one of the executives who are in charge of the Basic Medicine English Medium Instruction Programme.

**Head D:** Well, maybe I sound bold, but I think what English teachers can offer is still largely English for general purposes, though I appreciate English teachers’ efforts in teaching ESP. ((Line 4))

**Audience:** True!

**Head A:** And I think it’s not plausible to compel English teachers to command medical knowledge. ((Line 5)) For one thing, it even takes us

\textsuperscript{10} As illustrated earlier, students will be given a screening English test on entering the university. According to the test results, they will be placed into different classes and attend different English teaching programmes designed to suit their English levels. This model is called Graded and Classified Teaching Model in this university.
...years to learn the very basic part of medical knowledge. For another, medical science is too professional and contains too many and detailed divisions of subcategories. I wonder how specific your curriculum can be. (Line 6) Or rather, won’t it be more practical that you teach students some common, I mean, across-curriculum academic English skills? (Line 7)

Audience: Yeah...Good point...

Before the Dean followed up, subject matter teachers carried on in that vein. So the next 10 minutes were spent discussing the limited function of the English Department, the weaknesses of the ESP curriculum, and possible solutions. English teachers remained silent. Finally, the Vice-Chancellor closed the meeting with a brief comment as follows:

Vice-Chancellor: I can see that both our English teachers and subject matter teachers are working hard on making progress. The road of reform is full of twists and turns. At this stage we are still exploring what works best for us. I suggest that after the meeting every school hold meetings to further discuss possible solutions and future direction. We as university leaders are looking forward to further initiatives and actions from the English Department.

In this one and a half hour’s meeting, problems were explicitly pointed out, whereas no consensus on solution or the ensuing actions was achieved. I was told that it was only in recent years that students’ English learning outcomes had come to be a hot topic in such university-wide meetings. Previously, it used to be rare for English teachers and
stakeholders from other departments to sit down together for a discussion about English teaching and learning.

5.3.1 A University Level Activity System: A Preliminary Picture

This meeting offers some clues for me to paint a preliminary picture of the activity system of the focal university. First in this activity system, teachers and students are without question the subject. According to the Vice-Chancellor’s opening remarks, driven by the university objective of building “a medical university that is first-class nationally and competitive internationally”, the object of the current educational reform activity is to promote students’ ESP proficiency while ensuring their learning of discipline-specialised subject matter knowledge. In addition, it is also hoped that this endeavor can facilitate teachers’ professional development. The tools to achieve this object are the ESP courses provided by English teachers, the Basic Medicine EMI Programme and the bilingual teaching courses provided by subject matter teachers. The rules of the activity are found in the institutional documents such as syllabus and curriculum statements, course programme guidelines, teaching and learning assessment guidelines, etc. The meeting attendees constitute part of the community of the institutional activity system, with the other part being the students.

When it comes to the division of labour, it is clear from the meeting that subject matter teachers and ESP teachers are doing the frontline work. Nevertheless, it is hard to infer the role played by university and school leaders from the meeting observation. Neither is the division of labour among all stakeholders sufficiently illustrated in the documents. By the time of the meeting, the actual outcome of the activity is incongruent with the object, as revealed in the attendees’ countervailing discourses. For instance, despite the curricular and pedagogical changes that were intended to enhance content
and language learning, attendees reflected that students’ English competence for academic and professional purposes was still unsatisfactory. In addition, divergent views existed among stakeholders as to the role English teachers can play. Based on this preliminary analysis, an activity system on the level of the whole university, and specifically pertaining to teaching reforms, is graphically presented in Figure 5.1.

Figure 5.1 The University Activity System of English Education

While observing participants in the meeting, my feelings were mixed and hard to articulate. A burning sensation I had at that moment is that English teachers seemed somewhat marginalised and excluded from the meaning making process. Nonetheless, I was very cautious, well aware that I should not allow my interpretation to be led astray by my personal attitudes and emotions. Presuming that my sensation probably derived from the perceived power relations among the speakers, I resorted to discourse analysis, hoping to represent “the characterization of speaker meaning and its explanation in the context of use” (Candlin, 1985, p. viii), and to uncover the power relations that are
substantively discursive in nature (van Dijk, 2011). Also the relationships between the interlocutors are to be inferred through discourse analysis.

5.3.2 Power Relations Embedded in the Meeting Discourse

On the whole, university leaders, heads of schools and subject matter teachers were dominating the discussion. They took most of the turns to articulate their meanings, seldom leaving room for English teachers to talk. On the face of it, the speakers seemed to divide into two groups, with ESP teachers being one group confronting the other group consisting of the rest of the speakers. I label the other group as the dominant group for the simple reason that it outnumbered the ESP group, but more importantly, it was in effect exercising power over the ESP group.

First, the beginning and ending of the discussion was decided by the Vice-Chancellor, in terms of the topic and the angles from which the topic was expected to be tackled. At the very outset, the Vice-Chancellor put forward an unquestionable assertion that students’ ESP deficiency is the most salient issue exposed in the past two years’ teaching reforms. Such a statement is supported straight away by the follow-up talks given by the Director of Academic Affairs and the Director of Research. In effect, the message the directors added made it even more urgent to address the low efficacy of ESP teaching, as it is affecting not only students on campus, but also graduates who are put on a competitive job market, and those young teachers and researchers. Because the directors have access to factual cases and figures on these aspects, what they say usually carries considerable weight and credibility. Subsequently, the Vice-Chancellor was confident in drawing the conclusion that “we are far from realizing our objective” (see Line 1). However, as the conclusion is preceded by a focus on English teaching reforms and English teachers’ work, it might be natural for listeners to ascribe the undesirable
outcome to English teachers’ work. At that moment I was wondering what psychological effect these statements might have on English teachers, especially when I saw the solemn look of the Dean of the English Department and her fellow colleagues lowering their heads. In a later interview (See Section 6.1) with the Dean, my assumption that it was a stressful situation for English teachers was confirmed.

Here I would like to pause and briefly refer to what Bakhtin (1981) termed an *authoritative discourse*. Authoritative discourse “demands that we acknowledge it, that we make it our own; it binds us, quite independent of any power it might have to persuade us internally; we encounter it with its authority already fused to it” (Bakhtin, 1981, p. 342). In this sense, the Vice-Chancellor and the Directors were actually creating a certain authoritative discourse. Meanwhile, in a hierarchical organization like the focal university, people’s institutional status as authoritative leaders also adds to the authority of their discourse. At that specific temporal and spatial setting of the meeting, it is probable that people acknowledged it and were bound by it, as no one overtly represented any different voice.

The dominant groups’ higher social status is another factor by which to impose power on ESP teachers. After minutes of silence it was School Heads from subject disciplines, instead of ESP teachers, that took over the turns to talk about the problematic aspects. This alone had already put ESP teachers at a disadvantage in terms of taking control of the direction and content of the talk. This is because heads of schools are regarded as secondary to university leaders in rank in the focal university’s bureaucratic system. Within a university setting in China, as perhaps in many other social sectors as well, there is a prevailing psychology of authority worship and conformity, which can find its plausibility in Fromm’s (1942) masterpiece – *The fear of freedom*:
In any society, the spirit of the whole culture is determined by the spirit of those groups that are most powerful in that society. This is so partly because these groups have the power to control the educational system, schools, church, press, theatre, and thereby to imbue the whole population with their own ideas; furthermore, these powerful groups carry so much prestige, that the lower classes are more than ready to accept and imitate their values and to identify themselves psychologically (p.42).

On this premise, the dual status of being senior administrators and prestigious experts uncontestably empowers their discourse, rendering it more influential and controlling than individual ESP teachers’ thinking and speech.

In addition, the content, perspective, and speech act of the dominant group also exercised power on ESP teachers. Returning to Head A’s speech, it is apparent that he was very confident in drawing on his personal experience in validating his argument. Speaking of the efficacy of English learning, he made a comparison between two learning contexts, the English class at home and the overseas research institution, and asserted that the former could play only a very limited role in enhancing students’ ESP competence. A statement as such made by a reputable scholar like Head A is likely to be persuasive. For one thing, this is because it is evidenced by his personal success. For another, since few staff members in this local context have overseas experience, they could not make sound judgement for themselves. Yet, their personal beliefs may push them to identify with the Head’s idea. In this manner, ESP teachers and their teaching were implicitly undervalued.

Subsequently, initiated by Head A’s suggestions, the speech content of the dominant group was exclusively about what subject matter teachers should do and what
support they need, which is clearly shown in Head B and Teacher A’s speech. Almost no initiatives or ideas mentioned involve ESP teachers and their work. Especially, Teacher A’s associating young teachers’ strong desire to improve ESP proficiency with training opportunities either overseas or in other universities also partly revealed their neglect of potential collaboration with their ESP colleagues. What is even more striking is Head C’s suggestion of “employing contract professionals to teach some courses” (Line 3). Later from ESP teachers’ narratives, I got to know that there were a few occasions where leaders uttered their consideration of employing contract ESP teachers to teach ESP courses. This idea has put pressure on ESP teachers. People’s whispering (see p. 150) implied their dubious attitudes towards such a possibility.

Finally, the Vice-Chancellor invited the ESP group to talk. The way the Dean of the English Department articulated her opinion is in sharp contrast with the dominant group in that her speech suggests a commitment to conversation, exchange, and an active response to previously mentioned problems. This can be found in her interpersonal rhetoric, which observes Grice’s Cooperative Principle (Grice, 1975). In response to the problems raised by the dominant group, the onset of her speech is a humble and genuine acknowledgement of the existing issues, and a claim that ESP teachers have been working hard to address the issue. Then she attended to people’s concerns about English teaching by pointing out that an ESP-dominant curriculum is supposed to benefit staff and students, and thus foregrounded the meaning of ESP teachers’ work. To seek the reason for the low efficacy of the new curriculum, she mentioned the ESP teachers’

11 The Cooperative Principle (CP) was developed by Grice (1975) as one of the guiding principles of human communication. It consists of four maxims: Quantity, Quality, Relevance and Manner.
lack of disciplinary subject matter knowledge, and expressed their needs for greater institutional support. Clearly her utterance demonstrates *quantity, quality, relevance and manner*, the four maxims of Cooperative Principle (Grice, 1975).

The Dean’s interactive speech act triggered response. However, the dominant group seemed to be sceptical about the English teachers’ capability (see Line 4), about the practicality of ESP teachers’ learning subject matter knowledge (see Line 5), and about the efficacy of the ESP courses they could offer (see Line 6). Their belief about the role of their English-teaching colleagues remains largely on their conventional practice of teaching English for general purposes. Also, they reflect a vague concept of what ESP courses can do and should do (see Line 7).

Thus far, I have scrutinized how power was discursively represented and exercised in the meeting. Drawing on this scrutiny, a vertical structure of power relations in the university can be envisaged. At the top of the hierarchy are the university leaders, who are the owners of the authoritative and administrative discourse rights. They own direct access to national and local political and administrative initiatives, and they have the right to make policies and allocate resources. Therefore, their discourse is prone to be too powerful and influential for people at lower levels in the hierarchy to resist or convert.

Subordinate to university level leaders are school heads in disciplinary faculties. Apart from having administrative power, they are also well-known scholars in their respective fields. As senior academics, they have more and deeper engagement with academic discourse, in particular international academic discourse in English, which is what novice academics seek to have. It is not unreasonable to assume that the power of their status and discourse overrides that of the frontline teachers.
The frontline teachers, at the base level of the hierarchy, are not necessarily equal in power. It would be fallacious to base an argument on such a one-time observation. However, we might get a hint of the subtle power relations from the fact that ESP teachers remained silent during the whole meeting, whereas their disciplinary counterparts were much more talkative. The most likely cause is that the speakers who were dominating the discourse were representing their voices (see Teacher A’s response in Line 2), in contrast, ESP teachers only have their Dean to speak for them. Considering many invisible factors that may exist in the complex institutional relationships, I presume that there can be some leverage for the power relations between the frontline ESP teachers and subject matter teachers, which might put them on a seesaw. A graphical idea of the power relations in terms of rank and discourse rights is presented as follows:

Figure 5.2 The Asymmetrical Power Relations in the Focal University
5.3.3 An Emerging ESP Community of Practice

Seen from Figure 5.1 and Figure 5.2, ESP teachers constitute an aggregate that is distinct and separate from others in terms of function, institutional status and power relations. Located at the bottom of the institutional hierarchy, they are bound together by a common enterprise – ESP teaching. But can they be verified as functioning as a community of practice? From the Dean’s speech, it is evident that they share a common concern and a set of problems. But do they “deepen their knowledge and expertise in this area by interacting on an ongoing basis” (Wenger, McDermott & Snyder, 2002, p.4). Putting this question in a more theoretical way, are they practicing to the effect of forming and maintaining a community which is characterized by mutual engagement, negotiation of a joint enterprise, and a shared repertoire? And if they are, how is their ESP community of practice cultivated and maintained? Wenger (1998) posits that rather than being self-contained entities, communities of practice root their development in larger historical, social, cultural and institutional contexts. Then how is the ESP community of practice impacting and being impacted by the larger context? Answers to these questions will unfold as we go deeper into the multiple-case study in Chapter 6.

It can be safely presumed that an ESP community of practice was taking shape at the time I was about to start the research. However, I was not clear about the possible variety of their “modes of belonging” (Wenger, 1998) or the way they aligned themselves with current or future enterprises. Some ESP teachers might have imagined themselves as having something in common with colleagues who have similar professional aspirations or personal traits, while others might have already found their “community of alignment” (Wenger, 1998).
The language-driven evidence obtained through analyzing the discourse of the meeting shows that a certain professional identity is discursively ascribed to the English teachers. In the discourse of the dominant group, ESP teachers were viewed as functioning hardly more than GE teachers. In contrast, they were transformed into efficient ESP teachers in the Dean’s discourse. In one way or another, the ESP teachers were regarded as a nexus. Hypothetically, they have already been put into a discursive space where they are bound to engage in practices that are expected to address the existing problems with ESP teaching and learning.

What’s more, if we take account of the impact that a fixed space/place may have on facilitating the formation of a community of practice (see Eckert & McConnell-Ginet, 1992; King, 2014), then ESP teachers’ offices, the meeting room of the Department, and most importantly, the classrooms, are all milieus where mutual engagement among ESP teachers on a continuous basis is expected to occur.

Chapter Summary

In this chapter, findings of Part One and Part Two – Stage One were reported on and discussed. The challenges identified in Part One are pertinent to ESP teacher knowledge. Based on the findings of the exploratory factor analyses, the knowledge system for ESP teaching is conceptualised as comprising at least four dimensions: 1) discipline-specialised subject matter knowledge, 2) knowledge of needs analysis and students, 3) ESP-specific pedagogical content knowledge, and 4) general pedagogical content knowledge. Teachers’ needs for institutional support when addressing each of the above challenges vary. To counteract knowledge related challenges, facilitation for learning either in a self-directed manner or learning from disciplinary content teachers and senior ESP teachers is anticipated as being necessary. Comparatively, to address difficulties in
relation to needs analysis and student variables, ESP teachers are earnestly calling for liaison with target language-use communities, related policy guidance, administrative intervention, and funding.

What is noticeable with respect to teachers’ needs is the prevailing request for university policy and funding support for cross-disciplinary collaboration and professional training. This result has revealed that these elements are in effect not available in reality. In the focal university, for example, despite the shortage of cross-disciplinary collaboration and professional training, the ESP teachers were placed in a working context inhabited by negative discourses and asymmetrical power relations, as revealed in Section 5.3. This is to say, the emergence of an ESP community of practice entails challenges as well as opportunities. It would thus be intriguing to have a closer look at individual ESP teachers’ teaching and learning experiences as well as their identity formation in practice and in discourse.

The findings of the survey of narrative frames have portrayed ESP teacher identity as discursive and collective in nature (see Section 7.4 for further discussion). An overall impression generated from the findings is that the shift from being a GE teacher to being an ESP teacher is a process that combines, over time, experiences of that which endures and that which changes. Inspired by these findings, I find it meaningful to connect past, present and future in my interest in understanding each participant’s identity work within the ethnographic multiple-case study. This is one of the research foci of the next chapter.
CHAPTER SIX

STORIES OF RU, ALICE AND FRANK

Chapter Overview

This Chapter focuses on the lived experiences of three ESP teachers in the focal university. Since there is little research that attempts to present a holistic picture of an individual ESP teacher’s experiences when shifting from GE to ESP, I believe it necessary to separately report on each teacher’s stories and experiences in a three-dimensional way (see Section 4.2.1 and Table 4.4 in Chapter Four). While the focus is on the teachers’ experiences of ESP teaching, I should not lose sight of their past experiences of EFL learning and GE teaching, since it is widely claimed that past experiences influence present and future learning (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). This temporal dimension was examined in light of the social and contextual space in which the teachers were situated. Along the temporal line, I captured moments, events, activities, relationships and inner psychological movements that were significant to each teacher and were instrumental in constructing their own stories. Each story unfolds with the participant’s changing identities being the clues. In the last part of each section, I present episodes that best show the participants’ ESP pedagogical practices. At the end of the chapter, I weave the stories together with a brief summary and discussion.

6.1 Ru

My first interview with Ru, Dean of the English Department, happened in her office where she shared a lot of her past experiences. Before the teaching reform, Ru was not satisfied with her long-standing identity as a senior GE teacher that had been designated
to her on account of her teaching years. She was tired of being a member of the old English teaching community, which in her eyes was doing repetitive work year after year. The designated identity was not connected to her imagined self. Her imagined self, as she construed, should always walk ahead of her present self, leading to a sense of elevation and exultation. Although Ru had an enthusiastic and proactive personality, the misalignment between her imagined self and the designated identity she had in reality at that moment often put her into psychological and affective restlessness.

To address this issue, Ru had been working on transforming the established community, patterns and thinking. The university’s call for a new round of educational reform turned out to be an opportunity. While she was leading the implementation of an ESP-oriented curriculum in the English Department, she was assuming diverse roles within the wider university activity system. During this process, she was shuttling between multiple identities while engaged in different communities of practice, both within and outside the English Department or the university, and both in reality and in imagination.

**A Warrior in the Early-Career Battlefield**

Ru has been working in this university for more than 19 years. Before working in this focal university, Ru worked in a local college after getting her Bachelor’s degree in English. That college failed to be the context where she could realize her ambition. In order to seek further development, Ru was among the few of her peers who returned to university for a Masters’ degree. Ru looked solemn when recalling those experiences:

> Interview excerpt 20/04/2015

> In my time, doing postgraduate study was not as prevalent as it is today.

> Like most of my peers, I went to work straight away after I got my
bachelor’s degree, and, as natural as that was, I got married. Two years later our son was born. My husband and I then became members of the so-called sandwich generation, who are responsible both for bringing up the child and for the care of the ageing parents. On the other hand, we both had strong desire for bigger achievements in our career. Therefore, both of us decided to do a Masters’ degree. This added to the financial pressure we had at the time, as we were just earning modest salary. Consequently, I had to take several part-time jobs teaching English in other schools. As a young mother still breast-feeding my baby, a young wife looking after the household, a young teacher whose career just took off, and a postgraduate student of a university in another city, life was like a battlefield to me and I tried so hard to get things to work.

Ru’s metaphor of “the battlefield” in the above narrative struck me graphically as to how much Ru had invested in her self-transformation while juggling the roles of a young mother, wife, teacher and postgraduate student. Thanks to the “baptism of this early-career struggling” (Ru’s words), Ru got her master’s degree which enabled her to get a teaching position in this focal university which is higher in rank than the previous college. She cherished this hard-won opportunity so much that she was always working with great passion and a high sense of commitment. Though her postgraduate study was on British Literature, she was interested in curriculum and pedagogy. She was among the pioneers in the department to introduce the Problem-based learning (PBL) approach to English teaching, to develop teaching materials of Medical English, and to promote collaboration and communication with colleagues in other institutions.
An Enthusiastic Advocate of College English Teaching Reforms

Since becoming Dean of the English Department seven years ago, Ru has been leading the whole department in a series of English teaching reforms and innovations, which she prioritised as the most important commissions. Actually, her concern with the English teaching practice existed long before taking over this administrative role, as revealed in one reflective diary entrys about her leadership:

Diary writing 31/12/2010

For almost fifteen years since I started working here, I didn’t see much change in the way we taught English. I cannot remember there was any demand for a change, be it from society, from the university, or from the students. Our teaching was guided by a long-standing syllabus created by some senior teachers who had already retired. And there were only a few options in terms of textbooks. For many years, we were using the same set of textbooks and references. Teaching thus became a routine repetition, which greatly affected our agency [as teachers].

Putting into perspective the general developing trend of higher education in China, Ru envisioned that College English teaching would undergo ongoing reforms with China’s socioeconomic development. In an interview, she analysed why English teaching stagnated for a long time in the focal university.

Interview excerpt 13/03/2015

At that time, and as always, I believed stagnation is only temporary. There were several reasons for the stagnation. First, north-east China was economically isolated and remote from more advanced regions like Beijing,
Shanghai, or Guangzhou, and so the development in education was lagging behind. Second, the university leaders were comfortable with continuing traditional practice. Third, people’s visions were largely constrained by local conditions. Students regarded English as a subject to gain degree credits, whereas the university only prioritised CET-Band 4 pass rate. What’s more, English as a discipline was marginalised in a medical university. Most of the resources and policy support were allocated to disciplinary departments.

On the basis of the above analysis, Ru argued that the general socioeconomic environment, the local context and stakeholders’ attitudes were greatly impacting English teaching in the university. And her foresight of the change proved to be right. Since the MOE issued CECR 2007, leading universities across the country, such as those appointed as 211 and/or 985 national project universities, were taking the lead to reform their English curriculum and pedagogy. While it was still slow and reluctant to react, the focal university began to put English teaching reform on the agenda.

Ru was excited when the Dean told her that the English Department was asked by the Vice-President to renew the syllabus and curriculum. She began to work day and night writing reviews on existing practice and proposals for incoming changes. Due to her dedication, she was appointed as Assistant Dean, and three years later, she became Dean.

*A Passionate ESP Practitioner*

From Assistant Dean to Dean signified a big leap forward in terms of Ru’s job responsibilities and obligations. Years of working experience as an ordinary teacher and
Assistant Dean brought insights of how the institutional regimes work. In her perception, this university was characteristic of a top-down management style with a strict hierarchy and “annoying” (Ru’s words) bureaucratic patterns and formulations. The consequence was the monopoly of power, as only university leaders and school heads were making decisions (cf. the university meeting discussed in the previous chapter). Such a coercive workplace culture greatly hampered the individual teacher’s agency, as implied in Ru’s comment when she talked about the difficulty of motivating teachers to implement ESP:

Interview excerpt 05/03/2015

It’s conventional that the university leaders make the policies and decisions on every aspect and we as teachers only execute what is assigned to us, even when the decision or policy is detached from reality. We have no voice in these sorts of things. Therefore, many of my colleagues used to simply finish teaching tasks that they didn’t really care for. They just did it one way or another, endured their lives and waited for the weekends with no real sense of fulfilment. Once the habit of enjoying ease is formed as a collective practice, people would be unwilling to take any challenge. ESP, for most of us, was a big challenge, and hence a thing that was resisted at first.

Ru’s comment revealed that ESP teachers were generally excluded from the university’s meaning making process. This kind of exclusion was regarded by Ru as demotivating and demoralising to her colleagues. She was deeply concerned with the “collective inertia” as an obstacle to promoting ESP curriculum and practice. The teachers, who were accustomed to following conventions, were at first reluctant to participate in ESP practice, particularly given the additional workload required. In this circumstance, Ru
took it as her responsibility to encourage and facilitate her fellow teachers’ active *engagement and participation*. She was determined to orient the development of the discipline and her fellow teachers, and to establish a new community of practice in the English Department, as demonstrated in the excerpt below:

**Interview excerpt 05/03/2015**

Although my administrative rank might be the lowest in the power hierarchy of the university, it’s my obligation to set up a new community made of ESP teachers. I must find a way to inspire teachers to unleash their potential through enacting new curriculum and pedagogy.

She contemplated that the first step to eliminate inertia was to bring in fresh air and to expand people’s vision. For this purpose, she decided to convene a regional conference on ESP teaching and learning.

To convene a large-scale conference might be easier if the convenor has a widely-recognized academic reputation and adequate funds were available. However, there was no well-known expert or leading figure in ESP teaching or research in this university. On the other hand, as a marginalised department, it is not easy to get funds for this event. Ru thus had to negotiate the meaning of this activity with the university, her fellow teachers, and funds providers and collaborators. As Dean, Ru had more connections with university leaders and administrators, and thus had more knowledge of how the university invested in academic activities. In one journal -entry, Ru recorded her worries over getting funds from the university:
The funds the university appropriates to us are usually limited and less compared with other mainstream disciplinary departments. We are like the “ignored children” in the family. While my fellow colleagues may just see the unfair treatment, I understand that the university has its own budgeting preferences because the resources that a provincial university like ours can get are far less than a 211/985 university.

Nevertheless, Ru was determined to secure institutional support even if it might not be substantial. She continuously went to lobby the Vice Chancellor, the Director of Academic Affairs, the Director of Research, and the Director of Health Education Research Centre. Looking back on that experience, she jokingly said in an interview: “I was like a salesperson trying to tout my wares to a tightly-budgeted housewife.”

At the end of the day the university not only allotted some funds but also made it a university-wide academic event. This result carried more symbolic meaning than merely gaining funds. Ru and the other ESP teachers read it as recognition and appreciation of an ESP turn in the university’s English education. Ru’s morale was high and her next step was to engage her fellow colleagues.

An Engaging Leader

Ru believed an ideal ESP community of practice should provide opportunity for the individual teachers to unleash their potential. Teachers had lost their incentive and confidence partly because of the challenges of ESP teaching per se, and partly because of the fact that ESP was still a somewhat marginalised practice in comparison to mainstream College English teaching in other peer universities in this region. But above
all, English teachers in this university, as mentioned earlier, had been put into a position where they had no voice in the university’s activity system. This point was more detrimental to teachers’ agency and motivation. To address this issue, Ru advocated what she called “distributed power” – to distribute the leadership in relation to this new conference event. Ru showed me a document reserved in the departmental archive, which presented a detailed illustration of the division of labour:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Conference Committee’s Division of Labour</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>XX: online propagation, correspondence and coordination</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>XX: sending out invitations to potential attendants</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>XX: making posters, conference brochures, and name badges</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>XX: managing accommodation and transport</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note. XX is used to substitute real names for anonymity consideration*

The box above reveals that almost every teacher as a member of the conference committee was assigned a task. Ru pointed out, in the excerpt below, that the meaning of such arrangements lay in the fact that every individual was engaged and authorised with a certain degree of power in accordance with his or her task responsibilities.

Interview excerpt 20/03/2015

That was the first time that our department had convened and organized a large-scale conference on the theme of ESP, which was also the first of its kind in Northeast China. I deliberately put everyone to work, because I wanted each of them to build confidence that we can take the lead in English teaching reforms, ESP also has its proponents, and we each can do our bits to open a new page of our university’s English teaching.
**A Public Relations Coordinator**

The ESP conference marked a significant starting point and a reification of an emergent ESP community of practice within the English Department. Ru was cognisant that the ESP community could not exist in isolation, and that people’s engagement involved activities and relationships both within and outside the university.

As such, Ru attached importance to several relationships. First, she was keen on building connections with Medical English teachers in other universities. For example, a number of guests attending the conference were ESP practitioners that Ru had made acquaintance with at several national or regional English teaching conferences, forums and seminars.

In 2014 and 2015, two workshops on Medical English curriculum and pedagogy were run in this university, with the keynote speakers being leading experts in the field of Medical English teaching. These events, in a certain sense, can be regarded as the evidence of the existence of an ESP CoP inside the focal university.

Meanwhile, Ru was enthusiastically developing relationships with some large and influential foreign languages publishers, including those who produce and provide ESP textbooks and materials. As these publishers are striving to provide suitable products and services for academic and educational enterprises, they are also actively engaged in supporting and organizing academic and educational initiatives and activities. Ru found these publishers fairly resourceful in terms of funds-raising and networking. Therefore, she was very mindful of maintaining a good relationship with them so that they could help to promote communication between different ESP teaching groups.
What’s more, Ru placed great importance on the relationship between ESP teachers and subject matter specialists and practitioners both on and off campus. Her ideal was to promote collaboration between the two groups in the dimensions of ESP needs analysis, curriculum design, materials preparation and learning outcome assessment. As she was aware of the disciplinary borders forged by historical, cultural, spatial and/or temporal factors, she appreciated the efficiency of online communication. Therefore, she spared no effort in supporting Frank, the third participant of this multiple-case study (see Section 6.3), to build the online cross-disciplinary ESP teaching and learning community.

**Ru’s ESP Pedagogical Practices: Developing the New Art by Weeding through the Old**

Ru’s ESP pedagogical practices, in her own words, were quite distinct from her previous GE instructional experience. Simply by the look of it, the physical configuration of the classroom was more varied, as desk arrangements were flexible for the convenience of teaching and interaction. Why, one may wonder, is such a practice that may be commonly seen elsewhere worth mentioning? According to Ru, this is a symbolic break-away from the university’s conventional teaching practice, as she stated:

*Interview excerpt 16/03/2015*

If you came to our classroom settings in the past, you would feel they were consistently “serious, suppressive, and teacher-centred”. I expect to stimulate students’ active engagement through creating new experiences.
Despite this good intention, Ru admitted that her ESP teaching might not be so “animated and appealing” as some of her younger colleagues in the department, especially in terms of technological savviness.

Apart from the physical configuration of the classroom settings, Ru put more emphasis on the content of ESP teaching. As one of the first few ESP teachers in the faculty, she had more knowledge of the ESP course-books available in the market. She would select several books as reference and develop her own instructional materials based on a synergy of diverse books and resources. The key components of her ESP instruction were vocabulary, literacy, translation and writing.

Ru had accumulated a number of lecture notes on the etymology of medical terminology after two years’ ESP teaching. Teaching medical vocabulary would take up nearly 15% of her class time. Ru’s belief of the function of terminology instruction in fostering students’ learning skills can be seen in the following description.

Interview excerpt 31/03/2015

Every time at the beginning of an ESP course, I will emphasize the importance of terminology learning and the necessity of having some etymological knowledge, because in medicine a lot of terms contain Greek or Latin roots. Once students build their knowledge in this respect, they’ll find it easier [to learn terminology] as they go on.

The PowerPoint slides below present the content of Ru’s terminology instruction. Regular tests were given not only on the medical terms but also on the Greek or Latin roots. For instance, students were asked to write out the root: “echo-”, which means “using ultrasonic waves”.

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Terminology instruction as such is generally well-received by students who are at the early stage of medical study, probably because terminology in English is also part of their medical exams. After one semester’s teaching, Ru noted, EMI programme students tended to be more interested in terminology learning than other students. Classroom interaction with those students was likely to be more active and rewarding. Students appreciated Ru’s work, as evident in the following quote:

Student interview excerpt 18/05/2015

Our teacher is very dedicated and responsible. She taught us a lot of word-formation knowledge, which helps us memorize medical terminology in English.

Apart from terminology, Ru also directed students’ attention to those words which in medical sciences have meanings different from their meanings in everyday usage. Usually she would point out these words when analysing texts. Below is a case in point.

Classroom teaching episode 18/05/2015

Ru: Will you please underline the word COMPLICATION in the sentence: “Complications of gastric bypass surgery vary according your procedure, surgeon and behaviours before and after surgery.” What does it mean?

Ss: 并发症 ((Complication)).
Ru: Right↓. But I need an explanation in English.

Ss: ((Silence)).

SX: Maybe problems?

Ru: Close! Good! In medicine, complication means an unanticipated problem that arises following, and is a result of, a procedure, treatment, or illness. It’s a familiar everyday word with a subject specific meaning. I suggest you to make a list of such words as we go on, will you?

Ss: Okay.

*Note. “Ss” in all the transcripts of classroom teaching episodes refers to all the students in the class, and “SX” refers to a specific student.*

During the break, Ru reflected on the above teaching episode. She believed that vocabulary, like syntactic and textual knowledge, constituted the foundation for the development of students’ Medical English literacy and writing ability. This belief resulted partly from her personal Medical English learning experience, and partly from her knowledge of students’ GE ability. She divided instruction on Medical English vocabulary into three categories – instruction on terminology, instruction on familiar words with subject-specific meanings, and instruction on academic usage of words. The first two categories are already exemplified above. From the episode below we can get an idea about the third category of vocabulary instruction.

Classroom teaching episode 08/06/2015

((Example sentence: “The belief that we’ve vanquished our ancient microbial enemies leaves us alarmingly vulnerable to them.”))

Ru: Well, let’s think about this sentence. How can we paraphrase it? X ((called a student)), will you please try?
SX: If we believe our ancient microbial enemies have been defeated by us, then (pause).

Ru: Then::we will be GREATLY (pause), can we use greatly to replace alarmingly here?

Ss: Yes.

Ru: No, I don’t think so. Alarmingly denotes WORRYING, or DISTURBING. So maybe we could say they would worry us by imposing potential harm on us. Is it clear now?

Ss: Yes.

Ru: But you see, if we write in this way, it would appear too informal and redundant, which should be avoided in academic writing.

As can be seen, the third category of vocabulary instruction relates to the typical features of medical texts. Compared with everyday English writings, Medical English writings can be characterised by a set of linguistic features such as formality through nominalisation, impersonalisation through passive voice, succinctness through lexical density, among others (e.g., Gao, 2012; Rundblad, 2007). The above example sentence is a good example of nominalisation (i.e. “The belief that…”) and lexical density (i.e. “alarmingly vulnerable”). Ru was convinced that students needed teachers’ guidance in developing such genre awareness, as she said:

Interview excerpt 08/06/2015

Some university leaders and disciplinary colleagues say Medical English is just about technical terms. I cannot agree. Even though there are medical dictionaries, students still need effective methods to memorise terminology.
More than that, they should be trained to be watchful of the distinction and overlap between Medical English and everyday English.

Despite her ongoing effort in light of vocabulary instruction, Ru found some issues to address. One issue pertained to the systematicity of medical vocabulary teaching materials. With regard to medical terminology, her method was to organize teaching materials into units of body systems. These units covered terms related to anatomy, physiology, diseases, investigations, procedures and pharmacology. In this manner, she tried to address the issue of systematicity. However, the scope was not easy to demarcate.

Take the unit about “Diseases” for example. What diseases should be included? When it comes to the second and third categories of vocabulary, there is no ready-made coursebooks or references available. Consequently, instruction on these words was rather contingent on chance encounters during text analysis. This issue, in Ru’s opinion, not only affected students’ learning outcome, but also made it hard to promote her three-category medical vocabulary instruction to other ESP teachers. The following quote presents her concern of this particular challenge:

Interview excerpt 08/06/2015

It is hard to guarantee quality if the content and scope of teaching and learning is not well delineated. My idea of vocabulary instruction is not well accepted and enacted by most of my colleagues. Some of them are reluctant to teach terminology because they are still learning relevant knowledge and skills. Others refuse to touch upon the second and third categories, complaining [that] there are no systematic instructional materials.
Nevertheless, Ru was determined to address these issues. Her first plan was to publish a Medical English terminology book which was oriented to Chinese Medical English teachers and students. Based on the existing materials, she called for contributions from disciplinary subject matter teachers, Medical English teachers from other universities, and her students. Up to the end of my field observation, there had already been a substantial amount of materials, together with some written memos of ideas and advice. Ru’s next step was to seek support from a publishing company experienced in producing English instructional materials.

Academic literacy is another focus of Ru’s classroom instruction. When preparing the lesson, she found most of the textbooks only provided one and the same genre: popular medical texts, which mainly popularise medical science and healthcare knowledge to the general public. These texts probably were selected from newspapers, science magazines, reports from research journals and other resources. Ru commented, “They can be good reading materials for students who already have some basic medical knowledge.” There are a total of 12 units in the textbook, each consisting of three texts with a length of approximately 1600 words. Constrained by limited classroom time, only one text would be used for detailed instruction. Ru’s approach was to design various after-class tasks, of which the completion depended on a thorough reading of all the three texts in one unit. In class, she would focus on enhancing students’ literacy using one selected text.

After several rounds of classroom observation, I found that the content composition and time allocation of the pedagogical activities were relatively stable in Ru’s reading and writing lesson. Table 6.1 outlines the main content of each activity.
Table 6.1 Ru’s 90-Minute Reading and Writing Lesson Configuration

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Content</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>5-10 min</td>
<td>Vocabulary quiz, home-assignment check-up</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5min</td>
<td>Introduction to the new lesson: topic, objectives, key points, intended outcome, etc.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10-15 min</td>
<td>Medical terminology instruction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30min</td>
<td>Text analysis: Complex sentence structure</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Category 2 and 3 vocabulary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Text structure</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Literacy enhancement tasks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30–40 min</td>
<td>Writing or Translation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Academic writing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Medical research article writing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Translation</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

A cursory look at this table may leave the impression that such an ESP lesson bears much procedural resemblance with a GE lesson. Ru pointed out, however, that the fundamental difference lay in the primary teaching objectives and the corresponding teaching methods and approaches that could be quite different from her GE practices. A key objective in teaching ESP reading and writing is to teach genre knowledge and cultivate genre-awareness. The following classroom episode demonstrates Ru’s approach.

((The following is a text paragraph selected from Text A Unit 6)).

((Sentence 1)) The flu virus is a trickster, constantly changing its surface antigens, so that our immune systems need to relearn how to fight it every time it adopts a new costume. ((Sentence 2)) “To our bodies, it’s a new virus,” Morse says. “Old wine in new bottles, if you will.” ((Sentence 3)) A larger-scale genetic shift could also make the virus something like new wine in new bottles. ((Sentence 4)) Researchers will have to characterize
the new flu early enough for vaccinations to be created and delivered to enough people for prevention to be successful.

Classroom teaching episode 18/06/2015

((Ru asked the students to read again and think about the gist of it)).

**Ru**: Well, what does this paragraph tell us? Give me a one-sentence summary. A, will you please? ((Called a student to answer)).

**SA**: The flu virus is constantly changing and our body need to relearn how to fight it.

**Ru**: Imm…that’s true, but does it cover all the ESSENTIAL information? Others, what do you think? ((Turned to the whole class)).

**Ss**: ((Silence)).

((Student B put up hand)).

**Ru**: Yep, please. ((Nodded to the student)).

**SB**: Flus virus is constantly changing in complex ways, so early enough characterization for new flu is necessary for vaccination to play a role.

**Ru**: GOOD! This one is more comprehensive. Let’s compare the two students’ summaries.

Ru repeated SA’s summary, pointed out that it only covered the information in Sentence 1, whereas SB’s cleverness lies in that both Sentence 1 and Sentence 4 were covered. She then asked the whole class to think about the logical and structural relationship between the four sentences and draw a schematic graph to show how the text moves to organize and convey the information. She quickly walked around checking on students’ work. Ru highlighted that this activity was essential for students to raise “genre-based structure awareness” and sharpen their “textual information processing” ability.
Afterwards, she drew a schema on the blackboard with an explanation of how it was generated. Ru was convinced that, as an ESP teacher, she has the responsibility to guide students, as she stated in her memo:

Memos in Ru’s lesson plan

To make distinctions between essential and non-essential information, fact and opinion, propositions and arguments; to distinguish between cause and effect, classify, to categorise and handle data that make comparisons…

After the structural analysis, Ru directed students’ attention to some detailed linguistic features:

Classroom teaching episode 18/06/2015

**Ru**: We’ve got some interesting metaphors here: “Old wine in new bottles” ((in Sentence 2)) and “new wine in new bottles” ((in Sentence 3)). My question is what is the old wine? And the new wine? What do the bottles refer to?

Students’ responses to this question varied a lot. Some said the wine meant virus, whereas some thought it referred to human beings, still some thought the bottles meant human beings. But no one got the right answer. In the after-class interview, Ru gave a reflective talk on this episode as follows:

Interview excerpt 18/06/2015

Actually ESP is challenging also because our students’ General English is not proficient enough. Just think about students’ interpretation of the metaphor. It has nothing to do with discipline specific discourse, it’s just
an ordinary metaphor used in a medical topic context, but clearly it proves a hindrance to comprehension, you see. That’s why we often say although we are prioritising ESP, we still need to keep an eye on students’ GE learning.

The fact that the implementation of ESP is affected by students’ GE proficiency is not uncommon in educational contexts that involve non-native English speakers (see e.g., Ahmadi & Bajelani, 2012). In this research, the challenge Ru encountered is identified by some other ESP colleagues who found the same problem with their students as well. On the part of the students, the majority of them were still preparing for CET-4 and CET-6, which indicates that their English might not be good enough to follow the ESP programme.

Actually, some students told Ru that the materials in the textbook were too difficult or even beyond their ability to comprehend. In addition to the obstacle caused by a substantial number of new words and medical terms, their inadequate English literacy skills, both in GE and ESP, proved to be the biggest barrier. As a consequence, Ru found either it took longer than planned to complete the instructional tasks or only part of the teaching plans could be enacted in the limited classroom time specified to the ESP literacy and writing class.

Challenges were also found in Medical English writing instruction and its effect on students’ writing performance. Ru’s writing instruction covered a range of common genres in medical science, such as clinical vignette abstract, case report, case series, and research. The focus is on medical research writing, which is supposed to help students publish in English-medium journals, as advocated both in this university and across the country. It started with an overview of the major structural components, namely IMRaD
Introduction, Methods, Results and Discussion) format, which is widely adopted to report scientific research studies (see Mišak, Marušić & Marušić, 2005; Wu, 2011). Then every week one component of a research paper was addressed through a genre-based approach.

Preparing for Medical English writing instruction was at first a “painful” learning process for Ru, as she needed to learn the genre knowledge of research papers, reviews, and case reports in the field of medical science and clinical practice. As for Ru, it was not hard to become conversant with the generic structural features, which were clearly illustrated in some medical writing course-books and online learning resources. However, it was difficult to design proper writing assignments for students to have a hands-on writing experience to the effect that they could transfer theory to practice. In addition, Ru was also mindful of accommodating and adjusting students’ pedagogical preference. As she explained:

Interview excerpt 24/06/2015

The students are often asking for patterns or model writings that are applicable to as many writing tasks in exams, such as CET-4/-6, TOFEL, ILETTs, etc., and then they recite and use them. Such request can be satisfied because medical research papers also have patterns and models, but more learning strategies and effort are required for students to be truly able to write a research paper in English.

Bearing these thoughts in mind, Ru invented an approach which she named as “deconstructive analysis and constructive simulation”. By deconstructive analysis she meant to teach students to conduct genre-based analysis, hoping they could develop
genre knowledge and awareness. By constructive simulation she meant students learn to write through imitation, drawing on the genre knowledge they have accumulated. The following description of a writing lesson can illuminate Ru’s approach.

This session was centred on writing a research abstract. Before the class, an example abstract was given to students as a home-assignment reading task with a question to think about: What structural and language features can you find in this abstract? At the beginning of the class, several students were asked to report on their findings. Ru considered this kind of home-assignment to be crucial, as it would encourage students to become observant of the genre features when reading on their own and be able to do genre-analysis based on the knowledge and skills they learnt from literacy class and the writing class. Among the students who answered this question, one student’s performance was particularly noteworthy. He gave the following response:

A student’s response in class 24/06/2015

Clearly, this is a structured abstract, a typical format used by most contemporary medical journals. The readers can get fast access to the key contents guided by the subtitles like introduction, objectives etc. The style of the language is very formal and concise, with a lot of passive voice sentences.

It was a bit surprising to see that a second-year undergraduate student, who had no research or research writing experience at all, could provide comment like this. Ru told me students’ potential was amazing, though most of them were still struggling with learning GE. Some students surprised her with their excellent performance on certain
tasks. Actually, this inspired Ru to collaborate with students in developing their own ESP teaching and learning materials later.

Figure 6.1 Ru’s Annotated Teaching Plan for Medical English Writing Instruction

Note. /C+F/ means contend and function, /LF/ means language features

After a brief positive and encouraging comment on this students’ performance, Ru provided detailed instruction on the standardised format of structured abstracts, and dug deeper into the functional and lexical-grammatical features of each labelled session. Ru was able to utilise a heuristic method in getting students engaged in the textual and language analytical and appraisal process. For instance, in teaching writing the conclusion section of a paper, instead of providing the textual analysis herself, Ru guided students to identify the features of the content and language with three questions:
Classroom observation notes 01/07/2015

- What information does each of the three sentences tell the reader?
- What language features can you find?
- What contents do you think should be exhibited in the conclusion section of an Abstract?

Through these analytical questions, and other related writing activities, students were asked to collaborate with their pair-work or group-work partners in various forms, such as discussion, co-author writing, peer-review, peer-feedback, among others. On those occasions, Ru would go around and join their activities spontaneously. Afterwards, a commentary of students’ performance and a summary of the teaching content would be given by Ru. At the end of the class, Ru assigned the homework: to annotate the genre features of another exemplary abstract following Ru’s instruction and steps demonstrated in her annotation in Figure 6.1.

In the post-observation interview, I invited Ru to reflect and comment on her preparation for the lesson and instructional practice. From the following quote it could be seen that this lesson is a combined product of Ru’s constant self-study, ESP teachers’ concerted effort in lesson planning, students’ inspiration and contribution, as well as peer colleagues’ consultation and provision of resources.

Small story 01/07/2017

1. The class instruction you just saw is the result of a long time recursive accumulation and preparation. The content I covered today tripled what I taught abstract writing for the first time one year ago.
2. At that time, only I and another senior teacher were teaching Medical English writing to postgraduates. It was only a five-session course with no exam required, and we had no collective lesson plan activities.

3. However, the implementation of the ESP curriculum has pushed us to strive to enrich and systemise writing instruction to the effect that it could really address students’ academic and professional needs.

4. As a result, the previous “one-man game” evolved into a “collective struggle” because most of the ESP teachers find it really hard to learn, prepare for, teach, and assess Medical English writing.

5. True, as there are course-books and online resources, but it took time and collective effort to collect, compare, select, sort out materials and judge the quality before finally pinning down what is to be used. But that work only got us the basic frameworks of writing.

6. Fleshing them out with exemplary texts and sample writings is more demanding. We sought resources both online and from the disciplinary teachers, researchers, and our students.

7. Usually after collecting an initial amount of materials, we ESP teachers would read and learn first.

8. However, it required great effort and dedication to finish even one article, because we were handicapped by the lack of subject matter knowledge, and on the other hand, we were outside the discourse communities who use the genres.

9. Sometimes, it can be hard to judge whether our understanding is correct and [whether] what we teach is congruent with the conventional practice in the discourse communities.
10. While I’m relatively satisfied with my performance today, I wouldn’t be so satisfied when I move on to the other sections of a research paper. I am still learning. Whenever a question concerning disciplinary knowledge arises, I tried every means to address it, learning either from my ESP colleagues, subject matter teachers, or from my students.

Ru’s narrative constituted a small story about her learning experience for preparing for Medical English writing instruction, which unfolds along the temporal dimension (from “one year ago” in Line 1 to now) and shows an extensive cast of people (from only two teachers initially, as in Line 2, to all the teachers and students now) who are involved in a new situation.

The changing metaphors from “one-man game” to “collective struggle” in Line 4 vividly revealed the stress and tensions, as “most teachers find it really hard to learn” (Line 4). English teachers’ workload was increased at almost every step from collecting the instructional materials to writing assessment, as partially illuminated by Line 5 through to Line 9.

Distinctive from GE writing, which is accessible to every “layperson”, ESP writing opens a narrow entry to non-professionals who are probably “handicapped” (Line 8) due to insufficient disciplinary knowledge. Given teachers’ commitment to self-learning and within-department collaboration (Line 7), they still need cross-disciplinary assistance in various aspects, for instance, to judge the viability of ESP teachers’ understanding of the discipline-specific conventions as mentioned in Line 9.

Despite challenges and higher demands for commitment, the writing course, as a representative section of the ESP curriculum, also functioned as the stimulus and catalyst
for teacher learning and collaboration, as indicated by the “collective effort” in Line 5 and the recurrent theme of “learning” explicitly expressed in Lines 4, 7 and 10.

Ru, in particular, has a strong incentive to establish herself as a learner learning from all sources available. However, from previous analysis of the disciplinary division that has long existed in the university, it is assumable that coordination and collaboration with subject matter teachers is easier said than done. Ru expressed this concern and her intended solution in the following statement:

Interview excerpt 01/07/2015

It takes time for us to communicate and collaborate. If the ideal situation is to form a community with disciplinary subject matter teachers and medical professionals, then we need to take small steps with patience. Frank’s online community ((see Section 6.3)) is taking shape, which is a good move forward. At present, I would rather motivate my students to take more responsibilities in teaching and learning.

Ru motivated students by involving them in the development of Medical English teaching materials. Her plan was to edit and publish a Medical English reading and writing course-book oriented to both undergraduate and postgraduate medical majors who need to read original literature and write research-based thesis or journal articles. Students were invited to contribute various multimodal materials—textual, audio, and visual, as long as they were closely related to their learning needs. They were very enthusiastic and creative, as can be seen from the following feedback:
Student interview excerpt 20/04/2017

The part I like most is to contribute to our own ESP text book. We are encouraged to collect all sorts of materials, journal articles, PowerPoint slides, video clips…

Ru would retain the materials she considered valuable, or those that had been validated in real teaching and learning practice. For instance, effective writing samples, the texts with annotations of genre-analysis done by students or ESP teachers, students’ own writings with feedback remarks, reading materials that were extracted from medical science literature or textbooks, were all kept as potential components of the course-book to be edited. Through this enterprise, Ru shifted her role from an authoritative teacher to a collaborator with the students, who were empowered to go beyond just being passive recipients of knowledge.
6.2 Alice

From early in Alice’s life, becoming a university English teacher has been a dream. Born into a working-class family, Alice was inculcated with the belief that knowledge and competence would change one’s fate. Therefore, she has been hard-working all the way through university to the workplace. After three years of intense study in a key high school and winning through the highly competitive Gao Kao (College entrance examination), Alice was admitted into a well-known 985 and 211 national project university, one of the top ten universities in China. Alice spent both her undergraduate and postgraduate years in that university. As a result of her constant diligence, she was among the top three students and graduated with honors. With dreams and ambition for a promising future, as was always the case, Alice left her hometown, setting sail for a new life and career in this city north of her hometown.

In our first interview, Alice discursively drew a picture of the university’s physical environment on her first day on this campus. The graphic image she portrayed struck me like an open box where I could see the very sentimental and emotional facet of her persona. Here is her description:

Interview excerpt 02/03/2015

The campus was sitting quietly in the hustle and bustle of the capital city. That day, the whole world was white and silver. Snow covered the buildings, trees, paths, and the roofs. Small pine trees were like little bears! The magnificent administrative building, in traditional Chinese architectural style, was located right in the middle of the functioning area.

I was wrapped up in a sort of solemn and impersonalised atmosphere when
I went inside to sign the contract for employment. Even now I could still recollect the fascination I had with the huge crystal lights hanging high above the marble stairs.

This is a fairly impressive verbal portrait of an administrative building. The slightly poetic rhetoric, the metaphor of the pine trees, as well as the sensory and emotional accounts, are reflective of a young teacher’s state of mind: a feeling of hope, passion and aspiration for the future which was mixed with a sense of curiosity, isolation and even intimidation in a new environment. Later in my encounter with Alice, I noticed some changing images of the same administrative building in her discourse. For instance, when she won two prizes in a university-wide teaching excellence competition as a representative of the English Department, the building was nearly “shining” as she said the following words while tramping out of the gate:

Journal writing 19/05/2012

How I love its bright yellow surface, its fantastic red pillars, and the glazed tiles on the roof…

Whereas on other occasions, like when she came out from the university-wide meeting discussed in Section 5.3, the building would take on an entirely different look as an “inaccessible territory” in her articulation:

Interview excerpt 04/03/2015

We ((ESP teachers)) were silenced for another time, as we often are. It’s hard for university leaders and those in power to listen to us. They sit up high in a leading position in this building ((the administrative building)) as
if this is their territory, which looks so apathetic, forbidden and depressing to me…

While she was saying that, I noticed that she was frowning and she crossed her hands in front making a *NO* sign. Put these three completely distinctive images of the same building on the timeline of Alice’s professional experience, and we can see that the changes took place over time as Alice gradually assumed more job responsibilities and more professional roles (See Figure 6.2).

![Timeline of Alice's Professional Experience 2009-2015](image)

**Figure 6.2 Alice’s Professional Experience 2009-2015**

Along this timeline, only key events and job responsibilities that were emphasized by Alice in the interviews were marked out. Alice believed that it was a few important events and activities that gave her “a sense of existence as an English teacher” (quoted from her journal writing 19/05/2012). To a great extent, the meaning of her professional life is defined by these events and activities, which are embodied by the pivotal dots forming the symbolic line of her professional trajectory.
A “Young Backbone Teacher” in the Early-Career Period

The first three years from 2009 to 2012 was a preliminary stage for Alice to establish herself as a GE teacher. With a strong desire to outperform the other colleagues and maintain her past glory as a top (student) performer in university, she worked very hard. She was completely obsessed with preparing lessons, learning from senior teachers, trying various pedagogical approaches in class, improving teaching materials, and mixing well with students. In her words, those years were “rosy days” when her confidence was boosted, sense of achievement was enhanced and, most importantly, her knowledge and expertise of GE teaching dramatically increased. When asked how she would define her role(s) in those days, she said with excitement:

Interview excerpt 13/03/2015

I was like an adventurer-the first person to eat a crab- as I kept trying new teaching methods, organizing various teaching activities, and applying a wide range of teaching materials. I felt obliged to give my students a new taste every day, and I hated being restrained by the university mandated syllabus and curriculum.

I understood the implication of her metaphor “the first person to eat a crab”. Trying “new” or non-authenticated pedagogical practices in this university could be a bit risky, because all teachers are required to conform to relatively unified codes of conduct for teachers’ classroom behaviour. The University Code of Conduct includes two parts. One part concerns classroom disciplines. For example, it was stipulated that there must be a five-minute break between two sessions constituting one 90-minute class, and students should raise their hands and stand up to answer questions. The other part deals with the
pattern of a lesson. In particular, it specifies the basic components of a lesson which includes “a leading-in; a brief review of previous lesson; an outline of new lesson, key points and difficult points of new lesson; summary and home-assignment” (cited from the university issued Lesson Plan Template). Alice used to be flexible with these codes of conducts. She seldom complied with any fixed rules of classroom teaching and management, but would rather rely on her own style based, in turn, on her teaching beliefs.

Interview excerpt 13/03/2015

I firmly believe learning in university is dependent more on students themselves than on teachers. I tried to be a director and a coach. I’ll share with them my own learning experience and teach them how to learn for themselves…

As shown in the above quote, Alice positioned herself as a “director” and “coach”. She thought it more important to motivate students to learn, rather than simply compel them to learn, as revealed in the following quote.

Interview excerpt 13/03/2015

More often than not, students come to English class with a test-driven habit and mentality formed in middle school. Therefore, a primary thing is to direct or redirect their learning objectives. No matter whether I’m teaching intensive reading or listening comprehension, the first thing I would do is often to ask them to think why, what, and how to learn…

In practice, Alice used to organize different activities and bring in a rich variety of content via which she could direct and coach her students. Informed by her own
successful English learning experiences, she was very confident in her knowledge about
the learning needs, preferred teaching methods, and effective learning strategies of her
students. Such belief encouraged her to break away from the confinement of the
documented regulation and conduct what she perceived to be more effective teaching
approaches. She once wrote:

Journal writing 04/05/2015

English teaching is a creative enterprise. Admittedly, good teaching is
based on the depth and scope of the teacher’s knowledge of the language
and the cultural legacy it carries. However, it flourishes on the teacher’s
imagination and creativity. And above all, I believe learning outcomes can
be optimised only when there is mutual engagement between the teacher
and the students with genuinely vested interest.

Embracing such a view of “good teaching”, Alice brought into her class British and
American literature, history, news report, movies, music, and intercultural
communication, which are related to, but also greatly expanding, the content of the text
books. Her teaching was enriched by her solid knowledge base in the English language
and its culture. It can be safely assumed that she has a good command of the content
knowledge of GE. Moreover, she not only understood “that something is so”, but also
to “further understand why it is so” (Shulman, 1986a, p.9), as manifested in her accounts
of how she taught GE vocabulary:

Interview excerpt 24/03/2015

When I teach vocabulary, I touch upon the following aspects: meaning,
collocation, usage, and memorization. I try to draw a mind-map of the
connotation and denotation of a key word, exemplify its most frequent collocation and usage…and share the stories behind certain words…

Alice found the linguistic knowledge that she accrued while doing Masters’ study was very useful, as some theories could be well applied in practice. If she was teaching grammar or vocabulary, she would direct students to discern the correlation between meaning and form; if she was addressing texts and writing, she would focus on sentence structure, register, genre, and the nuanced differences between the two languages in terms of pragmatic and cognitive features. She enjoyed her teaching and had a great sense of fulfilment, as she stated:

Interview excerpt 24/03/2015

The classroom was my stage. I was so much empowered by the knowledge I had. I enjoyed every moment when students were fascinated by the knowledge and learning skills I shared with them. I felt like I unleashed a certain potential that I hadn’t been aware of.

The initial three years’ of GE teaching experience witnesses Alice’s transformation from being a novice teacher to an excellent performer. She had developed the capability of integrating various aspects of knowledge into her teaching. She had also been continuously refining her craft on getting GE knowledge and skills comprehensible and accessible to students. She was adept at appropriating different forms of representation, such as analogies, illustrations, examples, explanations, demonstrations, etc. to optimize teaching effect. She was actively designing and enacting a wide range of classroom activities to make her class captivating and engaging. It is evident that she demonstrated good pedagogical content knowledge when teaching GE, as she definitely knew “the
ways of representing and formulating the subject that makes it comprehensible for others” (Shulman, 1986b, p.9).

Alice’s performance was highly appraised by students and the English Department. In 2012, when the university-wide teaching competition was held, she was nominated to participate on behalf of all English teachers. She won two awards, which was the first time that a teacher from a non-mainstream disciplinary department was granted with such honours. She had since gained a name for Teaching Excellence and was entitled as a “Young Backbone Teacher". In the following year, she was appointed to be leader of the 7-year Programme English teaching panel.

A Friend and a “Temporary Life Mentor”

Apart from being a good English teacher, Alice also resolved to be a good friend and a “temporary life mentor” for her students. Deeply influenced by the traditional Chinese philosophy of education, she has faith in the tenet that the purpose of education is to impart knowledge and to educate people. In one of her web blogs she put down her educational tenet, as follows:

Online blog writing 01/01/2013

As an English teacher, I embrace a utilitarian objective of English education, whereas as a teacher, my ultimate goal is to become “a decent

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12 “Young Backbone Teacher” is a title endowed to excellent young teachers who are supposed to take leadership in the focal university.
Therefore, Alice would share with the students her own reflections on her experience of
life and study in the university, the way English provided new dimensions in her life, as
well as a worldview and values that she believed positive and nourishing for the students.
Such exchanges on life wisdom, moral sense, and reflections on learning and personal
development were integrated naturally into classroom English teaching activities. Her
Teaching and her personal charm were well received by the students, as can be seen from
a student’s anonymous written comment on her teaching:

Student anonymous written comment 12/2014

She is more than an English teacher with rich knowledge. For us, she is
also an elder sister and a friend we can trust and rely on. She is so candid,
sincere and committed. In her class, we not only learn the structural
knowledge of the language, but also learn how to use the language as a way
to enrich our understanding of the world and of ourselves…

A Novice Panel Leader, an ESP Teacher at a Loss

In 2012, ESP courses were offered first among 7-year Program medical students, whose
GE level was deemed higher than average. As the leader of the teaching panel, Alice

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13 “The Essay on Learning” (Xue Ji 学记) is one of the passages of The Rites (Li Ji 《礼记》), the
earliest scholarly record in the Chinese history on the philosophy of education (Zhang & Bai, 2015).

14 Students’ anonymous written comments are part of the survey for teaching quality and teacher
performance evaluation which is conducted at the end of every semester in the English Department.
was assigned to design and implement an ESP curriculum, which actually opened a new page in her professional life, as she commented:

Interview excerpt 27/03/2015

The first time I prepared an ESP lesson, I knew I was at a turning point. A remarkable difference I discerned almost in the first instance was that what I could do with the textbook content was very limited…

Alice labelled her sensation of the first-year ESP teaching experience “at a loss”. At that time only a few commercial textbooks were available, and most of them were only single volumes that focus on a single ESP skill, such as *Medical Vocabulary, Cambridge English for Nursing, Conversation in Hospital, History Record Writing Manual*, among others. Resonant with Ru, Alice found Medical English teaching materials lacked systematicity. Despite a strong desire to compensate for the insufficiency in teaching materials, Alice found her GE knowledge and teaching expertise did not allow her much leverage. She was struggling when teaching ESP, mainly because she could not elaborate as much as she could when teaching GE. Actually, a feeling of helplessness prevailed among all the teachers who were teaching ESP in those early days, as manifested in Alice’s recounts of a lesson plan experience:

Interview excerpt 27/03/2015

We all felt somewhat down at the end of our rope. To give you some idea, once we were doing a collective lesson plan, the topic of that lesson is emerging and re-emerging infectious diseases. Though the text is intended for a general audience, still we found it hard to elaborate much as we were afraid of making mistakes in terms of medical knowledge.
Alice and her colleagues came to realize that professional medical knowledge, and familiarity with the disciplinary genre, register and other language features were the basis for effective ESP teaching, especially when proper teaching materials were unavailable. Given her own anxiety and stress handling the new ESP curriculum, Alice was mindful of her responsibility as a panel leader. A sense of commission to rise above being mediocre both individually on her part and collectively as a team was gradually developed, as can be seen from the quote below:

Interview excerpt 27/03/2015

I had enough confidence to play a solo when teaching GE. However, teaching ESP lead me to re-think how far an individual teacher can go all alone, the impact she/he can have, in comparison to those of a team…I needed a new approach to handling ESP.

This quote implies that Alice was ready to re-position herself in relation to teaching, to students and colleagues, and to the contexts. This aspiration became stronger in 2014 when the university embarked on the 7-Year Basic Medicine EMI programme where GE was eliminated from the curriculum.

“New Curriculum, New Me”

If the ESP experience in 2013 was more like fathoming deep waters, then more significant challenges emerged from 2014. On the one hand, Alice contended that an ESP curriculum be premised on coherence and systematicity in order to generate satisfactory outcomes. However, issues existed in almost each of the four basic parts of a curriculum – content, organisation, learning and teaching methods, and assessment (see Knight, 2001). On the other hand, the mismatch between what students needed for
EMI learning and what the ESP curriculum could provide was becoming increasingly manifest. Under these circumstances, Alice proposed that a finely-tuned ESP curriculum was imperative, and it must be grounded on experiments and reflective practices. Nevertheless, the exploring process was filled with tensions, conflicts, challenges, and difficulties, which were continuously shaping and reshaping Alice’s ESP teacher identity both in discourse and in practice, along with changes in the dimensions of her cognition, motivation and emotion.

Alice once made an analogy between her professional performance and the movement of a curve. As a GE teacher, it had been on a smooth rise since 2009 and peaked in 2012. Then it began to drop and almost touched the bottom in 2014, while transferring to being an ESP teacher. While she was making strenuous efforts to enhance her ESP teaching capacity, she was losing the aura of the past as a “Young Backbone GE Teacher”. In one interview she recalled an episode in an intensive reading class:

Small story 03/04/2015

This episode keeps coming up in my mind. It occurred when we were analysing and interpreting a text whose title is “Tuberculosis: A Forgotten Plague?” It was a long passage with an explosion of information and background knowledge. There were not only professional medical terms and notions, but also a host of writers, poets, and celebrities from the Anglo-American world. With texts like: “Interferon gamma tests have been shown to be comparable in the detection of tuberculosis”, what I could do was simply translating. However, I talked a little more on Jane Austen, Edgar Allan Poe and the Bronte sisters, so that students could understand the metaphor—“the vanished bloom and wasted flesh of sufferers was
splashed across play-houses, poetry and novels”. Suddenly I found most of my students looked absented minded, not interested at all. I was a bit hurt, and I criticised a student who was staring at his mobile [phone]. I asked him to repeat what I had just said. He was very apologetic and explained he was reviewing a chapter on the physiology of the digestive tract in preparation for the test in the evening. Hearing that I turned to the whole class, and the majority were nodding with eager eyes as if asking for my sympathy.

*An Increase in the Inconsistency between ESP Courses and Students’ Needs*

Alice was shocked by this experience, not only because it was the first time that she had lost her students to their commitment to subject matter courses. What we can see from the above small story is that Alice was applying the expertise she accrued when teaching GE. However, this approach lost appeal to the students, because of a change in their needs. In addition, her frequent practice of “a simple translation” for ESP teaching was not well received by her students.

Adding up to these issues was growing learner dissatisfaction. From students’ anonymous written feedback at the end of 2014, Alice learnt there were pervasive complaints among students about the content of the ESP courses. Coinciding with her long-held suspicion, students were deprecating the ESP class due to its detachment from the language demands of EMI. Aware that the ESP course she could provide was not what students were expecting, Alice knew it was time for a radical change.
Journal writing 28/02/2015

I don’t fear failure, but I fear methodological fallacy, narrow-mindedness and the inertia to cling to past glory. The last thing I would do is to waste my students’ time by forcing them to engage in a learning experience that deviates from their actual needs…

The Wrestling Process of Getting out of the Previous Comfort Zone

As can be seen from this quote, Alice was wrestling emotionally. On the one hand, she admitted that she was more comfortable with continuing her previous GE pedagogical approach, which was once highly praised by everyone and contributed to her “past glory”. On the other hand, as a dedicated teacher who invariably placed students’ interests above everything else, she couldn’t accept the fact that her teaching might be a “waste of students’ time” (recounted in the small story 03/04/2015). Her rationality told her ESP should and must be driven and oriented by the target needs. It is this emotional wrestling, and a strong sense of commitment to teaching for the good of the students, that motivated Alice to transform herself and her pedagogical practices in a substantial way. The first step she took was to identify learning needs, problems, and gaps.

Cross-Boundary Participation Leading to New Knowledge

Probably Alice was among the few in the department who preferred to obtain insights of target ESP learning needs through field work. She went to sit in the EMI courses, communicate with EMI teachers about their perceptions and attitudes towards students’ ESP learning needs, and acquainted herself with the original medical textbooks. In so doing, she got an idea of students’ immediate English learning needs so as to follow EMI.
What was most provocative was her experience as the oral examiner at the terminal EMI oral exams.

Interview expert 29/06/2015

If you hadn’t seen the tyre blowout on the road, you wouldn’t find regular maintenance so important. When I saw my students underperformed in their EMI oral exams because of their deficient English, my face flushed…

The above quote is indicative of Alice’s concern when seeing that students’ ESP learning outcomes were far from being satisfactory in practical use. The EMI terminal exam was administered by the Basic Medical Education School which took charge of the EMI programme. Aimed at assessing students’ basic interpersonal communication skills and academic English proficiency, the exam was designed to include two parts. Part One was a short popularised biomedical passage with reading comprehension questions, and Part Two was a question-and-answer session concerning subject matter knowledge. Examiners were composed of subject matter teachers, who would do most of the on-site communication, and ESP teachers, who mainly observed and assessed students’ English performance. A total of 24 examiners were assigned to twelve test rooms, with each having one subject matter teacher and one ESP teacher. The exam was in the form of 20 minutes’ face-to-face oral communication between the two examiners and one student, randomly assigned to a test room. The exams were radio-recorded for teaching and teacher assessment research purposes. ESP teachers were asked to mark according to a scoring guide, which was adapted from IELTS speaking score descriptors. Alice has been the examiner several times and below is her written reflection on one of such exams.
Journal writing 15/07/2014

Each student was given 15 minutes to read the passage in Section One and they are allowed to use dictionaries or online resources. However, 90% of the students failed to correctly pronounce “schizophrenia”, the topical word of the passage. More than half couldn’t exhibit fluid expression or clear progression of ideas. About 30% found it difficult to understand teachers’ questions. It’s getting even worse when answering subject-specific questions. Over 80% of the responses are delivered in a choppy, fragmented or telegraphic manner with frequent pauses and hesitations…

What was going wrong with current ESP courses and how could they be adjusted so as to enhance students’ academic English performance in EMI settings? Alice believed in addition to ESP courses, problems also existed in EMI courses.

According to Alice’s description, due to EMI teachers’ insufficient English proficiency, the language input students could get from EMI was fairly limited. The EMI classroom discourse was filled with heavy technical language, formal genre and register features, which added to students’ cognitive workload to process the content. However, the effectiveness of instruction was often achieved through code-switching or the assistance of textual and visual assistance (e.g., PowerPoint slides). Some EMI teachers’ pronunciation had dialectical features, and some pronunciation was barely intelligible. Besides, because the instruction of the content knowledge is unanimously prioritised, English use was seldom paid enough attention to by the instructor. All these factors had reshaped Alice’s belief of ESP teaching, as she stated:
Interview excerpt 04/03/2015

The university discourse tends to relegate ESP teaching completely to the responsibility of English teachers. Whenever things go wrong, we ((ESP teachers)) are the first target to blame. Fortunately, the EMI programme offers a new perspective for people to look at ESP teaching. People should know it is not solely dependent on ESP teachers, the sources and quality of language input and the general English environment also matter.

As such, Alice contended that “ESP should become a collective teaching and learning activity, where ESP teachers, EMI teachers and students were all responsible participants”. As head of the 7-year Programme ESP teaching panel, she was determined to take the lead to reappraise the position of ESP courses, renew the curriculum, and motivate concerted efforts to address current issues.

*An Advocate of Collective Teacher Learning*

Reflecting on the failure of her own ESP teaching, Alice came to realise it would merely be wishful thinking to leave an English teacher to address all the challenges posed by ESP all alone. Rather, the whole process from syllabus and curriculum design, implementation, to assessment should be a collective learning and experimenting process. In addition, Alice was concerned with the marginalised and contested status that ESP teachers had in the university’s discourse. As the panel leader, she felt obliged to clarify the direction and propose a new ESP syllabus that was more in tune with students’ EMI curriculum, and reclaim the meaning of ESP teachers’ contribution. An a panel meeting, she made the following statement,
Panel meeting record 17/03/2015

I propose that we make utilitarianism the fundamental principle of our ESP teaching activities. Utilitarianism, as I conceive, is the soul of an ESP curriculum. Our course would lose its value and appeal to our students if it is not grounded on practical learning needs.

Table 6.2 ESP Syllabus for 7-Year Basic Medicine EMI Programme

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Objectives</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>To enhance students’ communicative competence, especially in writing and speaking</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To help students develop transferable/generic skills</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To promote students’ self-directiveness, critical thinking, and problem-solving ability</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To facilitate the EMI program</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Course Design</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A two-phase course design closely tailored to the needs of the parallel EMI programme is provided by subject-subject matter teachers.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phase 1 (week 1-week 4): Coaching general academic English skills draws on Johns’ (1997) general academic discourses features common to all disciplines and basic academic study skills.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phase 2 (week 5-week 17): Developing discipline-specific academic English proficiency (for detailed contents see Table 3)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pedagogical Approaches</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>EMI: compulsory for no less than 30 percent of all instructional activities.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PBL/CBI/Genre-based process-oriented/Other : recommended as alternatives</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Assessment

Formative and summative co-assessment involving both English teachers and subject matter teachers.

By utilitarianism, Alice meant to promote an ESP model as adjunct to the EMI programme, so as to align with students’ immediate EMI learning needs and long-term academic and professional needs. To give me an idea of a utilitarian ESP curriculum,
Alice showed me the new syllabus for 2015 which came out through the panel’s concerted research and creation (See Table 6.2 for the details of the syllabus).

Apart from clarifying what the renewed ESP course should do, Alice added that the syllabus was significant also because it projected to the university the meaning of ESP teachers’ work, as she said:

Interview excerpt 17/03/2015

Often word came that the university leaders, school heads and colleagues in disciplinary faculties are not sure what we ((ESP teachers)) are doing. Our invisibility even becomes an excuse for them to challenge the meaning of our work. This syllabus is intended to bring our work to light in the university.

Since it is not my research focus here to assess the renewed curriculum, I made no comment in this respect. During the field work period, I notice some ESP teachers were dubious about the idea of an adjunct ESP model. A possible reason was that the new model was still taking shape. Alice’s coping strategy was to take the lead in experimenting with the adjunct model in her own practice.

In addition, Alice was keen on creating a community of practice, with its participants being 7-year programme ESP teachers, EMI teachers and the students. She encouraged her fellow colleagues to network with EMI teachers. She also shared with them instructional materials she obtained from EMI teachers. During their collective lesson planning, she insisted on promoting the idea of integrating a certain amount of EMI teaching content into ESP lessons. At first, her fellow colleagues were fairly dubious about this initiative, as can be seen in Alice’s narrative:
They felt like being pushed to a subordinate status, like sort of teaching assistants working for our subject matter counterparts. I was having a difficult time trying to convince them of the meaning of this endeavour. But still I would often provide them with EMI contents that are appropriate for ESP.

Alice was empathetic with her fellow teachers’ psychology. Though Alice did a lot to collect EMI materials which were supposed to be used in ESP courses, she never made it mandatory for the other panel teachers to use the materials in their teaching. Instead, she proactively integrated these materials in her own teaching, hoping to set an example for her fellow colleagues.

For instance, Alice allocated a fixed time of 15-20 minutes to focus on EMI content in her classroom instruction. Such practice was welcomed and positively appraised by students. Student journalists reported on Alice’s instruction of EMI content in The University Newsletter: “It is novel experience and very helpful to prepare us for EMI learning.” Such positive comments greatly encouraged Alice and justified her efforts. For her, this report increased her confidence to persuade her fellow teachers to practice the model too, as indicated in the quote below:

The University Newsletter report is a stimulus to our teaching panel and other ESP teachers. Those who are suspicious of an adjunct ESP model might have more confidence in its feasibility and benefits for students.
Therefore, I suppose it would be easier for my fellow teachers to accept my proposal.

Also, Alice show her ways of connecting with EMI teachers. For instance, she would ask them to share teaching tasks, as she explained:

Interview excerpt 22/05/2015

I would go to their ((EMI teachers’)) class to learn with my students, usually once or twice a month. I would communicate with them about their pedagogical problems and concerns, and ask what they would like me to address in the ESP class. Mostly, they would like me to teach terminology, especially the pronunciation of the medical terms. Besides, they would ask me to help address literacy issues that might affect students’ learning of the content knowledge. For example, I was once asked to guide students in reading some passages from their EMI textbooks and other supplementary materials, such as review articles, case reports, short papers, conference presentation manuscripts, etc.

All these actions proved Alice’s resolution and action to promote an ESP community of practice, irrespective of the ambiguities and suspicion that attended its implementation. As an ESP teacher herself, she understood the pressure and extra workload this endeavour would impose. However, she had faith in herself and her fellow teachers, as she knew they were all dedicated teachers who would always prioritise students’ benefits.

A Learner Who Learns for, with, and from Students

When Alice taught GE, she had developed a credible professional identity with her students and professional colleagues. She demonstrated fine craftsmanship in teaching
and was very popular among students. However, ESP teaching required her to come to terms with new experiences and new understandings of her professional roles and functions. Reflecting on her not so successful ESP teaching experience in the past two years, she remarked:

Interview excerpt 28/02/2015

I believe I can make progress. I must pocket my pride and senses of achievement gained in the past, and head on to become an excellent ESP teacher in the near future. Now I’m in the transitional stage, I must learn for, with, and from my students.

Why learn for, with, and from students? And how? I was keen on seeking answers to these questions from Alice’s classroom performance. During the course of the research, I sat in on Alice’s class six times. My general impression was that Alice was conducting experiments, trying to create an open space to engage students, subject matter teachers, and relevant healthcare professionals. In the first lesson of the new semester Alice set the primary tone of the course with the statement:

Classroom record 02/03/2015

The ESP course you are going to learn with me may be very different from your previous English courses. Firstly, I’m no longer an English teacher as you are familiar with. I am a learner, who will learn for, with and from you. I will learn for you, because I hope I can be your ESP learning consultant and assistant. I will learn with you, and sometimes even from you, because ESP is a challenge for me too, especially in terms of the medical science knowledge it involves. I might need you to give me an English lecture on
the structure of the human heart or the mechanism of diabetes. Secondly, the textbooks you have at hand are only part of the materials we will use. More will come along as we proceed, either from me, you or your subject matter teachers. Third, we will have a variety of learning activities and tasks, meaning your engagement and commitment are required. Whatever forms of instruction or types of activity we conduct, I hope you always ask yourself: Why am I doing this? How to do a better job? How can we benefit from my teachers and peers?

The purpose of this long prologue, as Alice explained, was manifold. First, she aimed to give students some initial idea of her ESP classroom culture. By defining her role as a learner, she hoped to disrupt the myth of teachers as knowledge gurus, and to empower students to be active participants and contributors in ESP teaching and learning.

Second, knowing that none of any of the available Medical English textbooks could meet students’ learning needs alone, she cautioned her students to break away from their stereotypical dependence on prescribed textbooks. Instead, they were invited to engage in material development. By emphasizing students’ engagement and commitment, she was suggesting that learning occur through participation.

Lastly, Alice encouraged her students to be open-minded and think critically in learning, and to become aware that they are participants in a community composed of language specialists, subject matter specialists, and students who are bound together by a common need to use ESP.

Here I would like to pause to briefly discuss the relationship between Alice’s emotion and sense of commitment. Undoubtedly, Alice is a caring and dedicated teacher.
The fact that students regarded her as a “sister” and “friend” indicates that she must have invested plenty of emotion into her relationship with students and a rapport was set up between them. Such emotional rapport, together with her educational tenet of letting her “disciples follow their will willingly”, consolidated her resolution to get out of her previous comfort zone. Shifting from being a GE to an ESP teacher, her sense of commitment has never changed across time or with the change of the context. Rather, it has translated into “a continuing willingness to reflect upon experience and the context”, as well as upon the “intellectual and emotional engagement” (Day, Elliot & Kington, 2005, p. 573). A combination of her sense of commitment and her underlying educational tenet catalysed the reconstitution of Alice’s professional identity. She changed from being an “expert” GE teacher, “director” and “coach” to a “novice” ESP teacher, ready to start all over again.

**Alice’s Pedagogical Practices: Challenges Encountered**

The following episode occurred in a classroom activity called **Talks about Disease**. The objective was to cultivate students’ ability of public speech and oral presentations in class, academic seminars and conferences. Students were divided into groups at the beginning of the semester and each group was given a task to prepare and present information about a disease in front of the whole class on a weekly basis.

**Classroom teaching episode 09/06/2015**

1. **Alice**: Well everybody, it is time for Talks about Disease. Our first group today will talk about the aetiology of breast cancer. The word aetiology derives via Medieval Latin from Greek aitiologia. ((She wrote the word
on the blackboard). The prefix aitia means a cause. So what does aetiology of breast cancer mean?

2. **Ss:** The cause of breast cancer.

3. **Alice:** Correct! As a woman, I’m very interested in this topic, and I bet girls would feel the same. But boys should also listen attentively so you might share this knowledge with your girlfriends or sisters.

4. **Ss:** (Laughter).

5. **Alice:** While I’m keen on learning, I’m not sure whether I can get it as I’m a completely layman compared with you. I need professionals like you to help me, so please be ready for my questions, okay?

6. **Ss:** Okay. (Laughter).

Turn 1 to Turn 6 demonstrate a smooth interaction between teacher and students in a pleasant classroom atmosphere. Alice is very fond of this “Talks on Disease” activity as she believes it gives enough space for students’ collaborative and self-regulated learning experiences. More importantly, she was trying to bring in the pedagogical approach: problem-based learning (PBL), which was utilised in subject matter courses. She explained this approach below:

*Interview excerpt 09/06/2015*

In fact, this activity bears close resemblance to what they ((students)) do in EMI class, where PBL is frequently applied. When undertaking those tasks in the subject area, students’ performance is likely to be compromised by their limited English proficiency or lack of problem-solving skills in English. Through doing similar things, I aim to facilitate students to
develop the English ability and skills that they can use in learning subject matter knowledge.

Actually, PBL is recognized as a “powerful means for facilitating students’ attainment of the high level competencies and transferable skills” (Ertmer & Glazewski, 2015, p.89). The wide-ranging application of this method rests on its effectiveness in cultivating learners’ critical thinking and self-directed learning. Crucial to the success of PBL are elements including the prior knowledge of learners, collaborative problem-solving, assessment, appropriate scaffolding (Puntambekar, 2015), authenticity of the problems, and the transferability of skills (Savery, 2015).

In this focal university, PBL has been the main instructional strategy used by subject matter teachers to teach medical sciences. English teachers are encouraged to adopt PBL in ESP teaching. Alice believed adopting a disciplinary pedagogical approach in ESP teaching could foster students’ transferable skills. Her understanding was that through applying the same approach, ESP can be set in an experiential learning context closely resembling the disciplinary context, and therefore it might be easier for students to transfer their ESP proficiency acquired in English courses to the EMI context and other relevant contexts.

Prior to students’ presentation, Alice would use after-class time to offer language consultancy, and share literature or information resources with the presenters. As each member student in a presenting group has his/her own responsibility for the collective task, nobody could look on with folded arms. In this way Alice tried to ensure that every student was involved and looked after.
Usually, a written synopsis of the content to be presented would be sent to Alice for a preview, so she could do some self-learning concerning the subject matter knowledge and plan her instructional activities. Sometimes she would turn to subject matter teachers for help. In this respect, she quite liked the online ESP-QQ group launched by Frank, as she said,

Interview excerpt 23/06/2015

It can be really hard for a layperson to deal with medical knowledge, most of which can be very domain-specific. Though I’m not imagining that I can elaborate on medical knowledge as I can on English knowledge, I should at least ensure what I say about medical knowledge is correct and logical. For this purpose I’d like to learn from my subject matter counterparts. The only obstacle is that we are all too busy to regularly meet or talk. So, I often post my questions online to Frank’s ESP-QQ group ((see Section 6.3)), it does help, though not much.

This quote evidenced Alice’s resolution to take on a new identity as a “medical knowledge learner”, who expected to learn from the students, as made explicit in Turn 5 (see Classroom teaching episode 09/06/2015), and from medical subject colleagues, as shown in the above quote. Learning undoubtedly is crucial for Alice to reconstitute herself as an ESP teacher, especially in relation to learning discipline-specialised subject matter knowledge. A case in point can be found in the following episode, where student X was giving a presentation on the topic of Flow Cytometry.
1. SX: You know in a certain way flow cytometers can be considered to be specialised fluorescence microscopes. Two instruments are involved: a flow cytometer, and a fluorescent activated cell sorter. Look here. ((Pointed to the image on the PowerPoint slide)).

2. Ss: Oh, yeah…

3. SX: Now let me show you a simplified layout of typical analytical flow cytometer. ((A graphic image was shown on as below)).

4. Alice: Will you briefly introduce this graph?

5. SX: Hmm…well, you can see the basic components (pause). Like the detectors, the filter, ((moved his index finger downwards along the vertical line in the graph)). the dichronic mirror, the beam splitter…

6. Alice: Maybe knowing the structure of a cytometer is more meaningful for a technician?

7. Ss: Yes it should be so.

8. Alice: Then what shall we focus on? Or what are we supposed to know?
9. **SX**: I think we need to know the basic working mechanism (pause), I mean principle of how the equipment works. ((Here he quickly moved on to the following picture)). You see (pause), Sorry, I found it’s hard to describe this in English.

![Diagram of equipment](image)

10. **Alice**: Well, why not we try together? ((Turned to the whole class.))

11. **Ss**: ((Silence)).

12. **Alice**: As I see, the cells are going through (pause) the pipe↑, maybe, in the first picture, aren’t they?

13. **Ss**: Yeah.

14. **SX**: Yes, and when the cell passes by the laser, it blocks the light, and 投影在 FALS Sensor 上. ((Translanguaging between Chinese and English)).

15. **Alice**: You mean it blocks the light, and the shadow of it will be cast on the FALS sensor?

16. **Ss**: Yeah ↓

17. **Alice**: What’s going on in the third picture then, anyone can tell me? ((Turned to the whole class and invited a student to answer)).

18. **SX**: Imm… I think in the third picture, the four coloured ball (pause) are they balls? (Pause). Anyway, the colours tell the features of the cell, I guess…
19. **Alice**: Could be.

20. **SX**: Yes, they are the fluorescent character of the cell.

21. **Alice**: Can I suggest that we make it a home-assignment that we’ll do more reading and give a professional illustration of the pictures next time?

22. **Ss**: Okay.

Later I showed the transcript of this episode to Alice and asked how she felt about the process. She was disappointed at her own performance. Due to unfamiliarity with the content knowledge of this topic, she was unable to manage the immediacy and unpredictability of the teacher-student interaction (see Tsui, 2002).

The question in Turn 4 (Classroom teaching episode 02/06/2015) was spontaneously asked without any pre-lesson planning. Alice was expecting this question could initiate the presenter’s contribution of his subject knowledge and expose his language problems to be repaired. Unfortunately, as the presenter was unable to respond as expected but merely read the script and used hand-gestures as in Turn 5, Alice did not have any problematic English to repair. Unable to provide an answer herself, she could not but get on with it by shifting to another question in Turn 8.

When the presenter was implicitly seeking language help in Turn 9, Alice was put under pressure, for she was not sure what proper domain-specific language to use for the description. Again she turned to students for possible knowledge contribution as in Turn 10, but got no response. Then she gave a trial description as in Turn 12, where the hedging rhetoric such as “as I see” and “maybe”, as well as the pause before and the rising tone of “the pipe” demonstrate that she had little confidence in her expression.
Comparatively, Alice looked more comfortable when only language problems were relegated to her charge, as in Turn 14 and Turn 15, where she repaired the student’s code-mixing straight away. Apparently from Turn 17 through to the end, Alice was trying to maintain the interaction with the students by asking questions to the whole class (see Turn 17), giving non-affirmative response (see Turn 19) and assigning after-class remedial work to address all the problems regarding the language and the content in class (see Turn 21).

Interview excerpt 02/06/2015

As an English teacher, I feel ashamed when my language knowledge couldn’t help. My teaching performance is greatly affected by my knowledge deficit in medical science. Despite pre-lesson preparation, I often find it still hard for me to handle contingency. However, I’m not going to be defeated, as long as I learn step by step, I will get there.

The above quote is what Alice said at the end of the interview that day. I had strong empathy with her feeling ashamed in that situation. Looking back at my own ESP teaching experience, I knew how extensive and unmanageable the discipline-specialised subject matter knowledge can be. As I once experienced similar emotional struggles, I really appreciated her resolution to transform herself through further learning.
6.3 Frank

“Sorry I’m still test driving this new device…” An energetic, bright male voice came along as I entered the classroom. Frank, with a bunch of cords and a laptop in his hands, stood up from behind the teaching station, and greeted me, and thus began our first meeting and the journey to understanding his professional identity and experience.

A Disheartened Peripheral and Marginalised GE Teacher

Born into an urban family where the father was a civil engineer and the mother was a middle school English teacher, Frank grew up in a well-to-do environment surrounded by intellectuals. Influenced by his parents who thought highly of the power of knowledge, Frank has been a hard-working student all the way through from primary education to higher education. After getting his Masters’ degree in applied linguistics from a provincial university, he started to work in this medical university. At the very outset of his professional life, Frank was not particularly motivated, as it wasn’t a job really in line with his ambition, as he stated:

Interview excerpt 06/03/2015

To be honest, teaching English in a university was not my dream career. My original ideal job was to be a white-collar employee in an international corporation located in a fancy, super economic zone like Shang Hai, Beijing or Shen Zhen. However, as I’m the only child of the family and my parents would like me to have a stable job, or what people of their
generation call “Iron rice bowl”\textsuperscript{15} and stay closer to them, I ended up being a university English teacher in my home-town.

As a result, the probationary period was spent in a somewhat passive and routine manner. Frank simply fulfilled his job responsibilities as required and abided by all regulations and disciplines stipulated by the university. While Frank was recounting his initial experience in the university, I noticed his knitted brows or pursed lips, especially when he sunk into contemplation.

\textbf{Interview excerpt 06/03/2015}

I wasn’t quite keen on fitting into the workplace culture in the first few years. Something, it’s hard to tell precisely, was not quite right for me.

As I was following the flow of his accounts, the “not-quite-right thing” suddenly drew my attention, partly because I was looking for the contradiction(s) in the activity system from the individual’s perspective, and the conflict(s) that make it hard for an individual to be aligned with the values and behaviours of the community. But more than that, it was because my own memory of similar feelings at the initial stage of my career was triggered off. A strong aspiration to hear more for potential evidence to justify my own “unhappy period” (See my personal account in Section 1.6) took over me. “Believe it or not, I felt the same when I started working.” I responded attentively and encouraged Frank to reflect further on this “not-quite-right” sensation. He led me into this reflection

\textsuperscript{15} "Iron rice bowl" is a Chinese term used to refer to an occupation with guaranteed job security, as well as steady income and benefits. This term can be compared to the similar (but not identical) English concept of a "job for life". Traditionally, people considered to have iron rice bowls include military personnel, members of the civil service, as well as employees of various state run enterprises (through the mechanism of the work unit). https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Iron_rice_bowl
with a story of his experience in the university’s pre-service training program oriented to new teachers.

Small story 06/03/2015

The five days’ training took place in the last week of the summer holiday. It was in a theatre-like lecture hall with four pieces of movable blackboards at the front. The first three days were a bit boring to me, with its content being the history of the university, its reputation and achievements, theories of teaching and…can’t remember clearly…other sorts of bureaucratic discourse and text-book talks…Nothing impressed me much until the fourth day when the content was a demonstration of teaching protocols presented by a revered expert teacher, Professor Lu, who was a retiree rehired by the university as a mentor with expertise in teaching and teacher training. He was so enthusiastic about sharing his life-long experience as a model teacher that he kept talking and demonstrating for hours disregarding the stuffiness and hot inside the room.

At that moment, Frank was a bit shocked by Mentor Lu’s passion, as he wanted to know what it was that motivated a man to be so dedicated to teaching for decades. However, the ensuing accounts revealed what Frank phrased as the “not-quite-right” thing.

Interview excerpt 06/03/2015

After an eloquent speech on his long-held belief that it is the teacher’s solemn mission to impart knowledge, educate people, and set up a moral model, Mentor Lu stressed the importance of teacher’s appropriate dress
code and tips of classroom teaching manners. He went into great length on how to behave starting from entering the classroom.

As he was talking, Frank stood up with a cunning smile, grabbed a book and went to the door.

Interview excerpt 06/03/2015

Ah, let me show you how it was like…though five years have passed, you know, the scenes still leap vividly before my eyes as if it happened yesterday. Look, hold the textbook in the left hand, open the door with the right, and stepped confidently towards the platform while keeping your face towards the students. When you stood steady on the platform, fix your eyes to the middle of the classroom, then move slowly down, right, up, left, down, right and back to the middle. In this way, your eye-contact with all the students will imply it’s time to study…for me, such a ritual feels like a model ramp walk. There were more other rituals and routines of behaviour which Mentor Lu demonstrated twice to us. We were given home-assignment to practice on our own. At first it was fun, but later we were told it is part of the exam after training…at that moment I couldn’t help but ask aloud: “Are you kidding me?”

“Are you kidding me?”—This ironic surprise and disbelief illuminated what was not-quite-right. While acknowledging and respecting that the history and heritage of a university should be preserved and passed down, Frank contended that the university in the modern age should be “an evolving and emancipating organism” (Frank’s words), which should not be harnessed by any rigid rituals or routines. He believed that teachers,
as the academic and life mentors for students, are responsible for delivering the message that university education is a process of getting to know who we are and what we really want to be and to do. Thus, unlike soldiers in the army, teachers’ behaviour should never be over-restricted by any unitary, prescribed rituals as that demonstrated by Mentor Lu.

Mentor Lu’s demonstration represented a whole lot of established meanings in the university’s shared repertoire. His teaching demonstration was deeply rooted in Frank’s mind as a symbol of the university’s “static, outdated, and impersonalized style” (Frank’s words), which he found hard to identify with. As a consequence, Frank was reluctant to actively engage in teaching in the way advocated by the university. He remained a marginalised participant (Lave & Wenger, 1991) in his early career years as a GE teacher.

What also affected Frank’s agency was the Teaching and Learning Inspection. With the purpose of evaluating teachers’ pedagogical performance and ensuring that specific standards in teaching and learning are met, the university has a special inspection committee composed of professors and senior teaching experts. They conduct classroom observations, talk to teachers and students, rate teachers’ performance according to an assessment rubric, and produce reports. In a blog three years ago, Frank recorded a scene of this inspection:

Online blog writing 16/05/2012

As unpredictable as always, Prof. Han sat in my class this morning without advance notice. I had planned to lead in with a short video clip of Grey’s Anatomy, and I knew it would completely wake my students up and get them excited about what we were about to learn. However, Prof Han’s
presence got me chill down. I was hesitant as I knew if I intended to get positive comments from her, I should start with writing down on the blackboard the topic of the lesson and bulleting the key contents. I know the rubric, I know the standards, but I’m not fully convinced by its applicability for every subject and in every context. Prof Han is an expert in Biochemistry and I respect her as a teacher with more than 40 years of teaching experience, but she is not an expert in English teaching. Shall I compromise my teaching belief and practice just to appeal to established norms and the taste of the inspector?

Frank was confused. As clearly expressed in the underlined text, he was doubtful of the reliability of using the same set of rubrics indiscriminately to assess the teaching of every specific subject. Most of the time, he had to compromise, because the inspection report was regarded as an important indicator in the annual review of a teacher’s teaching practice, which was then related to teacher assessment and promotion. However, such emotional and practical compromise did not lead Frank to becoming a “promising young teacher” highly regarded by the university, as he said,

Interview excerpt 13/03/2015

I couldn’t have become a promising young teacher, which is an honour granted to new teachers who outperform others in the annual assessment. How could I, as I wasn’t motivated enough and I wasn’t convinced by norms?

The pressure from the university’s high-stake teaching assessment regime rendered Frank to end up being a passive peripheral participant and a marginalised member of the
community. For a long time, his performance was seen as mediocre by his peers. Nevertheless, Frank was seeking his own pathway while teaching ESP, as he came to realise the new curriculum, actually quite distinct from GE practice, can bring about different perspectives and opportunities.

A Leader of an Innovation Project, An Online ESP Community Creator

Opportunities came to him in 2013, when the university decided to invest in digital technology in order to improve teaching and learning. The English Department was encouraged to make use of multi-media means to innovate ESP teaching. Frank was appointed to lead the so-called “multimedia-assisted ESP teaching innovation” project, which he was so excited about that he wrote in his blog:

Online blog writing 13/09/2013

It is time I could do something truly meaningful! In this information age, we can see digital devices are all the rage among young people. I’m a big fan of digital devices myself too. In my class, most of the students have electronic dictionaries, MP4 players, tablets, and each of them has at least one computer and one smart phone. Unfortunately, I don’t think students are making the best of the technology to facilitate ESP learning. But I’m quite confident that technology will compensate for my lack of subject matter knowledge.

Among the three case study participants, Frank showed particular enthusiasm and interest in using technology to innovate ESP teaching. I could not help contemplating the denotation of the phrase “truly meaningful”. From the above quote, it’s clear that Frank loved digital technology. For the first time, the university’s initiative was in line
with his personal interest and teaching needs. More importantly, he believed digital technology was a tool not only to compensate for his insufficient knowledge, but also to empower students by motivating and assisting their automatic learning. This probably is what he meant by “meaningful”. From the following journal writing, we can get an idea of Frank’s beliefs about students’ role in ESP learning.

Journal writing 26/04/2015

Students are agentive participants of teaching and learning. Contemporary students can never and should never be treated like those of my generation. The traditional teacher-fronted lecturing pattern is no longer appealing. As a teacher, I’m always thinking how to empower my students to the effect that they no longer rely on me or any other teacher as the sole knowledge tank. It’s my responsibility to help them to develop into independent and clever learners who can take advantage of multiple resources.

Frank believed that ESP teaching and learning should be facilitated and optimised through empowering students. The best way to empower students, in Frank’s eyes, was to employ what he named a “student-empowered technology-based ESP approach”. He was determined to break away from being typecast as merely an English teacher who transferred knowledge from commercial text books.

An Enthusiastic ESP Teacher with Multiple Non-Professional Roles

As the leader of the innovation project, Frank was motivated and prepared to take on more responsibilities. In the focal university where infrastructure and existing facilities were still mostly serving traditional chalk and blackboard English teaching, the first thing was to renew teaching facilities in the classrooms, including installing projectors,
multi-media teaching desks and other devices. Though IT support was available, English teachers were asked to design, initiate, coordinate, experiment and test the new technology. As a result, Frank, as the project leader, was playing the role of an administrator, advisor and coordinator, apart from his original role as an ESP teacher. Often he needed to deal with the external vendors to bargain the price. He needed to coordinate with the university clerical staff to prepare for purchase, and to collaborate with the university IT technicians for maintenance work. However, these responsibilities did not bring Frank material returns or explicitly raise his profile as an ESP teacher. His leadership was still somewhat invisible to other colleagues.

Interview excerpt 06/04/2015

Technically I’m doing more than what an ESP teacher is supposed to do. Apart from being appointed by the department as the leader of the project, I have no formal administrative entitlement, meaning I’m not paid for the extra workload. My job involves a lot of interactions with digital product companies, IT staff, and the administrators, and it’s often done in after hours. Compared with those “promising young teachers” who raise their visibility via excellent performance in demonstration teaching, teaching competitions of various kinds and in other teaching-related activities, my work is often invisible.

Despite the unpaid extra workload and a lack of visibility, Frank was very enthusiastic about the new job. He viewed the task as an opportunity to “transcend the conventional professional borders set up for an English teacher” (Frank’s words). Collaborating with professional staff and administrators, and dealing with business communities opened a new dimension in his professional life, which offered him opportunities “to explore new
possibilities outside the constraints of established modes of working” (McAlpine & Hopwood, 2009, p.159).

Interview excerpt 06/04/2015

If it were not for this innovative project, I wouldn’t have got the chance to work with people in different fields. I feel like I’ve been offered a certain degree of freedom to break away from the routine that most of my ESP colleagues are following.

Since the new job provided a space for Frank’s resistance to established norms and behaviour within the disciplinary boundary, his agency was enhanced. The job was actually demanding. On the one hand, he needed to help to furnish the classrooms with multi-media devices and inspect whether the system worked smoothly in the initial stages. On the other hand, he was taking charge of surveying people’s opinions, and organizing the selection and application of resources. He recounted:

Interview excerpt 06/04/2015

Initially, I was engaged in collecting information and opinions on what commercial software or learning platform to introduce, and what online resources to draw on to improve ESP teaching. We have installed an autonomous English learning platform in the students’ self-learning lab, and subscribed as a group user to www.pigai.org, which is a web-based automatic writing assessment programme.

While taking the responsibilities as the project leader, Frank was conscious that the management and coordinating work on which he spent much time and energy would not count as officially recognizable workload. He was not disturbed by this, though. Instead,
he saw this work as leading to new professional opportunities. Through working with people of different functions, Frank gradually accumulated knowledge outside the professional boundary of an ESP teacher, as indicative in the quote below:

Interview excerpt 06/04/2015

When the sales representative with www.pigai.org approached me at first, while I was reckoning on how much students can benefit from this platform, I was also budgeting the investment and considering how to convince my colleagues to learn and persist in using it… I wouldn’t have such a multifaceted view without the hands-on experience as the leader of this project.

The extended experience also provided him with inspiration and incentive to overcome the obstacles, misunderstandings, and even objections in the process of the project, as shown in the following quote:

Interview excerpt 06/04/2015

Some of my colleagues, especially the younger ones, are willing to try new technology. Those who cling to traditional pedagogy or who are sort of technophobic, on the contrary, tend to step back or even find fault with every new technology or web-based resources. My strategy is always trying my best to encourage them and to provide assistance whenever it is needed.

A Reflective Boundary Broker

While promoting the use of technology and online resources, Frank often reflected on their effectiveness in terms of improving ESP teaching and learning. The automatic
online learning platform they used for GE teaching was too static and basic, as learning materials are installed in advance and the major function of the device is to monitor students’ learning activities. The web-based automatic writing assessment programme could mark, diagnose and provide feedback on the language aspect of a student’s English writing. It also allowed teachers to give online feedback. However, its benefits for ESP learners were limited because the writing tasks were mostly related to GE. Reflecting on these weaknesses, Frank proposed that the best way to incorporate technology in ESP teaching was to enact active person-person and person-technology interaction, as he described in his journal writing:

Journal writing 0/05/2015

How can students be motivated to explore online resources on their own? How can ESP teachers be encouraged to collaborate with subject matter teachers through online platforms? How can a web-based learning community be formed that involves active interactions between teachers from different disciplines and between teachers and students? If these questions can be addressed, or in other words, if technology can assist and enable us to wipe off the boundaries between disciplines, between teachers and students, and between the finite and infinite teaching and learning opportunities, then we can really make the best of technology in teaching ESP.

Frank’s opinion was appreciated by the Dean of the department. Aware of the difficulty in initiating cross-disciplinary coordination, the Dean decided to help Frank seek the university’s top-down administrative intervention. The following quote described their negotiation with university administrators:
We first went to talk to the Dean of the Office of Educational Administration. He then convened a meeting with the deans of the disciplinary departments where he introduced me as leader of the project. This was like a formal entitlement procedure. You know, you need a certain authorized identity to be able to communicate with and manoeuvre people in other departments.

Frank was highly motivated by the administrative support given by the university and his own department. As he understood that communicating and coordinating with people who he had never worked with before might be somewhat challenging, he was determined to establish rapport with them through seeking common goals and respecting differences. He recounted:

Subject matter teachers are busy doing their job. Not all of them feel committed to help students to improve their ESP competence. Only a few who are involved in EMI are keen on collaborating with us, as they also need language support from us ((English teachers)) to some extent.

Frank held the view that cross-disciplinary collaboration could only be ensured on the premise of it being a mutually beneficial enterprise. Therefore, he targeted subject teachers who were doing EMI. After an initial project introduction, either through email or telephone conversation, Frank came up with a list of people who would like to participate in the project. In order to eradicate the confinement of time and space and bring convenience to spontaneous interaction and sharing, Frank set up a QQ group and
a WeChat group composed of ESP teachers and subject matter teachers. He also set up another QQ group exclusively for students. Using these two most popular online instant messaging apps in China, Frank set up a virtual space for teacher-student and student-student interactions for the purpose of ESP teaching and learning. In the following quote, he described his strategy of motivating people’s engagement:

Interview excerpt 12/05/2015

Although these online instant messaging platforms provide a venue for easier connection, it is not easy to motivate and maintain active and effective participation and interactions. My strategy is to take a lead to share resources and initiate talk regularly; also I encourage my ESP colleagues who are close friends with me to share and communicate more proactively…It took a while before online communication and resource sharing became routine among subject matter teachers and ESP teachers.

At that time, the university was running a series of cross-disciplinary meetings over EMI curriculum and pedagogy. Frank, together with the Dean and some other ESP teachers representing the English Department, was invited to attend. Frank got to know that English deficiency turned out to be a major predicament in EMI and university’s support for in-service training and language support was called for. He then tried to persuade ESP teachers in the QQ group to agree to provide language support if it was needed by the subject matter teachers in the same group. However, this initiative was opposed by the majority of the ESP teachers. Some historical causes for this opposition can be found in the following quote,
I can understand my colleagues’ thought. They feel inferior to their subject matter counterparts if they provide language support such as doing translations or consultations.

Once before, the English Department had offered contract translation service on campus. This experience had subjugated English teachers to the status of “service provider” (Frank’s words). English teachers felt more reluctant to provide that service especially after the commencement of the EMI programme because the university’s discourse tended to depreciate the achievement and value of English teaching. The discursive coercion and marginalisation of English teachers ignited their wish to make a change – a change that Frank, despite initial opposition, led and facilitated. This is a point which may advance the effort of theorising “contradiction” in Engeström’s (2001) formulations.

**A Capable Instant Messaging Group Administrator and “Big Brother”**

Basically, Frank’s idea was to crowdsourced people’s ideas and resources through an online network. More importantly, he contemplated that this might ignite people’s aspiration to eliminate the bias and stereotypical perception of EMI teachers, which was derived from disciplinary differences and institutional conventions. As the group administrator of the WeChat group and the QQ group, Frank often took the lead to commence dialogues, initiate group talks, release information, share resources, and offer services. He found that doing this work in the teachers’ QQ group involved different amount of effort from doing it in the students’ QQ group, as articulated below,
Interview excerpt 09/05/2015

In teachers’ QQ group, I’m acting as a talk-show host, a convenor, a facilitator…so as to encourage and sustain continuous communication. It’s time-consuming, but I have to persist.

Compared with maintaining teachers’ engagement, motivating students’ participation was much easier.

Interview excerpt 09/05/2015

As for students, it seems that WeChat and QQ have become the most important means to socialise. They have online messaging groups for various purposes, of which ESP learning group is one, as naturally acceptable as all the others. It’s just that, at the beginning, the teachers need to encourage students to form the habit of using WeChat and QQ to communicate with teachers and classmates about everything related to ESP study.

In the students’ QQ group, Frank was not only an ESP teacher, but also a group member, a friend, and “Big Brother” (his group name). He found the asynchronous online interactions with students not only useful for maintaining connections but also helpful to ameliorate the potential anxiety and tensions caused by the subject matter knowledge dilemma in class. This thinking was implied in his journal writing:
Journal writing 06/06/2015

In class, I can feel an invisible line between me and my students. Maybe I would feel more comfortable with the line if I had more knowledge in the subject area. However, now I believe that ESP learning is a co-constructed process where we are all learners to some extent. The line is blurred when we communicate online. I was like their big brother, and sometimes we make jokes or chat casually in a good humour. We are much closer in the virtual world…This gives me an opportunity to get out of the subject matter knowledge dilemma. I believe I can improve myself through learning with students.

Also from the above text, we can see that in the process of constructing an ESP online teaching and learning community, Frank has gradually developed a new understanding of ESP pedagogical practices and recognized the value of learning in practice as an approach leading to self-improvement. With increasing teacher and student engagement for the common goal of ESP teaching and learning, an online ESP community emerged. During the course of creating and maintaining this online ESP community, Frank’s identity was shaped and reshaped by various factors, including people’s varied attitudes and reactions, the growing cross-disciplinary connections, and the increasing acknowledgement of his effort. His identity shift was also mediated by the power relations between the teacher and students, between ESP teachers and subject matter teachers, and between the university administrators and the ESP teachers.

In turn, the new identities he developed significantly affected his thinking and actions. The idea of making ESP teaching and learning into a collaborative and joint enterprise between teacher and students was manifest in his ESP classroom pedagogical
practices. In the following section, I report on a selected classroom teaching episode to show how Frank’s new identities and perceptions of being an ESP teacher were influencing, and demonstrated through, his ESP pedagogical practices.

**Frank’s Pedagogical Practices: An Empowering ESP Teacher**

This episode occurred in a literacy class on the topic of *Diabetes*. Before the class, students were given preview tasks and some online interactions had already been completed. Frank first praised those students who shared resources in QQ group.

Classroom teaching episode 19/05/2015

**Frank**: Up to this morning, we’ve got nine lists of diabetic vocabulary; ten research articles on the symptoms and treatment. Mr Doctor ((a student’s QQ name)) shared a video tutorial given by an expert from Johns Hopkins University. I really appreciate your work, thank you all for your contribution.

**Ss**: Thank you. ((Smiled and applauded)).

**Frank**: Next, as usual, comes our vocabulary quiz.

**Ss**: Oh…Okay.

As shown above, after a brief acknowledgement of students’ contribution to the online learning activity, Frank gave a test on medical terms based on the vocabulary list he had previously posted as a group-share document. Unlike Ru in Section 6.1, who would spend time on instructing the etymological knowledge of medical terminology in class, Frank thought it more efficient to leave this kind of “rote memory task” (Frank’s words) to students’ self-directed learning after class. As he observed,
Interview excerpt 19/05/2015

Technical terms and jargons are certainly important for students. Subject matter teachers often request us ((ESP teachers)) to help students enlarge terminological vocabulary. Therefore, many of my colleagues spend quite a lot of classroom time teaching suffixes and prefixes, which I think, is unnecessary, traditional, and in a certain sense, a waste of time. I mean, if students can learn and memorize the suffixes and prefixes as long as the teacher provides them the material, what’s the point of wasting precious classroom time on such rote memory tasks?

The above quote indicates Frank was fairly critical about certain established teaching practices (e.g., teaching terminology in class). His classroom time was mainly spent in addressing problems and creating opportunities for students to put what they had learnt into practice. A terminological vocabulary test, as he saw it, is one such opportunity.

After that, Frank carried on with the following question-and-answer session.

Classroom teaching episode 19/05/2015

**Frank**: Well, now I have some questions about diabetes, some layman questions that await professional answers from you future doctors and medical experts.

**Ss**: ((Laughter)).

**Frank**: My first question is: What are the different types of Diabetes? Will you answer together? They are =

**Ss**: = Type 1 diabetes, Type 2 diabetes, gestational diabetes, pre-diabetes.
Frank: Excellent! Then what is Pre-diabetes? What harm will it do to human beings? ((Pointed to Student X)). Will you please tell me?

SX: Imm…

Frank: In terms of blood glucose ↑ ((Gave hint)).

SX: Yes, the blood glucose levels are higher than average.

Frank: Is it high enough to be classified under Type 1 or Type 2?

Ss: No. It’s lower than that…

The pedagogical purpose of the above session was to check on students’ after-class learning outcomes. Frank first positioned himself as a layman seeking professional knowledge from students who were given an imagined identity as future doctors and experts. In this way, students were empowered as the primary giver of knowledge. Stepping back from being the commander and enabling students to play the main agents of classroom activities, Frank was tactically changing the classroom hierarchy, leading to more flattened power relations between him and the students. The classroom interactions went on in a pleasant atmosphere, as can be seen from students’ laughter and attentive responses to questions.

In the next 10 minutes, students were doing group discussions on the topics previously assigned online. Students needed to prepare for all the topics in advance. In class, they were divided into groups, with each getting a topic through drawing lots. It was obvious that most of them were pretty enthusiastic and actively engaged in the process. Frank monitored the whole class, walking from one group to another, joining in their discussions, or asking questions, as if he were attending a round table seminar in a conference. I noticed several verbal and non-verbal features in his performance:
• Verbal cues:

Dramatic use of intonation. Amid students’ buzzing, Frank’s dramatic intonation could be heard now and then. For instance, after hearing a group of students listing the symptoms of diabetes, Frank cried out an exclamation: “Oh:: my::GOD, I have got EIGHT out of ten of those symptoms, I’m DYING!” ((Covered his eyes with hands)). Students were laughing in response to his good humour. When he listened to an individual student, he frequently made responses like “REAL::LY?” “You must be KIDDING↓”, or “Come on, tell me MORE” ((put on an attentive and expecting look)).

Frequent use of modality. When making a proposition or argumentation, Frank would use modal auxiliaries, nouns, and adverbs, as in “There might be the possibility to develop diabetes” or “Probably you are right”. Instead of directly pointing out students’ improper use of English or their incorrect understanding of the content (e.g., “You’ve made a mistake here”), he was likely to use negation, as in “This saying is not acceptable”, or certain hedging at the lexical or clausal level, as in “I think you could say…” or “It could be the case that…”

Explicit mention of names. When Frank joined a group discussion in class, he would highlight students’ participation by addressing their names when citing or rephrasing what they said. For example, after one student made a proposition, he turned to the audience and said “Do you agree with what XX ((the name of the speaker)) just said?” or “Just now XX ((a student in another group)) was very creative when he said…” He would also refer to the QQ names of the subject matter teachers whom he consulted.

16 Modality here refers to “the many ways in which attitudes can be expressed towards the ‘pure’ reference-and-prediction content of an utterance, signalling factuality, degrees of certainty or doubt, vagueness, possibility, necessity, and even permission and obligation” (Verschueren, 1999, p, 129).
or who were active in online communication with students, as in “Doctor Dragon ((A teacher’s QQ name)) asked for some materials on testing for diabetes, and yesterday I got some from Professor XX, who suggested that all of you should read…”

- **Non-verbal cues**

  Along with the verbal cues are some non-verbal cues including gestures, facial expressions, and body language. When Frank said “Let’s draw on Dr. XX’s idea ((a leading expert studying diabetes in one of the university’s affiliated hospitals))” he raised his right hand and made a “clutch” movement as if grabbing that person in the distance, and then pulled the clutch back to the group. In another instance, where a student jokingly said he would like to offer free medical test for diabetes to Frank in the future, Frank laughed and cuddled his shoulder. When listening to students, his look was often conveying various messages such as attention, interest, assimilation, doubt and encouragement, among others.

  A scrutiny of these verbal and non-verbal cues in Frank’s classroom discourse may shed light on how an engaging and empowering ESP class was built or was likely to be built through his effort. When arguing for the dialectic of social structures and discourse/practices, Fairclough (2015) mentioned the subject positions in schools as an example. Appropriating his idea to the local context of this study, we could say that the subject positions (or the social roles) for ESP teachers and students are historically set up by the social structures in the classroom. Students may rely on teachers to pass on knowledge and clarify their confusions, or they may passively receive whatever is provided by the teacher. The teacher, on the other hand, may exercise power over students by controlling the teaching materials, methods, interactions, and forms of assessments. However, during the group activity, Frank positioned himself at the same
level with students, taking a metaphorical role as conference participant seeking knowledge. His dramatic intonation foregrounds his genuine interest and engagement, which may give students the perception that their voice was being listened to and valued, hence their motivation for participation increased. This, combined with other verbal and non-verbal features, helps to create a more open access to the classroom discourse and communicative events. In this sense, discourse, as one element forming the basis of power (van Dijk, 2008), was operated by Frank as an means to deconstruct the conventional educational discourses where “teachers usually control communicative events, distribute speaking turns, and otherwise have special access to, and hence control over, educational discourse”(van Dijk, 2008, p.67). Frank was trying to reproduce a classroom structure that enabled students to become agents and take over the responsibility to manage their own ESP learning.

This point is further supported by Frank’s use of modality and explicit mention of names. By means of modality, Frank largely avoided being assertive, dominating, or overtly authoritative in his discourse. His stance was framed as a listener and learner, making no absolute judgement or evaluation. The clause “I think”, which frequently occurred in his speech when correcting students’ language problems, mitigated potential face-threatening utterances (see Kärkkäinen, 2003). In addition, the vagueness and hedging embedded in his discourse seemed indicative of openness to negotiation or further learning and research. All these factors contribute to an engaging and empowering ESP classroom discourse for his students.

With respect to the explicit mention of forms, I argue that the pragmatic function is twofold. For one thing, explicit mention of students’ names in this context can be viewed as a way of recognizing and highlighting their contribution to knowledge
construction and their identity in the classroom discourse community. For another, a juxtaposition of students’ names with the names of experts, scholars, and professionals, both local and global, virtual and in reality, is an action to integrate students into an imagined discourse community, where they are discursively put into communication with those experts, scholars and professionals who are distant (as they are not physically present and students are mostly excluded from their professional communities) owners of specific orders of discourse (Fairclough, 2015). Such a creative endeavour to mix students’ discourse with that of the imagined community is likely to lead to “the restructuring of the relationships between different discursive practices” (van Dijk, 2011, p.363) within an ESP classroom, and between the classroom and the wider context.

The classroom teaching episode depicted here is representative of Frank’s teaching style and can be a good indicator of the outcome of his actions in the activity system. Thanks to his initiative of setting up an online interaction platform for ESP teaching and learning, his ESP classroom is becoming a cross-boundary space where students are empowered as agents of learning and subjects of discourse practices. An emerging online ESP community comes into view through participation and collaboration of students and subject matter teachers. Instead of being a passive learner, students are beginning to assume more responsibility in knowledge construction. With more interactions and communication, both online and in reality, the subject positions of teachers and students in the classroom are also changing. As students are encouraged to

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17 Fairclough (2015) views discourse as social practice, meaning it is part of society and is a socially conditioned process. Social structures with their underlying conventions are determining discourse. These conventions are regarded as clustering in sets or networks which Fairclough call orders of discourse, a term he borrowed from Foucault (see Fairclough, 2015 for details).
be the centre of ESP learning and given more power, it is predictable that they will gradually obtain status commensurate with that of the teacher.

Chapter Summary

Given the unique and distinctive aspects in each of these case study teachers’ experiences, their stories when woven together, illuminate some commonalities in terms of ESP teachers’ professional development and practices in the transition from GE to ESP. Their learning to become and develop as ESP teachers engaged them in the intertwined dynamics of their identity (re)formation. Both learning and identity (re)formation took place through participating in the emerging ESP community of practice and through the (re)negotiating of meanings of both the joint-ESP enterprise and their own practices. Their pedagogical practices, identity work, and professional learning proved to involve a concerted effect of the interplay of multiple forces, both internal and external, and both in discourse and practice.

With close field observations, I found each ESP teacher had their own focus and approach to ESP teaching, which hinged upon their own cognition, past and present teaching experiences, as well as their competence at handling the curriculum and various stakeholders. Moreover, the ESP teachers’ pedagogical practices were operationalised through boundary-crossing activities, which formed a sharp contrast to conventional GE teaching.

The trajectories of teachers’ identity change can be seen from the sub-identities they have developed shifting from GE to ESP (see Figure 6.3).
Figure 6.3 The Sub-identities of Ru, Alice and Frank

Commonly embedded within the three trajectories is the interaction between the teacher’s personal self and the contextual factors, which will be discussed in more detail in the next chapter. In addition, given that each participant demonstrated their own approach to ESP teaching, their pedagogical practices are contributing to a more expansive and collaborative teaching and learning model. This point is also explored further in the following chapter.
CHAPTER SEVEN
GENERAL DISCUSSION

Chapter Overview

This chapter aims to formulate more holistic and profound insights about the subject under investigation through critically examining the findings of different aspects of the research in the light of prior research and the theoretical underpinnings outlined in Chapter Three. I first extend the discussion of Chapter Five about ESP teachers’ challenges and needs by incorporating various critical interpretations of the findings. Then I focus on the systemic contradictions existing in the focal university activity system, with the purpose of casting light on contextual factors that were hindering but also catalysing collective and individual change. This is followed by a critical discussion about how identity (re)formation and professional development were realised, especially by the multiple-case study participants. Following that, I discuss ESP teachers’ identity work and ethical agency, which has important implications for new research interests in teacher education and teacher identity.

7.1 Extending the Discussion about ESP Teachers’ Challenges and Needs

7.1.1 Challenges and Needs Concerning the Knowledge System for ESP Teaching

In the field of second language teacher education during the last three decades, increasing emphasis has been given to conceptualising the knowledge base of teaching. Historically, the knowledge base of language teaching is broadly dichotomised as knowledge of/about the language and knowledge of the skills/methods/pedagogy, with
demarcation lines between the two recently becoming increasingly blurred (Graves, 2009). Considering the complex, dynamic and developmental nature of teacher learning, the current view defines the knowledge base of teaching as a system of knowledge bases (e.g., Richards, 1998). I found this definition helpful when conceptualising the knowledge base of ESP teaching.

Part One of the study surveyed the challenges that Chinese ESP teachers encounter in practice, as well as their corresponding needs for institutional support. Exploratory in nature, the findings have shed light on some essential components of the knowledge system that ESP teachers are expected to command. This system is seen as comprising at least four dimensions: (1) discipline-specialised subject matter knowledge, (2) knowledge of needs analysis and students, (3) ESP-specific pedagogical content knowledge, and (4) general pedagogical content knowledge. I contend that these dimensions are interrelated and collectively affect a teacher’s ESP teaching practices.

Among the four dimensions, discipline-specialised subject matter knowledge proved to be a significant challenge for my participants, as manifest in the results of the questionnaire survey and the narrative frames survey. Apart from the fact that this knowledge domain was initially outside these teachers’ prior knowledge system for General English teaching, I argue that the above challenge is also related to the question: How much domain-specific subject matter knowledge should a well-qualified ESP teacher possess? Though continuously discussed, this question has never been settled in the field of ESP teacher education (Belcher, 2006; Hall, 2013; Robinson, 1991; Wu & Badger, 2009). The legitimacy of this question seems incontestable. In an empirically-based article discussing the challenges confronting European pre-service ESP teacher education, the authors expressed the view that “specialist-area knowledge seems to be
essential to develop teaching materials and classroom activities of interest to learners eager to acquire and develop the literacy skills” (Cabrita, Mealha & Barrros, 2014, p. 352). This observation is one instance among many (see also Campion, 2016; Hall, 2013; Wu & Badger, 2009) that underscore the necessity of subject matter knowledge but that yet fail to tap into the delineation of the content.

Unfortunately, in the absence of a relatively definite demarcation and delineation, it could be considered challenging for ESP teachers to pin down the desirable amount and content of specialist knowledge that they are expected to learn. In the multiple-case study of this research project, for example, Alice once tried to learn subject knowledge through attending disciplinary courses. However, even the quantity of the knowledge in the common core courses was so overwhelming that she decided to give these courses up. Reflecting on her experience, I am suspicious of the feasibility of requiring an English teacher with a humanities-based educational background to have substantive prior specialist knowledge. Even if it is possible, is it in fact necessary? Ferguson (1997), one of the few researchers who address this question, articulated his stance two decades ago. I concur with his view that it is unrealistic to require ESP teachers to acquire a substantial amount of specialist knowledge, given that in today’s world, knowledge is growing exponentially in every field.

In addition, different teaching objectives and foci might also affect the scope of specialist knowledge needed for doing ESP, as indicated in this research project. In the multiple-case study, the various points of teaching focus among the three participants were clearly different. Ru focused more on vocabulary and genre knowledge, Alice emphasized the authenticity of the carrier content and students’ academic communicative skills, whereas Frank foregrounded students’ ability for self-learning.
and collaborative learning. As a result, their pedagogical approaches also varied. This then led to different attitudes and needs towards subject matter knowledge – Ru needed more specialist linguistic knowledge of genre and discourse, Alice needed more subject matter content knowledge, whereas Frank did not identify any explicit knowledge demands.

I thereby contend that, be it for the purpose of identifying the role of subject matter knowledge in ESP teaching, or for addressing issues concerning the ESP teachers’ subject knowledge dilemma, what matters first and foremost is the “variation” (Ferguson 1997). Variation, characteristic of ESP teaching, means the specificity of the context, curriculum objectives and student variables. Concurring with some ESP experts (e.g., Basturkman, 2010, 2014; Ferguson, 1997; Hall, 2013), I propose that all the four dimensions of the knowledge system of ESP teaching and their interrelationship should be discussed while taking variation into consideration. In so doing, one should take account of the diverse teaching and learning settings, methodological concerns, learners’ language proficiency and expertise in the subject matter area, among others.

In addition, the multiple-case study findings have extended the discussion about the factor which was labelled, in Section 5.1.3, as “the knowledge of needs analysis and students”. In that discussion, I observed that in order to achieve trade-offs between perceived needs and the real needs of educational institutions, target disciplinary communities and future workplace contexts, it is advisable to engage multiple perspectives, methods and stakeholders. Yet because of the fact that the participants found this knowledge most challenging and anticipated more external support, I would argue that cross-boundary collaboration for this purpose is hard to realise in reality.
the case study highlights one more issue: ESP teachers’ awareness and abilities of doing needs analysis in practice.

Among the three participants, only Alice took explicit action to identify students’ needs through exploring EMI classroom teaching and terminal exam settings, and investigating EMI teaching materials. The other teachers demonstrated neither the awareness of the importance of needs analysis, nor enthusiasm to do it themselves. The approach Alice employed is in line with the ethnographic methodology in ESP needs analysis, which helps to generate in-depth understanding of how English is used in the target contexts and communities (e.g., Cheng & Mok, 2008; Lillis, 2008; Northcott, 2001; Northcott & Brown, 2006). Nevertheless, it is not clear whether this method also appeals to other ESP teachers in the focal university, as sustained ethnographic engagement “can be severely constrained by the resources available to ESP practitioners and researchers” (Paltridge & Starfield, 2011, p. 115). Further, it is not clear whether or how other signature methods of ESP needs analysis are used in ESP teaching in China.

In order to get a general idea of Chinese ESP teachers’ awareness and their capacity for conducting needs analysis, I conducted a review of journal articles published in key journals in China from 2013 to 2017. China National Knowledge Infrastructure (CNKI)18 was used to retrieve a list of 30 articles on the topic of “ESP

18 CNKI is a key national information construction project under the lead of Tsinghua University, and is supported by PRC Ministry of Education, PRC Ministry of Science, Propaganda Department of the Communist Party of China and PRC General Administration of Press and Publication. Till now, CNKI has built a comprehensive China Integrated Knowledge Resources System, including journals, doctoral dissertations, masters' theses, proceedings, newspapers, yearbooks, statistical yearbooks, and so on. It is widely used by universities, research institutes, governments, think tanks, companies, hospitals and public libraries around the world. Retrieved from https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/CNKI
needs analysis”. Only five articles (16.7%) involve empirically-based research, adopting survey and interview methods, and only two of them involve multiple participants: students, teachers and people from the target language communities (Ou, 2013; Li, 2014). Evidently, despite the priority given to needs analysis in theory, the actual operation is still limited in the educational context in China.

This observation, combined with the multiple-case study findings, consolidate my proposal that, in reality, ESP teachers need to raise their awareness and enhance their ability in relation to the knowledge of needs analysis and students. Nevertheless, I admit that this can be challenging because it requires ESP teachers to become researchers, as indicated in the relevant literature (Basturkmen, 2010; Dudley-Evans & St John, 1998; Hall, 2013). Rather than being exclusive to China, this challenge has aroused international concern. For instance, in a cross-case study based in the New Zealand context, the researcher found ESP teachers faced similar challenges in doing research for planning courses, locating materials, or referring to previous analysis of needs (Basturkmen, 2010). As such, it is conceivable that ESP teachers need to be provided with more theoretical and methodological knowledge during their transition to the role as a researcher in ESP practice.

### 7.1.2 Challenges and Needs Revealed in Individual ESP Pedagogical Practices

Building on the relatively large scale quantitative data collected in Part One and Stage One of Part Two, I identified some general challenges facing Chinese tertiary ESP teachers and their needs. However, given the emphasis on the ESP attribute “variation”, I should also give due attention to the issues that were revealed in individual pedagogical practices. As mentioned above, each of the multiple-case study participants showed their distinctive focus in teaching practices. They provided qualitatively different evidence of
the challenges and needs that might be impossible to excavate from quantitative data. I am thus keen on exploring the discrepancies and commonalities among the individuals, hoping to draw implications for the wider ESP teaching population.

Ru’s teaching practice showed her focus was the linguistic knowledge of ESP, i.e. medical terminology and genre-based textual knowledge, both of which are uncontestably key components of ESP courses. Vocabulary knowledge is essential, as it carries the basic information that is needed for comprehension and communication (Nation, 2001). In the field of ESP, the importance of the teaching of vocabulary is also widely accepted, especially in non-native English speaking learning contexts (e.g., Atay & Ozbulgan, 2007; Coxhead, 2013; Sarani & Sahebi, 2012). The importance of genre and discourse knowledge is self-evident in that ESP itself is considered a school of genre studies nourished by the work of ESP theorists such as Swales (1990, 2004) and Bhatia (2008), as well as Hallidayan and corpus-based ESP specialists, such as Hyland (2002, 2004) and Flowerdew (2004).

However, there are some emergent issues with regard to Ru’s pedagogical experience in vocabulary and genre-based literacy instruction. These issues include: (1) a blurry delineation of the size and depth of the vocabulary, which is a general concern in the field (see e.g., Akbarian, 2010; Bogaards & Laufer, 2004; Milton, 2009); (2) a lack of systematic teaching materials, which turns out to be a vexing problem for most Chinese ESP practitioners (see Section 2.1.2); and (3) excessive workload involved in the lesson preparation for literacy and writing instruction, which is caused by unfamiliarity with subject specialist knowledge, disciplinary culture and genre-specific discourse and rhetoric conventions. Together, Ru’s experience teases out some major
challenges that are either hypothetically or empirically described in the relevant literature.

Yet on top of the above challenges, another issue is how to make ESP a sustained collective and collaborative practice, both within and beyond the disciplinary boundary. For instance, though Ru was enthusiastic and serious about vocabulary teaching, she admitted it was hard to motivate her fellow teachers to follow suit for a variety of reasons. In Frank’s opinion, for example, vocabulary learning is just a matter of rote memory and therefore could be left to students’ self-learning.

Similar challenges also exist in Alice’s case. While she was active in advocating an adjunct ESP syllabus, she adopted content-based instruction (CBI) in her own class, and took the lead in collaborating with EMI colleagues, it was not easy in getting her panel teachers to accept this idea and accordingly take action. Pressure from excessive workload and a demoralising sense of being pushed into a subordinate position was a major hindrance. This reality to a certain extent echoes the major issue of the wider marginalization of language specialists in academic contexts where ESP is supposed to serve content learning, or is operated within a broader framework of content and language integrated learning (CLIL), CBI or EMI (see e.g., Crandall & Kaufman, 2002; Hall, 2013; Hyland, 2002; Swales, Barks, Ostermann & Simpson, 2001; Wilkinson, 2008).

In addition, the challenges identified in Frank’s case corroborate Hall’s (2013) idea that ESP teachers also need to effectively manage the relationships that they have with different stakeholders. As the leader of the digital-assisted ESP learning project, Frank was managing interactions with commercial vendors, university decision-makers, clerical staff, and IT technicians; whereas as a group-leader of the online ESP teaching
and learning community, he was striving to maintain the commitment and engagement of subject matter teachers, ESP teachers, and students. Taken together, these tasks demand a significant investment of time and energy, well beyond the responsibility of an English teacher. Likewise, Ru and Alice were also handling various public relations in order to obtain resources and establish productive collegial relationships. Therefore, in agreement with Hall (2013), ESP teachers need additional training in managerial skills, “particularly in change management, people management, negotiation skills, time management, and financial management” (p. 4).

7.2 Contextual Contradictions Affecting ESP Teacher Professional Development and Identity (Re)formation in the University Activity System

It has been well established in the field of teacher education that the formation of teacher identity is affected by teachers’ practices and sociocultural contexts. The identity that is forged will in turn affect teachers’ actions (Gao, 2012; Menard-Warwick, 2008, 2011; Morgan, 2004; Varghese et al., 2005). Contexts at all levels are exerting a complex and subtle influence on ESP teachers’ identity, power and agency in this current study. While a general landscape of ESP and the status quo of ESP teachers was depicted in Chapter Three, what I focus on here is the micro-level context where ESP teachers’ lived stories are taking place. As such, I adopted AT as a philosophical and theoretical framework to examine the institutional and contextual factors that constituted and constrained ESP teachers’ actions. In particular, I focus on the contradictions in the system. To formulate an idea of the systemic contradictions, I adopt a bottom-up strategy by delving further
into the contradictions revealed at the action level of the individual component of the system.

### 7.2.1 Contradictions at the Action Level of the Individual ESP Teachers

According to AT, activity systems are internally contradictory and it is the contradictions that offer the possibilities for expansive developmental transformations (Engeström, 2001). There are two perspectives to investigate contradictions. One is the four-level construct of inner contradictions within the human activity system illustrated by Engeström (1987, 2014), of which the first two levels are relevant to this research (see Table 7.1).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Contradiction level</th>
<th>Engeström’s description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Level 1</strong></td>
<td>Primary inner contradiction (double nature) <em>within</em> each constituent component of the central activity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Level 2</strong></td>
<td>Secondary contradictions <em>between</em> the constituents of the central activity.</td>
</tr>
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</table>

Another perspective taken involves the investigation of contradictions from the individual action level. Though not explicitly stated, this perspective was indicated in Engeström’s (2001) analysis of the contradictions in a Finnish medical care organization. Furthermore, this perspective was empirically justified by some researchers in a variety of educational contexts, including learning through boundary-crossing in school-university partnerships (e.g., Tsui & Law, 2007), distributed leadership in school teaching communities (e.g., Tay & Lim, 2016), PhD education in work-based environments (e.g. Granata & Dochy, 2016), among others.
Here I combine the two perspectives in discussing the contradictions under investigation. First, the findings of the multiple-case study reveal the contradictions – which are represented with double-headed lightening-shaped arrows – in each participant’s activity system. Through within and between-case scrutiny, I could thus generate insights about the two levels of contradictions.

First, the rules-object contradiction prevailed in three cases. As head of the English Department, Ru worked with more rules than her fellow teachers, due to her administrative role and leadership responsibilities. However, these rules did not support all the items of Ru’s object (see Figure 7.1). No policy or guidelines stipulated the conditions for claiming the legitimate status of ESP as a discipline or stipulated the allocation of resources or facilitation. Neither did policy or guidelines provide due recognition of ESP teachers’ professional credibility and integrity, nor support their professional development and collective learning (see Figure 7.1).

In the cases of Frank and Alice, the rules-object disturbances came about because the rules failed to explicitly encourage or facilitate cross-disciplinary collaboration. Both the adjunct ESP model and the online ESP community were preconditioned on close interactions and the co-work of ESP teachers and subject matter teachers. Both Frank and Alice had been doing a lot of extra work communicating and connecting with subject matter colleagues, students and other relevant groups. Nevertheless, neither of them would compel their fellow colleagues to follow the same pathway, as they understood that this sort of extra work was not counted as recognizable workload or merited performance by the university. Without any incentive system in the form of cognitive and emotional support, or financial compensation or rewards, as rules of the activity system, it may be both hard and unfair to induce sustained teacher engagement and
commitment with regard to increases in teacher workloads that exceed their designated job responsibilities.

Figure 7.1 Ru’s Actions and Disturbances

In both Alice’s and Frank’s cases (see Figure 7.2 and Figure 7.3), there was a tension between the subject and the division of labour, which is likely due to the bearings of the asymmetrical power relations in the focal university, as graphically depicted by Figure 1 in 5.3. Given that their administrative roles, either as the leader of the 7-year ESP teaching panel or the leader of the digital-assisted ESP project, were not officially nominated by the upper-level leaders, their leadership might not be recognized by their subject matter colleagues in the local context.
Figure 7.2 Alice’s Actions and Disturbances

Figure 7.3 Frank’s Actions and Disturbances
As a consequence, the effectiveness of their management and orchestration of the engagement and commitment of the subject matter teachers was hard to maintain. This point is evidenced by the fact that both Alice and Frank were committing more unilateral effort to their interactions with their subject matter colleagues.

The overlap between Ru’s and Frank’s cases relates to the tension between the tools and the division of labour. In Ru’s case, the disturbance was derived from the mismatch between teachers’ needs and the resources and facilitation available, whereas in Frank’s experience, the tension came from teachers’ divergent attitudes towards integrating virtual social networking teaching platforms. There can be various factors affecting teachers’ acceptance and adoption of digital technology, such as their teaching style, computer and internet skills, workload, technology self-efficacy, among others (e.g., Celik & Yesilyurt, 2013; Kale & Goh, 2014; Rienties, Brouwer & Lygo-Baker, 2013). This said, non-participation, tensions and even conflicts are predictable in teachers’ reactions towards Frank’s initiatives.

7.2.2 Contradictions within the University Activity System of English Education

As stated in Section 3.2.1, the broader activity system draws its sense from the actions of its constituent individuals (see Bakhurst, 2009). The discussion about the contradictions at the action-level of each of the three participants helps to elucidate the primary and secondary level of contradictions of the focal university’s activity system of English education. Since the participants are constituents of this broader system, the disturbances, ruptures and tensions revealed in their individual action-level activities are representative of the primary level of contradictions. These contradictions then help to illuminate the secondary level contradictions that can reflect the problematic contextual
factors that were bearing down on ESP teachers’ professional development and identity (re)formation.

First, the rules of the university activity system are problematic in the following ways. The assessment regime, which is a historical product oriented to the old activity system where EMI and ESP were not implemented, was hindering teachers’ agency and their actions in practical terms. Though ESP incurs more responsibilities and roles on the part of the English teachers, their accountability and performances are still evaluated against old standards. As a result, a considerable amount of innovative work and investment – such as the work of Alice and Frank – that are indispensable for achieving the object went unacknowledged. Premised on the correlation between teacher motivation, agency and self-efficacy, and the institutional assessments regime in relation to accreditation, accountability and responsibility, it is conceivable that this deficit will compromise ESP teachers and subject matter teachers’ performances, and in turn the outcome of teaching over time.

Additionally, there is no policy explicating the forms and means of cross-disciplinary collaboration expected of ESP teachers, as shown in the findings of my survey studies and the body of ESP literature (e.g., Cargill, O’Conner & Li, 2012; Lillis & Curry, 2010). Previous research suggests different ESP course models entail diverse cross-disciplinary teacher partnerships and ESP learning outcomes (Dudley-Evans, 2001; Perry & Stewart, 2005). Yet for the actualisation of collaboration there can be various challenges, including divergent personality and working style, beliefs about teaching, awareness and willingness to collaborate, stringent time limits and resources, etc. (Cargill et al., 2012; Jackson, 2005; Perry & Stewart, 2005).
Furthermore, in the rules of the university activity system, there is a lack of a structural framework that encourages distributed leadership among individual teachers. The enactment of ESP, EMI and bilingual education brings about opportunities for institutional transformation and teacher development. However, this can hardly be secured by a rigid structural management style (Chapman, Lindsay, Muijs, Harris, Arweck & Goodall, 2010; Fullan, 2004). As ESP requires collaboration and networking between English teachers and subject matter specialists, the talents and leadership of the individuals should be recognized and teachers should be entitled to spontaneously respond to situations (see Muijs, 2011; Moran & Marchionini, 2012). Accordingly, ESP teachers will need to focus primarily on cultivating, creating and supporting patterns of distributed leadership practices that are most likely to result in improved organisational performance (see Harris, 2013).

Figure 7.4 Secondary Level Contradictions in the University Activity System
Taken together, these problems with rules constitute secondary contradictions between the rules and the subject, object and division of labour, as represented by the three double-head lightening arrows in Figure 7.4.

Apart from these tensions, there is one more identifiable factor: the contradiction between the division of labour and the object. The object of optimising students’ language and discipline content learning outcomes is in line with the pedagogical goals of Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) and Content-Based Instruction (CBI) (see Dalton-Puffer, 2007; Lyster, 2007; Ruiz de Zarobe & Cenoz, 2015). The inherent complexity behind CLIL and CBI has to do with the convergence of the discipline of the subject and that of language, which both come with their particular theoretical and methodological mindsets (Dalton-Puffer & Nikula, 2014).

The implication that such complexity has for ESP is that cross-disciplinary collaboration is expected between teachers in terms of curriculum design, materials development, and pedagogical practices (Arnó-Macià & Mancho-Barés, 2015; Soler, González-Davies & Iñesta, 2016). However, in the focal university, there was still a clear boundary line between disciplines, and English teaching was relegated mostly to the charge of English teachers. This, plus the asymmetrical power relations that the English Department and the other mainstream discipline departments share, made it hard to achieve the collaborative division of labour which is necessary for the realisation of the object.
7.3 ESP Teachers’ Identity (Re)formation and Professional Development

The AT analysis of individual actions in the university’s activity system, as well as the contradictions inherent in the whole system, have shed light on the institutional context, norms and rules. This knowledge constitutes the vertical axis (Wenger, 1998) against which ESP teachers’ learning as participation is approached in this research (See Section 3.2.). I now incorporate the horizontal axis where learning is mediated by theories of social practice and theories of identity.

As I elaborate in Section 3.2.2, according to Wenger (1998), learning in practice includes the following processes: (1) evolving forms of mutual engagement; (2) understanding and turning their enterprise; and (3) developing their repertoire, styles, and discourses. In parallel, identity is formed in the “kind of tension between our investment in various forms of belonging – engagement, imagination, alignment – and ability to negotiate the meanings that matter in those contexts” (Wenger, 1998, p.188). This means identity is built through an investment of the self in relations of association and differentiation. Negotiability, on the other hand, determines the extent to which we have control over the meanings we own.

Ru, Alice and Frank, together with the other ESP teachers in the department, and despite their distinctive socially designated roles (i.e., as department dean, panel or project leader, ESP teacher), personal histories, power and competence, were all making investments in turning the old GE enterprise into an emerging ESP enterprise. They were making an effort to create new forms of mutual engagement and to develop the repertoire and discourses necessary for the new ESP enterprise. The trajectories of their learning
and identity (re)formation were intertwined within this process. The ensuing section will first discuss the impetus that the participants felt in learning to shift from their previous roles as GE teachers.

7.3.1 Non-Identification, Marginalisation, Misalignment as Impetuses for Learning and Identity Change

In this research study, the inherent challenges of ESP teaching and the multiple contradictions of the university’s activity system have given rise to non-identification, marginalisation and misalignment, which are deemed negative in Wenger’s (1998) framework. Yet for the multiple-case study participants, these negative aspects turned out to be the impetuses for subsequent learning and identity shifts.

For instance, Ru’s motivation to reform established practices originated from her personal non-identification with the established meanings and practices of the old GE teaching community. For reason that she believed that an ESP-oriented English teaching reform was the corollary to China’s educational development in the new century, she could not be satisfied with the routine practice of GE teaching. Besides, she could not associate herself with the “collective inertia” (see p. 156) within the English Department, which was largely forged by long time stagnant practice, its marginalised disciplinary position, and its related disadvantageous power status in the institutional hierarchy. As a result, her agency was augmented so as to renew the old community into an ESP community of practice, which provided new learning and development opportunities not only for herself but for the whole department as well. Ru’s decision and action to make meanings through promoting a change from the old GE community of practice in the English Department confirm the significance of Wenger’s (1998) idea that the experience of meaning is not generated from routinisation. On the contrary, it is the
renewal of old patterns that gives rise to an experience of meaning in our engagement with practice.

Frank’s motivation to seek new spaces of learning was derived from his earlier career identity as a non-participant and marginalized member of the old GE community of practice. Suspicious and even cynical of the university’s long-standing educational values and practices, Frank was resistant to participation and became marginalised by the GE community. Peripheralisation or marginalisation is not uncommon among English teachers for one reason or another (e.g. Trent & Gao, 2009; Tsui, 2007; Zhang & Zhang, 2015). However, consistent with the conclusion of Trent and Gao’s (2009) research, Frank’s history of non-participation in GE was in effect a catalyst for him to become actively engaged in the new ESP community of practice. This new community of practice offered space for his preferred form of teaching and learning, as well as a new professional identity formation.

As for Alice, the challenges of doing ESP greatly impacted upon the way she engaged in teaching. The disparities between students’ ESP learning needs and what her ESP courses could provide eroded her previously valued GE teacher identity. This inconsistency lead to a misalignment between her ideal self-image (i.e. “a Young BackboneTeacher”, “a friend” and “a temporary life mentor”) and the reified identity formed in the ESP practice (i.e. “a teacher at a loss”). The negative emotions and feelings thus caused her to reposition herself in the mutual engagement of ESP teaching and learning.

Collectively, these processes of non-identification, marginalisation and misalignment have also shown that the three participants were reflexively and emotionally engaged in their work. None of them mechanically sought identification
with the mainstream policy discourse, norms and rules (e.g. the university power hierarchy, the assessments policy, the Teaching and Learning Inspection mentioned in Section 6.3), established community practice and culture (e.g. GE teaching, the “collective inertia” in Ru’s case), and the professional roles and labels (e.g. the “Young Backbone Teacher” in Alice’s case, the role model demonstrated by Mentor Lu in Frank’s case).

Instead, their actions testify that their own teaching philosophies, emotions, professional commitments, and ethics were actively involved in navigating, interpreting, reacting to, and even resisting the official ethos and work regime of the existing community of practice (O’Connor, 2008; Trent, 2012; Yuan & Lee, 2015). We see in Ru her professional commitment to the development of ESP teachers and her justification of ESP as a meaningful legitimate discipline; in Alice, we see her philosophy of viewing education so as “to impart knowledge and to educate people” (see Section 6.2) and viewing ESP as utilitarianism-oriented; and in Frank, we see his professional ethics of pursuing the “truly meaningful” (see Section 6.3), the ESP teaching model that values students’ agency and empowerment. The emotional involvement is most explicit in Alice, whose feelings, sentiments, passion towards teaching and caring for students were embodied by her mental image of the administrative building, her emotional wrestling and her resolution to reposition herself in ESP teaching (see Section 6.2).

7.3.2 Negotiating Meaning for the ESP Enterprise

Taking stock of the status quo of ESP teaching and ESP teachers through reviewing the literature, I can see that, at the macro-level, there is widespread public scepticism about the legitimacy of an ESP-dominant college English teaching model, and the
accountability and qualifications of the majority of ESP teachers. Meanwhile, at the micro-level, the effectiveness of ESP teaching also appears to be questioned by mainstream discourse owners of the focal university: ESP teachers were placed at the lower end of the power hierarchy of an activity system replete with contradictions. In these circumstances, I contend that ESP teachers’ identity (re)formation and professional development are interwoven with and premised on the negotiation of meaning for the ESP enterprise.

According to Wenger (1998), meaning is negotiated through participation and reification. Participation is both personal and social as it implies both membership in a community of practice and active involvement in a joint enterprise. Aligned with this idea, the participants of the multiple-case study, as members of a joint-ESP enterprise, were actively engaged in leadership, management, and interactions with university leaders, administrative staff, teachers and external agencies outside the bounds of the university. It is during such engagement that meanings of the ESP enterprise are negotiated.

Aimed at justifying the meaning of doing ESP, Ru was continuously contributing to the formation of an ESP community of practice. Wenger (1998) notes that a community of practice itself can occur in a peripheral or marginal context and in relation to broader institutional arrangements. The ESP teachers were once put in a marginalised position, as is illustrated in the discursively constructed image of Figure 5.2 and the earlier activity system analysis and discussion (see Section 5.3). Through convening the conference, organizing workshops, engaging and empowering the fellow teachers in the department by distributing leadership, as well as negotiating with the university leaders for funds and support, Ru was going all out to change the position of this community of
practice, as if seeking to change the situation of the “ignored children” (see Ru’s journal writing excerpt, p.160), in the broader university activity system. In conjunction, the meaning produced during her engagement with the joint-ESP enterprise was reified through the publicity (via the conference), professional development (via workshops), and the ESP social networks both within and outside the university.

Frank and Alice also played active roles in initiating and contributing to the emergent ESP enterprise. Frank was making continuous investment in the online ESP teaching and learning community by coordinating and managing relations with different parties. The QQ group and the WeChat group, the online discourse, engagement protocols and the shared materials are all constituents of the shared repertoire (Wenger, 1998) and the reification of Frank’s participation. Alice’s participation was in the form of leading her fellow teachers to experiment an adjunct ESP model, to practice collective learning, and to collaborate with EMI teachers. The meaning she was trying to claim was reified as the new ESP syllabus, the collective lesson plan, and the EMI content-based teaching materials that were to be shared among the panel members.

The work of Ru, Alice and Frank not only justified their engagement in the multi-tasking required to establish a new ESP community of practice, but also created opportunities that will support others in this joint enterprise (Margolis, 2008). In this way, the relatively “flat trajectory” (Taylor et al., 2011, p. 85) that describes the pathway of what it is to merely be a language teacher was being revised and enriched by inculcating a sense of, and enacting leadership in, the ESP community of practice. Apart from being a language teacher, the three participants seemed to have formed a set of similar identities: a leader, a team member, a collaborator and a coordinator. Such
processes of identity formation are a good fit with Wenger’s (1998) observation that “identity is formed through participation as well as reification” (p. 152).

Apart from these identities, participation in ESP pedagogical practices, along with interactions with students and colleagues, enabled the participants to fashion their roles as ESP teachers and to expand their own professional development – something which I will discuss in the next section.

7.3.3 Becoming and Developing as an ESP Teacher through Boundary-Crossing and Expansive Learning

Based mainly on participants’ pedagogical practices, I contend that being and developing as an ESP teacher is realised through crossing boundaries and expansive learning. In this process, ESP teachers fashion a set of identities as boundary crossers, brokers, and learners.

Boundaries are invisible but part and parcel of ESP teaching activities. This is greatly predetermined by the nature of ESP as a multi-disciplinary activity (Dudley-Evans & St John, 1998) both theoretically, as expounded earlier in the literature review, and practically as supported by the research findings. In order to examine the boundaries of ESP teaching practice under investigation, I sought a guiding framework. Among different approaches to investigating the types and properties of boundaries (see Hara & Fichman, 2014, for a review), I drew on Wright’s (2009) framework, which most closely aligns with my overarching research focus. This framework defines four boundary dimensions: structural boundaries, which address people’s role in the organization; knowledge boundaries, which address people’s expertise and functional activities;
political boundaries, which focus on people’s organizational legitimacy and power; and interpersonal boundaries, which deal with the relationships between stakeholders.

Inspired and guided by this framework, I identified three salient boundaries: the boundary between ESP teachers and subject matter teachers (ESPTs-SMTs for short); the boundary between teacher and students (T-Ss for short), and the boundary between a spatially and temporally bounded model (e.g., classroom ESP teaching) and a more flexible unbounded model of teaching and learning (e.g., online ESP teaching) (Bounded-Unbounded for short). The first two boundaries have more to do with the structural, political and interpersonal boundaries defined in Wright’s (2009) framework. Nevertheless, embedded in all three boundaries is the practice-based interdisciplinary connection between English and subject matter content, relating to different knowledge domains, methodologies, and discourse communities (see Belcher, 2006; Ferguson, 1998; Hall, 2013). As such, the processes of crossing over the three boundaries are actually interwoven with the interdisciplinary connections.

Wenger (1998) observes that boundaries are crossed primarily via “boundary objects” and through “brokers”, which brings me to discuss the boundary objects and the participants’ brokering activities. Taking each teacher as the unit of analysis, I present in Table 7.2 the boundary type and the most representative boundary objects for each case.
Table 7.2 Boundary Type and Boundary Objects

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Teacher</th>
<th>Boundaries crossed</th>
<th>Boundary objects</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ru</td>
<td>ESPTs-SMTs</td>
<td>Lecture notes on medical terminology</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>T-Ss</td>
<td>Materials, ideas and advice for developing course-books</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Writing instruction materials developed based on the collaboration with ESPTs, SMTs and Ss.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alice</td>
<td>ESPTs-SMTs</td>
<td>The New ESP Syllabus and the Adjunct ESP Model</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>T-Ss</td>
<td>EMI instruction materials as the carrier-material for ESP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frank</td>
<td>ESPTs-SMTs</td>
<td>Learning materials shared in QQ and WeChat groups</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>T-Ss</td>
<td>The online ESP teaching and learning platform.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Bounded-Unbounded</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Notes: “ESPTs-SMTs” refers to the boundary between ESP teachers and subject matter teachers; “T-Ss” refers to the boundary between a teacher and students; “Bounded-Unbounded” refers to the boundary between classroom teaching and online interactions.

The identification of the boundary objects in Table 7.2 is based on Wenger’s (1998) notion that boundary objects, though not necessarily constrained to being thought of as artifacts or encoded information, should at least function as a nexus of perspectives and practices for different communities. All the artifacts in Table 7.2 thus have the attributes of bridging disjoint forms of participation. For instance, Ru’s lecture notes on medical terminologies might be enriched or edited by students or subject matter teachers.

“Brokers are able to make new connections across communities of practice, enable coordination… [and] open new possibilities for meaning” (Wenger, 1998, p. 109). Via boundary objects, Ru, Alice and Frank were bridging the expertise and knowledge of ESP teachers, subject matter teachers, and students. Ru joined different communities together in an effort to develop ESP teaching and learning materials, and brought in
discipline specific discourse features via genre-based reading and writing instructions. Alice introduced her experience in the EMI classroom community into her fellow ESP teacher community. Frank organized and coordinated connections via the online ESP teaching and learning community, and created a learning space in his classroom teaching where students are empowered and encouraged to traverse the boundaries between themselves and their teachers.

In the processes of boundary crossing and brokering, a crucial meaning was created: ESP is an expansive learning process for both teachers and students. This point is evident in each participant’s pedagogical practices. For instance, in order to teach medical English literacy, Ru first had to learn the genre features and prepare the materials herself (a “painful” learning process, see p. 171) and then with her fellow teachers (a collective effort, see p. 174). She also enabled students to learn by themselves using the “deconstructive analysis and constructive simulation” (see Section 6.2, p. 171). Comparatively, Alice learnt from ESP classroom teaching, learnt with and from her students, promoted collective learning among ESP teachers, and encouraged networking with EMI teachers. All these exercises were based on her underlying recognition that “ESP should become a collective teaching and learning activity, where ESP teachers, EMI teachers and students were all responsible participants” (see the quote by Alice on p. 207). In a similar vein, using the boundary objects he created (i.e. the IM ESP platforms), Frank enacted brokering as a coordinator and platform administrator. In this manner, he put into practice his idea of making ESP teaching and learning a collaborative and joint enterprise between teachers and students. As a result of these practices, knowledge, skills, expertise, ideas from different communities, he traversed existing boundaries and contributed to new teaching and learning patterns.
7.4 Understanding ESP Teachers’ Identity Work and Ethical Agency

After discussing how individual ESP teachers negotiated meanings for the ESP enterprise and their professional identities, it is pertinent and useful to address ESP teachers’ identity work and ethical agency.

The necessity for a discussion on this aspect arises primarily out of the following concerns. First, unlike GE teaching, ESP is expected to satisfy the needs of specific learners in specific contexts with tailored-to-fit instruction (Belcher, 2006). This means the objectives and content of ESP teaching are largely contingent on the context. In this sense, ESP reflects an affinity with the post-positivistic conceptualisation of language and knowledge as being contingent and socially constructed (e.g., Canagarajah, 2005; Makoni & Pennycook, 2007), which supposes that teachers are consistently negotiating their teaching identities through practice “with others in a professional context” (Beauchamp & Thomas, 2009, p. 178). However, ESP practice in this study occurred in an institutional activity system fraught with contradictions, conflicts and tensions, as has been previously discussed (see Section 5.3.2). These factors are undoubtedly obstacles to teachers’ identity negotiation.

Second, from the experience of the three multiple-case participants, we can see how participation in the new ESP enterprise involves resisting the dominant discourses that underplayed the meaning of ESP and the roles of ESP teachers, and the related struggle for ESP teachers’ own voices and self-authorship (Niesche & Haase, 2012; Zembylas, 2003a, 2003b). In addition, the discourse analysis of the university meeting (see Section 5.3) indicates that the ESP teachers were living a professional life in a discursively coercive nexus of power relations.
In such circumstances, it is essential that ESP teachers reflect on their teaching-self and listen to their own voices so as to “circumvent the often disciplinary power of educational institutions” (Niesche & Haase, 2012, p. 278). Moreover, it is imperative that researchers in the field of language teacher education are informed of what ESP teachers know about their teaching self and how they work on the self in relation to others (Christie, 2005). To this end, I will delve deeper into the findings of the narrative frames survey and the multiple-case study.

Reflecting on the survey of narrative frames study, as the data were in the form of narratives and quantitatively approached, the identity contour formulated, based on the findings, is thus inevitably discursive and collective in nature. While the multiple-case study contributed more to my knowledge of ESP teachers’ identity-in-practice, the survey study provided distinctive and supplementary knowledge of identity-in-discourse.

An overall impression generated from the findings is that shifting from being a GE teacher to an ESP teacher is a process that combines what endures and what changes over time. Among the four components, the substances of identity are assumed to be relatively stable, irrespective of the change in the contexts and teaching activities. Comparatively, responses in relation to the other three components seem to be more contextually sensitive. This suggests consistency with a dialogic poststructuralist conceptualisation of teacher identity, which addresses the “unitary and multiple”, “continuous and discontinuous”, and “individual and social” (Akkerman & Meijer, 2011) dimensions of teacher identity constitution.

Following these conclusions, two questions become worth considering: First, how should ESP teachers’ identity be protected and who is responsible for this? Second, how should we define ESP teachers’ agency and how can we determine the sources of ESP
teachers’ agency that enable them to transcend current challenges and structural constraints, while expanding their own professional development?

In response to the first question, I believe it essential to protect the “substance” (see Section 3.2.3 for the definition of this concept) that ESP teachers use to form themselves as ethical beings, primarily because this concerns the moral conduct (Foucault, 1997b) and the ethical judgement (Davidson, 1997, cited in Besley & Peters, 2007, p. 13) of ESP teachers. First, the hypothesis I made in 5.2 that ESP teachers’ identity formation may be undermined by a lack of ESP teaching knowledge, is supported, in particular, by Alice’s experience of losing her past glory as an expert GE teacher. In terms of protecting this aspect, both the university and the teachers are responsible. The ESP teachers like Ru, Alice and Frank have already initiated an emerging pattern of expansive learning within the university’s activity system. The university, in turn, should promote and facilitate such learning as a way to support the ethical formation of teachers’ identity.

In this research, apart from the theme of “teacher knowledge”, the other two themes in relation to the substance of teachers’ identity work support the duality of identity, which is “at once individual and personal yet also social and relational” (Clarke, 2009b, p. 146). The theme of “the self-concept” is more individual and personal, whereas “the social and historical self” is more relational. These themes are related to Foucault’s notion of moral code. Foucault (1997b, p. 263) distinguishes between “the [moral] code that determines which acts are permitted or forbidden and the [moral] code which determines the positive or negative value of the different possible behaviours.” Accordingly, “the social and historical self”, in this research, can be regarded as the product of the socially and institutionally normalised moral codes of behaviour, which
are analogous to Foucault’s notion of the aforementioned moral code that determines which acts are permitted or forbidden.

To work on this kind of self, as I speculate, means that the teachers need to deal with the kind of codes that are usually maintained by authoritative discourse communities and are historically rooted in social relations. However, as is the case in the focal university, the renewal of these codes might not keep pace with the emergence of new educational situations, and thus lead to the types of tensions and contradictions that were exposed in the multiple-case study. As a result, adjusting to the new ESP practices actually requires more leverage between the self and others. As such, it is advisable that university leaders build a more empowering professional environment. ESP teachers should be encouraged and facilitated to claim meanings for their new teaching roles and their social relationships with others in the same activity system.

Comparatively, “self-concept” has more to do with “the [moral] code which determines the positive or negative value of the different possible behaviours” (Foucault, 1997b, p. 263). It denotes a strong sense of morality (e.g., “doing something meaningful” by T#28 in Table 5.5) and personal emotions and feelings (e.g., “love towards students”, “enthusiasm about teaching career” in Table 5.5). The emergence of this theme is supportive of the view that “teachers’ emotions are inextricably linked with teachers’ perceptions of self-formation” (Zembylas, 2003b, p. 223). In the multiple-case study, the role of affective elements in shaping ESP teacher identity and teaching practices is evident in Alice (who determined to be a good friend with and a temporary life mentor for students, as seen in Section 6.2) and Frank (who was “Big Brother” to students both online and in the classroom setting, as seen in Section 6.3). Facing the challenges imposed by ESP teaching and the complex power dynamics that inhabit the university;
both Alice and Frank have made significant investments in improving teaching effectiveness and conducting self-transformation. Also, the intimate relationship they have developed with their students, as a result of their emotional investment, resonates with Osborn’s (1996) statement that “effective teaching and learning is necessarily affective...and that the quality of teacher-pupil relationships is vitally important to the learning process” (p. 455).

This kind of substance is what the university should respect and protect, because it is intimately connected to ESP teachers’ agency. In response to the second question posed earlier, it is helpful to reflect on the two themes of ethical substance of identity just mentioned. The “social and historical self” speaks more to a pre-defined identity that is constructed in pre-existing social and cultural conditions (such as the previous educational experience and family legacy expressed by T#3 and T#21 in Table 5.5). In comparison, the substance of “self-concept” voices more potential for teachers to construct identity through resisting static institutional rules and norms and negotiating meanings between different discourses (Zembylas, 2003b).

Such observations are partly based on the speculation of the causality between the substance and the telos revealed in the survey study. As shown in Section 5.2, the majority of teachers aimed to become “expert teachers”, which complies with the somewhat stable, pre-discursively constructed identity assigned by the university. This raises the question as to whether such compliance just leads to a conforming to the university’s dominant discourse or whether it also motivates teacher’s critical examination of both different discourses and their own form of being. It is assumed that this compliance might be the underlying cause of the “collective inertia” in Ru’s case,
and also the cause of the difficulty Alice had in getting the adjunct ESP model accepted by her fellow ESP teachers.

In contrast, the non-identification, marginalisation and misalignment, which are supposed to be the impetuses for learning and identity change, can be understood as originating from the conflicts and dissonance that exist between the individual ESP teacher’s self-concept and the university’s hierarchical power relations and systemic contradictions. Ru’s engaging and empowering the ESP teachers, Alice’s advocating for a pragmatism-oriented ESP teaching model, and Frank’s intention to do something truly meaningful all demonstrate their ethics of care for others, which corresponds to the theme of “to serve the students” (as in Table 5.10). Also motivated by such ethical pursuits, all the three teachers cared for themselves through self-transformation, which centred on resisting established discourses and negotiating meanings for the ESP enterprise and their own professional identities.

I thereby suggest that ESP teachers’ agency should be defined as a kind of ethical agency. This is premised on a poststructuralist approach to understanding agency. Usually, agency refers to the capacity for intentional acts or reflexive mediation (Bandura, 1997; Zembylas, 2003b). The poststructuralist views suggest that agency should be understood in its cultural and political context with consideration made for the power dynamics that characterise the context. On account of this understanding and the

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19 Ethical agency is not a concept newly invented by me. This concept has appeared in a body of theoretical literature. For instance, in Nietzsche’s philosophy, this concept is associated with ethical autonomy which can be glossed in relation to the ideas of becoming what you are and the will to self-responsibility (see Owen, 2008). In Levinas’s philosophy, it refers to “that which enables us to act in the interest of another, to put the well-being of another before our own” (Hofmeyr, 2009, Preface). When this term is used here, I give it an operational definition which works for the purpose of this research.
empirical knowledge obtained from this research, I also propose that ESP teachers’ ethical agency could be defined as the capacity to respond to, or react against, contextual power dynamics in pursuit of an ethical formation of identity.

The ethical agency, as such, is indispensable to ESP teachers conducting “work on the self by the self” (Clarke, 2009b, p. 159). The three themes of telos identified in Section 5.2 indicate that ESP teachers’ identity formation is a continuous process of identification and differentiation, reflecting the interplay of the past, present and future. This finding corroborates Connolly’s (2002, pp. xiv-xv) observation that: “Identity is always connected to a series of differences that help it to be what it is… there is a drive to diminish difference and to complete itself inside”. In this vein, differentiations not only define identity but also open the space for doing identity work. As for the ESP teachers in my study, this work is to transform the self from who and what one aimed to be in the past into an ideal self in the present, with the intention of achieving future identity goals that involve constant eradication of the differentiations both in discourse and in practice. This means in order to achieve identity integrity, ESP teachers need to exercise ethical agency in order to take actions that enable them “to make space for the fullness of self-identity for one constituency by marginalizing, demeaning, or excluding the differences” (ibid).

Chapter Summary

To continue the discussion in Section 5.2, findings of the multiple-case study have indicated that the absence of a relatively definite demarcation and delineation of the discipline-specialised subject matter knowledge turns out to be an obstacle for ESP teacher learning and teaching. I have proposed to take account of the idea of variation when addressing challenges in relation to ESP teacher knowledge and pedagogical
practices. The idea of variation here refers to the specificity of the context, curriculum objectives, teacher and student variables. I have also argued that variation is an important element to consider when examining the interrelationship of the four dimensions of ESP teacher knowledge as identified in this study. In addition, enhancing ESP teachers’ research awareness and capacity, and developing their managerial skills so as to maintain collective and collaborative practice both within and beyond the disciplinary boundary, should be put on the agenda of ESP teacher education and professional development.

In this chapter, I have also discussed the primary and secondary level of contradictions within the focal university activity system. The analysis illuminates the contextual factors that had a bearing on ESP teachers’ professional development and identity (re)formation. Drawing on Wenger’s (1998) theorisation of learning as dual process of social practice and identity formation, the impetus for learning and identity change, meaning negotiation for the ESP enterprise in the focal university, and ESP teacher professional development through boundary-crossing and expansive learning, were discussed.

Finally, combining the findings of the multiple-case study and the survey of narrative frames, I have explored in depth the dialogic conceptualisation of ESP teacher identity as both practice and discourse. More importantly, the concept of ESP teachers’ ethical agency is proposed, and argued as being indispensable to ESP teachers who are in pursuit of ethical well-being and professional development in the face of the various challenges they face and in relation to the power dynamics that inhabit the university activity system. These findings provide the basis for preparing and supporting teachers as agentic professionals in the transition from GE teaching to ESP teaching.
CHAPTER EIGHT

CONCLUSIONS, IMPLICATIONS, LIMITATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Chapter Overview

In this final chapter of the thesis, I first provide a brief summary of the research followed by an outline of its theoretical and practical implications, after which I will comment on the limitations of the study and propose recommendations for future research.

8.1 Summary of the Research Findings

This research is framed drawing on theories of teacher cognition and teacher knowledge, AT (Engeström, 1987, 2001), the sociocultural theory of learning and identity (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Wenger, 1998), as well as the construct of ethico-politics of identity work (Clarke, 2009a). Adopting a mixed methods design, this research has shed light on the challenges and needs that are presently confronting Chinese tertiary ESP teachers in relation to their ESP teacher knowledge, their pedagogical practices, and the process of their professional development and identity (re)formation.

Part One was designed to obtain an overview of the challenges and needs confronting ESP teachers. The findings show that the challenges identified are closely associated with ESP teacher knowledge. The findings of the exploratory factor analyses enables me to conceptualise teachers’ knowledge system for ESP teaching as comprising at least four dimensions: (1) discipline-specialised subject matter knowledge, (2) knowledge of needs analysis and students, (3) ESP-specific pedagogical content
knowledge, and (4) general pedagogical content knowledge. However, as this research is only a tentative categorisation of teacher knowledge and practices in the ESP field, further systematic and large-scale correlational studies are anticipated as being necessary for the further conceptualisation of this knowledge system. With regard to teachers’ needs, the findings of Part One and Part Two-Stage One demonstrate that institutional policy and funding support for cross-disciplinary collaboration and professional training is anticipated by ESP teachers.

In terms of ESP teachers’ pedagogical practices, the findings of the narrative frames study in Part Two-Stage One reveal that there are some changes in teachers’ activities when switching from GE to ESP. When teaching GE, most teachers in the focal university were competent and comfortable in teaching linguistic knowledge, communicative skills and practical skills like translation and writing. In comparison, ESP teaching put teachers into a situation where they needed to handle challenging contingencies that were due to a lack of knowledge in the specific subject area. Teachers also needed to apply pedagogies distinct from those used for teaching GE. These findings are supported by the teaching experiences of the three multiple-case study participants.

With a closer observation of classroom teaching practices of the three participants, I found that each ESP teacher had their own focus and approach to ESP teaching, which hinged on their personal philosophy of ESP teaching, past and present teaching experience, understandings of ESP curriculum and the students, as well as their competence and power at handling interactions between themselves, the curriculum and the students.
More importantly, the pedagogical practices of the three teachers were operationalised through boundary-crossing. Through various ESP teaching-related activities and artefacts that functioned as the boundary objects, boundaries were constantly transcended between ESP teachers and subject matter teachers, between teachers and students, and between spatially and temporally bounded classroom teaching models and more flexible online interaction models. In this manner, practices, knowledge, skills, expertise and ideas from different communities traversed disciplinary and teacher-student boundaries and contributed to a collective and more expansive teaching and learning model for ESP teachers’ pedagogical practices and professional development.

In addition, this research has illuminated the trajectories of ESP teachers’ identity (re)formation and professional development. Teachers have reformed their identity and enacted professional development through participation and negotiation within an emerging ESP community of practice, which inhabits a university activity system that is understood here to be hobbled by both systemic contradictions at various levels and complex discursively-constructed power relations.

The findings of the narrative frame study present a broad picture of the collective identity shifts experienced by all the ESP teachers in the focal university (see Figure 8.1). Such shifts have demonstrated the socially constructed nature of identity. The findings of the multiple-case study have revealed the basis and underlying mechanisms of these identity shifts.
With non-identification, marginalisation and misalignment as the impetuses, the three ESP teachers navigated diverse sub-identities (See Figure 8.2). They have been negotiating meanings for the emerging ESP community of practice, playing the role of boundary brokers, and learning through collective and expansive endeavours.

Combining the findings of the narrative frame study and the multiple-case study, it is evident that ESP teachers identity work – “argue for themselves”, and “work on the self by the self” – and their ethical agency – the capacity to respond to or react against contextual power dynamics in pursuit of an ethical formation of identity – are crucial in their professional development and identity (re)formation.
8.2 Conclusions

With the overarching aim in this research being to explore ESP teachers’ professional development and identity (re)formation, I have posited three research questions which are closely interrelated and important constituents of the lived experiences of ESP teachers. Using a two-part mixed methods design, it is now possible to generate a holistic conclusion about the research subject. Based on a triangulation of the findings summarised in the previous section, the following conclusions can be drawn.

To begin with, the challenges currently confronting Chinese ESP teachers can be categorised into four types. The first challenge is derived from teachers’ insufficient knowledge for ESP teaching, which, as a corollary of the distinctive characteristics and demands of ESP teaching, is distinct from GE teacher knowledge. This insufficient knowledge base inevitably impacts on the efficacy of ESP teacher practices.

The second challenge is contingent on individual teachers’ pedagogical practices. In line with the theoretical underpinning that language teaching is informed by teachers’ knowledge system and their particular cognitive processes, each individual ESP teacher has to deal with challenges that are a consequence of their own ESP knowledge structure, knowledge of their students, experience-based beliefs and their concept of the focus of the curriculum, as well as perceptions of their professional identities, among others.

The third type of challenge facing ESP teachers is connected to the creation and maintenance of collective and collaborative relations between different stakeholders, both within and between disciplinary boundaries. When new curriculum or pedagogical initiatives are proposed, or a constellation of expertise and knowledge is required for the purpose of ESP course design, materials development and learning assessment, ESP
teachers both within the English Department and from other institutions, subject matter teachers from disciplinary faculties, as well as students and experts in relevant fields, are all likely to be involved. The ensuing challenges relate to whether and how ESP teachers are able to effectively manage relations with the different stakeholders. This requires that ESP teachers, as opposed to GE teachers, become more capable of managing public relations and displaying leadership in practice.

The last challenge, as revealed in Part-Two of the research, arises from the systemic contradictions that characterise the university activity system, and the institutional top-down hierarchical management and asymmetrical power relations that impact upon the institution’s activity system. ESP teachers are marginalised in university discursive power relations. While striving to improve their teacher knowledge and pedagogical practices, teachers also have to deal with various contradictions that are contingent on the ESP undertaking. The structural, political and interpersonal challenges may prove a hindrance to ESP teachers’ professional development, as well as the ESP teacher’s self-recognition and positioning.

In view of these challenges, what ESP teachers need first and foremost are professional learning opportunities. On the one hand, it is desirable that the university should arrange and fund in-house training programmes, as well as various learning and communication opportunities outside the university. On the other hand, the autonomous and self-regulated learning of teachers as a practice should be encouraged and facilitated, in particular, in terms of the expansive and collective learning model as evidenced in this research. In addition, the disciplinary status of ESP, the emergent ESP communities of practice, and the collective and individual identities of ESP teachers need to be
legitimized, recognized and promoted by the university through diverse policy and financial support mechanisms.

With regard to ESP teachers’ pedagogical practices, this research has confirmed the idea that teaching is “a process which is defined by dynamic interactions among cognition, context and experience” (Borg, 2015, p. 157). What ESP teachers are doing in ESP classroom teaching is “underpinned and influenced by a range of preactive, interactive, and post-active of cognitions which they have” (Borg, 2015, p. 324). However, when differentiating ESP teaching from GE teaching, ESP teachers are constantly exploring and experimenting with new pedagogical approaches in the classroom, which can be seen to result in these teachers constituting themselves as learners-in-practice, researchers-in-action, and leaders and executors of new pedagogical initiatives. Despite the challenges and difficulties that may arise during teaching practice, ESP teachers are engaging enthusiastically as learners in relation to what works best in their pedagogical practices. A crucial approach to realising ESP teacher learning is boundary-crossing, which forms a sharp contrast in approach to that used in conventional GE teaching practices. ESP teaching-related activities and artefacts serve as boundary objects, facilitating boundary transcendence between ESP teachers and subject matter teachers, between teachers and students, and between spatially and temporally bounded classroom teaching models and more flexible online interaction models. In this manner, a collective and expansive teaching and learning model for ESP teachers’ pedagogical practices and professional development can also be envisioned.

Another conclusion that can be drawn is that ESP teachers’ professional development and identity (re)formation occur in parallel, and are dual outcomes of participating in ESP communities of practice. ESP teachers’ professional learning takes
place in the process of handling diverse challenges, conducting ESP pedagogical practices, and participating in ESP related activities. Shifting from teaching GE to ESP, ESP teachers are constantly involved in organising and reorganising “a sense of who they are and how they relate to the social world” (Norton, 2000, p. 11). The inherent challenges of ESP, the contradictions of the university’s activity system, and the clashes between traditional and new practices, between structurally and socially imposed roles and the individual teachers’ ideal identity, and between a teacher’s multiple sub-identities, may give rise to non-identification, marginalisation and misalignment. These dissonances are proved to function as stimuli, which actually go on to facilitate ESP teacher learning and identity shifts.

It is also imperative to acknowledge that ESP teachers in China are seeking a sense of belonging. The emergence of the ESP community of practice in this research highlights teachers’ incentives to symbolically construct a sense of belonging. Negotiating meanings for such ESP communities of practice is paramount in terms of negotiating meanings for the individual ESP teacher’s identity. In particular, considering controversies in the public arena towards the legitimacy of an ESP-dominant college English curriculum, and scepticism towards the accountability and qualification of the majority of ESP teachers, this nascent collective identity, as owned and reified by ESP communities of practice, should be considered to be positive with respect to its contribution to the formation of individual ESP teachers’ professional identities.

Finally, I argue that ESP teachers’ identity work, which refers to the process of teachers arguing for themselves in the face of structural politics and unbalanced power relations (Clarke, 2009a), plays a significant role in their transition from GE to ESP. The substitution of an ESP-dominant tertiary English curriculum for the traditional GE-
dominant curriculum puts English teachers in a constant experience of flux engaging ongoing challenges to do with identification and differentiation. Moreover, the contradictions within the university activity system and the structural politics, and unbalanced power relations within the professional context also make it essential for ESP teachers to seek their well-being on the basis of a more ethical approach to their practices. Concurring with the poststructuralist conceptualisation of identity, ESP teachers’ identity (re)formation is a dialogic process that combines continuous and discontinuous, and individual and social dimensions of the self. This said, it is paramount to recognize that ethical agency, which we define as the capacity to respond to or react against contextual power dynamics in pursuit of an ethical formation of the identity, is indispensable to ESP teachers when needing to address current challenges and structural constraints, and to realising professional development and identity reformation, both in practice and in discourse.

8.3 Implications

8.3.1 Implications for Research on ESP Teacher Knowledge and Knowing

As ESP is distinct from GE, the knowledge system of ESP teachers differs considerably from that of GE teachers. As elaborated at the beginning of the research, the ESP process, consisting of five key stages – needs analysis, course design, teaching, assessment, and evaluation – places considerably higher demands on ESP teachers’ multiple role as a teacher, collaborator, course designer and materials provider, researcher and evaluator (Dudley-Evans & St. John, 1998). Largely due to this characterisation and based on the findings of this research, I suggest that considering that ESP is a free-standing area within ELT, it is incumbent on researchers and ESP teacher educators to conceptualise
ESP teacher knowledge in a dynamic context-specific manner and to legitimise and to promote ESP teachers’ knowing in action.

One reason for suggesting a consideration of context-specificity is that different research purposes may involve different perspectives and approaches. To my knowledge, the interest in conceptualising ESP teacher knowledge has so far been mostly derived from the needs of course design for ESP teacher training programmes (see Basturkmen, 2014). Hall (2013), for instance, suggests three topics to be included as essential ESP teacher knowledge: language needed and issues of analysis; specificity, especially in terms of the trade-off between effectiveness and efficiency; and purposes, which are analogous to ESP needs analysis. And he groups these aspects with other skills into three areas of an ESP teacher education curriculum – pedagogy, context-embedded language and discourse analysis, and management.

Recalling Hall’s (2013, p. 4) suggestion to “attempt an inventory of what might be included in a training course for LSP teachers” 20 and drawing on the findings of Part One of this research study, I make a preliminary proposal that at least four dimensions should be incorporated into an inventory for Chinese ESP teachers: (1) domain-specific subject matter knowledge, (2) knowledge of needs analysis and students, (3) ESP-specific pedagogical content knowledge, and (4) general pedagogical content knowledge. Obviously, my inventory overlaps Hall’s inventory elaborated above, i.e. the topic of pedagogy. Nevertheless, my inventory emphasizes not only language knowledge but also domain-specific subject matter knowledge, while management is not my concern. Such discrepancies exemplify that the conceptualisation of teacher

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20 LSP is short for language for specific purposes. ESP is one branch of this umbrella term.
knowledge can be grounded in different research purposes. For the purposes of this research, it is oriented to investigating the challenges met by Chinese tertiary teachers in classroom teaching, whereas, for Hall, it is oriented towards training teachers who might become short-term LSP courses providers both in academic and workplace training contexts. Another reason for advocating a context-specific conceptualisation of ESP teacher knowledge is the conceptual alignment with Borg’s (2015) idea that language teaching is “a process which is defined by dynamic interactions among cognition, context and experience” (p. 157). Whilst these four dimensions are supported by existing literature on the complexity of the ESP process and the data-based evidence in this research, they are context-specific, and hence have the potential to change with context. To reiterate my view in Section 7.1.2, delineation of the four dimensions is contingent on specific educational contexts, target needs, course goals and objectives, methodological concerns, learner variables (such as English proficiency and subject matter knowledge expertise), among others. In the case of individual ESP teachers, influenced by their divergent contextually-constructed cognition and practice, they may display different aptitudes and reactions vis-à-vis the four dimensions. In this light, it may be advisable to take a dynamic perspective when conceptualising ESP teacher knowledge. Instead of ending up with a one-size-fits-all inventory, detailing all the separate subordinate knowledge bases of ESP teaching, make it instead open and responsive to specific cultural, contextual, individual and disciplinary variables.

That said, this is by no means meant to undervalue the significance of generating an overarching conceptualisation of ESP teacher knowledge as consisting of core knowledge bases. I acknowledge that research on ESP teacher knowledge and teacher education should be informed by a cognitivist paradigm which views cognition as static
and discrete entities that are dissociated from action and context, yet I am in agreement with Kubanyiova and Feryok (2015), in that I suggest there should be an emphasis on ESP teachers’ “situated, dynamic, and embodied knowing in action” (p. 483), which occurs through participation in practice and situated learning.

Knowing in action is particularly helpful, considering the complexity of ESP teaching. Theoretically, different stages of the ESP process emphasise different knowledge bases and cognitive processes. In reality, however, “teacher cognitions seemed to be structured in a less orderly fashion” and “it seems that individual cognitions are not used all at one time, but rather [are] called upon whenever needed to enable information processing, judgement formation, problem solving or the decision making…” (Górska-Poręcka, 2013, p. 32). Findings of the multiple-case studies attest to this statement. For instance, as Ru’s teaching focused more on Medical English in linguistic, pragmatic and disciplinary cultural terms, she accrued and deployed knowledge in this aspect more than Frank, who instead emphasized the importance of cultivating students’ own knowledge construction. Alice’s action of sitting in EMI classes to investigate target language use, and gauging teaching accordingly, also exemplifies knowing in action and its effectiveness in improving her ESP teaching experience.

In a certain sense, Ru, Alice and Frank’s knowing in action is an automatic behaviour as there was no training or other explicit intervention that anticipated the need for this action. Their actions merely stem from their beliefs and motivation to provide what is useful for students. For them, their students and the contextual variables functioned as the filter of adjustment in their engagement in ESP teaching and learning. Teacher beliefs, motivation, together with other dimensions of teachers’ inner lives,
such as emotions and values, are viewed as new dimensions to extend the conceptual and epistemological scope for understanding teacher cognition (Kubayiova & Feryok, 2015). Based on these considerations, it is recommended that ESP teacher education should encourage and train teachers’ awareness and skills in enacting knowing in action in teaching practice.

8.3.2 Implications for Advancing Wenger’s Community of Practice

Wenger’s (1998) theory of community of practice (CoP) focuses on the social interactive dimensions of situated learning. In as much as CoP proliferates in the research field of teacher education (e.g., Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1999; Sutherland; 2005; Tsui, 2007; Tsui & Law, 2007; Tsui et al., 2009), it is not without its weaknesses. A major extant critique is that there is inadequate discussion about the role of power dynamics and power relations in learning (Barton & Tusting, 2005; Fuller, 2007; Fuller, Hodkinson & Unwin, 2005; Liu & Xu, 2013; Roberts, 2006).

In response to this critique, first of all, I need to clarify that Wenger (1998) did mention power while elaborating on the dual nature of identity formation as identification and negotiation. As he states

Identity is a locus of social selfhood and by the same token a locus of social power. On the one hand, it is the power to belong, to be a certain person, to claim a place with the legitimacy of membership; and on the other it is the vulnerability of belonging to, identify with, and being part of some communities that contribute to defining who we are and thus have a hold on us. Rooted in our identities, power derives from belonging as well as from exercising control over what we belong to.
Here, Wenger’s (1998) notion of power is more related to identification and the inherent tension between identification and negotiability. He explains this tension by describing the instance of a politician who is accusing another of a lack of patriotism. The politician displays his power through “using patriotism to grab the moral high ground in a political contest” (p. 208). But at the same time, his behaviour also involves an open struggle for the definition of patriotism (i.e. the negotiability of meaning) or, in Wenger’s terms, a struggle for power. In this sense, Wenger asserts that theorizing power and belonging is the entailment to theorize identity.

However, Wenger does not proceed with any further discussion about how to theorize power in a community of practice. I conceive this as the main cause of the need for the above critique. Besides, it seems that while Wenger (1998) underscores the value of a participants’ power to identify with established meanings and be open to negotiation, he leaves unresolved issues such as the potential inaccessibility to a community of practice that are caused by complex power relations (see Roberts, 2006, for examples). Due to its limited research scope, my research project cannot directly theorize power within Wenger’s conceptual framework. Nevertheless, it may advance the theory of CoP by adding empirical understandings of how participants leverage power and power relations within their communities of practice.

“Power is the ability or capacity to achieve something, whether by influence, force, or control” (Roberts, 2006, p. 626). In order to understand how knowledge is developed and distributed within and among communities of practice in a university activity system, it is essential to understand the power relations and power dynamics among people. Though CoP theory states that meaning can be negotiated in the process of participation
and reification, it is critical to interrogate the role of power as either a facilitator or a hindrance vis-à-vis to meaning negotiation. In addition, it should be asked, what is the source of agency that enables teachers to negotiate meaning when they are at the lower end of the hierarchy of power relations, as is the case with the ESP teachers in my study?

Through investigating the three ESP teachers’ lived experiences, this research provides some empirical basis to address the above questions. In the process of negotiating meanings in relation to their own ESP pedagogical practices and leadership endeavours, all three teachers have realised learning, and fashioned and refashioned their identity, through managing themselves and others in relation to the power relations that inhabit various situations. On the one hand, the ESP teachers are located in the nexus of power relations within the university, which are manifest in the general atmosphere of criticism and questioning, as shown in the university meeting. On the other hand, they are faced with power issues in the ESP classroom, which were mainly caused by inadequate ESP teaching knowledge. However, each teacher used different strategies to cope with these power relations in their communities of practice.

In Ru’s case, there are four dimensions of power relations inhabiting her professional pathway, and they exist respectively in: the top-down hierarchical management and disciplinary marginalisation, the responsibilities and activities as Dean of the department, the role as an initiator and manager of external networks, and in her own ESP teaching. Hypothetically, we can say Ru was involved in four communities of practice, each presenting one of the above four dimensions of power relations. As she agonized over the university’s autocratic administrative style and the dominant discourse and ideology that tended to undervalue the work of ESP teachers, she actively stood up for the department and argued for the meaning of the ESP enterprise, through
“touting her wares” to university leaders and by gaining external support to ameliorate her power status. Within the community of practice shared with her fellow colleagues, she was playing the role of an engaging leader who was doing her best to promote a shared enterprise accessible to every participant. Her strategy was to provide every ESP teacher in this CoP with an opportunity to negotiate, claim and create new meanings. In so doing, the imbalanced power relations were gradually transformed between Ru, as the Dean, and her fellow colleagues, and between those at the higher level of the institutional hierarchy and the English professional staff who were used to being passively subjugated by structural policies and administration.

What is common to the approaches of Ru, Alice and Frank, in terms of their reactions to various power relations in the workplace, is that they were all exercising boundary-crossing and encouraging other participants to participate in what they had initiated. This is particularly evident in their ESP teaching related activities. Looking at each of their ESP practices, it is evident that they were crossing over the boundaries between ESP teachers and subject matter teachers, between their own teaching panels and other panels, and between the traditional GE teaching model to a new ESP teaching model. The course of boundary-crossing is at the same time a journey of empowerment. Ru transformed from a “one-man gamer” to one of the “collective strugglers”, then through advocating and leading collective lesson plans and preparation, she became a “collective effort maker”. In Alice’s case, she shifted from a model GE teacher to a wrestling ESP teacher and then to an active ESP learner, an innovative panel leader and collaborator with students. Frank, who used to be suspicious of the university’s educational traditions and who was a passive GE teacher, changed to become a proactive programme leader, an enthusiastic initiator and manager of the online ESP CoP, and a
co-constructor of ESP knowledge together with students and other colleagues. Based on their trajectories of identity (re)formation as realised through boundary-crossing between communities of practice, I contend that the power relations within and between the boundaries have played a significant role in empowering these ESP teachers.

This idea resonates with Liu and Xu’s (2013) viewpoint. Through a narrative inquiry of the learning trajectory of a language teacher in the workplace, they argue that various power relations in the local community of practice were functioning as a shaping force for the participant’s identity construction. In resonance, this research also proves that through struggling to legitimise various sub-identities in reaction to diverse power relations within and between community boundaries, ESP teachers have developed new forms of power relations, professional engagement, understandings, knowledge and skills, which in turn have led to ongoing renewal of the emerging ESP community of practice (also see Gu & Benson, 2015; Trent 2010, 2012; Yuan & Lee, 2015).

8.3.3 Implications for Research on English Teachers’ Collective Professional Identity and Agency

To date, language teachers’ identity and agency have been conceptualized and approached mainly as an individual phenomenon. In particular, qualitative methodologies (e.g. narrative inquiry and ethnographic case study) dominate the field of language teacher identity research, due to their effectiveness in probing into the intricacies and complexities of identity. Relatively few studies address language teachers’ collective identity and agency within their professional communities and contexts. In a recently published longitudinal study, Hökkä, Vähäsantanen, and Mahlakaarto (2017) justify the need for investigating teacher educators’ collective identity and agency by pointing out the collaborative nature of the profession and
conceptualising teacher agency and identity within social cognitive theory (Bandura, 2006) and the subject-centred sociocultural approach (Eteläpelto, Vähäsantanen, Hökkä, & Paloniemi, 2013). I welcome this line of research as my research has indicated that, in the face of challenges brought about by ESP or other English curriculum reforms, collective identity and agency can play a positive role in empowering teachers and facilitating their professional learning and identity negotiation.

In this research, through using narrative frames, I have identified what I have termed the collective identity of ESP teachers in the focal university. This is not an individual / collective dichotomy, however, but rather a form of dialectic, since I have highlighted and captured some of the collective elements that necessarily come to constitute an individual teacher’s professional ESP identity.

Later in the multiple-case study, the protagonists Ru, Alice and Frank were actively negotiating meanings for their ESP enterprises and the emerging ESP community of practice. As I elaborated in Section 7.3, their individual identity (re)formation was enacted through and with the identity formation of the ESP community. In this process, the ESP community of practice becomes at once the reification and resource of their sense of belonging, belonging referring here to a joint enterprise with mutual engagement and a shared repertoire. Their activities suggest an initiative to examine collective identity, given “belonging” is an important indicator when exploring collective identity (see Davey, 2013).

Also manifest in Ru, Alice and Frank is their ethical agency, which not only enables them to transform their individual identities, but also leads them to the development of new practices (e.g. Alice’s adjunct ESP teaching model), new boundary objects (e.g. Frank’s online ESP platforms), and shared understandings (e.g. ESP as a
collaborative teaching and learning process). In this manner, their agency has shown a collective element in that they shared and pursued a common interest in improving their joint ESP enterprise (see Ibrahim, 2006). Furthermore, through their joint efforts, the marginality of the ESP community also witnessed progressive change.

Taken together, these elements of collective identity and agency, both implicitly and explicitly found in the research study, highlight the ESP teachers’ shared efforts to influence matters and shared awareness of affinity. The findings as such corroborate those of Hökkä et al. (2017). An important implication for future research is that a more elaborate understanding of English teachers’ collective identity and agency is needed, especially in recognizing that “collective identity and agency play a pivotal role in academic ecosystems, and that they can be supported through creating social arenas for identity-work” (Hökkä et al., 2017, p. 45).

8.3.4 Implications for University Policy Makers

Educational reforms require teachers to renegotiate their professional identities and incorporate new ideas into their professional practices in order to respond to various challenges (Day & Kington, 2008). Simultaneously, teachers also need to maintain their own well-being at work (Hökkä et al, 2017). “A sense of spiritual well-being develops as teachers interact in a system characterized by empowerment and political and social agency. Alternatively, a sense of alienation or determinism develops as teachers interact within a constricted system characterised by prescriptive accountability and pedagogical policies” (Parkison, 2008, p. 52). In this sense, the present research has several implications for university policy makers.
One implication is that the university leaders are expected to take measures to address systemic contradictions. Grounded on the identified contradictions within the activity system of the focal university (in Section 7.2.2), I make the following suggestions:

- Update the long-standing assessment regime in a tailored-to-fit manner by re-evaluating teachers’ functions and roles against new objectives, conditions and requirements.
- Encourage and facilitate cross-disciplinary collaboration by providing guidelines, funding, resources and logistic support.
- Empower individual teachers by cultivating, creating and supporting patterns of distributed leadership.
- Clarify the division of labour by detailing responsibilities and tasks of different academic and professional sectors within the university.

Additionally, university leaders should be expected to create an ethical workplace culture where ESP teachers’ ethical agency and identity work is respected and facilitated, otherwise the status quo is likely to cause unnecessary impediment for teachers to develop a sense of belonging and moral obligation to function for the benefit of students and the university. In the focal university, because of the authoritarian top-down management style and vertical power hierarchy, ESP teachers have had to argue for the meaning of their professional practices and identity, “a sense that enables them to resist pressures that seemingly insist that they bow to or conform to university hierarchy dictates, professorial whims and/or culturally embedded, inexplicable but historical practices” (Grimmett, 2015, p. 82). In such circumstances, whilst some teachers (like Ru, Alice and Frank) may practise an ethical agency, others (like those who displayed
“collective inertia”) may be pushed “into a slow psychological death” (Parkison, 2008, p. 53) Therefore, for any university that is committed to educational reform, the imperative for its leaders and policy makers is always to avoid top-down hierarchical management, authoritarian discourses, and negative political power relations.

### 8.4 Limitations and Recommendations for Future Research

As with all research, I recognize that there are several limitations to this research, and furthermore that it has thrown up some questions that are in need of further investigation.

Firstly, the investigation of the challenges and needs concerning ESP teachers’ professional knowledge and practices is still preliminary and exploratory. When I first conceptualized the content and scope of the questionnaire: ESP-TCNQ, I did not encompass all the complex aspects of ESP teaching which have been theoretically and empirically elaborated in its development in existing literature. This is primarily because my research subjects are Chinese ESP teachers and their teaching experience is in China. By the same token, I focused more on issues concerning ESP teaching in China in published research. However, as I explained in Section 2.1.2, tertiary ESP teaching in China is still at the early stage of development compared with wider international trends. Therefore, there is still a limited availability and variety of empirically based research on problems associated with ESP teacher knowledge. As a result, the posited dimensions of the scope of ESP-TCNQ are inevitably somewhat limited, which in turn affects the generalizability of the findings. Such design deficiency will hopefully be ameliorated with more in-depth ethnographic case studies similar to that conducted in this research. For instance, the multiple-case study approach in this research project indicates that ESP teachers (e.g. Frank) are playing the role of collaborator (Dudley-Evans, 1997). The
knowledge bases connected to this collaborator role, which is untouched by the present ESP-TCNQ, can be included in future variations of this questionnaire. Therefore, more empirically based understandings of the individual ESP teacher’s experiences will help to extend this dimension and add to the item pool for a renewed ESP-TCNQ. Besides, the sample size in this research project is small in quantitative terms. Hopefully, an enriched version of ESP-TCNQ and a larger sample size in future research will generate more extensive findings.

Secondly, the way I engaged with the notion of “identity work” (Clarke, 2009a), resulted in my conceptualisation of teachers’ identity work being relatively limited, in that I mostly used it as a framework for the design and analysis of the survey of narrative frames. Albeit that I have touched upon the discursive construction of language teacher identity and ethical agency in a political context filled with disparate discourses and complex power dynamics, my understanding remains preliminary. Insofar as the notion of identity work draws on Foucault’s notion of historical ontology in three domains – knowledge, power and ethics, and hence views tensions in an institutional community of practice or an activity system as “offering potential points of focus for conducting work by the self on the self” (Clarke, 2009b, p. 159), it is still helpful to generate more insightful understandings of language teachers’ agency and identity formation in the context of educational change. Therefore, more studies drawing on this notion are expected to contribute to the scholarship of language teachers’ individual and collective agency and identity.

Last but not least, I also suggest several topics that are pertinent to ESP teacher learning and multiple-role practice for the research agenda. These topics touch upon how ESP teachers acquire ESP teaching knowledge; how they develop skills and
capacities for being a course designer; researcher and evaluator; and how they learn to collaborate and coordinate. These are the gaps that the existing literature has not yet bridged (see Basturkmen, 2014). To this end, the current research study can be seen as a good starting point. The ethnographic and narrative-oriented multiple-case studies, though limited in sample size, context, and time duration, have foregrounded the initiatives of ESP teachers’ community of practice and cross-boundary expansive learning (see Sections 7.3.2 and 7.3.3). A community of practice, as characterised by emergent structure and dynamic boundaries (Wenger, 2010), is conceived of as opening a space for ESP teachers’ knowing and learning. The pattern of cross-boundary expansive learning among ESP teachers, subject matter teachers and students is also an effective way of doing this. Therefore, these initiatives are worth further inquiry. Additionally, I am also anticipating more in-depth qualitative studies using different methodologies to enrich the understanding of these research topics and ESP teachers’ lived experiences and stories.
Appendix I Chinese Tertiary ESP Teachers’ Challenges and Needs Questionnaire (ESP-TCNQ)

Section I ESP Teachers’ Perceived Challenges

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No challenge</th>
<th>Weak challenge</th>
<th>Moderate challenge</th>
<th>Strong challenge</th>
<th>Very strong challenge</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In Section I, we would like you to tell us how challenging you feel when you carry out the following activities. Please tick a number from 1 (no challenge for me) to 5 (very strong challenge for me).

1. deal with the subject knowledge in the students’ specialist area
2. increase knowledge in the disciplinary area
3. familiarize with disciplinary cultures and values
4. know the epistemological basis of the discipline, i.e. its cognitive structure, characteristic modes of enquiry, and the criteria for validating or falsifying knowledge claims
5. identify target tasks activities and skills that students are/will be using English for
6. collaborate with subject specialists to identify ESP needs in professional and academic situations
7. develop and evaluate ESP teaching materials based on genre and discourse analysis of target language materials
8. identify students individual difference in EG proficiency, English ESP learning motivation and strategies
9. plan activities that accommodate the range of individual differences among the students
10. plan activities that can optimize students’ ESP learning outcome.
11. involve students in developing higher order thinking skills
12. implement appropriate teaching methods according to the content and context
13. adjust teaching and learning activities and materials as needed
14. utilize teaching aids and learning materials to meet students’ ESP learning needs
15. maintain high levels of student engagement in ESP learning tasks
16. provide a learning environment that accommodates students with special needs
17. effectively manage routines and procedures for ESP learning tasks
18. provide students with specific feedback about their ESP learning
19. maintain a positive classroom climate
20. communicate to students ESP language knowledge that is accurate and logical
21. communicate to students the purposes and/or importance of learning tasks
## Section II ESP Teachers’ Perceived Needs

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No need</th>
<th>Weak need</th>
<th>Moderate need</th>
<th>Strong need</th>
<th>Very strong need</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
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</table>

In Section II, we would like you to tell us how much you need the institution to support you to overcome the challenges. Please tick a number from 1 (no need) to 5 (very strong need).

1. deal with the subject knowledge in the students’ specialist area
2. increase knowledge in the disciplinary area
3. familiarize with disciplinary cultures and values
4. know the epistemological basis of the discipline, i.e. its cognitive structure, characteristic modes of enquiry, and the criteria for validating or falsifying knowledge claims
5. identify target tasks activities and skills that students are/will be using English for
6. collaborate with subject specialists to identify ESP needs in professional and academic situations
7. develop and evaluate ESP teaching materials based on genre and discourse analysis of target language materials
8. identify students individual difference in EG proficiency, English ESP learning motivation and strategies
9. plan activities that accommodate the range of individual differences among the students
10. plan activities that can optimize students’ ESP learning outcome.
11. involve students in developing higher order thinking skills
12. implement appropriate teaching methods according to the content and context
13. adjust teaching and learning activities and materials as needed
14. utilize teaching aids and learning materials to meet students’ ESP learning needs
15. maintain high levels of student engagement in ESP learning tasks
16. provide a learning environment that accommodates students with special needs
17. effectively manage routines and procedures for ESP learning tasks
18. provide students with specific feedback about their ESP learning
19. maintain a positive classroom climate
20. communicate to students ESP language knowledge that is accurate and logical
21. communicate to students the purposes and/or importance of learning tasks
Appendix II The Survey of Narrative Frames

1 I am a ____ (gender) teacher.
2 I got my _____ (degree qualifications) in _______ (name of graduated university).
3 I have been teaching general English for ____ year(s) and ESP for____ year(s).
4 Now I am a (n) _____ (professional title) in my university.

5 Reflecting on my professional experience, I think I have constituted myself as an English teacher with…
6 When I taught general English, I used to focus on…
7 At that time I was a teacher who…
8 This is because I believed …
9 Since I started to teach ESP, the challenges confronting me could be summarised as…
10 I remember once in my ESP classroom I had a difficult time trying to…
11 I tried to solve the problem by…
12 It would have been very helpful if…
13 In relation to this sort of problems, what I need is…
14 Now I see myself as…
15 My attitudes towards ESP are…
16 I believe that in order to be a qualified ESP teacher, I…
17 Thinking about my own professional trajectory, in the past, I aimed to…
18 Now my goal is…
19 I hope in the future I can…
Appendix III Interview Protocols

Example questions in relation to general topics

- Will you share with me your own English learning history?
- Will you tell a little about your experience of becoming an English teacher?
- Why did you choose to be a university English teacher?
- What is your GE teaching experience like?
- What makes you become who you are today?
- What’s your opinion over the ongoing English curriculum reform in this university?
- How do you perceive the implementation of ESP?
- What are the challenges you are faced with when teaching ESP?
- How do you react to these challenges?
- How do you think problems and challenges can be addressed?
- How do you define yourself as a GE teacher?
- How do you define yourself as an ESP teacher?
- How did you transit or are transiting from a GE teacher to an ESP teacher?
- Looking back at the whole process, what motivated you to embark on the project and kept your persistency?
- What are the internal and external factors that are affecting your work and sense of yourself?
- Apart from functioning as a language teacher, what other responsibilities and tasks are you engaged in?
- How do you comment on your relationship with your colleagues and students?
- How do you look at ESP teacher learning and professional development?
• How do you feel about the institutional support on your faculty and your professional development?
• What teaching or administrative activities have you been engaged in? How do you evaluate your position and role in the faculty?
• How do you see the university’s policy incentive to be cost-effective in resource allocations?

Example questions in relation to teachers’ pedagogical practices (during field observation period)

• What is your focus of classroom teaching?
• How do you prepare a lesson?
• How do you address the subject matter knowledge dilemma?
• How is your teaching received by your students?
• What are your colleagues’ attitudes and reaction towards the new syllabus you proposed? (To Alice)
• How do you collect materials for writing instruction? (To Ru)
• What if subject matter teachers would not contribute to the online practice? (To Frank)
• What do you think of collaboration with subject matter teachers? In what way?
• What teaching methods are you going to use?
• How do you see the extra work you have invested into this new initiative?
• What if students find it hard to finish your home-assignment? (To Ru and Frank)


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