

Cultural Differences Encountered by a Novice Chinese Immersion Teacher in an American Kindergarten Immersion Classroom

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Abstract

The research objective of this study was to explore the cultural differences and challenges encountered by the Chinese Immersion Teacher (CIT) and how the CIT deal with the cultural differences in the immersion classroom. A qualitative case study approach was chosen for this research. The participant was a novice kindergarten immersion teacher who was born and educated in a Chinese-speaking country. There were 13 children with diverse ethnic backgrounds in the teacher's classroom. Interviews and observations were the primary sources of data. The data collection and analysis stages were undertaken concurrently. The researcher used thematic analysis to analyze the data. The findings of this study show that a novice CIT typically faces several challenges owing to the differences between Chinese culture and American culture, including the differences in the expectations regarding learning, teacher status, teacher authority, teaching methods, and learning styles. Moreover, the study found that the CIT struggled with these differences and did not know how to do her job without considerable support and training. The research led to suggestions to improve cultural awareness, management of cultural differences, and CIT training.

Keywords: Chinese early immersion, cultural difference, Chinese language teaching, Foreign language immersion

Introduction

With the increasingly pivotal role of China in geopolitics and the globalized economy, the demand for Chinese language speaking skill continues to grow (Stewart & Livaccari, 2010). Chinese immersion has become one of the most popular teaching models in the USA because immersion programs have considerable positive effects on children's target language abilities. An immersion program is a form of bilingual education aimed at additive bilingualism. The immersion program provides students with a classroom environment wherein at least 50% of the course curriculum is taught in the target language (i.e., second language, foreign language, or heritage language). Academic content and language learning are integrated. Immersion programs may assume different forms and are described with terms such as partial/total, early/late, and 50:50/90:10 (Fortune & Tedick, 2008).

With the increased need for Chinese immersion programs, the shortage of qualified and certified Chinese Immersion Teachers (CITs) has become a challenge, especially in urban and rural areas (Van Houten, 2009). The USA does not have a sufficient number of Chinese language teacher training programs; therefore, the majority of American CITs are not properly trained. For CITs to be effective, it is crucial that teachers recognize and understand their own cultural views, the differences between themselves and their students, and how the differences influence teaching and learning. Teachers should conduct teaching through diverse cultural lenses (Bennett, 2004). Nevertheless, most immersion studies focus on teachers with the same cultural backgrounds as their students, in the same country. Relatively few studies have investigated how CITs negotiate cultural differences within a foreign social context where teachers do not share the cultural or

linguistic backgrounds of their students (Xu, 2012). An increasing number of Chinese language teachers are recruited to teach in the USA; it is critical to obtain a deeper understanding of these teachers' teaching and classroom management practices in cross-cultural contexts. Hence, this study attempts to explore this research gap by observing one CIT. The research questions are as follows:

- Q1. What are the cultural differences between the CIT and her students in the kindergarten immersion classroom?
- Q2. What are the major challenges caused by the cultural differences?
- Q3. How does the CIT deal with the cultural differences in the immersion classroom?

Review of Literature

Pratt (1998) proposed the concept of the “contact zone” to refer to “social spaces where cultures meet, clash, and grapple with each other” (p. 173). The concept of the “contact zone” as a site of cultural adaptation and resistance where teachers and students with different cultural backgrounds meet as active agents to construct and challenge the design of the programs and teacher-student interaction (Singh & Doherty, 2004). CITs who were born and educated outside the USA but are now teaching in K-12 classrooms in the USA are also on the front line of the global education contact zones. These teachers face a dilemma as they try to export Eastern way of pedagogy to Western culture. These teachers often face a wide range of challenges in a teaching environment that is extremely different from those in their native cultures. For example, Pan, Chaffee, Chu, and Ju (1994) reported that Chinese people viewed school as a place that promotes children's academic excellence. Students are expected to show respect and obedience to their teachers (Xu, 2012). However, American people viewed schools as a place to nurture students' independence and critical thinking. Students are encouraged to express their thoughts and to challenge authority. As a result, Chinese teachers and American teachers might perceive and interpret students' same behavior differently (Jin & Cortazzi, 2012).

Many of CITs have no experience in teaching Chinese as a second or foreign language and have no knowledge of American culture and society (Stewart & Livaccari, 2010). Romig (2009), who studied a novice Chinese teachers' acculturation process and found that initially, Chinese teachers used their culturally embedded strategies to discipline students. Nevertheless, teaching a language does not simply involve the teaching of the language; it also involves cross-cultural communication (Valdes, 1986). When teachers draw on their own cultural practices and past educational experiences to teach, they potentially face cultural conflicts (Zhou & Li, 2015). In immersion classrooms, teachers and students originate from various backgrounds; they may approach the same situation differently, based on their different cultural values and expectations. Therefore, teaching the Chinese language in a cross-cultural US classroom is complex and challenging.

Zhou and Austin (2017) indicated that Chinese language teachers often encounter challenges rising from the cultural differences regarding teaching, pedagogy, classroom management, and assessment in classroom settings. These teachers tend to lack knowledge and strategies for effective pedagogy, classroom management, and communication with students and parents (Zhou & Austin, 2017). Numerous untrained, unprepared Chinese language teachers are being recruited by American schools to work as CITs. It is imperative to have a deep understanding of these novice teachers' cultural expectations regarding their classrooms. Moreover, the current lack of knowledge regarding the CITs' actual experiences prevents people from fully understanding the key issues faced by foreign-born teachers. This study can provide

foreign-born teachers all over the world, especially those who teach in the USA, information about the effects of their cross-cultural differences. This information can enrich Chinese teacher training programs to help teachers overcome numerous cultural conflicts.

Methodology

The complex issues that the typical CIT tends to encounter in the typical US kindergarten immersion classroom warrant an in-depth, qualitative study. Thus, a qualitative, instrumental case study approach was chosen for this research. The researcher used the theory of “global education contact zones” to construct the study. The researcher adopted a phenomenological approach for this study because this approach is best suited for exploring individuals’ experiences and the meanings attributed to those experiences (Smith, 2015).

Participants

According to Yin (2013), the goal of case study sampling is to “maximize learning” by studying a case. A novice fortyish teacher with a Chinese language teaching certificate who was currently teaching in a US kindergarten immersion classroom was selected as the main teacher participant. The teacher had been born and educated in a Chinese-speaking country. The teacher had three years of adults’ Chinese language teaching experiences. Qualitative inquiry focuses on human experience; therefore, it should be conducted on an experienced participant who is willing to undergo frequent observation. The researcher invited several subjects to participate in the immersion program. However, only one teacher named Lily who met all the research criteria agreed to be observed and interviewed in this study; the others disagree to be observed but agreed to be interviewed. The immersion program was conducted in an urban area with a culturally diverse population. There were 13 children, including one Indian-American, one Mexican-American, one Taiwanese-American, and four African-Americans, among other American students in Lily’s class. She had experience in teaching the Chinese language to older students in the US and other countries. However, she had never taught very young children (i.e., kindergarteners). She had joined the kindergarten immersion school six months before the study began because the previous teacher had unexpectedly left the school. Thus, she was very new to the kindergarten immersion classroom.

Data Collection Procedures

Interviews and observations were the primary instruments used for data collection. Formal in-depth interviews that lasted minimum 2 hours were conducted once with two kindergarten teachers, two first grade teachers, and their directors (i.e., the principal and the vice-principal). Lily was interviewed 5 times using the semi structured interview method and free chatting. Interviews were conducted following an appropriate open-ended protocol with a phenomenological approach (Smith, 2015). The interview included three main questions: (1) What difficulties do you encounter in your teaching? (2) How do you think these difficulties relate to cultural differences? (3) How do you perceive these cultural differences, and how do you deal with these differences? Interviews were conducted in a very dynamic manner, with questions emerging from the content of the participants’ descriptions. Some follow-up questions that were used to prompt the participants to describe their experiences included “Could you tell me more about it?”, “What does/did it really mean to you?”, “Would you please give some examples?”, and “Can you recall your experience?” The goal of the interviews was to elicit as much detailed description as possible from the teachers about their experiences with cultural differences and the concomitant challenges. In addition, the researcher closely monitored and observed Lily’s

classroom from 8:00 am to 4:00 pm daily for one month to record the daily practical challenges faced by the teacher. Data sources included verbal responses to the interviews and the recorded observations.

Data Analysis and Triangulation

The data collection and the data analysis were undertaken concurrently. After the interviews and observation field notes had been transcribed, the data were entered into the ATLAS.ti data management program for coding. The researcher used thematic analysis (Creswell & Poth, 2017) to analyze the data. First, the researcher read all the texts repeatedly to identify noteworthy passages relevant to the research questions. Thereafter, the researcher segmented the texts into meaning units. For example, the researcher identified “cultural difference” as the main repeated segment of the text and designated “cultural difference” as a loose category to capture the relevant text segments such as “expectation,” “teaching method,” “disciplinary method,” and “teacher’s authority.” This step identified the data to be interpreted, identified, and coded. Next, the researcher began to code the data inductively. Meanings were coded on the basis of the data. For example, the teacher described her struggle in communicating with parents who had different cultural beliefs regarding learning; the researcher generated the codes “difficult content” and “motivation” for such responses. The emerging codes served as a data management tool for organizing similar or related texts to assist interpretation. After completing the coding process, the researcher began combining codes that referred to similar issues and formed themes. The researcher often wrote thoughts and reflections during data collection and analysis that served as a reference for potential ideas in the thematic analysis. For example, the researcher found that the teacher often recalled her previous learning experience in China to understand her difficulties in teaching. Thus, the researcher constituted the theme “prior learning experience in foreign culture” to designate one source of the teacher’s cultural conflicts. Following a similar process, the researcher sometimes reassigned and deleted some themes and finalized the following four themes: “expectations for learning,” “status and authority of teacher,” “teaching method and learning style,” and “ways of dealing with cultural differences.”

To ensure the validity and reliability of the research, the data were coded and themes identified by the researcher. Then, the consistency of the data analysis was discussed with research assistants. The researcher repeatedly checked the coded themes with the original text segments to ensure their reliability. In addition, the researcher interviewed different subjects using the same questions (i.e., kindergarten teachers, first grade teachers, and directors) to triangulate the data. Finally, transcriptions of interview data were sent to the interviewees to verify the accuracy and completeness.

Results and Discussion

This section describes four key constituents that comprehensively describe the cultural differences experienced by the CIT in the kindergarten immersion classrooms:

Expectation for Learning

The CIT mentioned that American parents tend to expect less formal academic learning in kindergarten children than the CIT. There were several disagreements between the parents and Lily regarding this. Lily assumes that parents send their children to Chinese immersion schools because of the following expectations:

“Parents sent[sic] their children to this school because they want their children to learn Chinese and academic thing.[sic]” (20170119T11)

Lily continues to provide formal teaching of the Chinese language and mathematics. Based on the researcher's observations, most of the teacher-led classroom activities are academically oriented. Sometimes, Lily gave the children difficult learning tasks (e.g., mathematical problems of addition and subtraction) to challenge them. However, some American parents reacted negatively to this method of teaching, as follows:

“One parent tells me that she does not want little children to learn such difficult academic things. She thinks children should not learn these things until she[sic] is nine years old” (20170201T1I)

Some parents do not agree with Lily and believe that such academic content should be taught at a later stage in formal schooling. However, Lily believes that these parents expect too little from their own children. The other kindergarten teacher also stated that American parents care more about children's happiness and motivation to learn than they care about academic education.

Due to these differing expectations, Lily often spent a considerable amount of time communicating her curriculum planning with the parents. In the observation period, the researcher was told that some parents wanted to transfer their children to the other classes because they did not agree with Lily's teaching methods. When Lily was interviewed about the parents' reactions, she stated:

“Challenging children is good for children's preparation for their elementary school. Most parents send their children to Chinese immersion programs because they want their children learn Chinese and [the] Chinese way of education.” (20170209T1I)

Thus, she insisted on following her Chinese way of teaching. Lily's thinking is rooted in the Chinese cultural belief of academic achievement as a gateway to a better life and future academic success. Pan, Chaffee, Chu, and Ju (1994) reported that Chinese people view academic achievement as the foremost way to attain higher social and economic status. Thus, school is viewed as a place that enables children's academic excellence. Therefore, Chinese teachers often have high and rigid expectations with respect to the students' academic performance levels and classroom behavior.

In addition to the disagreement regarding the teaching content, Lily and American parents also had different opinions about what a kindergartener should learn in school. Lily addressed the importance of “respect,” “politeness,” and “modesty”:

“Teaching them how to respect others is very important. You need to be polite and be humble. Western children, generally speaking, do not respect teachers very much.” (20170201T1I)

Lily emphasized the importance of proper learning conducts such as “respect,” “politeness,” and “modesty.” Inculcating these learning conducts in children to enable diligent learning attitudes and conscientious habits is generally considered the responsibility of the Chinese teacher. However, American parents expect their children to be creative, think critically, and contribute to class discussions (Hue & Li, 2008). As another kindergarten teacher in the immersion program states:

“American parents seem to care more about children's learning motivation and happiness. They are happy as long as their children can speak a little bit [of] Chinese and like to learn in the school” (20170122T2I)

Young (1996) studied the differences between Chinese and American cultures and indicated that American parents value freedom and self-promotion in their children. Thus, American parents do not like “pushing too much.” Due to these cultural differences, many conflicts occurred between Lily and the parents.

Status and Authority of Teacher

The other obvious cultural difference is that Lily believes that a teacher's authority is so disregarded in the school that she has difficulty in managing her classroom:

“Here, teacher is not authority; parent is authority [sic]” (20170206T1I)

Lily mentioned that American parents have more power than the teacher. If parents report something to the principal, teachers must respond to it. Thus, children do not respect their teachers, and the teachers find it challenging to maintain classroom discipline. Lily explained:

“Teacher gives you a glance, you will notice where you have done wrong. Teachers don't even have to tell you loudly or call your name, and you will modify your behavior immediately. Here, you give him consequence. [sic] He does not care!” (20170206T1I)

In Chinese society, teachers have a very high social status; students are expected to always show respect, conformity, and obedience to them (Xu, 2012). Hence, Chinese teachers can manage the class well by using nonverbal interventions (Zhou, 2013). As Lily stated, “giving a glance” is enough to stop misbehavior because Chinese students can interpret this message very well. However, the nonverbal cues of disciplining that work well in Chinese school are ineffective in American schools. American children prefer a more specific and straightforward communication style (Jin & Cortazzi, 2012).

In addition to the difference in the status and authority of the teacher, Lily attributed the difficulty she faced in managing the classroom to the “positive discipline” of American culture:

“American education emphasizes positive discipline. You have to use encourage [sic] words. Look at these kinds of misbehavior...How do you use positive words? He does not know where he has made mistakes if you use “positive” words all day.”(20170130TII)

Lily and all other CITs mentioned that the positive discipline method is difficult to implement for some children, leading to challenges in managing the classroom order. In Chinese society, when encountering moderate or severe misbehavior, Chinese teachers sometimes make individual disruptive students stand or sit in a corner to calm them down and make them reflect on their mistakes. After class, the Chinese teachers would have a formal talk with children to help them understand how their behavior disrupted the classroom and disturbed the other students (Zhou & Li, 2014). However, this kind of method is forbidden in the USA, which strictly prohibits physical contact between the teachers and students, adding to the challenges faced by the teachers in dealing with misbehavior. As one immersion kindergarten teacher says:

“you can only talk to children. We have Positive Behavior Intervention and Support (PBIS) training to teach how to use talking techniques. You cannot touch children.” (20170122T2)

This teacher also said that this discipline mode does not match with her prior working experience in Chinese society. Thus, misbehavior management is often cited as a major challenge for Chinese language teachers (Xu, 2012; Liu, 2012; Zhou & Li, 2014).

In this immersion program, when teachers could not solve the children's behavioral problems through positive behavioral intervention support (PBIS), they could only seek help from the social workers or the principal. Thus, teachers felt that they had no power or control over their own classrooms. The social workers cannot stay with the same classroom all day; thus, Lily wrote to parents for help. Nevertheless, some parents complained about why Lily always viewed their children's negative sides. Parents asked her “why don't you see my children's positive side?” These parents sometimes directly reported to the principal for conflict resolution. With respect to this, Lily said:

“I want to let them understand their children. So, I use my off-time to write letter [sic] to parents.. But, it seems that some parents don't accept my opinions.” (20170201T1I)

In our observation, Lily's classroom included several children who often disturbed other children, ran out of the classroom, or were inattentive to most classroom teaching. It appeared to the researcher that these children might need help in the form of special education. However, as Xu (2012) indicated, most Chinese teachers are only trained to teach students with typical needs, because inclusive education is not implemented in China. Therefore, most Chinese language teachers are not experienced in teaching in an inclusive environment involving children with special needs (Kritzer 2011). Most CITs in this school did not have any training in special education and did not have any first-hand experience with children with special needs. This may be a major reason that these immersion teachers feel frustrated when handling misbehaving children.

Notwithstanding, from the cultural point of view, sometimes Lily's definition of misbehavior was questionable. Roberts (2016) highlighted that foreign language teachers perceive their students' behavior based on their prior knowledge, beliefs, and experiences. Therefore, some behaviors may be perceived as misbehavior by the Chinese teachers but not by American teachers. For example, Chinese teachers feel offended when students interrupt their instruction with questions and comments; however, this behavior is acceptable, even welcome, in an American classroom (Zhao 2007). American culture encourages individual choice and allows various learning styles without rigid requirements regarding how students should behave and learn; however, Chinese teachers often have strict requirements for proper learning conduct (Zhao 2007). These cultural mismatches may have influenced the Chinese teachers' perceptions of the children's misbehavior.

Teaching Method and Learning Style

In my observation, Lily frequently conducted her teaching in a big group and rarely designed small-group activities. She seemed to teach the Chinese language as an independent subject that included songs, rhymes, or ancient poems. Every morning, she asked the children to write down their Chinese names following the correct stroke order. Even though most children could finish this task successfully without assistance, following the stroke order seemed difficult for the children. The Chinese language subject class teaching often involved the teacher reading out and explaining and the children repeating after her. Lily's instruction alternated between Chinese and English. English was often used to translate the meaning of Chinese songs or rhymes. Lily often used English to assist Chinese comprehension; English remained the main communication language among the children. Chinese was mainly used by Lily herself. In addition to the Chinese classes, mathematics class was often conducted by Lily. The following scene depicts a typical mathematics class:

Lily sits in front of the whole group of children. Children sit surrounding the teacher with small whiteboards and markers in their hands. Lily asks the children to write down a number. (20170123TIO)

Lily says: "write down number 7" (in Chinese). As the children finish their work, they raise their whiteboards to show the teacher their written numbers. Lily comments on that or praises them by saying "good" or "yes" (in Chinese). (20170123TIO)

Sometimes, the mathematics questions are difficult such as addition or subtraction of two numbers between 1 and 10 (e.g., $3-2 = ?$ $1+7 = ?$). Some children are able to solve the difficult questions; however, a majority of them do not know how to do solve these. It was observed that the children easily lose focus if the teaching process becomes repetitive or difficult.

Lily's teaching method is very teacher-directed and is based on big groups. Further, the teaching content is very academically oriented and is dominated by the teacher's predetermined

plans. As the previous paragraphs show, Lily believes that challenging children aids their academic abilities. Romig (2009) found that in their first year as teachers in the USA, Chinese teachers tend to use rote and mechanical memorization as main teaching methods; however, these are contrary to the children-centered teaching techniques commonly adopted in the USA. The mismatch between the teacher-centered teaching style and child-centered learning style contributes to the challenges in cross-cultural Chinese language teaching (Zhao, 2007). Lily's teaching method was similar to the aforementioned teacher-centered practices and exhibited minimal interaction among the children.

Two first-grade teachers in the immersion program mentioned that the contrary teaching methods cause a cultural conflict contributing to the initial maladjustment of a novice teacher:

“In America, teachers seldom use big-group instructions. [sic] Most of the time, teachers use small-group discussion and ask children to take turn [sic] to participate the activity. In Eastern tradition, teachers often give direct instruction to the whole group of students.” (20170208T3I)

These two first-grade teachers said that it takes time to gradually adjust to American children's learning styles. When they found that students prefer small-group learning, they adjusted their teaching methods, and they found that small-group and child-centered teaching methods are more effective for educating American children:

“Advanced students can learn more difficult content; below-average students can review what they do not understand. This way matches the notion of ‘no child left behind’.” (20170208T4I)

Unlike these two experienced first-grade teachers, Lily was and is still struggling to adjust her teaching methods. Lily seemed to believe that direct teaching is more effective for teaching children who might be left behind. As the vice-principal indicates:

“Chinese people believe in the power of knowledge. So, teachers are viewed as a knowledgeable person [sic] who should teach students with their known concepts, ideas, and knowledge.” (20170214VPI)

However, the vice-principal states:

“American teacher [sic] emphasizes how the knowledge comes from [sic] and how to apply the knowledge to their daily lives” (20170214VPI)

The vice-principal explains, using the mathematics class as an example:

“In Chinese society, teacher may directly teach students how to calculate wide, [sic] length, area, and volume. In America, teacher will ask children to do an airplane project, children will learn how to calculate these things through making an airplane model.”

The teacher's teaching methods and children's learning styles are very different in Chinese and American schools. In Chinese society, direct-teaching and rote practice guided by a knowledgeable teacher are believed to be highly effective for learning. However, American culture emphasizes children's exploration, individual choices, and self-initiated learning processes. Therefore, many researchers have found that Chinese teachers struggle to balance children-centered and teacher-directed values of learning and teaching (Gao 2010; Xu 2012; Zhao 2007). The challenges of balancing these two modes of teaching methods are also reflected in the novice CIT's difficulties reported in this study.

Methods of Dealing with Cultural Differences

Based on the cultural conflict she experiences, Lily believes that combining the positive elements of the two cultures' advantages is an effective way to overcome the difficulties arising from cultural differences. She gives an example:

“Sharon is a good performing girl. [sic] Her mother is a Taiwanese and father is an American. I think she is a good example of integrating advantages of two cultures. She knows how to respect people. She knows how to obey teachers’ instruction but still has her own opinions. She will express her own opinion if she does not think the thing [sic] reasonable.” (20170130TII)

Lily thinks that Sharon’s good performance can be attributed to her mother’s eastern style of parenting and the school’s western style of education. Nevertheless, when being asked how to integrate the good practices of the two cultures, Lily was unable to provide any suggestions. In particular, the two cultures sometimes have substantially different or even contradictory points of views. For example, Chinese culture values “modesty” and “respect to authority”; however, American culture values “self-expression” and “critical thinking.” Therefore, in reality, Lily is still struggling to deal with the cultural conflicts arising from the differences between the school’s policies and her teaching concepts.

According to the directors, a novice teacher often requires one to two years to become familiar with American culture. The vice-principal indicated that a teacher’s educational background and prior work experience play key roles in the time taken for adjustment:

“Novice teachers from China and Taiwan, who have teaching experiences, not in immersion program, need longer time [sic] to adjust their teaching. These teachers often directly adopt the same methods as they taught in their own countries. These teachers are stubborn. They are confident in their prior working experiences and reluctant to change” (20170214VPI)

According to the vice-principal, the preconceived ideas of a novice teacher who has some experience of teaching in China or Taiwan strongly influence these teachers’ acceptance of other people’s suggestions. Teachers with stubborn, preconceived conceptions require more time for adjustment. These teachers do not change easily unless they encounter failure several times. According to the principal, after a few years of adjustment, experienced teachers can integrate the characteristics of eastern and western cultures effectively. The vice-principal gave an example of the first grade teachers:

“The first grade teacher teaches mathematics multiple, [sic] they not only teach children to memorize multiplication table, but also teach children how these table produce. [sic] They emphasize both the learning result and process.” (20170214VPI)

These two first-grade teachers had 3–4 years of experience in working in Chinese immersion programs. At the time of the study, they had adjusted well and were able to balance their cultural conflicts; thus their students demonstrated successful academic performance. This finding agrees with that reported by Romig (2009), who studied a novice Chinese teachers’ acculturation process and found that initially, Chinese teachers used their culturally embedded strategies to discipline students. With the assistance of their American counterparts, some teachers were able to adopt some classroom management practices to create a friendly environment for the students.

To help novice teachers successfully balance cultural differences, teacher training and development is important. Thus, the absence of a training program for novice teachers in this Chinese immersion program is a major problem. As the principal said:

“Our training for teachers is not enough. It is like that you ask soldiers to fight but do not give them weapon [sic]” (20170216PI)

In fact, this immersion school conducts meetings and professional discussions every morning that include several focus topics such as PBIS, Primary Years Programme (PYP) curriculum, experience sharing, and so on. However, Lily indicated that she does not get a lot of benefit from these meetings because of the time limit (30 minutes every morning) and the theory-

based discussion (e.g., PYP curriculum design). The directors said that the school does not have professionals to conduct the necessary training and development. The principal and the vice-principal are occupied by administrative duties. The principal stated that if the school provides an American teacher development program for developing immersion teachers in the future, then the future teachers will be better prepared. Until then, teachers recruited from Chinese-speaking countries must struggle and experience cultural shocks. As the principal stated:

“Teachers have to rely on themselves to explore how to survive in the immersion environment.” (20170216PI)

In sum, this study showed that a typical novice CIT can face serious challenges owing to the differences between Chinese culture and American culture. The study also revealed that a particular novice CIT was aware of the cultural differences in the expectations for learning, teacher authority, teaching methods, and learning styles. The evidence proved that the CIT struggled with these differences and faced difficulty in conducting classroom teaching without sufficient support and training. These findings are similar to those of previous reports (Gao 2010; Xu 2012; Zhou and Li 2014; Zhou and Austin 2017). Therefore, the cultural conflicts experienced by CITs pose a serious challenge that must be addressed. The following section provides some suggestions based on these findings.

The present findings indicate that CITs encounter several cultural conflicts and must be competent enough to resolve various cultural differences between Chinese and American cultures. The researcher presents the following suggestions: First, CITs must know how to teach students whose cultural and living environment is different from theirs. Teachers must have intercultural awareness in instructional strategies, classroom management techniques, and students' learning styles in diverse cross-cultural contexts (Jin & Cortazzi, 2012). Teachers are able to achieve better classroom management by aligning their practices with their students' culture (Evertson & Weinstein, 2013). Second, when CITs encounter cultural conflicts or tensions, they should have the competency to resolve these conflicts. Thus, CITs should be prepared to teach a heterogeneous group of children in the same classroom. Unlike the classrooms in ethnically homogenous countries, American classrooms frequently include children from diverse ethnic backgrounds. Teachers need to have a basic understanding of multicultural education and know how to create a supportive environment to meet the diverse needs of linguistically and culturally diverse students.

Third, CITs should not only be trained to teach languages, but also be instructed in age-appropriate educational training that suits their teaching levels. For example, kindergarten immersion teachers should have adequate training for early childhood education, including age-appropriate language teaching strategy, curriculum design, and classroom management for young children. In this study, although the CIT was certified for teaching Chinese, she did not understand young children, resulting in greater teaching challenges than those that arose from cultural differences. In addition to training for age-appropriate curriculum planning and classroom management, CITs should receive training for inclusive education. This study found that most Chinese immersion programs in western countries adopted inclusive education. Hence, Chinese teachers must expect to teach children with special needs in inclusive classrooms. However, most Chinese teachers do not receive relevant training or have pertinent experience. Therefore, CITs should also be provided with knowledge of inclusive education and related resources.

Finally, CIT development programs should involve pre-service and in-service stages of training. Numerous studies have found that many Chinese teachers experience difficulty in teaching in western countries because of the deficiencies of teacher education programs in their

native countries (Wang et al., 2013; Zhou & Austin, 2017). Zhou and Li (2015) have found that teacher preparation courses influence a teacher's intercultural awareness and competence. Therefore, teacher-training programs are essential for developing CITs' skills for Chinese immersion teaching. In the pre-service stage, before being sent to teach in foreign countries, CITs should be made aware of the differences between the two cultures in the aspects of teacher-student relationships, learning expectations, classroom management, and children's learning styles. In the in-service stage, training should focus on resolving the CITs' real problems and sharing teaching ideas in classrooms. In this stage, CITs should be encouraged to frequently reflect their teaching and discuss it with their local school colleagues. Local school colleagues in the field can often provide useful assistance that would facilitate the CITs' adaptation. (Liu, 2012; Romig, 2009).

Conclusion

In conclusion, this study found that CIT experienced cultural differences in American kindergarten immersion program, including "expectation for learning", "status and authority of teacher", and "teaching method and learning style". In addition, this study found that CITs' attitudes and responses to cultural conflicts and tensions strongly depend on their cultural educational experiences. Based upon the findings, the study provides information and suggestions for future research. First, future research can consider the teachers' social, political, and historical backgrounds to explore their influences on the attitudes and methods of teachers who struggle with cultural differences. In addition, future research can focus on the adjustment process of kindergarten immersion teachers and its relationship with the teachers' ages, experiences, and cultural contexts. Moreover, pre-service and in-service teacher training are required to help CITs. Thus, studies that focus on how these training programs proceed and how they can exert influence on teachers' teaching methods will be very beneficial for the implementation of Chinese immersion programs in American settings.

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