In-Service Middle School English Teachers' Beliefs, Knowledge, and Practices in Developing Self-Regulated Learners in China

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Submitted to:

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Author Note

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1. Introduction

Researchers have demonstrated those who achieve academically are often better able to analyze and adjust their approach to learning tasks than are students who are less successful (Bol and Garner, 2011; Hacker, Bol, and Bahbahani, 2008; Nietfeld, Cao, and Osborne, 2005). Self-regulated learning (SRL) refers to independent, academically effective forms of learning that involve metacognition, intrinsic motivation, and strategic action (Zimmerman, 1989, 1990, 2002). Fostering students' ability to engage in effective SRL is an important goal of secondary education, as it prepares students for the demands of higher education or workplace learning.

However, SRL does not naturally develop as children grow up (Baker, 2005; Bembenutty, 2011). A large body of research has shown that students display high levels of motivation and achievement in SRL processes (e.g., Dignath, Buttner, & Langfeldt, 2008; Hilden & Pressley, 2007; Perry & VandeKamp, 2000; Zimmerman, 2001), researchers have paid less attention to the role of teachers (Hilden & Pressley, 2007) and many teachers remain unfamiliar with SRL (Lombaerts, Engels, & van Braak, 2009; Perry, Hutchinson, & Thauberger, 2007).

2. Literature Review

There have been numerous studies on how teachers' beliefs influence their willingness to adopt educational innovations as well as their instructional practices (Woolfolk Hoy et al., 2006). For example, teachers' beliefs are a primary force in any school reform implementation (Gess Newsome, Sutherland, Johnston, and Woodbury, 2003; Nunnery et al., 1997). Additionally, teachers' beliefs about student learning affect classroom pedagogy (Albert, 2016; Gibbs and Powell, 2012; Sinatra and Kardash, 2004). In a qualitative study by Albert (2016), it explored pre-service science teachers' beliefs about science knowledge and their teaching practices. Six pre-service science teachers were interviewed to explore their beliefs. Moreover, lessons taught

by pre-service teachers were observed to see how their beliefs manifest in their teaching practices. Post-observation interviews followed to focus on critical incidences observed. Findings showed that pre-service science teachers hold dualist views about science. They viewed science knowledge to be simple, rigid and derivative of specific bodies of knowledge handed down by authorities such as textbooks and experts. Consistent with their beliefs, pre-service teachers adopted transmissive teaching strategies to propagate textbook-based science knowledge. It was concluded that the way science teachers uptake the aspired learner-centered teaching may be partly due to incompatible beliefs they hold.

Some researchers have also explored self-regulated learning in practice. For example, Artzt and Armour-Thomas (1998) examined 14 new and experienced teachers' metacognition in the context of a problem-solving lesson. The qualitative analysis yielded categories of teachers who varied in the quality and extent to which they fostered metacognition in their lessons. One group of five teachers, including one new teacher, fostered SRL strategies such as goal setting, monitoring, and student-centered learning activities. Results for a group of four new teachers suggested little awareness of goals for student learning and a failure to create conditions that would promote SRL among students. A third group fell somewhere in between these two ends of the continuum. Among the less successful teachers, the authors noted the misalignment between espoused student-centered goals and their instructional practices.

Teacher beliefs and knowledge have been well researched, while some studies have been conducted to explore SRL in instructional practices; however, few studies have been conducted to link teacher beliefs and knowledge about SRL to their practices. In an effort to bridge this gap, I have included measures of SRL practice as well as beliefs and knowledge in this study.

3. Subjectivities statement

I am interested in this topic because of my educational background and my work experience. Rooted in Chinese culture and nurtured by Confucius and Confucians, developing life-long learning skills has been one of my major concerns as an English teacher in teaching middle school students in China. The prevalent adage "teaching a man to fish for a lifetime rather than simply giving him fish for a day" by Confucius has been affecting me on my mind in teaching for many of years.

Considerable empirical evidence attests to the positive impact of SRL not only plays a key role during schooling, but also in the life-long learning journey (van Beek et al., 2014; Kuo, 2010). It aroused my interest and curiosity to know what in-service teachers' beliefs, knowledge and practices in developing self-regulated learners in China.

4. Research design

1) Purpose/ Rationale

As pressure to increase students' academic success, students need to take ownership of their learning, to become self-regulated learners. Self-regulated learners are often described as strategic, metacognitively guided, and intrinsically motivated learners, who are more likely to be successful in and beyond school (Perry, 1998; Winnie & Perry, 2000; Zimmerman, 2001). Many researchers have found that only when teachers become self-regulated learners themselves and learn to deal strategically with the complexities and dilemmas of the teaching and learning process can they effectively develop their students into self-regulated learners (Duffy, 1993; Hilden & Pressley, 2007; Randi, 2004).

Additionally, according to Perry et al. (2008), most teachers agree with the concept to support their students to become self-regulated learners; yet many of the teachers that they

investigated reported to feel unsure about how to do that. Knowledge of whether teachers do not know how to enhance their students' self-regulation or whether (for unknown reasons) they refuse to, could indicate where teacher training would have to start and which points would have to be addressed. Kramarski and Michalsky (2009) also found that teachers' ability for SRL was associated with their pedagogical knowledge as well as with their beliefs on student-centered learning.

Furthermore, empirical investigations of these issues have been conducted mainly in Western countries. Relatively scant studies have focused on teachers' roles in Asian countries and regions, such as mainland China.

2) Statement of research problem

Therefore, driven by this situation, I believe efforts to study how Chinese teachers perceive SRL, what knowledge they have already known about SRL, what influence them to develop or implement, and how SRL is being taught are needed.

3) Research questions

3.1. Brief description of overarching research purpose

Accordingly, this qualitative study is to explore in-service English teachers' beliefs, knowledge, and practices in developing self-regulated learners in middle schools in China.

3.2. Present research questions

More specifically, the following research questions would be explored in this study:

1) What do in-service teachers believe and know about self-regulated learning?
2) How are in-service teachers' beliefs and knowledge about self-regulated learning related to their instructional practices?
3) What instructional practices do in-service teachers use to develop self-regulated learners?

5. Methods

1) Site of research

I plan to conduct this study in Chaoyang District, Beijing, China. Chaoyang District comprises of 70 schools (Youzi, 2018). No new schools have been established since 2018. For the purposes of this study, the teachers would be chosen from a private school named RDFZ Chaoyang Branch school in Chaoyang District, Beijing, China. This is the first-tier urban middle school of all in Chaoyang District. The reason why I would like to conduct the research in this school because this school is the branch school of The High School Affiliated to Renmin University, where I used to work. This is the convenient resources that I can use. Another reason is this school was only established five years ago but made tremendous achievements. I would like to see whether the teachers' SRL beliefs, knowledge, and practices have much impact on them or not. In studies that rely predominantly on interviewing, the subject is usually a stranger (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). Following this, the site and the teachers would be strangers. With the strong endorsement from my former principals and head offices in my former school, I could make connections with this site.

2) Data generation

As for the participant observation and interviewing, I would use Boekaerts' model as my theoretical framework. Boekaerts (1996b) developed a structural model (Figure 1) in which self-regulation was divided into six components, which are: (1) domain-specific knowledge and skills, (2) cognitive strategies, (3) cognitive self-regulatory strategies, (4) motivational beliefs and theory of mind, (5) motivation strategies, and (6) motivational self-regulatory strategies (Boekaerts, 1996b).

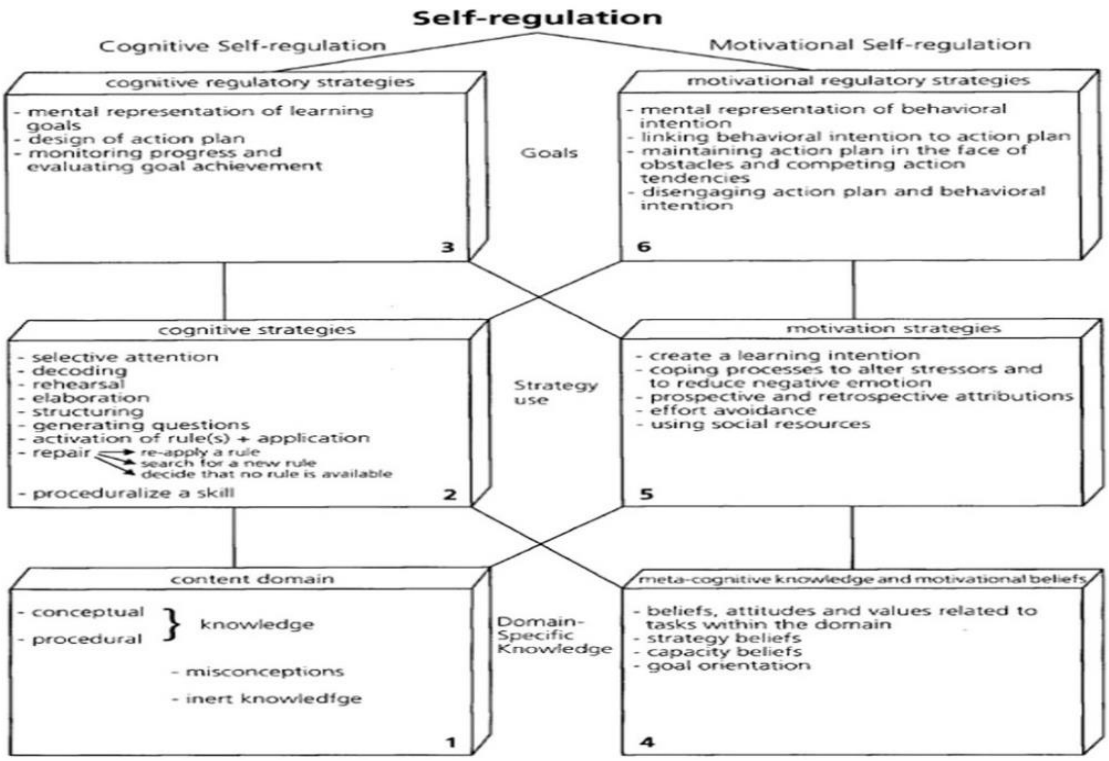

FIGURE 1. Six-component model of SRL. Adapted from Boekaerts (1996b).

The questions would be grouped by the six components. Participants would be first asked questions about the domain-specific knowledge and skills and then the questions from the sequential components. Participants would be asked about their own learning experiences, followed by questions about their actual practices and actions as teachers.

3) Participant selection

Participants would be chosen from Chaoyang Branch School in Chaoyang District, Beijing, China. Two middle school English teachers were chosen by my former principal and we made connections one week ago. They included one male English teacher and one female English teacher. They meet their students on weekdays. Teachers all have experience of using computers and Internet as well as teaching in schools for more than 3 years. The participants' age ranged from 25 to 40 years old. The selection criteria were based on my research questions, theoretical

perspectives, and accessibility of informants in both genders who are willing to share her experience in the study. More demographic information will be conducted when the meeting slots are scheduled. Email will be sent to seek for the signatures of consent forms and ask them to fill out the time slots they will agree to allow me to participate their online teaching and fellow up interview.

4) Analysis

The qualitative data will be analyzed both deductively and inductively. Boekaerts' theoretical model (1996b) will be served as the initial categorization scheme. That is, my questions and prompts will be organized around the major phases and components of the model first. At the next level an inductive approach will be used. Within the SRL sequential components, a content analysis will be used to identify topics, categories, and patterns that could emerge from the field notes and interview transcripts. I plan to initiate the process by reading and re-reading the data from the interviews. From there, topics within the six components will be identified. These topics will be developed into categories, and the data will be coded based upon these categories. These categories reflect teachers' descriptions and explanations of SRL strategy use.

6. Conclusion/ Findings

This qualitative research is to link in-service English teachers' beliefs and knowledge about SRL to their classroom practices. This research is very important to the field because my findings might suggest that these three constructs were not consistently aligned. My hypothesis would be: despite all teachers expressed positive beliefs about SRL in the classroom, however, teachers were not knowledgeable of SRL and teachers could not effectively employ them in their practices. Some experienced teachers employed some strategies in their teaching only based on their experience.

Therefore, training would be needed to begin with pre-service teachers as early as possible. This would help improve pre-service teachers' effectiveness in future teaching and facilitate their professional development as in-service teachers.

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