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Chapter 4

Fitting the Western idea for Chinese higher education?⁴

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Abstract

We explored the beliefs of Chinese university teachers with regard to what the role of research in university teaching should be and their perceptions of how research is actually integrated into their current teaching practices. We also explored which factors relate to the teachers' perceptions of their integration of research into their teaching today. This chapter focuses on the Chinese subsample from the survey study to explore how the Western idea about integrating research into teaching for the benefit of student learning is adopted and adapted within a Chinese context. China differs from Western countries in terms of the educational traditions, the current higher education system and curricular designs, and the social-economic circumstances. Because of these differences, the Chinese context of higher education can expect to be incompatible with the idea to integrate research into teaching and therefore create tensions for adapting this Western idea into Chinese higher education. We surveyed 152 university teachers who teach English as a foreign language. The teachers were found to be very positive about the role research should play in teaching in an ideal situation, but nevertheless had low perceptions of their actual integration of research into their current teaching practice. To understand this gap, we analysed a number of individual background characteristics of teachers (i.e., research experience, time spent doing research, learner type, study abroad) in relation to their perceptions of how they have actually integrated research into their current teaching practices. We also took into account the institutional background (research intensive versus non-research intensive institutions). The teachers with more years of research experience, spent more time doing research and from research intensive universities were found to have more positive perceptions of their actual integration of research into their current teaching. In addition, the teachers themselves mentioned fixed curricula and a lack of time and student motivation as reasons for the observed gap. The biggest constraint, however, appeared to be the mismatch between the current aim of maximizing language proficiency in China and the need to prepare students for functioning in a world that requires ongoing learning and research competence.

4.1 Introduction

A strong relationship between research and teaching is often considered one of the defining features of the academic identity of a university (e.g., Robertson & Bond, 2005). However, there is little empirical evidence demonstrating a positive connection between research and teaching or showing how to bring research and teaching together (cf. Brew, 2003).

One way of bringing research and teaching together is to embed research in teaching, as many university programs are aiming to do today by engaging undergraduate students in research activities (e.g., Boyer Commission, 1998 in the US; Healey et al., 2010 in the UK; Wilson, Howitt, Roberts, Åkerlind, & Wilson, 2012 in Australia; van der Rijst & Visser-Wijnveen, 2011 in the Netherlands). It can be assumed that the idea of undergraduate engagement in research will also spread to Asian countries, including China, because Western educational ideas often travel quickly between nations in the form of educational reforms, research cooperation, and student exchanges (Dang, 2013). Chinese university teachers will face the same question about how to embed research in teaching and therefore have to re-think the role of research in their ongoing teaching.

Just how Chinese university teachers will adopt and adapt the idea of embedding research in teaching is unknown. This is because the goal of education is defined differently within the Chinese education system than within most Western education systems. The main goal of Chinese higher education is to foster Chinese economic development — a goal that is closely related to Chinese government policy (Hayhoe & Zha, 2006). In the case of teaching English as a foreign language (EFL), for example, the goal is to mainly develop the English language abilities of students and thereby provide a workforce capable of internationalizing the Chinese economy. An important goal of most Western education systems, in contrast, is to involve students in research and thereby prepare them to function in a complex and constantly changing world (Brew, 2010).

Chinese university teachers also face barriers which stem from a number of factors. First, the current Chinese education system lacks systematic research support (cf. Bai, Millwater, & Hudson, 2013). This situation obviously impedes the research endeavours of teachers and any attempts to bring research and teaching closer together. Second, Chinese university teachers also face the issue of separate funding and assessment for their research versus teaching activities. This is almost a widespread problem and one that persists in such Western countries as the UK and Australia (Brew, 2003). Moreover, language teaching is traditionally teaching-dominated (cf. Bai, Millwater, & Hudson, 2012). This means that the pedagogical and professional benefits of research are unclear for most language teachers in China (cf. Zhou, 2005). The desired incorporation of research into teaching is a complex problem to be solved, and particularly in the case of EFL teachers at Chinese universities.

In order to gain greater insight into the beliefs of teachers about the role of research should play in teaching today and their perceptions of how they have actually managed to integrate research into their current teaching, we surveyed EFL teachers from Chinese universities with regard to not only these issues but also how they relate to teacher background variables. In the following, however, we will first consider the relationship between research and teaching — that is, the research-teaching nexus — as described in the current research literature. We will then describe the policy context for research and language instruction in China.

4.1.1 The research-teaching nexus

The relationship between research and teaching has been explored mainly in two different ways. On the one hand, research on the beliefs of both teachers and students indicates that a positive connection between research and teaching should ideally exist (e.g., Deem & Lucas, 2007; Neumann, 1992; Robertson & Blackler, 2006). On the other hand, research on the empirical relationship between research productivity and teaching effectiveness has shown an almost zero correlation between the two (e.g., Hattie & Marsh, 1996). This zero correlation suggests that the links between high research productivity and good teaching may need to be strengthened (Marsh & Hattie, 2002).

One explanation for the apparent contradictory findings reported in the literature obviously lies in a missing link between the two streams of investigation. One stream explored teachers' beliefs about the connections between research and teaching in an ideal world, the other focused on the correlations between actual research and teaching performances. Little is known about how things look like when both beliefs and performance are investigated. Another possible explanation for the discrepancy may lie in the examination of the research and teaching activities as separate activities while the connection between the two may be more apparent in a context where both are clearly present — for example in a context where research is integrated into actual teaching practice (cf. Clark, 1997; Wilson, Howitt, Wilson, & Roberts, 2012). A new way to investigate the research-teaching nexus is thus called for.

4.1.2 Policies promoting research excellence in China

As the promotion of research excellence is growing in higher education in the West, the promotion of research excellence is reaching the core of higher education in Asian countries as well (cf. Tien, 2007). This is because knowledge in a knowledge-based economy provides a competitive advantage for the economic development of a country (Shin, 2012) and research productivity was thus emphasized in order to stimulate knowledge production and knowledge-based innovation.

Government policies promoting research excellence have meant increased funding for research in China (Wang & Liu, 2011) and increased efforts to build

world-class universities via two national projects in particular, namely the *211 Project* and the *985 Project* (e.g., Altbach, 2009; Hayhoe & Zha, 2006; cf. footnote in section 1.2.4).

Excellent research performance is increasingly being required for the recruitment of new staff members in Chinese higher education. The promotion and annual assessment of the overall performance of university teachers in China is also being increasingly closely related to their research performance (cf. Bai et al., 2012). And for Chinese academics, regardless of academic discipline, research excellence is often being taken as an indicator of competence and academic identity today (cf. Bai et al., 2013).

4.1.3 Economic development and the aim of language education

Language education in China today is mainly focused on increasing the language abilities of students to stimulate economic development and not so much preparing them for a complex, ever changing world that thus requires ongoing learning and research competence. China has a historical tradition of “education for governance,” as represented by the Imperial Exam system, which has traditionally been used to select and appoint high rank officials in the country (Niu, 2007). Presumably influenced by this tradition, current Chinese governmental policies also use higher education as an instrument to stimulate economic development (Hayhoe & Zha, 2006). The expansion of university enrolments since 1998 is one such effort to accumulate human capital and thereby stimulate economic development (cf. Wang & Liu, 2011). In the case of EFL teaching, the main aim is to foster English language proficiency and thereby promote the internationalization of the Chinese economy. Existing EFL curricula are designed to maximize language abilities and thus involve little or no research materials or research activities.

In keeping with China’s educational tradition, higher education students themselves also tend to perceive language education — including EFL education — as a means to climb the career ladder. Speaking English in China is indeed likely to “open doors to academic, professional and business success” (Jin & Cortazzi, 2002, p. 53). In the Chinese education system, moreover, English serves a gatekeeping function — via, for example, the National College Entrance Examination — for access to higher education (Jin & Cortazzi, 2002).

4.1.4 The present study and research questions

Higher education teachers in China face major social and economic barriers to incorporating research into teaching. On the one hand, the goal of most English language teaching is to maximize student language abilities and thereby insure employability but also help stimulate the economic development of China. On the other hand, the overall performance of higher education teachers is assessed in close relation to their research performance as opposed to how they have incorporated research into their actual teaching practices. Against this background,

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we therefore decided to survey EFL teachers from Chinese universities. We asked the following questions.

- How do teachers' beliefs about the ideal role of research in teaching relate to their perceptions of the actual role of research in their teaching practice?
- How do teacher background variables relate to their perceptions of the actual role of research in their teaching practice?

4.2 Method

4.2.1 Procedure and participants

In this chapter we reported on a sub-set of the survey data ($n = 152$). This part of the data was collected between December 2011 and January 2012 through distribution of a questionnaire to university teachers who teach English as a foreign language in a metropolitan area of Southwest China. The questionnaire was distributed at four meetings. Two of the meetings were the routine meetings for teachers from the College of Foreign Languages within a comprehensive research university in this area. A third meeting was the annual meeting held for the teachers of *College English* from some 40 universities in this metropolitan area. And a similar group of teachers attended the fourth meeting, held for the purpose of grading college English Tests. In order to maximize response rates, the teachers were also sent links to an online version of the questionnaire. The majority of the Chinese data, however, was supplied using the paper and pencil format of the questionnaire.

Our sample included university teachers who were strongly involved in research but also teachers with a strong focus on teaching and thus less involvement in research at the moment. The inclusion of teachers with a strong focus on teaching was done to gain an overview of the beliefs of all higher education EFL teachers about the role of research in teaching and not just the views of teachers already strongly involved in research. Given that the relevance of research for teaching is increasingly being recognized across the world, those teachers who are not currently involved in research will also be confronted with the need to incorporate research into their teaching in the not too distant future.

A total of 152 valid responses were received (response rate of 39%). Of the teachers who responded, 54 were from universities being supported by the 985 *Project*, which we will therefore refer to as research intensive universities; 37 were from other Chinese universities, which we will refer to as non-research intensive universities; for the remaining 61 teachers, information was not available about the type of university they worked for. There were roughly twice as many female teachers as male teachers. The majority of the teachers were under the age of 45 years (87%); held a master's degree (79%); could spend 5% to 20% of their work time doing research (63%); and taught courses that involved little research activities or research-related course materials (e.g., *College English*) (84%). The

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number of years of teaching experience but also research experience were roughly equivalent. In addition, 38% of the teachers had studied in the US, UK, Canada, or Australia for anywhere from three to twelve months. Only a small percentage of the teachers had actual teaching experience abroad. Table 4.1 presents more detailed information on the background characteristics.

Table 4.1
Overview of teacher background characteristics

Background characteristic		Number of respondents
Gender	Male/Female	49/98
Age	30 years or under	35
	31-35	42
	36-45	54
	46-55	17
	56 or over	2
Educational background	Bachelor's	24
	Master's	117
	Doctorate	7
Institutional background	Research intensive university	54
	Non-research intensive university	37
	Missing	61
Research experience (years)	Less than 3	41
	Between 3-10	75
	More than 10	31
Teaching experience (years)	Less than 5	33
	Between 5-10	33
	Between 10-15	40
	More than 15	43
Time spent doing research (percentage of total work time)	0%	14
	5% to 20%	87
	At least 25%	38
Course type	Non-research focus	124
	Research focus	8
	Both	16
Learner type	Language major	40
	Non-language major	73
	Both language and non-language majors	24
Study abroad	No/Yes	92/56
Teaching abroad	No/Yes	125/19

4.2.2 The questionnaire

The design of this questionnaire has been described in full in Chapter 2. The core section of the teacher questionnaire encompassed seven scales addressing the role of research in teaching, in general, and the teachers’ beliefs about the ideal role of research in teaching and the teachers’ perceptions of the actual role of research in their own teaching, in particular. The role of research in teaching in the survey study refers to the goals of integrating research into teaching. In other words, it is about the learning outcomes for the students intended by the teachers in their integration of research into teaching (see section 2 in Appendix 1).

The seven scales for the core of the teacher questionnaire were thus: 1) developing creative disposition; 2) developing critical disposition; 3) fostering student research interests; 4) enhancing research skills; 5) prompting student reflection on research; 6) familiarizing students with current research; and 7) encouraging student participation in research. The same questions were posed with regard to the teachers’ ideal and actual teaching situations. More detailed information about the scales and their measurement reliabilities can be found in Table 4.2.

Table 4.2
Seven scales and reliability of their measurement (Cronbach’s alphas) for teacher beliefs and perceptions regarding the role of research in teaching

Scale	α	Sample item
<i>Ideal/Beliefs</i>		
		Ideally in my teaching, I would...
Creative disposition	.85	• foster students’ sense of innovation.
Critical disposition	.83	• stimulate students to not be easily satisfied with an explanation.
Student research interests	.76	• encourage students’ interest in research.
Research skills	.81	• increase students’ ability to conduct research.
Current research in the domain	.84	• make links to current research practices.
Reflection on research	.80	• stimulate students to learn about research findings.
Students as participants	.78	• ask students to make a contribution to research.
<i>Actual/Perceptions</i>		
		In my actual teaching practice, I...
Creative disposition	.85	• foster students’ sense of innovation.
Critical disposition	.83	• stimulate students to not be easily satisfied with an explanation.
Student research interests	.77	• encourage students’ interest in research.
Research skills	.81	• increase students’ ability to conduct research.
Current research in the domain	.85	• make links to current research practices.
Reflection on research	.85	• stimulate students to learn about research findings.
Students as participants	.85	• ask students to make a contribution to research.

The questionnaire that we administered also included questions regarding the demographic and background characteristics of the teachers, including gender, age, institutional background, years of teaching experience, years of research experience, time spent doing research, type of course taught, type of learner taught, study and teaching experience abroad.

In addition to the core questionnaire items and background questions, we also included an open-ended question. Teachers were asked to give specific reasons for any discrepancies they perceived between their ideal beliefs and actual perceptions regarding the role of research in university teaching. Only 30 teachers (20% of the respondents) replied to this open-ended item: 11 from research intensive universities; 11 from non-research intensive universities; and 8 from unidentified universities.

4.2.3 Data analysis

We applied nonparametric tests to analyse our data because the assumptions of normality and homogeneity of variance were not met by most of the questionnaire scales.

To answer our first research question and thus determine the relationship between the teachers' beliefs about the ideal role of research in teaching and their perceptions of the actual role of research in their current teaching, we applied Wilcoxon signed-rank tests.

To answer our second research question and thus determine how the background characteristics of the teachers relate to their perceptions of the actual role of research in their teaching, we applied Kruskal-Wallis tests. The 61 respondents lacking information on the type of university for which they worked were excluded from the analysis where the institutional background was investigated.

Finally, to explore the explanations provided by the teachers themselves for the discrepancies between their beliefs about the role of research in teaching, on the one hand, and their perceptions of the actual role of research in their own teaching, on the other hand, we analysed their responses to the open-ended question. We first identified all of the reasons mentioned by the teachers and assigned descriptive codes to these. We then grouped the descriptive codes into more general descriptive categories. In the end, three core categories of explanation could be identified for the data: reasons pertaining to the institution, the students and the teachers themselves.

4.3 Results

4.3.1 The role of research in teaching

When the teachers' beliefs about the ideal role of research in teaching were analysed in relation to their perceptions of how they have managed to incorporate

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research into their own teaching, major discrepancies were detected. The median scores and Wilcoxon signed-rank test results are displayed in Table 4.3.

Table 4.3

Comparison of university teachers' beliefs about and perceptions of the role of research in teaching (Wilcoxon signed-rank test)

Scale	n	Median		Z	r
		Ideal	Actual		
Creative disposition	112	4.33	3.33	-8.24***	.55
Critical disposition	110	4.13	3.00	-8.79***	.59
Student research interest	112	4.00	3.00	-8.26***	.55
Research skills	112	4.00	2.67	-8.44***	.56
Current research in the domain	111	4.00	2.67	-8.10***	.54
Reflection on research	112	3.75	2.50	-8.85***	.59
Students as participants	109	3.75	2.50	-8.46***	.57

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$.

Significant gaps were found between the teachers' beliefs about the ideal role of research in teaching and their perceptions of the incorporation of research into their own actual teaching for all seven scales with large effect sizes in all cases (r above .50). This finding shows that even though the teachers may strongly believe that research should play an important role in teaching, they are not necessarily integrating research into their current teaching practices.

Inspection of the median scale scores showed the seven aspects of the role of research in teaching to be ranked differently by the teachers for both ideal and actual teaching situations: The development of students' creative dispositions ranked highest; encouragement of student participation in research and student reflection on research ranked lowest. This pattern of findings suggests that teachers consider fostering students' creativity the key role for research in teaching; encouraging student participation in research and encouraging reflection on research were considered less important by the teachers in our study.

4.3.2 Relationship between teacher background characteristics and teacher perceptions

To further understand the gaps detected between the teachers' beliefs about the role of research in teaching and their perceptions of the actual role, we explored how a number of background characteristics of the teachers relate to their perceptions of actually integrating research into their teaching. Kruskal-Wallis tests were used, and three patterns of associations occurred (see Table 4.4).

First, the teachers' institutional background appeared to matter more than their other background characteristics. Teachers who came from research intensive

universities had significantly higher perceptions of how well they integrate research into their own teaching practices than teachers from non-research intensive universities.

Table 4.4

Relations between background characteristics of teachers and their perceptions of the integration of research into actual teaching (Kruskal-Wallis tests)

Scale	Institutional background ^a	Research experience ^b	Time spent doing research ^c	Learner type ^d	Study abroad ^e
Creative disposition	+	ns	ns	ns	ns
Critical disposition	+	ns	ns	ns	ns
Student research interest	+	ns	ns	ns	ns
Research skills	+	+	++	ns	ns
Current research in the domain	ns	ns	ns	ns	ns
Reflection on research	ns	++	++	ns	ns
Students as participants	+	+	+	ns	ns

Note. ^aMean ranks: non-research intensive universities, research intensive universities; ^bMean ranks: less than 3 years, 3-10 years, more than 10 years; ^cMean ranks: 0%, 5%-20%, 25%; ^dLanguage major, non-language major, mixed; ^eStudied abroad or not.

ns $p > .05$. + $p < .05$. ++ $p < .01$.

Second, the amount of research experience and time spent doing research mattered most for the teachers' perceptions of three aspects of the integration of research into their current teaching: Developing research skills, encouraging student reflection on research, and encouraging student participation in research. Those teachers with more than 10 years of research experience scored significantly higher than those with 10 or less years of experience. Those teachers who spent 25% or more of their work time on research were similarly more positive about these aspects of the integration of research into their teaching than those who spent 5%–20% of their work time on research and those who were currently not involved in research.

Third, no significant differences were found in teachers' perceptions of how they integrate research into their teaching when the type of learner was considered or the teachers' experiences with study abroad were considered. That is, the perceptions of the integration of research into their own teaching did not differ for those teachers who taught language major students versus those who taught non-language major students. The perceptions of the integration of research into their own teaching also did not differ for those teachers who had studied abroad versus those who had not.

4.3.3 Teacher explanations for the gap

In an open-ended question the teachers were asked to offer possible explanations for the ideal-actual gap experienced in the integration of research into teaching. Three general sets of reasons were mentioned by the teachers: structural aspects of the institutions; motivation and abilities of the students; and motivation and research training of the teachers (see Table 4.5).

Table 4.5

Frequency of explanations offered by teachers for discrepancies between ideal and actual integration of research into teaching (n = 30)

Category	Non-research intensive university (n = 11)	Research intensive university (n = 11)	Unknown (n = 8)
<i>Institutional</i>			
lack of time	2	2	3
fixed curriculum	2	1	2
central aim of the language courses	2	2	-
big class size	-	1	1
lack support for student research	-	-	1
<i>Students</i>			
lack of motivation	3	5	3
weak language abilities	3	-	2
<i>Teachers themselves</i>			
lower status of the course in general	3	-	-
lack of teacher motivation	-	4	-
lack of research training/experience/knowledge	1	-	2

Structural aspects of the institution were mentioned most often by the teachers as a source of difficulty for the integration of research into actual teaching practice. The teachers from the research intensive universities mentioned the same aspects of the institution as the teachers from the non-research intensive universities. One aspect was lack of time or, in other words, being too busy with heavy teaching tasks to even think about ways to incorporate research into teaching. Another aspect was a fairly fixed curriculum that thus allowed little or no room for teachers to incorporate elements of research into their teaching. A third aspect of the institution involved difficulties reconciling integration of research into teaching with the institutional aim of improving student language proficiency. Or, stated differently, it could be a problem of not seeing the relevance or value of integrating research in teaching for language learning. A few of the teachers also mentioned large class sizes and a lack of support for student research as reasons for the ideal-actual gap for the incorporation of research into teaching.

Student motivation and weak language abilities were mentioned second most often by the teachers as a possible explanation for the ideal-actual gap. Eleven teachers mentioned a lack of student motivation for involvement in research activities due to an interest in mostly passing the language exams and mastering the practical skills of fluent speaking, listening, reading, and writing. Five of the teachers mentioned weak language skills, which appeared to be particularly problematic for the teachers working at the non-research intensive universities.

The third set of possible reasons mentioned by the teachers for the ideal-actual gap involved the teachers themselves. The teachers from the different types of institutions mentioned different reasons, however. The teachers from the research intensive universities mentioned not being motivated to incorporate research into their teaching. This is perhaps due to an overwhelming emphasis on teachers' own research performance as opposed to their integration of research into teaching. The teachers from non-research intensive universities reported that college English is not considered as important as other core courses in the Bachelor's program. It is likely that this perceived lower status for language education therefore did not motivate them to improve their teaching in this respect. Three teachers (one from the non-research intensive universities, and two from the unknown group) also mentioned that they seldom had the time or opportunity for research training. This implies that they therefore lacked sufficient research experience and knowledge to include research in their teaching.

4.4 Discussion and conclusions

Regarding how teachers' beliefs about the ideal role of research in teaching relate to their perceptions of actually integrating research into their ongoing teaching practice, a significant gap was detected. Moreover, the teachers considered the integration of research into teaching to stimulate a creative disposition on the part of students most important; encouragement of student participation in research and reflection on research were considered least important.

To better understand the ideal-actual gap, we found the teachers who perceived to have better integrated research into their teaching practice to come from research intensive universities, had more years of research experience and spent more time doing research. The type of learner being taught (i.e., language or non-language majors) and teacher experiences with studying abroad did not relate to their perceptions of how they have integrated research into their actual teaching. Teachers themselves also mentioned a couple of additional limiting factors that contribute to this gap: institutional factors (lack of time, heavy teaching tasks and fixed curricula); lack of student motivation and insufficient English proficiency; lack of teacher motivation and low status of language teaching within the institution.

4.4.1 Highly valued but not practiced: Integrating research into language teaching

The finding that the teachers in our study highly valued the incorporation of research into English language teaching can be considered surprising. This is because the teaching of English as a foreign language (EFL) to students in China is overwhelmingly concentrated on the development of language proficiency, which is widely assumed to not be achieved via the incorporation of research into teaching practice. The fact that the teachers still value the incorporation of research into teaching thus comes as a surprise.

The reasons for the teachers in our study highly valuing the incorporation of research into their teaching probably stem from the imposition of Western educational ideas on the Chinese education system (cf. Dang, 2013; Grigorenko, 2007). Higher education in China has not only adopted Western education models (Altbach, 1989), it also features many scholars educated in the West and frequent visits from scholars coming from the West. International research cooperation and student exchange programs have also presumably promoted the adoption of Western educational ideals (Dang, 2013). In 1998, the Boyer Commission in the USA stimulated the engagement of all undergraduate students in research. Other Western scholars have pointed out that the integration of research into teaching heralds a new way of learning and teaching that can better prepare students to function in a highly complex and ever changing world (e.g., Brew, 2003). And the idea of integrating research into teaching was easily introduced into higher education in China.

Another reason for the teachers in our study highly valuing the incorporation of research into teaching may stem from the Chinese teachers, indeed, perceiving an increased need to prepare students to function in a highly complex world. While establishment of language proficiency is the central task of current higher language education in China, this focus may shift in the near future. For example, as the national level of English language proficiency improves, the further development of these abilities may not be as urgent as today. As the economy of China grows, moreover, the society is changing into a knowledge society, which means that students must develop the skills needed to deal with the massive amounts of information that characterize a knowledge society. Perhaps some awareness of these changes has predisposed Chinese university teachers to adopt the Western idea of integrating research into teaching in order to adequately prepare students to function in an increasingly complex world.

It is worrisome to see such a large gap between the positive beliefs of the teachers about the ideal role of research in teaching and their low perceptions of the actual incorporation of research into their own teaching practices. This ideal-actual gap can nevertheless be explained by the previously observed mismatch between what research-based teaching can presumably achieve and the institutional aims of attaining maximum language proficiency. The teachers in our research believe that

the integration of research into teaching can be used to promote a creative disposition on the part of students, but current approaches to language education in China require a focus on the promotion of English language proficiency. China has a 1,000 year old history of using imperial examination to produce state officials (Niu, 2007). Education has also often been used as an instrument for governance (Hayhoe & Zha, 2006). Such a cultural legacy, together with the internationalization of the Chinese economy, has made it necessary to focus on improving the language abilities of students in China. Today's language curriculum has been designed to achieve this goal, which means that students also enter such courses with the aim of improving their language abilities. These social-cultural and economic conditions can nevertheless create tensions for language teachers who want to meet the broader needs of students and therefore integrate research into their teaching practices. This assumption is confirmed by the teachers in our research mentioning a fixed curriculum, lack of student motivation, and low level of student language proficiency as reasons for the discrepancies between what they would like to do and what they have managed to do with respect to the integration of research into teaching.

In addition to the mismatch of the desired versus actual purposes of higher education language instruction in China today, the way teacher performance is assessed may also indirectly contribute to the ideal-actual gap observed for the incorporation of research into teaching. University language teachers clearly have a teaching focus in their work, but their performance and particularly promotion possibilities are assessed in close consideration of their research performance (cf. Bai et al., 2013). This way of assessing may account for our finding that higher education language teachers feel largely undervalued, on the one hand. On the other hand the teachers are not encouraged to adjust their teaching practices to include research components in their current teaching. The teachers have to surmount various barriers if they want to do so against the institutional aims of maximizing language proficiency. And any teacher efforts to integrate research into their teaching may also go largely unrecognized and definitely not be rewarded within the current system with the emphasis on maximizing language proficiency. These mismatches, tensions, and thus the ideal-actual gaps experienced by university language teachers are not expected to disappear in the near future.

To gain further insight into the worrisome ideal-actual gap, we also analysed the teachers' perceptions of the integration of research into their own teaching practices in relation to their professional background characteristics. The most relevant background variable was found to be the type of institution that the teacher worked for. Teachers from research intensive universities perceived the actual integration of research into their own teaching more positively than teachers from non-intensive research universities. Research intensive universities have been, by definition, engaged in research for a much longer period of time, have an

established research culture, and typically receive more research support from the Chinese government (cf. Altbach, 2009; Hayhoe & Zha, 2006).

In keeping with the above, more years of research experience and more time spent on research during work were also found to be associated with more positive perceptions of the teachers' actual integration of research into their teaching. This shows both research experience and time for research to affect a teacher's perception of incorporating research into their actual teaching practice. This finding was further confirmed by our finding that the teachers explicitly mentioned a lack of research experience and lack of time as obstacles to the integration of research into their teaching. Lack of time appears to be a universal problem for academics engaged with both research and teaching (Bai, Millwater, & Hudson, 2013). Lack of time affects not only their endeavours to do research but also their endeavours to integrate research into teaching as found to be the case in the present study.

In contrast to the above, those teachers with experience studying abroad did *not* perceive the integration of research into their teaching more positively than those with no such experience. This finding can be interpreted in two ways: Either that the local situation is too dominant to be influenced by the ideas of teachers returning from abroad or that the experiences of those teachers who have studied abroad for a couple of months have been too short to exert any observable effects on their subsequent teaching. In future research, the length and quality of the experiences of teachers studying abroad should be further examined in conjunction with their teaching in a Chinese context. Does a longer period of study abroad foster integration of research into subsequent teaching in China? And what other aspects of the study abroad experience appear to be important?

4.4.2 Closing remarks

Our findings show the Chinese language teachers to highly value the idea of integrating research into teaching but nevertheless a major gap exists when it comes to their actual integrating research into their own teaching. We found a number of constraints to contribute to this gap, but the biggest appeared to be the mismatch between the current aim of maximizing language proficiency and the need to prepare students for functioning in a complex world. Our findings show that the application of Western educational ideas within a Chinese context is a highly complex task that must be done with utmost care and attention to possibly conflicting traditions and local norms. The relevance and applicability of the Western ideas must be carefully assessed. And in the present case, the incorporation of research into university language teaching may need a reconsideration.

Perhaps research need not be integrated into *every* teaching course. It is possible, for example, that the current language education curriculum in Chinese universities should be made more flexible and teachers given room to decide what

to do themselves. For instance, conditions for the integration of research into teaching may differ depending on the level of teaching and level of language proficiency. Managers, policy makers and university teachers should certainly be encouraged to have dialogues among each other regarding these aforementioned issues. Topics of such dialogues may include, for example, how to explore ways to incorporate research into their teaching of different types of courses and thereby discover whether and how the inclusion of research in their teaching can possibly lead to new ways of teaching and improving the language abilities of students. And if it is decided to integrate research into a particular type of course, findings in this chapter can help to raise awareness of a gap in the beliefs versus actual practices of teachers concerning research integration into teaching. More support should be provided for the teachers' endeavours to do this. For example, the evaluation of professional performance should take the integration of research into actual teaching into account. Once the merits of integration of research into university teaching are better appreciated within the Chinese educational environment (cf. Clark, 1997), Chinese teachers will have or can develop the capacity to better integrate research into their actual teaching.

