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Peer feedback in teacher professional development

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Chapter 5

Novice Teachers' Appraisal of Expert Feedback in a Teacher Professional Development Programme in Chinese Vocational Education

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Abstract

This study explores novice teachers' appraisal of expert feedback in a professional development programme for vocational schoolteachers. Twelve novice teachers in different school subjects were interviewed after the programme. An appraisal framework with four domains and 12 appraisal categories was built based on coding and analyzing interviews transcripts. In addition, the most frequently occurring appraisal categories and the differences between Chinese language teachers and vocational subject teachers are analysed qualitatively. These findings reveal novice teachers' concerns and expectations about expert feedback as well as provide an appraisal framework for future studies on feedback in teacher learning activities.

5.1 Introduction

In the context of Chinese vocational education and training (VET), feedback from expert teachers is commonly used in many teacher professional development (TPD) programmes to improve novice teachers' teaching. The title 'expert teacher' in China is usually granted by local education committees and given to teachers who have a long teaching experience and outstanding teaching contributions. Some typical activities conducted in teacher development programmes in China are, for example, lesson observations, novice-expert interactions, teacher apprenticeship and master-teacher studios. All these activities involve feedback from expert teachers on novices' teaching, and research has shown that these activities can have positive effects on novice teachers' teaching ability and students' learning (Cui, 2012; Jin et al., 2019; Shao & Zhou, 2013; Zheng, Zhang, & Wang, 2019). In addition, studies from other countries also have evidenced the positive effect of some other forms of expert feedback. For instance, 'video clubs' involves feedback in the form of 'discussions in video club' and 'suggestions and comments on teaching videos', which is found to effectively shift teachers' focus from themselves to students and make teachers begin to relate their pedagogy to student thinking (Sherin & Han, 2004). A more specific impact of expert feedback is studied in the term of mentoring. Mena, Hennissen, and Loughran (2017) found that teacher mentors' role in a mentoring programme affected their feedback to pre-service teachers, and that it caused different learning outcomes. For example, non-directive feedback with less input has been found to improve pre-service teachers' learning of generalized knowledge of practice, while directive feedback with more input often leads to the enhancement of situation-specific knowledge.

Although the effect of expert feedback on novice teachers' learning is widely evidenced, few studies are focusing on the perspectives of novice teachers. Studying novice teachers' perspectives on expert feedback provides information regarding novice teachers' needs and concerns and helps to identify the feedback they perceive as useful for their teaching practice. Thus, to improve the effectiveness of expert feedback in the TPD context, a better understanding of how novice teacher view expert feedback is needed. The purpose of the current study is to examine novice teachers' appraisal of expert feedback in the context of a TPD programme in the Chinese VET context.

5.2 Review of research on the appraisal of feedback

Learners' appraisal of teacher feedback has been studied by numerous researchers in the fields of higher education and second language learning (Meerah & Halim, 2011; Vattøy & Smith, 2019). However, only a few studies examined how teachers evaluate feedback provided by more experienced peers. To provide more insights on teachers' appraisal of expert feedback, we first review studies on feedback content and then on teachers' appraisal of feedback.

5.2.1 Feedback content

The effect of feedback relies not only on how it is formulated, but also on the information it conveys by the provider. Thus it is necessary to make clear what kind of feedback is usually provided to novice teachers in general before we go deeper into novices' appraisal of it. A look into existing feedback practice in the TPD context provides us with some general aspects of feedback content. For example, Chien (2017) examined a TPD programme called 'teaching demonstration', where a group of in-service English teachers were asked to observe each other's teaching and provide feedback to each other on eight aspects, i.e., lesson structure, classroom management strategies, learning activities, teaching strategies, teacher's use of materials, teacher's use of language, students' use of language, and student interaction. Ma, Xin, and Du (2018) studied a teacher online learning programme, in which teachers are asked to provide feedback on each others' teaching plan from three perspectives, i.e., teaching analysis (teachers' analysis of the learners capabilities and needs, and teaching goals), teaching design (the design of learning activities and development of teaching materials), and pedagogies (instruction method and student-teacher interaction). Karagiorgi (2012) also studied a teaching observation activity in a TDP programme for primary school teachers. In the programme, teachers were provided with an observation instrument that allowed them to provide feedback to each other with respect to teaching method, student-teacher interaction, and classroom organization, and including some general comments. In addition, Soslau (2015) focused on developing a feedback protocol to guide the discussion between teacher educators and student teachers. Based on both previous literature and a self-study on her own experience with teaching observations, a protocol with 15 questions was developed. The main questions considered students' prior knowledge, the strategies used to engage students,

teaching objectives, students' feelings about the lesson, and teachers' reflections on the lesson. The above mentioned studies make clear that the feedback to teachers is mostly about the learning and teaching process in class including both instruction and interaction with and among students.

In addition, the specific context may also influence the feedback provided during a TPD programme. Previous research has found that VET students in China show more behaviour problems in class than students in general schools (Ren, 2018; Ma, Zhao, Han, & Zhao, 2018). This might mean that VET teachers, and novice VET teachers in particular, need feedback that focuses on motivating students, managing their classes, adapting their teaching to their students' ability, and setting their goals based the background of their students. In addition, some popular ideas in the Chinese VET context may also be suggested to the novice teacher. One of these ideas is called the 'vocation-oriented teaching method', which requires teachers to relate teaching to students' vocational specialty (even for teachers who teach general subjects, such as Chinese language and English language). This practice is regarded as a good way to motivate vocational students to learn both vocational and general subjects by many important researchers (e.g. Xu, 2012).

5.2.2 Teachers' appraisal of expert feedback

Many studies have examined the effect and addressed the importance of feedback in the terms of 'peer observation', 'mentoring conversation' and 'performance feedback on teaching' (Herbert, Allen, & McDonald, 2018; van Ginkel, Oolbekkink, Meijer, & Verloop, 2016; Sockman & Sharma, 2008). For example, in their study on adaptive mentoring, van Ginkel et al. (2016) found that adapting the mentoring conversation to novice teachers' reflective capacities is one of the most important activities recognized by mentors. The authors claimed that only if novice teachers understand how expert feedback is related to reflections on their functioning would this feedback be effective for their learning and teaching practice. However, what kind of feedback is most appreciated by novice teachers is still not systematically examined, because authors who study mentoring of novice in-service teachers focus more on the procedures and effectiveness of the programme, instead of the content and evaluation of mentors' feedback.

Although, a few studies do provide relevant information for the current study. Wynn, Carboni, and Patall (2007) surveyed beginning teachers' perceptions of mentoring programmes by examining four aspects of mentoring procedures: 1) adequacy of mentors to address concerns, 2) usefulness of mentor feedback, 3)

clarity of understanding of mentoring procedures and 4) adequacy of time to interact with the mentor. The first two were valued the most by novice teachers. More specifically, the support novices wish to receive from their mentors were found to be emotional support, suggestions on paperwork, information about school procedures and feedback on teaching strategies and classroom management. Löfström and Eisenschmidt (2009) also touched upon novice teachers' evaluation of feedback from their mentors. They interviewed 16 novice teachers and asked questions about their relationship with mentors. These novice teachers expressed their satisfaction with both positive and negative feedback from their mentors, the positive feedback was regarded as helpful for developing their professional identity, and the negative feedback was considered as a trigger of their reflection. Another example comes from Thurlings, Vermeulen, Bastiaens, and Stijnen (2012b) who observed, interviewed, and surveyed 12 primary school teachers who participated in a TPD programme involving peer feedback. Their findings showed that teachers usually valued peer feedback that was goal-directed, specific, detailed and neutral as effective, whereas ineffective feedback was often person-directed, vague, non-detailed and either too positive or too negative. In addition, Nami, Marandi, and Sotoudehnama (2016) examined five English teachers about their perception of the different phases of lesson study, and they found that teachers preferred critical reviews over positive feedback because teachers believed that critiques are more meaningful for improving the quality of the lesson plan.

Previous research provides valuable perspectives on what feedback novice teachers may receive from expert teachers and how novice teachers may think about the feedback provided by expert teachers. However, these findings are rather general, without specific information on how and why novice teachers appraise particular feedback. To improve existing feedback-based TPD programmes, a more in-depth understanding of novice teachers' appraisals of expert feedback seems to be necessary. Thus, we formulated our research question as:

- How do novice teachers in Chinese vocational education appraise expert feedback in a TPD programme?

5.3 Method

5.3.1 Setting

This research was carried out within the Standard Training Programme for Novice Vocational School Teachers in Shanghai (China). It was an annual programme developed and organized by the Shanghai Municipal Education Committee and the Institute of Vocational and Technical Education of Tongji University (Shanghai, China). The programme aimed to support the development of novice VET teachers by providing them opportunities to interact with expert teachers in their subject domain. These expert teachers were full-time in-service teachers in vocational schools, and there was no formal power relation between expert and novice teachers. The novice teachers participated voluntarily in the programme, and the expert teachers were paid by the local government to work as consultants in this programme.

In the programme at hand, novice and expert teachers were divided into different groups based on the school subjects they teach. Every group consisted of 8-12 novice teachers and 3-5 expert teachers. In the feedback session, novice teachers presented their teaching video one by one, and after having watched each video, the expert teachers provided feedback to the presenter. In this interaction with a novice teacher, the expert teachers were leading because the expert teachers were expected to be consultants in the context of this programme. All novice teachers in the same group could attend each other's interaction meeting, which they usually did, while in most cases only expert teachers provided feedback to the presenter.

5.3.2 Participants

To study the novice teachers' appraisals of expert feedback, individual interviews were conducted to collect data from novice teachers who have participated in the programme. Invitation e-mails were sent to all the novice teachers ($n = 144$) participating in the programme, and a total of 15 novice teachers responded positively to the invitation. However, three of these respondents failed to attend the interview due to their busy schedule. Table 5.1 shows the characteristics of the respondents. Research clearance has been obtained from the Ethical Committee of ICLON Graduate School of Teaching, Leiden University, file number: ICLON-IREC 2019-09.

Table 5.1 Characteristics of the participating novice teachers

Name	Gender	Teaching experience	School subjects
John	Male	1–2 years	Chinese language
Martha	Female	1–2 years	Chinese language
Ellie	Female	2–3 years	Chinese language
Sophie	Female	1–2 years	Chinese language
Amy	Female	Less than 1 year	Chinese language
Emma	Female	Less than 1 year	Chinese language
Louis	Male	1–2 years	Photography
David	Male	Less than 1 year	Electro-mechanical engineering
Alice	Female	Less than 1 year	Electro-mechanical engineering
Jake	Male	Less than 1 year	Animation
Henry	Male	Less than 1 year	Electro-mechanical engineering
Sarah	Female	1–2 years	Accounting

5.3.3 Data collection

In order to construct an interview protocol to investigate participants' appraisals of expert feedback, typical feedback content needed to be extracted from expert teachers' feedback dialogues. In a pilot study, we transcribed the audio recordings of four feedback sessions in this TPD programme. The four transcripts were segmented and coded based on different feedback content through a bottom-up analysis procedure. The analysis yielded 74 specific categories, which were then clustered into 10 types of feedback content (see Table 5.2). The 10 types of feedback were aiming at 10 aspects of novices' teaching practice, i.e., explanation and summarization, assessment and evaluation, students' experience, teaching content, professional development, lesson design, task and homework, teaching material, engagement, students' future vocation.

These 10 feedback types were included in the interview protocol to prompt novice teachers' appraisals of expert feedback (see Appendix C for the interview protocol). In addition, each of the feedback types was followed by two concrete examples in the interview protocol, so as to help novice teachers to understand the feedback types. Novice teachers were asked to evaluate all 10 types of feedback by indicating how these were addressed in their meeting with expert teachers and how

valuable these were for them. Each interview usually started with a general question: "Out of the 10 types of feedback, which one do you think is the most important and relevant for you? And why?" After the respondents elaborated on their perceptions of the most important feedback, the first author continued with follow-up questions covering all other types of feedback. Some typical follow-up questions were "is there another feedback type you got from expert teachers during the programme besides what we just talked about?" and "so we just talked about the most important ones, then how do you think about feedback type (number and type, e.g., 6. 'improve your lesson design'[see Table 5.2]) ?".

Table 5.2 Ten types of feedback and examples

Feedback types	Teaching aspects	Examples
1. Provide proper explanation and summary for your students	Explanation and summarization	<p>“Give a more precise explanation for students when introducing a new concept.”</p> <p>“Provide summary at the end of the lesson to emphasize the main point.”</p>
2. Assess and evaluate your students	Assessment and evaluation	<p>“Observe students’ reaction in the class and provide feedback.”</p> <p>“Encourage your students by providing more compliments when assessing their homework.”</p>
3. Relate your teaching to students’ experience	Students’ experience	<p>“Use cases that students have experience with.”</p>
4. Arrange the lesson according to the main point of teaching content	Teaching content	<p>“Relate the current lesson to what students’ prior knowledge.”</p> <p>“Remove irrelevant cases.”</p> <p>“Relate task and homework to the main point of the lesson.”</p>
5. Work on your long-term professional development	Professional development	<p>“Ask support from colleagues when you have a problem in teaching.”</p> <p>“Improve your knowledge and experience on the subject content.”</p>
6. Improve your lesson design	Lesson design	<p>“Re-arrange the sequence of your presentation.”</p> <p>“Prepare intriguing questions in the introduction part of the lesson.”</p>
7. Provide proper tasks and homework	Task and homework	<p>“Adapt the tasks/homework to your students’ level.”</p> <p>“Provide more clarity about what students have to do for their tasks and homework.”</p>
8. Improve the quality of teaching materials	Teaching material	<p>“Include the latest concept and information in your teaching materials.”</p> <p>“Use different forms of teaching material.”</p>
9. Engage with your students	Engagement	<p>“Encourage students to present and share work with each other.”</p> <p>“Include more interactive activities in your teaching to motivate students.”</p>
10. Relate your teaching to students’ future work situation	Students’ future vocation	<p>“Use the authentic task that happens in students’ future workplace.”</p> <p>“Make examples with real cases in the workplace.”</p>

5.3.4 Coding procedures and analysis

To answer the research question (How do novice teachers in Chinese vocational education appraise expert feedback in a TPD programme?), the coding and analysis of the 12 interviews were carried out in the following four steps:

Label the transcribed text. After transcribing the audio-recorded interviews, the text was labelled based on the aspects from which novice teachers appraised the 10 types of feedback. The authors used a coherent and continuous opinion towards certain feedback as an analysis unit, no matter the length or the number of sentences. Each unit of analysis was labelled as one appraisal, and 197 units of analysis were preliminarily labelled throughout the entire transcript. Moreover, the authors also marked the analysis units with feedback types to explore the relationship between particular appraisal categories and types of feedback. In Table 5.3, a labelled excerpt from an interview transcript is provided as an example.

Table 5.3 Coded excerpt from an interview transcript

Text	Labels	Categories
<p>Researcher: "Then how about the feedback type 'improve quality of teaching materials'?"</p> <p>Ellie: "I don't think it's very practical and valuable. It's the same cause (with another feedback talk before), how can you improve it? <u>In Chinese literature teaching, improving the material usually involve providing extra information about the literature, giving more explanation and exploring the value of the literature, there is a risk of over-interpretation. I doubt if it will work out well.</u>"</p>	<p>Potential risks in implementing feedback (F8)</p>	<p>Feedback benefit (F8)</p>
<p>Researcher: "Ok, but this type of feedback is not only about the explanation of literature, it's also about adapting and changing the improper content of teaching material."</p> <p>Ellie: "Oh, if so, this feedback is valuable to some extent, but still it's not very practical. <u>For new teachers, you have to have enough content knowledge to find out the improper content, and then change them into a proper way, that won't be easy.</u>"</p>	<p>The current level limited the use of feedback (F8)</p>	<p>Teacher expertise (F8)</p>

Note: this appraisal is on feedback type 8 'improve quality of teaching materials'.

Generate and adjust the categories. After the preliminary labelling, the labels were merged based on the similarities of the main issues that novice teachers concerned about when appraising specific expert feedback. For example, labels such as

‘problems in managing students’, ‘don’t have enough experience’ and ‘already be able to do so’ were all included in the category ‘teachers’ expertise’. In total, 23 categories were generated. After that, a discussion between co-authors found that there was still overlap and similarity between some of these concepts. Therefore, the 23 categories were merged again, and this led to 13 categories. To check inter-rater reliability, an independent researcher was invited to code 10% of the data independently by using the 13 categories. Inter-rater reliability was determined by comparing the ratings of the independent coder and the first author ($n = 22$; Cohen’s $\kappa = 0.788$ with a 95% confidence interval $0.602 < \kappa < 0.974$). Subsequently, differences were discussed, which led to the final 12 distinct appraisal categories. Important changes based on the inter-rater reliability check were: 1) a category called ‘potential risks’ was merged into the category ‘feedback benefit’ because the ‘risk’ was a negative evaluation of feedback benefit instead of an independent appraisal category; and 2) some specific labels were re-categorized, for instance, two labels classified as ‘personal needs’ previously were re-categorized as ‘teacher expertise’ because in the transcript when the novice teachers evaluated certain feedback as unnecessary for them, they actually meant the feedback does not fit their current level of teaching expertise.

Group categories into domains. In a further discussion among co-authors, it was found that the final 12 appraisal categories described factors in different aspects of novice teachers’ work and learning. Then we grouped them into four main domains based on the different aspects (i.e., ‘characteristics of feedback’, ‘characteristics of teacher’, ‘characteristics of VET’, and ‘professional development needs’).

Calculate the frequencies. The frequencies of the four domains and 12 appraisals related to 10 types of expert feedback were counted to identify the most frequently mentioned appraisal categories and to show the relationship between appraisal categories and feedback types (see Appendix D).

5.4 Results

In Table 5.4, we provide an overview of the 4 domains and 12 appraisal categories, with an example for each appraisal category. The definition and typecasting of these appraisal categories are elaborated with examples. The findings were also interpreted based on the frequencies of the appraisal categories in relation to feedback types (see Appendix D).

Table 5.4 The list of appraisal categories and the examples

Appraisal domains	Appraisal categories	Examples
Characteristics of feedback	feedback benefit	Martha: "It's important, I think, because a well-designed homework can help you to examine your student, so you know if they truly understand, and on the other hand, it extends your students' knowledge of what they had learned in the class."
	feedback frequency	David: "Actually I already can't remember some of the feedback you presented here, but this one about lesson design is very impressive for me because I remember that the expert teachers give me a lot of suggestions about this during the meeting, which makes me pay more attention to it."
	feedback specificity	David: "Mr. Zhang (an expert teacher) not only provide me with some principles of lesson design, but also showed me his own lesson plan and some of the teaching tools made by himself. His design and teaching tools are very visual and specific, and I can do that for my students too."
	feedback adaptiveness	Amy: "It depends on the specific teaching content. For example, I can use some cases or examples related to students' future vocation when teaching practical writing, but there are a lot of lessons that have nothing to do with students' vocational specialty."
Characteristics of teacher	teachers' expertise	Amy: "I think this one is very valuable, because I'm not good at designing lesson, and I do sometimes stray from the topic when teaching."
	teachers' belief	Jake: "I was told to remove some of the irrelevant cases, but I believe these cases can interest my students. I think it would be very hard to motivate my students if I based my teaching barely on the textbook."
	teachers' lessons	Louis: "I don't have that problem ('engage with your students'), because my courses are based on practice training. I have to keep guiding my students on how to operate the camera and how to film through the whole training course, so we have to be engaged, it's not like giving lectures."

Table 5.4 (Continued)

Appraisal domains	Appraisal categories	Examples
Characteristics of VET	students' characteristics	Sophie: "I don't think the creative homework will work out in my class. The vocational students care more about their vocational specialty, rather than the Chinese language."
	school conditions	Sophie: "We usually don't change the teaching material by ourselves, because we have a plan on what and how many lessons need to be taught in each week, it is planned by the Teaching and Research Group (a widely conducted school-based teacher learning community in China). If you want to change the material you use or even change the consequence, you need to inform the group. I don't want to make thing complicated."
	opportunities and resources	John: "Long-term professional development involves a lot of issues. You need to learn from others, communicate with peers, and participate in professional development programmes, but there is not enough cooperation between our school and teacher education institutions."
Professional development needs	external pressure	Henry: "Just like an expert teacher said, this job may be replaced by AI technique in several years. Who knows if this subject I teach may be cancelled in 5 years...they (expert teachers) can share some advice, guidance or experience about how to cope with these situation in general, which is valuable for my long-term development."
	personal needs	John: "As a beginning teacher, currently I don't think I need to do so. I need to focus more on my basic expertise and competency."

5.4.1 Characteristics of feedback

The first appraisal domain 'characteristics of feedback' shows how novice teachers value expert feedback based on their evaluation of feedback features, which consists of four appraisal categories: 1) **benefit**, which is novice teachers' general estimation on how certain feedback may help/hinder their teaching practice; 2) **frequency** describes how frequently certain feedback is provided by expert teachers, and can influence novice teachers' perceptions of the value and importance of particular feedback; 3) **specificity** refers to how detailed the feedback is; specific feedback often targets concrete issues that novice teachers encountered and provides detailed steps on how to improve teaching practice; 4) **adaptiveness** means the transferability of feedback, which indicates whether certain feedback can be applied to multiple teaching situations and content.

In this domain, 'feedback benefit' is the most frequently mentioned appraisal category, and it is related to many different feedback types. The example provided by Martha in Table 5.4 shows how she evaluated the potential benefit of the feedback type 'improve your lesson design' for her teaching practice. Similarly, when appraising the feedback type 'assess and evaluate your students', Sarah reported, "I agree with experts' suggestion on assessing my students more constantly, because this can provide me more information about what problem my students have, and so I can pay more attention to it."

In addition, novice teachers who teach different school subjects seem to have different concerns related to the feedback types 'feedback specificity' and 'feedback adaptiveness'. We found that 'feedback specificity' is mostly appraised by novice teachers who teach a vocational subject. As shown in Table 5.4, David, who teaches electro-mechanical engineering, appreciated the specific feedback he received from expert teachers in the programme. His example also indicates the reason why specific feedback is necessary for novice teachers who teach vocational subjects. Vocational subject teachers need to make procedural knowledge 'visual' to their students, which means that they profit from being informed how to present the knowledge step by step with the help of 'teaching tools'.

The appraisal category of 'feedback adaptiveness' is mostly mentioned by Chinese language teachers when appraising the feedback type 'relate your teaching to students' future work situation'. The reason is explained by Amy as shown in Table 5.4, who does not know how 'relate your teaching to students' future work situation' should be applied in language teaching. Another Chinese language teacher

Sophie also commented, “how am I going to know their future work situation...of course, it would be nice if I can use some materials or cases that are related to their vocational specialty, but it’s not very feasible.”

5.4.2 Characteristics of teacher

The domain ‘characteristics of teacher’ contains appraisal categories that refer to novice teachers themselves. This domain is most usually mentioned by novice teachers when expressing their perceptions of how expert feedback can be adapted to their practice. Three specific appraisal categories are included: 1) **expertise**, which indicates whether the feedback is fit to novice teachers’ current level of teaching; 2) **belief** refers to novice teachers’ understanding of teaching, which includes teachers’ values, perspectives, judgments, personal theories and practical principles; and 3) **lessons**, which is the school subject a teacher teaches, and it includes novice teachers’ consideration of how the nature of the lesson may influence their implementation of expert feedback.

‘Teachers’ expertise’ is the dominant appraisal category in this domain when novice teachers appraise expert feedback because ‘you have to have enough pedagogy and experience to support your teaching practice, you can’t just do that (implement expert feedback) based on nothing’, as stated by Henry, one of the novice teachers. Moreover, ‘teachers’ expertise’ is also used widely by novice teachers to evaluate many different feedback types. For example, a Chinese language teacher John expressed his negative attitude towards feedback type ‘relate your teaching to students’ experience’ because he thought he was not able to implement it with his current teaching level:

“They (expert teachers) made this suggestion because they are better at managing the class and have more knowledge about students’ experience, but I don’t have that experience and knowledge to do so, that’s why I think this feedback doesn’t suit me.”

Limited expertise is also a reason why David evaluated the feedback type ‘provide proper tasks and homework’ negatively, as he mentioned, “providing proper tasks means you need to make your tasks adaptive to every student...paying attention to every single student in the class and knowing their different level is too hard for me.”

Another finding about ‘characteristics of teachers’ is that the appraisal category

'teachers' belief' is used mostly by Chinese language teachers when appraising feedback types 'relate your teaching to students' experience' and 'relate your teaching to students' future work situation'. As already mentioned in Section 4.1, Chinese language teachers may have different opinions on how they can relate their teaching to their students' future work situations. Concerning the feedback type 'students' experience', there are different kinds of 'experience' that a Chinese language teacher could relate to when teaching literature, and language teachers tend to teach based on their own preferences and choices, explained by John:

"They (expert teachers) suggested me to relate to students' life experience to make it more understandable for them, but I already built the scaffold by reviewing the prior lesson. I think my students can understand easily ... of course their feedback is very good, but there is no perfect way in teaching language and literature. I want to try my own way first and see how it may work out."

5.4.3 Characteristics of VET

The domain of VET characteristics refers to the features of both the general system of VET in China and the specific VET school where the novice teacher works. 'Characteristics of VET' is also referred to very often by novice teachers. This domain contains three appraisal categories: 1) **students' characteristics**, which refers to whether the feedback is adaptive to vocational students' interest, personality, experience and current level; 2) **school conditions** are the supports and restraints at novice teachers' schools, and these conditions are usually regarded by novice teachers as important factors that affect their implementation of feedback; and 3) **opportunities and resources** refers to the chances and supports a novice has to implement certain feedback.

Within the domain of VET characteristics, the most frequently mentioned appraisal category is VET students' characteristics. Adapting new teaching strategies and methods to students is considered by novice teachers as the biggest challenge when implementing feedback. Martha, one of the respondents, commented in her interview, "vocational school students differ in many ways, such as their personalities, interest and academic level...how to make teaching appropriate for every student is a challenge." Concerning the relationship between appraisal categories and feedback types, 'students' characteristics' is also commonly considered by novice teachers when appraising many feedback types that involve

engaging or motivating students, such as ‘relate your teaching to students’ experience’, ‘provide proper tasks and homework’, ‘engage with your students’, and ‘relate your teaching to students’ future vocation’ (see also Appendix D).

The appraisal category ‘school conditions’ is mainly related to teachers’ appraisal of feedback type ‘improve quality of teaching materials’. The reason for this might be that the use of teaching materials is dependent on school regulations and curriculum plans. Table 5.4 shows that Sophie refused to change her teaching material because the teaching material is determined together with her colleagues, and she needs to inform the group before she changes her teaching plan or teaching material.

‘Opportunities and resources’ is a unique appraisal category that is only used by novice teachers to appraise the feedback type ‘work on your long-term professional development’. For instance, Martha had a positive appraisal of expert feedback on her long-term professional development because of sufficient resources and support from her school. She reported in the interview:

“I agree, and I’m actually doing that...We have some teaching skill competitions, and I and my colleagues participated as a team, so we have a lot of chance to discuss many issues during the activity... besides, other teachers in my school are all very nice and willing to help with my problem.”

5.4.4 Professional development needs

The domain ‘professional development needs’ indicates how the expectations of novice teachers on their future development may influence their attitudes towards different types of feedback from expert teachers. Compared to the other three domains, novice teachers mentioned the domain of ‘professional development needs’ less. This domain contains two appraisal categories, and these are mentioned relatively less in the interviews than the appraisal categories in the other three domains. The first appraisal category ‘**external pressure**’ refers to the pressures on novices teachers’ development caused by school regulations, policy requirements and technology development. **Personal needs**, on the contrary, means the internal needs of novice teachers, which usually involve teachers’ interests and learning goals.

In this domain, ‘external pressure’ is mentioned more frequently than ‘personal needs’, and it is also found that ‘external pressure’ is mostly mentioned by teachers who teach a vocational subject, rather than Chinese language teachers. The latter

finding might be related to the effect of technology development on teaching vocational subjects. Henry, who teaches bench work in a VET school, expressed his worry about how to keep up with the technology development, and he therefore appreciated the feedback type 'work on your long-term professional development' (see Table 5.4). This concern about technology change is very typical among vocational subject teachers. Louis also commented "In this field (photography), equipment, software, and editing concepts, etc. are all being updated very rapidly...if we don't learn and updated ourselves, what we can teach our students would be outdated, and my students wouldn't be interested."

5.5 Discussion and conclusion

In the current study, novice teachers' appraisal of expert feedback was examined in the context of a TPD programme in Chinese VET schools. The main contribution of the study was that we built an appraisal framework with 4 domains and 12 appraisal categories based on novice teachers' perceptions of different feedback types. In addition, we reported the most frequently mentioned appraisal categories, different appraisals from novice teachers who teach different school subjects, and the relationship between appraisal categories and feedback types. Based on these findings, we discuss three main points.

5.5.1 The pragmatic demands of novice teachers

The four domains generated in our appraisal framework are 'characteristics of feedback', 'characteristics of teacher', 'characteristics of VET', and 'professional development needs'. Findings of the current study show that novice teachers refer a lot to 'characteristics of teacher' and 'characteristics of VET' when asked about their appraisal of expert feedback, which indicates novice teachers' pragmatic attitude towards expert feedback. Their concerns show how they are trying to adapt particular expert feedback to the authentic teaching practice and the specific challenges they encounter. This can be regarded as a unique and original contribution of this study because previous research focused merely on the features of feedback. For example, Thurlings et al. (2012b) found four main dimensions that were underlying teachers' appraisals of peer feedback, i.e., goal/person-directed, specific/general, detailed/non-detailed and positive/negative. Another example is a study on postgraduate students' perceptions of feedback from their university lecturers (Meerah & Halim, 2011), where it was found that students appraise their

lecturers' feedback in terms of frequency, timing, and quality.

Another finding supporting this argumentation is that the specific appraisal categories 'feedback benefit', 'teachers' expertise', and 'students' characteristics' are commonly mentioned when novice teachers evaluate all different kinds of feedback content. This suggests that being beneficial for their future practice, being suitable for novice teachers' current level, and adapting to students' characteristics are the three basic features of effective feedback, no matter what the feedback content is. In the interviews, novice teachers also stressed their expectation of being able to use expert suggestions to solve their practical problems, and they frequently mentioned their concerns with authentic teaching situations. These results are supported by previous research on mentoring, such as van Ginkel *et al.* (2016) who found four adaptive mentoring activities by interviewing 18 mentor teachers. Two of the adaptive mentoring activities are about teachers' expertise, referring to 'adapting the mentoring conversation to novices' reflective capacity' and 'building tasks from simple to complex based on the novices' competence level'. Thus, we emphasize the importance and value of practical advice during the feedback session in TPD programmes.

5.5.2 Different concerns of teachers in different school subjects

Some differences were found between Chinese language and vocational subject teachers, which may imply that teachers in different subject areas have different concerns about expert feedback. The appraisal categories 'feedback adaptiveness' and 'teachers' belief' were both mentioned usually by Chinese language teachers when appraising the feedback type 'relate your teaching to students' future work situation'. This result illustrates how popular education concepts may influence feedback provision as well as feedback receiving among teachers. In the Chinese VET context, teachers are suggested teaching in a vocation-oriented way, also for teachers who teach general subjects. This is because relating teaching to students' vocational specialty is expected to promote students' interest in studying both vocational and general subjects (Xu, 2012). Some Chinese language teachers from the current programme seemed confused with this educational idea, because much of the content in language teaching has nothing to do with students' vocational specialty. This finding indicates that the idea of suggesting all VET teachers to teach in a vocation-oriented way, needs to be reconsidered. In addition, 'teachers' belief' was also referred to by Chinese language teachers when appraising feedback type 'relate your teaching to students' experience', and it could be explained by the

characteristics of language teaching. Borg (2006) has found that teaching language requires a teacher to have a wide range of knowledge, so they can be creative and flexible in their classroom and provide various cultural perspectives to their students. This means that there are many different kinds of 'student experience' that Chinese language teachers can touch upon in their teaching, such as students' prior knowledge on the subject content, life experience, and cultural perspectives. Chinese language teachers' could make such decisions based on their own beliefs.

Concerning vocational subject teachers, the appraisal categories 'feedback specificity' and 'external pressure' were frequently mentioned when appraising expert feedback. As suggested by many previous researchers, vocational subjects are supposed to be taught in a competence-based and vocation-oriented method, and teachers should be adaptive coaches and role models who provide enough skills training (de Bruijn, 2012; Wijnia, Kunst, van Woerkom, & Poell, 2016). Thus, teachers in vocational subjects need to combine their professional skills and pedagogy, and that might cause them to be concerned with 'feedback specificity', such as how to transfer expert feedback into concrete steps in their teaching of procedural knowledge. In addition, the characteristics of vocational subjects also explain novice teachers' concerns about 'external pressure' because teaching a skill-related subject requires teachers to update their knowledge and keep pace with the rapid development of technologies in today's world. This is also argued by other researchers in the VET field, such as Broad (2016). She emphasised that VET teachers need to keep updating their knowledge through workplace learning, which is crucial for them to transfer vocational knowledge from occupations to classrooms.

5.5.3 The generalization of the appraisal framework

Although the current study is based on a Chinese VET context, we argue that the appraisal framework we built can be used as a generic tool in different vocational education contexts and other education sectors. There is only one domain that is specifically about the context, i.e., 'the characteristics of VET', and some of the appraisal categories in this domain may present a number of unique results. For example, the appraisal category 'students' characteristics' is one of the most commonly mentioned appraisal categories in our study. A possible reason for this is that VET students often have more behaviour problems, lower learning motivation, and lower performance compared to students in general secondary schools in the Chinese context (Ren, 2018; Ma, Zhao, Han, & Zhao, 2018), and this could urge novice teachers to consider how to apply expert feedback in a way that helps their

students most. Taking into account the specific context seems worthwhile when building a framework for investigating feedback, also in other education sectors, such as special education, higher education and early childhood education. For instance, Finlay, Kinsella, and Prendeville (2019) examined the special challenges and needs in the development of primary teachers in special classes. Some context-related challenges were managing challenging behaviour, suitably motivating pupils and assessing the needs of children. The support special education teachers need in their professional development are help from Middletown Centre for Autism, principal involvement and suggestions from the school psychologist. All these local and contextual concerns of special education teachers can be well appraised by the domain ‘characteristics of VET’ in terms of ‘students’ characteristics’, ‘school conditions’ and ‘opportunities and resources’, although the name of the domain should be changed when it is used in other education sectors.

5.5.4 Limitations and suggestions for further research

We compared the differences between teachers who teach different subjects in a qualitative way. The participants were roughly grouped into Chinese language teachers and vocational subject teachers, and the vocational subject group consisted of four different subjects. Also, female teachers were dominant for the Chinese language group, whereas the vocational subject group contained more males. Therefore, the differences between the two groups of teacher could be affected by irrelevant variables. We suggest future studies to focus on the effects of the school subjects on teachers’ appraisal of expert feedback in a more strictly designed context.

When analysing the data, the frequencies of each appraisal category were calculated, however, these frequencies were merely interpreted qualitatively. Future research might conduct quantitative research on comparing teachers who teach different school subjects and exploring the association between feedback types and appraisal categories as a follow-up of the qualitative results we found in the current study.

5.5.5 Practical Implications

The comprehensive framework of appraisal domains and categories highlights the importance of novice teachers’ features and the characteristics of the context when evaluating expert feedback. This has consequences for mentors and educators, who are supposed to provide feedback that is adapted to the level of mentees and the

specific educational context. This would mean that mentors and teacher educators need more practical experience in the similar teaching situation that novice teachers are struggling with so that they can provide more realistic and relevant feedback for novices' teaching practice. Furthermore, novice teachers' concerns with regards to 'characteristics of VET' also show that the environment, resources, and opportunities are associated with novice teachers' development, which places a demand on school management. Flexible regulations, subsequent teaching resources, supportive colleague relationships, and responsible leadership would be necessary for novice teachers to apply what they learned from expert feedback into practice.

Some most frequently mentioned appraisal categories are found to be 'teachers' expertise', 'students' characteristics' and 'feedback benefit', which suggest these are the fundamental issues all novice teachers concern about. These results provide important information for mentors and teacher educators on what they should focus on when giving feedback and how they should formulate their feedback. We suggest that mentors and teacher educators should provide feedback that fits the level of novice teachers and their students, and the benefits of feedback should be explained to novice teachers to enhance their acceptance of the feedback.

Different appraisals were found between Chinese language teachers and vocational subject teacher, which provides insight into the different learning needs of teachers in different school subjects. Their different learning needs should also be taken into consideration when organizing teacher induction or TPD programmes involving feedback. For example, feedback with various perspectives and alternative methods that can be used in different conditions may be more useful for a language teacher, whereas highly detailed and specific feedback may be more appropriated for novice teachers in technical subjects.

