Chapter 11

K-12 Chinese Language Teachers' Perceptions of Classroom Portfolio Assessment

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Abstract

As an approach of assessment *as* learning, classroom portfolio assessment (CPA) has received much attention in the language assessment community. In this study, ten K-12 Chinese language teachers in U.S. schools were interviewed to examine their understandings, perceptions, and implementations of CPA. Overall, corroborating the findings of previous questionnaire studies on the assessment literacy of language teachers, the participants demonstrated rather limited knowledge of CPA (i.e., a knowledge gap). In addition, while the benefits of CPA were recognized by the participants, they showed little interest in implementing it in their classrooms (i.e., a gap between teacher thinking and classroom practice). These two gaps are discussed in light of the importance of a strong knowledge base for effective implementation of CPA and external factors that may affect teachers' motivation, intention, or decision to implement CPA. It is recommended that language teachers be provided with systematic initial training and

professional development in CPA; and that contextual constraints on the implementation of CPA be recognized and support be provided to teachers to promote their professional learning of language assessment.

Introduction

In educational assessment, there has long been a call for moving away from relying on a single, fixed-choice test to assess students to incorporating multiple ways of assessment that have a focus on student performance and using assessment to promote student learning and growth (Popham, 2014). Scholars broadly differentiate between two types of assessment: summative and formative assessment. While summative assessment, also known as assessment *of* learning, evaluates what students have achieved after a period of learning, formative assessment refers to an ongoing process where assessment activities are constantly undertaken by the teacher to diagnose what students know and do not know so as to adjust his/her instruction and provide feedback to students to improve their motivation and learning (Black & Wiliam, 1998). Because of its purpose to support student learning, formative assessment is often understood as assessment *for* learning (Stiggins, 2002). Along with the distinction between Assessment *of* and *for* learning, scholars also highlight assessment *as* learning (Dann, 2002), which refers to the activities that actively involve students in the assessment process such that the experiences of being assessed can promote students' reflection on learning, improve their learning motivation and efficacy, and help them become self-regulated learners (Lam, 2014).

Many forms of non-traditional or alternative assessment with a strong formative purpose have been discussed in the literature for teachers, portfolio assessment being a major one of them (Fox, 2017). In classroom-based assessment or teacher assessment (Davison & Leung, 2009; Rea-Dickins, 2008), a portfolio refers to a systematic or purposeful collection of student work

samples (e.g., essays and presentations) selected and maintained by students themselves over a significant period of time (e.g., a semester or even longer) (Brown & Abeywickrama, 2010; Popham, 2014). Accordingly, portfolios consist of two major types: working or developmental portfolio and showcase portfolio (Popham, 2014). The former refers to portfolios being developed to show student learning process and progress, whereas the latter shows the best work of students with a purpose to impress others. Whichever is the purpose, classroom portfolio assessment (hereafter, CPA) is characterized by students' active reflection on their own learning through selecting entries to go into the portfolio, their development of self-assessment skills, and teachers using conferences to provide ongoing support for students. Another major characteristic of CPA is that students' selective entries for their respective portfolio can vary. Thus, CPA provides a good opportunity for the teacher to give individualized assessment and learning support for students, although the process may pose a challenge to the teacher, which we will discuss in detail later. Essentially, the implementation of CPA requires close cooperation between the teacher and students; and opportunities for students to "learn about learning" and "value themselves as learners" (Paulson et al., 1991, p. 60).

In language assessment, over the past two decades, along with an increasing emphasis on language performance, communicative language teaching, and the sociocultural approach to language learning, CPA has received much attention (Fox, 2017; Hamp-Lyons & Condon, 2000; M. Yin, 2014). The affordances and benefits of CPA have been widely discussed, and various frameworks for implementing it have been proposed (Cummins & Davesne, 2009; Delett, Barnhardt, & Kevorkian, 2001; Hamp-Lyons & Condon, 2000; Lam, 2014). Delett et al. (2001), for example, delineates seven steps for foreign language teachers to design and

implement CPA systematically, including (1) plan the assessment purpose; (2) determine portfolio outcomes; (3) match classroom tasks to outcomes; (4) determine organization of the portfolio; (5) establish criteria for assessment; (6) monitor the portfolio process; and (7) evaluate the portfolio process (pp. 561- 564). Standards for language teachers or teacher preparation programs often indicate that teachers be (trained to be) versatile and flexible with diverse forms of assessment, including CPA, to assess students' language performance and support their long-term proficiency development (ACTFL, 2013; NEALRC & CLASS, 2007).

Interestingly, however, the recognition of the benefits of CPA does not suggest that it has readily become an integral component of language teachers' classroom assessment or been effectively implemented by language teachers. As a finding of a large survey on post-secondary foreign language teachers in the United States (Bell, 2005), about 70% of the participants reported that portfolio assessment "can be used to validly and reliably measure student achievement in the foreign language" (p. 264). Yet, Shohamy, Inbar-Lourie, and Poehner (2008) found in another survey study that portfolio assessment was actually valued much less than traditional forms of assessment like written exams. Overall, portfolio assessment has been noted as unpopular with language teachers (Hamp-Lyons & Condon, 2000; Lam & Lee, 2009).

The aforementioned gap between recognition and implementation can perhaps be understood from the perspective of the teacher, an active decision maker that plays a critical role in influencing what happens in the classroom (Borg, 2006). Research on teacher cognition and language teaching has revealed a close yet complex relationship of what is, or is not, going on in the classroom with a number of factors intrinsic (e.g., knowledge base and beliefs) and extrinsic (e.g., context of teaching and support) to the teacher (Borg, 2006; M. Yin, 2014). While a teacher may embrace the idea of CPA and think it deserves to be implemented in his/her classroom,

perceived challenges and potential obstacles may result in negotiation and renegotiation of his/her choice, and may eventually discourage him/her from actually conducting it (Fox, 2017; M. Yin, 2014). Because of the many considerations for successful CPA implementation, there are many expectations of the teacher, from planning the assessment purpose to determining portfolio organization and outcomes, and from establishing criteria for assessment to conducting conferences with students to provide individualized feedback (Delett et al., 2001; Fox, 2017; M. Yin, 2014). Teachers may thus feel it overwhelming to conduct CPA, even though they may be well cognizant of its benefits. This may be particularly the case when they perceive that they have not received adequate training in conducting CPA, there is limited interest or cooperation from students, or there are constraints due to policies in disaccord with the ethos of CPA (Lam & Lee, 2009; M. Yin, 2014).

Despite a possible agreement based on the foregoing discussion that CPA implementation is related, albeit in a complex way, to language teachers' perceptions, little research has examined the issue by listening to the actual "voices" of teachers or based on actual perceptions elicited from teachers. In a notable study, Lam and Lee (2009) reported that the instructors of a writing course for two-year, sub-degree students in Hong Kong were overall enthusiastic about their implementation of the CPA, and no teacher seemed to have reported any challenges or obstacles that had discouraged them during the implementation process. Although the authors did not discuss why the instructors responded very positively, it might be that CPA was required of the instructors, who might have been well trained to implement the CPA and have received a lot of support for conducting it. None of these factors may

necessarily be the case in other contexts. In other words, the study may be a success story told rather than suggests that it would be the case for all language teachers across contexts.

In addition, Lam and Lee's (2009) study, and current discussions and existing empirical studies on CPA in language classrooms in general (e.g., Aydin, 2010), focused on teachers of adult learners in an English as a Second/Foreign Language (ESL/EFL) context. There has been little research on this issue with a focus on teachers and classrooms of young learners of Chinese as a Foreign Language (CFL), the number of which has been gradually increasing over the past decade in K-12 schools in the United States. Compared to adult learners of Chinese (or any foreign language), school-aged learners are less mature with monitoring their learning behaviors and learning progress, which could pose a challenge for the teacher to implement CPA given its emphasis on active learner involvement (e.g., selection of entries, self-assessment, and active reflection) (Lam, 2014). On the other hand, the very fact that young learners are cognitively and metacognitively less mature suggests that more formative assessment should be conducted to support their learning and growth. Popham (2003), for example, particularly pointed out that school-aged students' abilities to self-assess and reflect should be nurtured as part of the teacher's implementation of CPA. Thus, the implication and significance of conducting CPA seems even broader for teachers of young Chinese language learners.

To address the aforementioned research gap, this study examined K-12 Chinese language teachers' perceptions and classroom implementation of CPA, based on the data elicited through semi-structured interviews. This paper aims to answer the following three questions.

1. How do K-12 Chinese language teachers in the U.S. understand and perceive CPA?

2. How, if at all, do they conduct CPA in their classrooms?

3. What factors are associated with their perceptions and (non-)use of CPA?

Method

Participants

Because its primary focus was to elicit teachers' voices to unravel the complexity and nuance of CPA implementation in K-12 Chinese language classrooms, the present study adopted the case study method, which answers "What," "How," and "Why" questions with minimal control from the researcher (Duff, 2008; R. Yin, 2013). The participants were ten CFL teachers in K-12 schools in the United States. They were selected, contacted, and later voluntarily participated in this study because of their connections with the authors and personal interests in this study.

As shown in Table 11.1, the ten participants' backgrounds, experiences, and teaching contexts showed notable differences, despite the fact that all were female native Chinese speakers and most held a master's degree in Curriculum and Teaching from an American university and were certified by State Departments of Education to teach Chinese language and culture in public schools in the U.S.

[INSERT TABLE 11.1 HERE]

Data Collection and Analysis

Data were collected through semi-structured interviews, which were conducted online with each individual participant in Chinese through Skype and were also audio-recorded for subsequent analysis. Consent to participate was obtained through a form emailed to and signed by a participant before she was interviewed. Following a protocol, each interview was divided into two sessions (with a short break in between) that lasted one and half to two hours, and consisted of three major parts: (1) teacher background, such as the information reported in Table 11.1; (2) understandings, perceptions, and practices of classroom-based assessment; (3) professional development needs in language assessment. As a component of the second part, the participants

were asked questions on their understandings and perceptions about CPA and the implementation of it, if any, in their classrooms. They were also probed to share further details that would help enlighten on their reported perceptions and implementations.

The audio-recordings of the interviews were transcribed verbatim and subsequently analyzed through thematic analysis (Ayres, 2008) in which meaningful segments of the scripts about CPA were thematically coded with key words or short phrases based on the research questions (e.g., understandings or implementation). As a consideration for *credibility* (Lincoln & Guba, 1985), the four authors went through the coding process separately to scrutinize the participants' responses with regard to (1) their knowledge base of CPA (i.e., their understandings about what CPA is and what major characteristics underpin CPA), (2) perceptions of CPA (e.g., its potential benefits and challenges of implementation), and (3) the actual implementation, if any, of CPA in their own classrooms. On the basis of each other's separate initial coding, the authors met to synthesize themes and patterns that emerged from the participants' reports in correspondence to the focus of each research question.

Results

Teachers' Understandings and Perceptions of CPA

Our first research question sought to understand K-12 Chinese language teachers' understandings and perceptions of CPA. To address this research question, during the interview, we first asked the participants whether they knew what portfolio assessment is. In the case of a positive response, we further elicited their understandings by asking them to describe what they knew about portfolio assessment (e.g., key tenets and characteristics). On the other hand, when a teacher responded that the concept had not been heard of before, a definition would be provided,

and subsequent exchanges would be conducted between the interviewer and the teacher so as to elicit the teacher's views on CPA and intention to use it in his/her classroom.

As an overall result, the interviews revealed that the participants' understandings about CPA were rather limited. While some teachers reported having heard of portfolio assessment, further elicitations revealed that not all of them demonstrated clear and deep understandings (e.g., reasoning on major underlying principles and processes of CPA); and the reported understandings were not always consistent, either. In a few cases, further probing suggested that the teachers' claimed knowledge could be based on their *ad hoc* inference on what portfolio assessment means. In other words, they seemed to have known little about portfolio assessment; nevertheless, they claimed that they knew it and then drew upon the meanings of the two constituent words (i.e., *portfolio* and *assessment*) to give an on-the-spot interpretation. Consequently, the understandings demonstrated in the interview were reasonably shallow and crude if not wrong.

For example, in Excerpt 1 below (all excerpts are English translations of interview transcripts in Chinese), Yijia, a Grade 1 teacher in a private school in California, is reflecting on her previous experience at another school and reports that portfolio assessment is simply a compilation of the projects that students have previously conducted. In other words, the interpretation of portfolio assessment is narrowly focused on the word *portfolio* itself, that is, putting a collection of students' artifacts in a folder. There is thus a question as to whether she has paid attention to the *assessment* component and used the assessment process to encourage and promote her students' reflection on learning.

Excerpt 1 (Yijia)

Portfolio is actually about putting together the projects that students have done. This is what

we did previously, putting projects of different thematic units [in a folder] ...

This seems to be similarly the case for Huarui and Meilu, who also taught young learners but

in public schools in Texas and Wisconsin, respectively. During the interview, Huarui, for

example, indicated that she knew what portfolio assessment meant and that she had actually done

a lot of "portfolio assessment." However, as Excerpt 2 shows, her understanding, like Yijia's,

obviously was narrowed to the concept of portfolio itself rather than what portfolio assessment is

about and how it involves students in the assessment process. Meilu's response shows a similar

pattern ("*I created a portfolio for each one of them [students]. This is required by the school.*

You [the teacher] must collect work samples etc. for students."). Essentially, Huarui, Meilu, and

Yijia seemed to hold the same view that portfolio assessment is all about a folder where students'

work samples are stored. In addition, all of them seemed to suggest that portfolios are organized

and maintained by the teacher rather than students themselves, which might be related to the

young age of their students (i.e., elementary grades), an issue we will revisit later.

Excerpt 2 (Huarui)

We've done a lot of this ... actually portfolio assessment is like a folder. You [the teacher]

can put students' homework, projects, etc. in a folder or an electronic one ... as their

portfolio... it is informal. Every student has his/her own folder.

While the above excerpts are typical examples of some teachers' responses that showed their

narrow interpretation, if not misinterpretation, of portfolio assessment, there were also a few

cases (e.g., Shenlu and Ya-Hsi) where the teachers seemed to have been aware of the formative

and "assessment *as* learning" function of portfolio assessment. For example, in the following

excerpt, Shenlu, a high school teacher in Arkansas, reports that she used a rubric to guide her

students to extract sentences from those that had been constructed by the students for their previous classroom assignments. Although it is unclear from the excerpt what the rubric was like and how eventually the extracted sentences, maybe together with other student artifacts, were assessed, an inference seems legitimate that through the activity, she aimed to promote students' reflection on the quality of their language production and used the rubric to facilitate and nurture that reflection (i.e., which level of the rubric corresponds to which set of previously constructed sentences).

Excerpt 3 (Shenlu)

I previously gave students a rubric … then they needed to, [following the rubric], extract sentences from those that they constructed before, or in other words, extract sentences from their previous assignments that met the requirements [described in the rubric]. They were then asked to copy these sentences on a new sheet. This is perhaps portfolio assessment.

The rare cases of teachers demonstrating an in-depth understanding about the ethos of CPA are represented in the following sharing by Ya-Hsi, an experienced teacher who taught middle schools for many years in Chicago (see Table 11.1). As Excerpt 4 shows, Ya-Hsi was apparently well cognizant of the affordance of CPA for tracking students' long-term Chinese learning process, and the opportunity it offers for students to reflect on their learning progress and pay attention to their strengths and weaknesses. Her sharing also highlights her understanding that the student rather than the teacher should take the primary responsibility for maintaining the portfolio (in this case, a folder accessible to both the student and the teacher on a Cloud storage space).

Excerpt 4 (Ya-Hsi)

We started portfolio assessment from this year. It [portfolio assessment] is not limited to a semester or a year; it goes as long as the whole period of their Chinese learning [in the school] ... my school's World Language department provides us with a lot of guidance [on designing and implementing portfolio assessment]. This year what I have done for my students is, I created a folder on Google Drive as the portfolio for each student. Every time they have finished a project or a major classroom assessment, I will ask them to put [relevant materials] in that folder. At the end of this year, when they go through what they have put in the folder, they will ponder over the whole process and likely feel they have gained a lot from it ... they will be aware where they are ... in other words, students need to monitor themselves. The monitoring can help them understand what their strengths and weaknesses are.

Teachers' Implementation of CPA / Intention to Implement CPA

Our second research question focused on the teachers' implementation of CPA. During the interview, we asked the teachers to what extent they had used CPA in their classrooms, or intended to use it in the case of those who reported not knowing the concept but later discussed it with the interviewer. Several interesting scenarios emerged. For example, some teachers (e.g., Jingjing) indicated that they had not used or did not intend to use portfolio assessment; others (e.g., Yijia, Meilu, and Huarui), while claiming they had used it, perhaps had not because they seemed to have only maintained a folder / portfolio for their students rather than engaged the students in the assessment process (see Excerpts 1 and 2).

Interestingly, for both scenarios, after the interviewer explained what successful CPA was like (e.g., what roles the teacher and students should respectively take), they did not respond enthusiastically on possible implementation of it in the future, even though they did not deny its

benefits. Only a couple of the participants, such as Shenlu and Ya-Hsi, who demonstrated a fairly good understanding about what CPA is as reported earlier, indicated some yet limited implementation in their classrooms that reflected the key principles of CPA. Nevertheless, these teachers, like the more others who indicated little interest in implementation, also reported a number of challenges, which is a focus of the following part.

Factors Associated with Implementation

In addition to eliciting whether CPA had been, or would be, implemented by the teachers, we were also interested in how they would make sense of their implementation / intention to implement, or rather the lack thereof for many of them. This was the focus of the third research question, which was concerned with the factors associated with the teachers' report on CPA implementation. To this end, we probed all teachers, for example, with questions like "*what possible challenges do you see in the use of portfolio assessment in your classroom*," to share their perceptions of challenges and obstacles.

There was overall a consistent pattern across the participants, whether or not they had implemented CPA before, that CPA was a welcoming method to assess students and support their learning and long-term language development; yet the teachers shared many challenges that prevented or discouraged them from either adopting CPA or putting CPA into its full use in their classrooms. Several major teacher-intrinsic and extrinsic factors (Borg, 2006) that emerged from the teachers' sharing are presented in detail below.

Knowledge base. A major teacher-intrinsic factor that influenced the teachers' (intention of) implementation, or the lack thereof, seemed to be their lack of a good understanding about the key tenets and details of designing and implementing CPA (refer to the findings presented earlier on the teachers' understandings and perceptions of CPA). Thus, it does not seem surprising that a

majority of the teachers reported their lack of training in CPA, and consequently, the lack of a strong knowledge base as a major reason for their little interest in implementing it.

Concerns about appropriateness for students. Most factors reported by the teachers did not actually pertain to the teachers themselves (i.e., teacher-extrinsic). One such factor was teachers' concerns voiced from the perspective of their students, that is, the procedure for conducting CPA may be too complex for their (young) students. As mentioned at the beginning of this paper, a number of considerations will need to be made for CPA to achieve it desired effects, from setting assessment goals and training students to select entries to go into their portfolio to conducting individual conferences with students to provide individualized feedback and support (Delett et al. 2001; M. Yin, 2014).

During the interview, Yijia, who taught first graders, for example, expressed the challenge of constructing an appropriate rubric to fairly and reliably assess individual portfolios, which could vary significantly from student to student. She also reported that even if an appropriate rubric could be constructed, it could pose a big challenge to making sure the rubric and her expectations are clearly explained to her first graders so that they could be actively involved in the assessment process. Her concern about the difficulty was also echoed by a few other teachers, particularly those who also taught very young learners, such as Meilu as shown in the excerpt below.

Excerpt 5 (Meilu)

You will first need to spend quite some time on "data collection." Eventually you will need to develop a rubric for assessing students' portfolios. Personally, it's difficult to decide which rubric to use.

Additionally, concerns were also voiced about the form of CPA itself rather than the complexity of designing and implementing it in young learners. A notable concern about CPA in

the literature is its relatively low reliability, even though it is considered to be highly valid in assessing students' long-term language development (Brown & Abeywickrama, 2010). A variety of factors could come into play in affecting the reliability of CPA, such as the rubric, the teacher, and the student. For example, a lack of careful attention and active participation and cooperation from students may significantly undermine the reliability (and consequently validity as well) of CPA. A teacher's concern from this perspective could be particularly strong if he/she perceives his/her students as not being able to do student-centric assessment reliably.

For example, Jingjing reports in the excerpt below that she is not confident in her students' ability to select their work samples and conduct self-assessment. Consequently, she indicates that there would be a reliability concern, despite her acknowledgement that CPA indeed can encourage students' reflection on their learning and progress. It is interesting to note, however, that she taught high school students, who, compared to very young students like those taught by some of her peer participants, should be metacognitively more mature; and thus her doubt about those students' ability to select entries and self-assess seemed to be a surprise. We conjecture that Jingjing's response might be related to her lack of awareness that all students, whether school-aged or adults, will need to be trained in and provided with clear guidance on how to participate in portfolio assessment. Note that earlier we reported Jingjing was one of the few who did not respond positively to our question which asked the teachers whether they had known or heard of CPA. The sharing in the following excerpt came out of the subsequent exchanges between the interviewer and her where the concept of CPA was unpacked to her. She would perhaps have not casted that doubt on CPA in her high-school students if she had been aware of the critical step of student training.

Excerpt 6 (Jingjing)

To high school students, whom I teach, I don't think it would make sense to ask them to select and self-assess what they have studied or done. It [portfolio assessment] certainly can help them understand what they have studied, how much they have made progress. But there is a reliability concern.

Consideration of program/classroom reality. An additional teacher-extrinsic factor pertains to the participants' consideration of their program/classroom. In a foreign language program, classroom instruction time is usually limited and could be considered by the teacher as very "precious" such that any activity that is perceived as time-consuming may not be favored and eventually may be discarded by the teacher. The concern about time constraint may be particularly exacerbated by the fact that some K-12 teachers could be teaching a large number of students simultaneously. Consequently, teachers may rely solely or heavily on assessment activities that are "quick" but not necessarily formative or that provide little space to engage students in the assessment process (i.e., assessment *for* or *as* learning).

This is clearly represented in the following excerpt of the sharing by Zihan, who taught as many as 20 different classes of students (or as many as 600 students) in her school district in Michigan, with each class having only one 30-min lesson in a week. At the interview, she initially responded that she did not know what CPA meant; after the concept was unpacked for her by the interviewer, she was asked to indicate if she would want to implement it in her classrooms. The following sharing came out as her response to the probe on why she was not interested in conducting CPA.

Excerpt 7 (Zihan)

I think it is too complicated ... you will need to have a lot of thinking: many things to be included in a portfolio; grading, etc. What's more, this is an ongoing process, and also very

time-consuming. Thus, it is not like quizzes, which we often do and are very quick. For

teachers like me who need to change class every 30 mins, the sustainability would be very

low. I'd rather conduct assessment activities that are quick.

Discussion

Based on the interviews with ten teachers from diverse backgrounds and contexts of teaching in

U.S. K-12 schools, the study generated some important insights into Chinese language teachers'

understandings, perceptions, and implementations of CPA and their associated factors. Overall,

the insights can be understood from two notable gaps revealed in the participants' responses. The

first one pertains to the teachers' knowledge about CPA and its major tenets, and the second

between the teachers' perceived importance and benefits of CPA and their limited

implementation or interest in implementing it in their classrooms. In what follows, we discuss

these two gaps in light of the importance of a strong knowledge base for effective

implementation of CPA (and classroom-based assessment in general) and the complexity of the

relationships between teacher thinking and classroom practice. The implications of the findings

for language teacher education are also discussed and the limitations of the study noted.

Gap in Teachers' Knowledge Base

A major finding of the present study is an apparent gap in the participants' knowledge base about

CPA and its theoretical and implementational underpinnings. More specifically, we found that

most of the teachers either had not heard of the concept of CPA and were thus unable to describe

its tenets or reported an understanding that was superficial if not spurious. A particular case in

point was some teachers' narrow conceptualization of portfolio assessment as a mere collection

of students work samples (i.e., a portfolio) with little attention to its component of assessment (*as*

learning) (see Excerpt 2). As a result, some of the claimed CPA implementations were primarily

about the (teacher's) construction of a portfolio for each student rather than students being engaged in a process of selecting entries to go into their portfolio, maintaining that portfolio, and integrating into that process self-assessment and active reflection on their learning and progress.

Despite a major focus of CPA on self-regulatory processes in students, as widely discussed in the literature (e.g., Fox, 2017; Paulson et al., 1991; M. Yin, 2014), the teacher has a very important role to play in the process to ensure CPA to achieve its desired effect. For example, teachers need to plan the assessment purpose and prepare students for the portfolio process and monitor that process (Delett et al., 2001). Essentially, teachers need to "have a solid understanding of portfolio assessment to achieve success" (Delett et al., 2001, p. 560).

Although our interviews did not specifically probe why the teachers had limited knowledge of CPA, logically, one cause inferred from some teachers' responses could be the insufficient training that they had received. The literature on teacher assessment literacy suggests that what teachers know about assessment is fundamental to and has strong implications on their classroom-based assessment practice (Inbar-Lourie, 2017; Taylor, 2009). Yet, an unfortunate reality is that the assessment competence of language teachers is often limited; and teachers were often underprepared to handle the complexity of classroom assessment (Fulcher, 2012). In a large questionnaire survey on foreign language teachers in seven European countries, Vogt and Tsagari (2014) found a large majority of the respondents (over 85%) reported having received no or only a little training in portfolio assessment, which was similarly the case for a few other forms of alternative assessment (e.g., self- or peer assessment). Although there was little previous empirical evidence on the CPA competence of Chinese language teachers, particularly those who teach in a K-12 context, it seems an inference could be made from the result of Montee, Bach, Donovan, and Thompson's (2013) study on a group of teachers of Less

Commonly Taught Languages (LCTL) in the U.S. that their assessment literacy is very limited. In that study, the authors administered a questionnaire on assessment knowledge and practices to about 30 LCTL teachers (mostly K-12 teachers and about half teaching Chinese language) before they received training in language assessment in a STARTALK summer program for teachers. For most of the target assessment concepts (e.g., formative assessment), a large majority of the teachers reported they had never heard it before or had heard it before but did not know what it meant.

With reference to the aforementioned findings, the knowledge gap found in the present study on CPA does not seem surprising. Yet, it is another piece of evidence that points to the critical importance of providing systematic training in assessment for language teachers, an issue we will return to when we discuss later the implications of this finding.

Gap Between Perceived Benefits of CPA and Limited Interest in Implementation

The other gap that emerged from the participants' responses was between their recognition of the benefits of CPA and limited implementation of it or reluctance of implementing it in their classrooms. At the interview, we elicited the participants' perceptions of CPA. Whether or not a teacher indicated prior knowledge of CPA, all responded later that CPA is of great benefits to students. Yet, none, including the few who actually had implemented it, was enthusiastic about conducting it in their classrooms.

Why would a teacher not do something that he/she considers of great benefits? This gap or the lack of a positive association would not be a surprise if it is understood in the context of the complex relationships between teacher thinking and classroom practice. The literature on language teacher cognition suggests that teachers are active decision makers whose decision-

making is often subject to the influence of a variety of factors intrinsic and extrinsic to them (Borg, 2006).

From a teacher-intrinsic perspective, we identified the gap in teacher knowledge about CPA to be a major factor as discussed in the previous part. Additionally, the teachers' cultural background and educational experiences might be another teacher-intrinsic factor. In the present study, all participants were native Chinese speakers educated – from elementary to secondary and tertiary education – in mainland China or Taiwan where classroom culture, including the role relationships between the teacher and students, is different from that in the U.S. (Asia Society, 2010). For example, teachers in mainland China or Taiwan are often regarded as the authority; classroom teaching is predominantly teacher-centered; and assessment often takes a single form and is primarily for summative purposes (e.g., a final exam). Thus, there is a possibility that the participants, who were teaching in an overseas, cross-cultural context, may be oriented toward teacher-centric assessment practices (as opposed to involving students actively in the assessment process, or assessment *as* learning). In the present study, even though most teachers received a master's degree in Education from a U.S. university and were certified to teach Chinese in U.S. schools, the influence from their previous educational experiences might have persisted. This explanation from the lens of culture, however, is noted to be based on logical inference rather than supported with evidence from elicitations from the participants, although it appears to be aligned with the findings of a recent study (Yue, 2017) that also studied Chinese language teachers and teaching in K-12 schools in the U.S. Such an issue certainly warrants attention in future research.

Other than teacher-intrinsic factors, the participants' responses revealed two extrinsic factors, which seemed to have a profound influence on their decision to "override" the embracing view

of CPA or their lack of enthusiasm of implementing it. The first "barrier" was the young age of their students. The teachers expressed two major concerns: the difficulty for their young students, particularly lower elementary graders, to understand the purpose and criteria of CPA and possess the metacognitive maturity to be actively involved in the portfolio process; and closely related to the foregoing concern, CPA possibly losing its reliability (and consequently validity). These concerns were not unique to the present study. Previously, studies on other forms of alternative assessment, such as self- and peer assessment, revealed something similar in teachers of young learners (e.g., Harris & Brown, 2013; Butler, 2016). One way to address these concerns would be to provide sufficient training for students to understand the purpose, criteria, and process of CPA so that they could follow the expectations closely to engage themselves in the process (Harris & Brown, 2013). As pointed out by Popham (2003), school-aged students' abilities to self-assess and reflect should be nurtured as part of the teacher's implementation of CPA.

Yet, a "nurturing" process means a significant amount of time would be needed from both the teacher and students, which emerged as another factor from the participants' responses that demotivated them to implement CPA. The concern about time constraint could be particularly strong for CPA implementation in a class with a large number of very young learners. In the current study, almost all the participants taught multiple classes of students at different grade/proficiency levels; and there was a very limited number of class hours each week. In one particular case (i.e., Zihan), the program was characterized by students only having a single lesson of 30 mins in a week and the teacher teaching about 20 different classes with a total of about 600 elementary graders. Such school/program realities would reasonably make it

overwhelming for a teacher (and students) to be effectively involved in CPA implementation, and consequently, the teacher tends to be demotivated to "invest" and commit him/herself.

Implications and Limitations

The gaps discussed above have a couple of implications on language teacher education or preparation and professional development of language teachers. A notable one is that teachers need to possess a strong knowledge base about CPA and be trained in the specific procedures for conducting it (Delett et al., 2001). This issue is particularly important for teachers of young learners, who have been reported in the literature as well as the present study to have difficulty understanding and following the teacher's expectations.

Another implication is that planning for knowledge development needs to take into consideration other factors pertaining to the teacher and the reality of the context where teachers teach. The second gap discussed earlier, that is, the gap between the participants' perceived importance and benefits of CPA and their limited implementation or interest in implementing it in their classrooms, particularly suggests that a lack of attention to contextual constraints perceived by teachers (i.e., a large number of young learners and time constraint in the present case) would undermine any positive effect that a strong knowledge base (and positive perceptions) may bring. This of course should not be interpreted to imply that given a smaller class / number of students or sufficient instructional time, CPA implementation would necessarily happen effectively and in a sustainable way, as teachers' decision-making is far more complex than could be accounted for by a single factor with a linear relationship. Nevertheless, there are important considerations to be made. One consideration concerns district/school support. As Fox (2017, p. 143) argues, "The implementation of a portfolio assessment strategy

may be undermined … if there is insufficient support for teachers (human and material) who may resent or may not fully understand, how to use portfolio assessment in their classrooms."

A few limitations of the study and directions for future research are noted. Chinese language programs and teacher backgrounds in K-12 schools in the U.S. are far more complex than what a convenience sample of 10 participants brought to the current study. Thus, it would be interesting and necessary to conduct large-scale studies to provide more systematic understandings about the issues examined in this study. Additionally, it warrants to compare K-12 teachers and those teaching in post-secondary contexts in the future. The latter group of teachers work with adult learners, and their assessment of students could be of lower stakes compared to that in K-12 contexts. Thus, interesting variations in teachers' understandings, perceptions, and implementations might be observed. Methodologically, in this study, data were based on the participants' self-reports. It would warrant to conduct class observations to provide a more nuanced picture about how CPA is conducted in actual classrooms. "Voices" from students and school administrators would also enrich the understanding about the complex relationships between teachers' knowledge base, thinking, and classroom implementation of CPA. Last but not least, content analysis of students' actual portfolios would be an important addition.

Conclusion

As an approach of assessment *as* learning, portfolio assessment has received much attention in the language assessment community. The benefits of CPA for supporting students' reflection on learning and progress and long-term language proficiency development have been widely recognized; yet, classroom implementation of it has remained limited. To address a gap in the literature on CPA and Chinese language teachers in the U.S., we interviewed a small sample of K-12 teachers in U.S. schools on their understandings, perceptions, and implementations of

CPA. Overall, corroborating the findings of a few previous questionnaire studies on the assessment literacy of language teachers, the participants demonstrated rather limited knowledge of CPA (i.e., a knowledge gap). In addition, while the benefits of CPA were recognized by the participants, they showed little interest in implementing it in their classrooms (i.e., a gap between teacher thinking and classroom practice). We discussed these two gaps in light of the importance of a strong knowledge base for effective implementation of CPA and external factors that may affect teachers' motivation, intention, or decision to implement CPA. We recommended that language teachers be provided with systematic initial training and professional development in CPA; and that contextual constraints on the implementation of CPA be recognized and external support be provided to teachers for their professional learning of language assessment.

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