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A CASE STUDY OF PEDAGOGICAL PRACTICES
THAT BOOST CHINESE STUDENTS' ORAL ENGLISH SELF-CONFIDENCE

By

MICHAEL DEAN KNAPP

A doctoral dissertation submitted to the
College of Education
in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree Doctor of Education
in Classroom Instruction and Curriculum Design

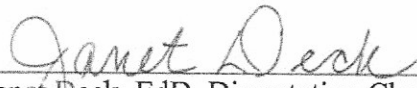
Southeastern University
April, 2021

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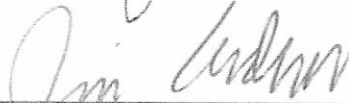
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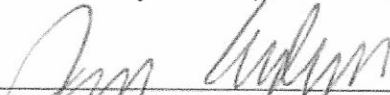
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James A. Anderson, PhD, Dean, College of Education

DEDICATION

I dedicate this dissertation to my Father in heaven who has a wonderful life-plan for anyone willing to come to him through Christ. Before I knew Him, I would never have anticipated someday studying for a doctoral degree; I am grateful that He brought me down this path. I would also like to dedicate this dissertation to another wonderful part of our Father's plan for my life: My wife Gracelynn and our kids Saralyn and Josiah. Doctoral work is never easy, but one of the greatest struggles for me was the countless hours spent studying that I could have been enjoyed with my family. My kids have been exceptionally gracious when they knew daddy had to study, or, I should say, when mommy and daddy had to study. While other couples are forced to spend extended time apart during their studies, Gracelynn has had the blessing of both studying for our doctoral degrees at SEU at the same time. Not only has Gracelynn been *willing* to encourage me in my studies, but from first-hand experience, she knows *how* to encourage me.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

In this long journey, I learned that attaining a doctoral degree is not a lone effort; Success is a team experience. I would like to thank everyone on the team who made this dissertation possible. A heartfelt thanks to my committee, including my chair Dr. Janet Deck, my methodologist Dr. James Anderson, and my third reader, Dr. Katlyn Elliot, for the long hours spent laboring over my drafts and providing feedback without which this dissertation would have been impossible.

Dr. Deck was my inspiration for this work beginning all the way back when she was my qualitative research professor. The idea for this dissertation started coming together, with Dr. Deck's encouragement, while I was taking her class. I never imagined she would someday be my dissertation chair. Through this journey, I learned a lot from Dr. Deck's expertise and benefited greatly from her invaluable feedback. At times when I felt like giving up, Dr. Deck stuck with me and provided the encouragement and inspiration I needed to keep going. Writing a dissertation can be an unsurmountable challenge, but Dr. Deck's godly character, with her impeccable balance of professionalism gentle patience makes her the most ideal person I know to chair my dissertation.

The team also included people not on my committee. SEU Graduate Writing Support's Dr. Cassandra Lopez and Dr. Kelly Hoskins meticulously combed through my drafts, finding errors that left me saying, "How could I have not seen that?" All of my Southeastern University professors made priceless contributions to my success. My fellow sojourners in Cohort I ("I" for "incredible") were not only encouraging, but created life-time memories.

Abstract

Practice is necessary for developing oral English proficiency, but many Chinese learners of English lack the self-confidence to practice oral English; furthermore, students' self-confidence deficiency is perpetuated by insufficient oral English proficiency. The purpose of this qualitative case study was to discover pedagogical practices that break the cycle of the reciprocal effect of deficiencies in oral English and in self-confidence in Chinese adult PhD non-English major students. Six participants who raised their oral English proficiency and self-confidence during their PhD studies described their English learning journeys by responding to interview questions. Analyzation of data from interview responses developed into two themes of pedagogical practices that simultaneously raised participants' oral English fluency and boosted their self-confidence. The results of this study revealed the specific speaking and listening strategies and aspects of fostering a learning environment that were effective for the participants and are recommended for raising oral English proficiency and self-confidence for Chinese adult PhD non-English major students.

Keywords: Pedagogical practice, self-confidence, oral English proficiency, learning strategy, Chinese adult PhD non-English major student

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I. INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this case study was to discover which pedagogical practices are effective for raising Chinese non-English major doctoral students' English-speaking fluency and self-confidence for oral English communication. A common phenomenon that inhibits second language learners from speaking their target language is distress connected with genuine or projected verbal communication with other people (Jugo, 2020; He, 2018). Chinese students arrive at their American teacher's English class expecting the same routine experienced in previous English courses, excessive memorization and tests with no requirement or opportunity to speak English (Zhang & Liu, 2014). When the teacher requires speaking, many students experience anxiety and are embarrassed to speak in front of classmates (Mak, 2011). Whether students' English is poor, or poor English is the learners' own negative self-evaluation, students lack the necessary confidence for attempting to communicate orally in English (Mak, 2011) even though students' self-confidence and proficiency are contingent upon more English speaking practice (Huang & Zhang, 2016).

This qualitative case study explored pedagogical practices that effectively raised self-confidence in oral English communication and resulted in improved oral English production skills for Chinese doctoral students. Language learners often limit their English production, which perpetuates low self-confidence and linguistic growth (Tridinanti, 2018). This study was

conducted in order to discover pedagogy that successfully perpetuated high self-confidence and linguistic growth in Chinese Doctor of Philosophy (PhD) students.

This study addressed the downward cycle of low self-confidence that deters students from putting forth the necessary effort to improve their English fluency skills. Perpetually low fluency caused by the lack of confidence to practice speaking, in turn, prevents students from raising their self-confidence. Self-confidence has a tremendous effect on students' progress (Morony, Kleitman, Lee, & Stankov, 2013; Tuncel, 2015). This study was conducted to discover how the cycle was successfully broken for some students so that educators and learners in the field of English as a second language (ESL) may avoid the consequences of this cycle.

Background of the Study

Self-confidence has a major impact on the effectiveness of learning. Many Chinese students lack self-confidence in their English skills (Zhang, 2014). Chinese children commonly begin learning English long before the age of 10, but the effect of low self-confidence may be more detrimental for adult doctoral students who are well past the peak foreign language learning age (Eguz, 2019). Literature related to this dissertation topic tends to mostly focus on the experiences of Chinese doctoral students studying abroad (Ma & Wang, 2012; Zhang, 2016) and generalized English learning for Chinese students (Ren & Bai, 2016; Wei & Zhang, 2013) rather than focusing on improving English fluency and self-confidence for doctoral students in China. Consequently, a gap in the literature exists for applying pedagogical practices to self-confidence and English fluency specifically to adult non-English major Chinese PhD students, a gap the researcher aimed to fill in the current study.

The problem of the effect of low self-confidence on learning has strong historical and cultural roots in China. Under Confucius philosophy, a major influence on Chinese culture, the

Chinese education system has been excessively exam-oriented for centuries (Schenck, 2015). Zhou (2017) examined accomplishments and gaps in the Chinese education system and outlined important historical occurrences. During the Republic era (1912-1949), and again under early communism, China's leaders criticized the Confucian educational system, yet exam scores continued to serve as the sole measure of success (Zhou, 2017). Zhou (2017) asserted that part of the dilemma was that communist leaders rejected any outside influence that might otherwise enhance self-confidence for learning, opting instead to stress socialism in education.

Zhou (2017) further pointed out that Chinese leaders were willing to go to any extent to prevent students from being affected by western ideals. More recently, post-Mao Chinese leaders resisted western influence by restoring Confucian traditions to the education system, mixing these traditions with socialism (Zhou, 2017). Thus, the problem of self-confidence in English communication is intensified by an age-long system of exam-focused learning, resistance to outside influence, and academic objectives that stress learning socialism more than engaging in oral English practice.

Several factors, in addition to contemporary mandates of the communist party, hold Chinese students in a social context that is not always conducive to increased English communication confidence and skills. Chinese mothers who use authoritarian methods are known as *tiger moms* (Kohler, Aldridge, Christensen, & Kilgo, 2012). Tiger moms are notorious for the “ferocity with which they discipline their children and for their emphasis on...academic achievement” (Kim, Wang, Orozco-Lapray, Shen, & Murtuza, 2013, p. 7), a contrast to imparting positive emotional feelings that are essential for fostering confidence (Sousa, 2017). Although academic achievement is the goal of tiger parenting, supportive parenting styles result in better

academic achievement (Kim et al., 2013). Subsequently, the challenge of fostering positive emotions for student English learning may be left for teachers.

Additionally, Chinese culture mandates a show of humility, regardless of whether the humility is false humility or genuine humility (Xiong, Wang, & Cai, 2018). When students tell their foreign teachers “My English is poor,” this may be an honest evaluation of their English abilities, but often the statement is simply the right thing to say to appear modest. Another factor that affects self-confidence is the hierarchal social system. People are ranked not only by age and job status, but also by social hierarchy, which is closely linked to exam scores (Wu, 2016). In such a system, a student may say “My English is poor” based merely on exam scores, rendering them afraid to communicate orally in English. Wang (2016), after interviewing Chinese students ages 12-22 in an ethnographic study, observed that exam-oriented education processes caused hierarchy in the classroom, a hierarchy that embarrassingly ranked students into the good and the bad groups. China’s cultural and social learning environments call for English teachers who employ pedagogical practices that enhance self-confidence to enable students to communicate in English.

In China’s exam-oriented system, the grammar translation method (GTM) has retained its position as the dominant pedagogy (Tan, 2016). GTM is characterized by students spending more time memorizing vocabulary lists than experiencing English in real-life situations that might otherwise improve skills for speaking English and boost students’ self-confidence (Tan, 2016). Through the GTM model, students miss the benefits of contemporary models such as experiential learning theory, which promotes knowledge through real-life experiences, sometimes individually, and sometimes together with other people (Yardley, Teunissen, & Dornan, 2012).

In addition to the experiential learning theory, this study of pedagogical practices for self-confidence and English communication relates to sociocultural theory and cognitive developmental theory. Lourenco (2012) compared sociocultural and cognitive development theories: Lev Vygotsky's social development theory stresses the role of social interaction in learning and emphasizes external influence, but the theory of cognitive development introduced by Piaget suggests that successful development results from biological maturity and interaction with a person's environment and focuses on the learner's autonomy (Lourenco, 2012). Even though student learning techniques may require autonomy, this study of pedagogical practices and self-confidence is similar to sociocultural theory through which Vygotsky theorized that social interaction for learning consists of interaction with peers and interaction with authority figures (Lourenco, 2012). Likewise, pedagogical practices and learning techniques considered in this study involved teacher-student relationship and student-student interaction. The advantages of sociocultural theory and experiential learning theory may be forfeited in China's GTM-dominated educational system, which highlights the need for pedagogical practices that activate Chinese students' oral English communication.

Theoretical Framework

Communicative language teaching pedagogy (CLT) coincides with the theory of experiential learning (TEL) because of TEL's emphasis on real-life experiences (Christian, McCarty, & Brown, 2020). CLT pedagogy, popularized in Europe in the late 20th century, focuses more on communication fluency than on accuracy, and in the classroom setting, teachers serve as facilitators who encourage collaborative interaction and creative use of the target language (Garrote, Alonso, & Galetti, 2018). If the hierarchy produced by an exam-oriented system in which GTM is the featured learning theory fails to enhance self-confidence, then

educators may expect the antithesis of GMT to foster confidence enhancement for language students.

In a qualitative study in five secondary schools in Bangladesh, Rahmatuzzaman (2018) used interviews and classroom observation to study the transition from the traditional GMT pedagogy to CLT. Rahmatuzzaman (2018) showed that the lack of training and teachers' struggle to move out of the GMT model hindered CLT from being fully implemented. Rahmatuzzaman (2018) also argued that CLT "works more effectively in an environment where all modern amenities are provided, as in the western contexts from which it originated" (Rahmatuzzaman, 2018, p. 31). The western origin of CLT may explain why it is easier for foreign teachers in China to implement this approach than for Chinese teachers who are used to the GMT traditional approach. Unlike foreign teachers in China who are inclined to implement CLT because of the western origin of this approach, Chinese teachers are generally more comfortable employing GMT pedagogy (Tan, 2016).

CLT is technically a language teaching methodology or an approach to teaching rather than a theory (Wong, 2012). Because one of the objectives of this research was to explore pedagogical approaches that positively influenced adult Chinese students' oral English skills, teaching methodology is of central importance to this study. However, the role of employing a theory in qualitative research is critical because theory not only expresses the values of the researcher, but it also provides a lens through which the qualitative researcher processes data (Collins & Stockton, 2018). Therefore, it is necessary to compare different language acquisition theories and to determine which theory encompasses the CLT approach that frames this study.

Noam Chomsky's (1975) universal grammar theory (UGT) suggests that language acquisition is a genetic occurrence and that children are born with a universal grammar that can

be applied to any language (Dastpak, Behjat, & Taghinezhad, 2017). If UGT can be applied to any language, English grammar for Chinese learners must be included. However, Chomsky focused his theory primarily on first language (L1) learning for children (Dastpak et al., 2017) rather than on higher education adult students. Even if UGT contributes to second language (L2) learning, the theory is insufficient for this study on self-confidence and oral English fluency for adult Chinese students because of its primary focus on L1 learning for children.

According to Steven Krashen's (2010) theory of second language acquisition, also called the natural approach theory, language fluency is acquired naturally and subconsciously, and it is not acquired through the process of learning (Latifi, Ketabi, & Mohammadi, 2013). Contrary to GTM, Krashen's theory does not place emphasis on correcting grammar errors, and the process of L2 learning closely resembles the L1 learning process of young children (Latifi et al., 2013). Some elements of Krashen's second language acquisition theory may be useful for developing self-confidence and enhancing L2 oral English fluency for Chinese learners, but because English language learning classrooms typically include grammar correction and direct vocabulary instruction, Krashen's theory was rejected as the framework for this study.

Introduced by Soviet psychologist Lev Vygotsky (1962) sociocultural theory holds that people develop language through social interaction and that cognitive development precedes language learning (as cited in Dastpak et al., 2017). While social interaction may be effective for improving oral English fluency, the theory was rejected as a framework for this study because, like Chomsky's theory, Vygotsky's theory applies to children learning their first languages, not to adult L2 learners (Dastpak. et al., 2017). Similarly, social learning theory asserts that people learn better in a social context through collaborative learning (Brauer & Tittle, 2012), which fits the learning model of this study; but the theory's emphasis on learning through imitation

disqualifies it because research indicates that Chinese learners tend to disregard the positive effects of imitation (Zhou & Guo, 2016). This study needed a theoretical framework that applies to L2 learning and carries the advantages of social learning theory without depending on imitation.

The theory of experiential learning is closely related to social learning theory, and according to this theory, learning builds on real-life experiences (Christian, McCarty, & Brown, 2020; Yardley et al., 2012), qualifying it as a fitting theoretical framework for this case study. According to the experiential learning theory, people can learn experientially together with other people, and the theory encourages teachers to listen to learners when students fall short instead of teachers simply purporting to know the reasons for students' shortcomings (Yardley et al., 2012). According to experiential learning, concrete experience, in a contextual setting, is necessary in order for learning to occur (Morris, 2019). Experiential learning offers active engagement as an alternative to passive knowledge impartation (Bradberry & De Maio, 2019). Chinese students attend PhD English classes after having already spent many years studying the English language and memorizing vocabulary under the GTM approach but lack self-confidence and speaking skills (Tan, 2016). The English vocabulary that students have learned in the past has served as the previous knowledge upon which the students build English speaking skills; and, as a kind of cognitive constructivism, experiential learning theory builds on previous learning experiences (Yardley et al., 2012). Experiential learning theory, therefore, embodies the pedagogical approach of communicative language teaching (CLT), and experiential learning theory constituted the theoretical framework that informed this study on pedagogical factors that improved Chinese students' oral English communication proficiency and self-confidence for speaking English.

Conceptual Framework

Several concepts formed the foundation of this case study to examine English classroom experiences and other factors that effectively raised oral English fluency and boosted English speaking self-confidence for adult Chinese PhD students. The first concept was the mutual inflection that self-confidence deficiencies and oral English fluency proficiency deficiencies exert upon each other. Zhang (2014) described the impact of self-confidence deficiency on Chinese students' unwillingness to practice English speaking: "the majority of students have no confidence in their English ability. They are afraid of speaking English" (p.41). Likewise, underdeveloped language speaking skills are related to self-confidence (Tridinanti, 2018).

This study was conducted with the intention of discovering the pedagogical practices that effectively boosted Chinese adult learners' self-confidence for speaking English and that positively influenced the learners' oral English fluency. Conceptualization of the influence of pedagogical practice and learning techniques that positively influenced the participants' self-confidence and fluency skills are illustrated in the two triangulations depicted in Figure 1 and Figure 2.

The pair of triangulations depicted in Figure 1 illustrate the exchange of influence between the four entities this study examined. The two entities of pedagogy and learning strategies provide classroom experiences that influenced the entities of self-confidence and oral fluency (Yardley et al., 2012). Figure 1, therefore, also illustrates the existence of an influential relationship between all four entities.

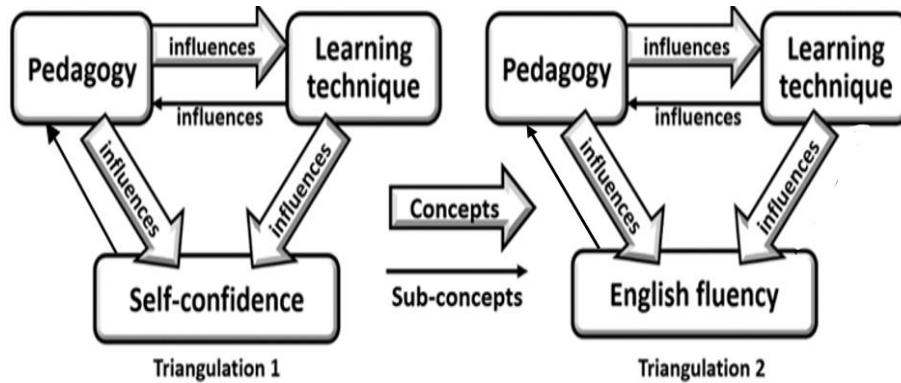


Figure 1: The influence of pedagogy and learning technique on self-confidence and on English fluency.

The triangulations in Figure 1 illustrate the supporting sub-concept of the influence of learning techniques on pedagogy, as depicted with the thin horizontal arrows. The influence of learning techniques on pedagogy is essential because experiential learning theory encourages teachers to listen to their students (Yardley et al., 2012). An example of the sub-concept of learning techniques influencing pedagogy would be when a teacher notices that a student’s current technique involves insufficient English speaking, the teacher adjusts the pedagogy to encourage more speaking because the teacher understands that language skill acquisition is a result in oral English participation (Gan, 2013; Shen & Chui, 2019). The thin diagonal arrows represent the influence of students’ current self-confidence and fluency levels on pedagogical choices for meeting specific learning needs.

The main concepts, depicted by the large arrows containing the word “influences” in Figure 1, represent a template for the data of this study. The researcher sought to discover which pedagogical practices positively influenced the learners’ learning techniques, self-confidence, and English fluency. Broom (2015) linked pedagogy to self-confidence through pedagogy’s

relationship to empowerment imparted by the teacher; however, Broom’s research did not investigate adult Chinese PhD students. The link between pedagogy, learning techniques, fluency, and self-confidence underpinned the endeavor to discover, through this study, which pedagogical practices boosted the participants’ self-confidence and increased their oral English communication skills.

Booth and Gerard (2011) discovered a reciprocal influence between self-esteem and academic achievement. The horizontal arrows in Figure 2 depict the mutually positive influence between self-confidence and academic achievement of increased English fluency. Figure 2 further illustrates the influence of the combined entities of pedagogy and learning techniques on fluency and self-confidence. This study of Chinese PhD students and their betterment of self-confidence and fluency skills sought to discover specifically what influences were represented in the diagonal arrows in Figure 2.

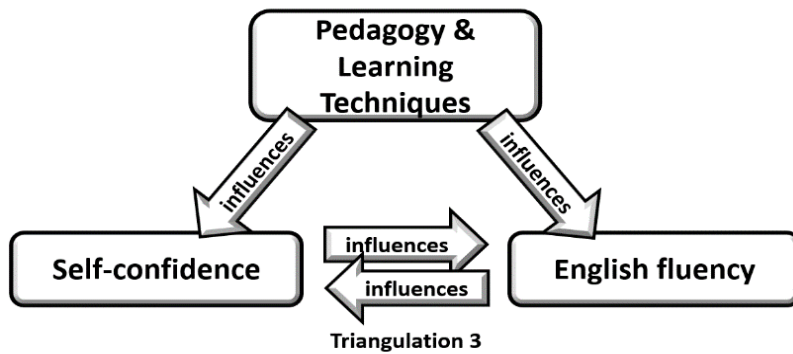


Figure 2: The combined influence of pedagogy and learning technique on self-confidence and on English fluency.

Problem Statement

Chinese students study English for many years, but due to lack of self-confidence, the prospect of communicating orally in English causes anxiety, producing a reluctance to speak (Tridinanti, 2018). Consequently, learners experience slow, if any, progress in acquisition of English communication skills because anxiety is linked to a negative influence on language ability (Hong, Hwang, Tai, & Chen, 2013). This phenomenon creates an endless cycle: A lack of English communication skills often causes self-confidence to remain too low for students to actually speak English, but refraining from speaking keeps the English levels low, which in turn impedes students' self-confidence (Tridinanti, 2018). Students who become proficient at orally communicating in English are the ones who have successfully broken this cycle and overcome the inhibitions caused by low self-confidence, but many Chinese students never gain enough confidence for communicating orally and therefore remain inhibited from speaking English (Zhang, 2014). Chinese students need oral English communication skills and the confidence to use and improve those skills, not only for communication with international travelers to China and the workplace, but also because many Chinese students need English to study abroad as a way to prepare for work in today's globalized world (Zhou, 2017). Many Chinese students, especially non-English majors, still lack the confidence needed in order to gain English fluency for studying or living abroad (Zhang, 2014).

Although much research has been conducted on ESL in China (Ren & Bai, 2016; Wei & Zhang, 2013), ESL pedagogy in general (Fatima, Ismail, Pathan, & Memon, 2020; Latifi et al., 2013; Murphy, 2014), and self-confidence in learning (Booth & Gerard, 2011; Mak, 2011; Tuncel et al., 2015), the need to discover pedagogical practices that effectively increase oral English fluency and self-confidence to speak English for Chinese PhD non-English major

students has remained unmet. Furthermore, even after the Chinese education system has made many reforms in its English curriculum (Yu & Liu, 2018; Zhao, 2012), Chinese students generally lack oral English fluency and self-confidence for speaking (Zhang, 2014), and consequently, the negative cycle of poor oral English production and low self-confidence mutually affecting each other (Tridinanti, 2018) persists for many students in China.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this case study was to discover which pedagogical practices were effective for raising Chinese non-English major doctoral students' English-speaking fluency and self-confidence for oral English communication.

Significance of the Study

This study sought to discover pedagogical practices that effectively increased self-confidence and raised oral English communication fluency for Chinese PhD students. Confidence not only affects Chinese students; but, L2 learners all over the world are influenced by self-confidence (Huang, 2014). The effective practices and techniques discovered in this study will contribute to the growing body of literature on ESL strategies. English is the most spoken language in the world and scholars estimate that approximately a billion people are learning English globally (Nishanthi, 2018). Therefore, this study could be replicated to discover pedagogy and learning techniques that are effective for ESL learners and their instructors outside of China and worldwide.

The findings of this study will benefit Chinese L2 learners and educators who teach English to Chinese adults, but many students lack the self-confidence needed to experience English as a real spoken language and they remain unable to communicate orally in English (Zhang, 2014). The pedagogical practices discovered in this study, as having boosted self-

confidence and oral English production for the participants, are expected to positively impact English learning and teaching in China and elsewhere, especially where there exists a deficiency of self-confidence and English fluency. Although this study may affect the general population of Chinese L2 learners, the primary beneficiaries of this study are the unique, and overlooked in literature, subset of Chinese adult PhD non-English major learners who struggle with fluency and self-confidence for speaking English, and their English instructors.

Overview of Methodology

This single instrumental case study was conducted on the phenomenon of enhanced oral English fluency and confidence for Chinese PhD non-English major students, and specifically during their adult English learning journey in a single city in China. In single instrumental case studies, researchers examine a single phenomenon that is bound by specific location and time (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Research Design

The six participants were adult PhD students who met the specific criteria of having been identified by peers as learners who improved their English fluency and raised their self-confidence at some point during their English learning journey, therefore defining the procedure as purposive criterion sampling (Mills & Gay, 2019). The participants were all non-English majors. Research was conducted by examining pedagogical practices employed by the participants' English teachers, as described by the participants.

Qualitative researchers must maintain ethical standards in order to protect participants from harm, assure confidentiality, and obtain honest informed consent (Mills & Gay, 2019). For this research, pseudonyms replaced participants' real names, and participants received explanations from the researcher about the nature and details of the study both verbally and in

writing. Chinese translations of this information were also provided for the participants by email. Finally, the participants were informed that they may withdraw at any time during the study for any reason.

Research Question

Creswell and Poth (2018) suggested forming one central question followed by sub-questions that serve to refine the overarching central question. The central research question for this study was, *Which pedagogical practices most effectively raise oral English communication proficiency and boost student self-confidence in Chinese PhD non-English major students for communicating in English?* For this study, Creswell and Poth's (2018) suggested sub-questions are incorporated into the interview questions.

Data Collection

Data was collected through interviews. Because data collection took place during the COVID 19 virus outbreak when travel and social contact were restricted, the interviews were conducted on the phone, using WeChat calls, rather than face to face. WeChat is a Chinese smartphone application that provides audio and video calling (Qu, Ge, Guo, Sun, & Zhang, 2020), so essentially the interview was conducted by phone, using the internet rather than phone lines. Interview responses were examined in order to determine which pedagogical practices boosted self-confidence and raised oral English fluency levels of the participants.

Procedures

This study was carried out in a logical sequential process, following the formula that qualitative studies should involve preliminary considerations and steps of an overall plan (Creswell & Poth, 2018). In anticipation of this study, the first preliminary step was to identify participants who, in the past, had a deficiency in oral English and self-confidence for English

speaking but had since raised their English fluency and confidence. Three participant candidates were introduced to the researcher by small group leaders of their former English classes and other candidates were introduced to the researcher by a Chinese fluent English speaker, Ellen (pseudonym). The group leaders and Ellen, known by the researcher prior to the study, were asked to identify willing candidates whom Ellen and the leaders had observed as having formerly lacked oral English skills and self-confidence for speaking English, and made progress in both areas. Email invitations to participate were sent to the candidates (Appendix C). In order to assure candidates qualified for the study according to the criteria of having improved English fluency and confidence, the researcher engaged in informal phone conversations with candidates who agreed to participate. The informal conversations included asking candidates if they believed that they had made substantial progress in their oral English skills and self-confidence. Candidates were permitted to speak freely while the researcher listened and observed their fluency. As a qualitative study, candidates were selected by purposeful sampling (Mills & Gay, 2019).

Next, candidates were informed of ethical precautions such as confidentiality and name pseudonyms. Six participants agreed to participate and signed the adult consent form (Appendix B). At that point, appointments were set in order to conduct the interviews. After transcribing the recorded interviews and inviting participants to verify the accuracy of the transcripts, the final step was to code and analyze data in search for answers to the research question.

Limitations

Although this study yielded the desired data for determining the positive influences of pedagogical practices on PhD non-English major participants, the study was limited by sample size and by the fact that all participants participated in PhD studies in the same city. Because the

typical size of a case study is small (Mills & Gay, 2019), the data cannot be generalized as broadly as may be expected from a larger sample. Therefore the sample in this study may not be representative of all non-English major PhD students in China. It is possible that the English learning experiences of students in the city where participants studied may be dissimilar to the experiences of PhD non-English majors in other cities; therefore, the generalizability of the results of this study may be limited.

The diversity of participants was limited because Chinese PhD non-English majors who were identified as having deficiency in self-confidence and fluency in the past, and subsequently showed improvement in these areas, were purposively invited to participate in this study. Students who have always possessed high self-confidence may be influenced by different pedagogical practices than students who approach their English studies with lower confidence. Furthermore, learners who are English majors or who are non-PhD students may also be influenced by different pedagogy. Although the participant selection sufficed for the specific objectives of this study, a larger and more diverse sample would have made the study more generalizable.

Definition of Key Terms

Self-confidence, according to Wang and Chang (2018), may be categorized as general self-worth, a sense of significance in society, and sureness of one's own capacity to perform specific tasks. In this study, the term refers to people's specific self-confidence in their own abilities to speak English, rather than the broad meaning of confidence in self. Students may have self-esteem or possess general confidence in themselves, but due to real or perceived oral English deficiency, they may lack specific confidence to speak English.

Fluency may be the most important aspect of language and must be kept in balance with accuracy (Diaz-Rico, 2013). For the purpose of this study, fluency refers to the ability to orally communicate in a meaningful way in English. Fluency and confidence were the linguistic areas of focus of this research rather than grammatical and phonetical accuracy.

Pedagogical practice generally refers to teachers' instructional methods (Chia & Lim, 2020), and in this study, refers to any instructional methods that were utilized by the teachers that specifically affected the linguistic growth of oral English fluency and self-confidence of the participants.

Learning techniques are defined as strategies that learners employ in order to facilitate their academic and linguistic growth (Ali & Zaki, 2019). In this study, learning techniques were the specific strategies employed by the participants, during their English learning journeys, for facilitating their own English language improvement and self-confidence, whether self-motivated or teacher-stimulated (pedagogical).

Summary

The connection between self-confidence and successfully improving English is undeniable (Tridinanti, 2018), which means a deficiency in either one of these two entities potentially perpetuates deficiency in the other one, creating a distressing cycle. Whether by self-determination or inspiration from their teachers, occasionally students break the cycle, resulting in a boost of self-confidence and consequent improved oral English fluency. The participants in this study were Chinese PhD non-English major students who experienced the breaking of this cycle. Through interviews, the objective of this study was to determine which pedagogical practices boosted the participants' self-confidence and increased their fluency.

II. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The relationship between self-confidence and oral English communication proficiency necessitates pedagogy and learning techniques that simultaneously foster increased confidence and oral fluency (Mandokhail, Kahn, & Malghani, 2018; Suryadi, 2018). The aim of this case study was to discover which pedagogical practices were effective for raising Chinese non-English major doctoral students' English-speaking fluency and self-confidence for oral English communication. The paradox for Chinese students is that although more speaking is necessary in order to improve oral English communication skills, many students lack the self-confidence to speak English and thus improve their English skills (Zhang, 2014).

Myriad research exists that confirms the influence of competent creative pedagogy on oral English proficiency, although a gap appears to exist due to the absence of studies applying pedagogy directly to Chinese adult PhD non-English major students for increasing oral English fluency and self-confidence. Liao, Chen, Chen, & Chang (2018) examined the effects of creative pedagogy on 256 primary school students in Taiwan by providing the same teachers and teaching materials for both the control group and the experimental group. The pedagogy for the control group used traditional knowledge-based methods that the school had already been using. Teachers used pedagogical practices with the experimental group that included brainstorming with opportunities to engage and apply their learning to life situations. The pretest mean score of students in the control group was slightly higher than the mean score of the experimental group,

but in the posttest the mean score for the control group was 76.70 and the mean score for the experimental group was 80.93. These quantitative scores, together with qualitative feedback from the students, led the researchers to conclude that there exists empirical confirmation that creative pedagogy, rather than teaching material alone, is effective in the English classroom (Liao et al., 2018).

Specific types of pedagogy influence students' English proficiency. For example, through interviewing 26 primary school English teachers in Indonesia, Zein (2017) found that 24 teachers agreed that age-related pedagogy was most effective. Elliot and Reynolds (2014) concluded that participative pedagogy is more effective for English learning than non-participative teaching styles because participative pedagogy encourages more student engagement. A study of 123 mainland Chinese undergraduate students who joined a study abroad program in four western countries was conducted through a survey after the students returned to China (Jackson & Chen, 2017). Although discussion-based pedagogy was shown to be useful, the 109 students who filled out surveys indicated that conversation participation in class was their most difficult challenge. The primary reason for the difficulty was that the students had no previous experience with discussion-based learning in China. The researchers presented a need to prepare students in advance for learning by using more discussion-based pedagogy (Jackson & Chen, 2017). Regardless of the pedagogy type, understanding the needs of the English teachers' students is critical for helping students become successful learners (Diaz-Rico, 2018).

Pedagogical practices are often accompanied by a variety of student employed learning strategies that also influence the success of improving oral English proficiency. Tanjung (2018) found that among the 127 Indonesian college students who responded to a survey, the most

frequently used English learning strategies involved actively using English more, watching English TV, and paying attention when another person is speaking English. A study of five ESL freshmen at a private Christian college in Midwestern United States demonstrated that the most successful learners practiced English with native English speakers outside of the classroom and that the learners' strategies included learning about western culture in order to enable them to communicate with local people (Lee-Johnson, 2015). In a study of 90 English major college students in Taiwan, Guo (2011) also concurred with the need for students to practice English outside the classroom, discovering that out-of-class practice provided authentic English experience. Whatever learning strategies teachers choose to encourage English learners to employ, students must be motivated to learn and they must overcome the reluctance to speak that results from fear of the embarrassment of making mistakes (Sousa, 2011).

To study pedagogy for the subgroup of adult Chinese PhD students, it is necessary to consider literature on andragogy. Teaching English to adult students is challenging for a number of reasons. Even though adults may be more conscious of time management in their studies compared to younger students, brain plasticity begins decreasing after adolescence, disadvantaging adult language learners (Castaneda, 2017). A study of 20 adult English learners in Spain revealed, through interviews, that challenges to English learning included family responsibilities, lower memory function, difficulty adapting to newer teaching methods, and psychological differences between adults and younger learners. The study demonstrated a need to use pedagogical practices that are supportive and encouraging (Castaneda, 2017). Wang and Storey (2015), after a survey study of 148 university English teachers in China, concluded that teachers who participated in the study were not comfortable with western student-centered andragogy but regardless of the students' ages, teachers preferred adhering to traditional test-

oriented teaching methods that concentrated on memorization, thus leaving a void that is often filled by foreign teachers. The filling of this void, for the adult PhD participants who learned English in the Chinese system, is the focus of the current study on pedagogy that increases oral English proficiency and self-confidence.

Education in China

Due to self-confidence deficiency, many Chinese learners of English are afraid to speak in English and consequently never reach their full potential of oral English fluency, a phenomenon that could be avoided with the use of pedagogical practice that is student-centered and that fosters an environment of positive emotions (Zhang, 2014). This review of relevant literature shows that self-confidence deficiency and limited oral English proficiency among Chinese students may be, to some extent, due to China's history, culture, policies, and educational system.

The Influence of Tradition and Culture on Education

The current study of pedagogy that positively influenced the participants' self-confidence and oral English communication fluency is compared with findings in literature that confirm Chinese pedagogy is influenced by traditional Confucianism and modern political strategies (Schenck, 2015; Zhou, 2017). Schenck conducted a study on Confucian culture's influence on educational leadership and learning, and Zhou outlined the history of China's educational system from the time of Confucius through the modern system.

The source of Schenck's (2015) data was the Program for International Student Assessment (PISA). PISA data indicated that in countries where education is influenced by Confucian culture, students tend to score higher on academic subjects such as math and science than students in non-Confucian cultures, but learning foreign languages is more difficult where

Confucianism prevails. According to Schenck's (2015) research, Confucian culture emphasizes memorization and impartation of knowledge directly from teachers, but Confucianism does not include andragogical theories that coincide social learning theory, which closely matches theoretical experiential learning (Yardley et al., 2012), the framework of this study, nor does Confucian culture endorse task-based pedagogy that requires students to be active learners (Schenck, 2015).

Zhou's (2017) synopsis of the history of China's philosophy of education emphasized the influence of Confucian culture on pedagogical practice. Zhou (2017) and Schenck (2015) agreed that the Chinese education system is exam-based. The exam system entered Chinese society during the Han Dynasty (206 BC-220 AD) with the objective of preparing people for civil service, and entering civil service was important to Chinese people because it meant they could become members of a higher class in China's hierarchal society (Zhou, 2017). The Chinese system, both historically and today, has ranked students according to exam scores. For many Chinese students, including learners of English, the competitive exam system can be stressful and damaging to self-confidence (Zhou, 2017).

The Influence of History and Politics on Education

Creativity is a critical element of learning and teaching English (Liao et al., 2018), but through much of China's history, the obligation to loyalty prescribed by Confucian culture has sometimes stifled creativity (Zhou, 2017). The expectation of unquestioned loyalty to the state continued into China's Cultural Revolution (1966-1976) when education was de-emphasized, and again when education was re-emphasized during post-Mao China when Confucian tradition was again elevated (Zhou, 2017). The communist party controls the Chinese educational system today and the party opposes western cultural influence and sees western culture as hostile,

especially in education (Zhou, 2017). Foreign English teachers in China must be aware that they are in a sensitive educational environment where ideology and politics are in tension with western ideals (Ogunniran, 2020). The party's educational objectives for China are to produce talent for promoting socialism under President Xi's increased emphasis on Marxism and his stress on the role of politics in education (Zhou, 2017).

In the current study on how Chinese doctoral students raised their oral English fluency and self-confidence, it is recognized that the participants improved their fluency and confidence in the presence of a backdrop where, according to Zhou (2017), both traditional culture and modern communism discourage diverse ideas and critical thinking, and political ideals are stressed above academic achievement. Zhou (2017) argued that China's current ideals oppose the values of modern education found in developed countries, and that in recent years, political control over education is tightening. The party closely monitors the content teachers are allowed to use, students are not encouraged to question what is taught, new private schools under foreign influence are now forbidden to open (Zhou, 2017), and existing private schools are firmly under the control of the communist party (Liu, 2020). The emphasis on memorization for exams and the increased lectures on socialism limit the amount of time students can spend learning and experiencing English, which presents a challenge to experiential learning theory, the framework for this study (Yardley, Teunissen, & Dornan, 2012).

Pedagogy and Learning Theory in China's Educational System

Experiential learning theory, with its accompanying communicative language teaching (CLT) pedagogy, is the antithesis of the grammar translation method (GTM), which is the dominant pedagogy in the Chinese educational system both historically and today (Tan, 2016). For language study, GTM explicitly depends on grammar rules and vocabulary memorization;

and, although it is effective for increasing knowledge, its influence on communication ability is minimal. In contrast to CTL's task-based experiential learning, which focuses on relationship to life outside the classroom, GTM learning is passive (Tan, 2016).

The purpose of Tan's (2016) study was to discover which method, GTM or CTL, was most effective for improving English language reading. The participants were students of two university classes taught in China by Tan. During the five months of the study, Tan taught the control group, consisting of 48 students, using traditional GTM pedagogy. The experimental group of 55 students studied English while Tan employed CTL. Both groups were given the same materials and both groups took the same pretest and posttest. Tan's GTM pedagogy involved introducing and explaining new vocabulary and having students translate an English passage into Chinese. No details were mentioned to describe Tan's use of CTL teaching techniques, except that students were engaged in completing various types of tasks. The pretest showed that the reading comprehension of the two groups was not significantly different before the study. The posttest mean score for the CTL group was 175.55, out of a possible 290, and the significantly lower mean score for the GTM group was 158.38. Tan concluded that CTL pedagogy was more effective than GTM pedagogy.

The participants of the current study spent most of their early English learning in the context of the Chinese educational system. The literature considered in this section showed that Confucian culture emphasizes education, which may account for the diligence with which many Chinese students study. The combination of an exam-oriented educational culture that primarily uses GTM pedagogy, a tradition of hierarchy, and government policies that discourage critical thinking, may have contributed to the participants' initial self-confidence deficiency and a lack of oral English communication proficiency.

Social Context for Self-confidence and English Learning in China

Although Chinese students tend to score high on exams in math, science, and other core courses (Schenck, 2015), there exists an overwhelming self-confidence deficiency for communicating in English (Zhang, 2014). The following literature suggests that lack of self-confidence among Chinese learners may be due, in part, to their social context.

A study in the University of Shanghai comparing family backgrounds with levels of self-esteem among a sample of 2,001 first-year students showed a variety of family-related issues that affected self-esteem (Shi et al., 2017). Using family information reported by participants and a Rosenberg self-esteem test, which uses a four point Likert scale, the study showed lower self-esteem among students who were raised by grandparents, which is common in China, and among students of a lower social-economic status. The study revealed higher self-esteem among students who were raised by their parents and who came from harmonious family situations (Shi et al.). Variation of self-esteem resulting from family environments may account for divergent levels of oral English proficiency among Chinese learners because a strong relationship exists between self-esteem and ESL speaking ability (Mandokhail, Kahn, & Malghani, 2018; Suryadi, 2018).

Rooted in Confucian doctrine, a hierarchal social system has been an integral feature of Chinese history for more than 2000 years, and Confucianism's hierarchy remains dominant in China's modern philosophy of education (Zhou 2017). An ethnographic study on the compatibility of Confucianism in today's Chinese educational system yielded both positive and negative effects of China's hierarchal culture (Wang, 2016). Data were gathered through observing and informally interviewing 18 students and through participation discussions with 31

students, ranging from ages 12 to 14 in a classic Confucius school. The school's program included memorizing classical Chinese literature. Wang concluded that this traditional pedagogy produced several positive results including students' improved moral character, better relationships with classmates, and the hierarchal principle of always obeying teachers, which Zhou praised, calling it an authoritarian system that was good. The article did not mention English language study, but critical thinking and open discussions, which are needed for Chinese ESL learners (Wang & Seepho, 2017) were absent from the study (Wang, 2016). Results of the study showed features of the hierarchal Chinese social life and education. Features that language teachers may see as harmful to learning English included criticism of students who disagreed with their teachers and disfavor toward individualism, autonomy, and independence among students (Wang 2016).

Chinese parents also contribute to the social contextualization of self-confidence and learning. Chinese families were forbidden to have more than one child before 2015 when the government enacted a two-child policy (Peng, 2020), so parents naturally want the best for that one child's education, which often means sending their only child to study abroad in English-speaking countries (Hu & Hagedorn, 2014). Through the procedure of interviews, a case study in China conducted with 20 parents of students in China who were preparing to send their Child to study abroad revealed the reasons they were sending their children abroad. Some of the reasons for wanting their children to study outside of China included parents' dissatisfaction with the lack of critical thinking and creativity and the exam-focused memorization pedagogy in Chinese universities (Hu & Hagedorn). The findings of Hu and Hagedorn have implications to the current study. Prior to attending the English classes where the participants indicated their self-confidence and oral English proficiency increased, they studied under pedagogical practices

that may have lacked creativity and critical thinking, which are needed for successful English learning (Liao et al., 2018). Learning, under the pedagogy where participants formerly studied, focused on memorization, which is less effective than other more active methods of acquiring English skills (Tan, 2016).

Some Chinese families construct a social context for learning called “tiger parenting” (Kim, Wang, Orozco-Lapray, Shen, & Murtuza, 2013; Kohler, Aldridge, Christensen, & Kilgo, 2012). Tiger parenting, often seen as overly authoritarian by Western people, is characterized by a belief that academic success is more important than a child’s self-esteem (Kohler et al., 2012). A longitudinal study involving 444 Chinese American families showed that children of tiger parents were less successful academically than children of parents who exercised more supportive parenting strategies (Kim, Wang, Orozco-Lapray, Shen, & Murtuza, 2013). The current study does not attempt to obtain data regarding the participants’ parents, but answers to interview questions revealed that the pedagogy used by their foreign teachers that contributed to participants’ improvement in their oral English and raised their self-confidence included positive words of encouragement. Encouragement is significant because students’ self-esteem influences their English speaking proficiency (Mandokhail et al., 2018). The literature in this section indicates that Chinese students’ social context for learning English includes a Confucian system of hierarchy and Chinese family values.

Pedagogical Practice

Literature supports the pedagogy that participants in the current study claimed positively influenced their oral English proficiency and self-confidence. If tiger parenting ignores self-esteem (Kohler et al., 2012), then, according to research tiger parenting misses an important pedagogical element of language learning. Students are often inhibited from speaking in their

English classes for fear of committing errors and receiving criticism, but inhibition can be alleviated by a pedagogy that uses praise and nurtures a positive and enthusiastic environment (Leong & Ahmadi, 2017). In order to promote self-confidence, Zhang (2014) suggested error correction be preceded with positive comments from the teacher. The most effective teachers of the participants of the current study stimulated a positive and enthusiastic classroom environment through a pedagogy of collaborative learning.

Collaborative learning, particularly through the use of discussion-based pedagogy, enhances English learning by inspiring enthusiasm, increasing class cohesion, and increasing student participation (Zhang, 2014). Discussion-based pedagogy is predominant in communicative language teaching (CLT) methods (Garrote, Alonso & Galetti, 2018). CLT aligns with the theory of experiential learning (Yardley, Teunissen, & Dornan, 2012), which frames the current research. A case study on two teachers in Bangladesh, using classroom observation and interview as data sources, examined teachers' beliefs about CLT (Rahman, Singh, & Pandian, 2018). The study showed that the teachers used very little pair work and group work in their classrooms because of time restraints due to an exam-focused system that primarily used lecture pedagogy, but teachers believed that more pair and group work were needed in their classrooms (Rahman et al., 2018). The use of CLT activities, such as drama, role play, and debate are effective activities for raising English fluency (Arung & Jumardin, 2016; Pishkar, Moinzadeh, Dabaghi, 2017; Rojaz & Villafuerte, 2018; Tipmontree & Tasanameelarp, 2020). The participants of the current study cited pair and group work, drama, role play, and out-of-class discussions as contributors to their oral English fluency improvement.

Kalantari and Hashemian (2015) investigated the influence of telling stories to children aged 10-14 on English vocabulary learning in a language center in Iran by analyzing a

vocabulary and grammar pretest and a posttest. The experimental group ($n=15$) was taught through storytelling and the control group ($n=15$) was taught without using stories. A t test was run in order to determine whether or not story telling had a significant positive effect. On the pretest, the experimental group had a mean score of 11.00 and the control group had a mean score of 11.06. The posttest mean score for the students who learned with stories was 27.86 and the control group mean score was 22.80. The t test showed a significant increase in vocabulary learning for the experimental group after they were taught with stories. A study of ESL college students in San Francisco showed the effectiveness of students telling stories through an online platform (Kim, 2014). Story-telling, presented by the teacher or created by students, stimulates language proficiency and increases self-confidence (Krishna & Sandhya, 2015).

Although experiential learning theory emphasizes learning through real experiences (Yardley, Teunissen, & Dornan, 2012), the participants of the current study also received direct teaching during their successful English learning journeys, including vocabulary and pronunciation instruction, careful error correction, and lectures on culture. English errors common among Chinese learners need to be corrected (Zhan, 2015). However, Huang, Hao and Liu (2016) cautioned against causing Chinese students to become discouraged through overcorrection, and suggested exercising patience during correction in order to avoid negatively affecting students' self-confidence. Students desire to increase vocabulary learning in order to improve their oral English proficiency (Vasu & Dhanavel, 2015) and English teachers need to recognize English pronunciation inaccuracies that are caused by Chinese students' L1 interference (Li, 2016). Because meaning is not only communicated through vocabulary and grammar, but also through cultural context, English teachers need to provide instruction on culture (Lee, 2014). Although English is generally not best taught through the teacher-centered

lecture GTM approach (Tan, 2016), direct teaching is also an essential element of language teaching pedagogy.

Experiential learning theory endorses the use of authentic activities (Yardley, Teunissen, & Dornan, 2012) and literature supports assigning authentic activities as a valid pedagogical approach to teaching ESL. Ozverir and Herrington (2011) argue that a language class without authentic learning is decontextualized, therefore students are unable to transform L2 learning into connections with the real world. A study of 11 secondary school English teachers in China, using a survey to determine the participants' knowledge about and use of authentic assessment (AA), confirmed a need for using authentic assessment but also revealed that the teachers who participated in the study rarely used AA (Huang & Jiang, 2020). The survey revealed that 70% of the teachers possessed knowledge about AA, but only 20% of the teachers said they had actually implemented it even though they agreed to the value of adding AA to their assessment strategy (Huang & Jiang, 2020). Participants of the current study cited a number of authentic activities that enhanced their oral English improvement.

Learning Strategies

The aim of this study was to discover which pedagogical practices contributed to the participants' increase in oral English proficiency and self-confidence, practices that may include encouraging students to take the initiative to employ effective learning strategies. Learners are often hindered from advancing their English proficiency because they are unmotivated, inhibited from speaking in class for fear of making mistakes, or because they prefer using their L1 in English class (Leong & Ahmadi, 2017). A study in Indonesia reported observations of 16 high school English students: eight low performers and eight high performers (Gani, Fajrina & Hanifa, 2015). The study did not explain specifically how students were classified as high and

low performers, except to say a teacher selected them for the categories. After observing and interviewing the participants, the investigators determined that low performers used less variety in their learning strategies than high performers and low performers had a tendency to ask classmates for help with pronunciation and focused more on memorization. High performers used a broader variety of strategies including listening to native English speakers and repeating, listening to English music, and watching English movies (Gani et al, 2015). During English conversations, when low performers heard words they did not understand, they tended to revert to their L1; but high performers either tried to predict the meaning or asked for synonyms, and high performers used English more with their friends outside of class (Gani et al., 2015). A study by Guo (2011) in Taiwan on out-of-class activity “encourages students to expand their language experience to outside the classroom by making them aware of existing and available English language opportunities in their surroundings” (p. 252).

Summary

The literature reviewed in this chapter supports the purpose of this study, which is to discover which pedagogical practices are effective for raising Chinese non-English major doctoral students’ English-speaking fluency and self-confidence for oral English communication. There are, however, gaps in the existing literature. For example, studies by Gani et al. (2015) and Tanjung (2018) reported a variety of effective ESL strategies, but the study only observed learners in Indonesia. Kalantari and Hashemian (2015) investigated the use of stories for teaching English in Iran and Rahman et al. (2018) provided insight on the use of CLT methods in an ESL classroom in Bangladesh. These studies reveal valuable data that English teachers and learners everywhere can glean from, but a gap appears to exist in the focus areas of these studies

for increasing oral English proficiency and self-confidence specifically for Chinese learners of English.

Gaps also appear in literature related to ESL teaching and learning for Chinese students. Liao et al. (2018) demonstrated that successful English classes consist of not only the right material, but also creative pedagogy; however, the study in Taiwan only considered elementary school students. A study by Jackson & Chen (2017) revealed valuable data on discussion-based learning for Chinese students; however, the study focused on Chinese undergraduate students who studied abroad. For their research on the use of western andragogy in China, Wang and Storey (2015) only used participants who taught reading. Schenck's (2015) study on Confucius-influenced pedagogy in China provided useful data for the current study, notwithstanding its generic application. A generalized study by Tan (2016) contrasted the difference between GTM and CLT pedagogies in China. Shi et al. (2017) described family issues that affect Chinese college students' self-esteem, but the study only focused on freshmen students. A study by Wang (2016), which was not English-learning specific, described Confucian influenced hierarchy. Hu and Hagedorn (2014) uncovered shortcomings in China's exam-oriented educational system, but the participants were part of a study abroad program; and, Huang and Jiang (2020) presented the need for authentic assessment in Chinese secondary schools. All of the studies described in this chapter contribute valuable findings to the body of research in the field of ESL as well as background information for the current study, but the absence of research that focuses specifically on pedagogy for increasing oral English proficiency and self-confidence for Chinese non-English major adult PhD students represents a gap in literature.

III. METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this single-instrument case study was to discover which pedagogical practices are effective for raising Chinese non-English major doctoral students' English-speaking fluency and self-confidence for oral English communication. A primary element of this study was to synthesize the learning experiences of the participants in order to generalize factors that positively influenced oral English fluency and self-confidence. This chapter describes the design of the study and the analysis that was used for answering the research question.

Description of Research Design

A case study may be conducted when the researcher wants to find out what happened or how something happened (Mills & Gay, 2019). Data was collected and analyzed in this study for the purpose of finding out how the participants improved their oral English proficiency and raised their self-confidence, or what happened in or beyond the classroom that positively influenced their English fluency and confidence. Through the interview questions, the participants were verbally invited to share stories of how their English journeys resulted in their current conditions of English fluency and self-confidence, regardless of whether their fluency and confidence increased as a direct result of teacher intervention or if their improvement resulted from other sources. Interview questions (Appendix A) were designed in order to discover the participants' perspectives on the problem of Chinese students' deficiencies in self-confidence and oral English fluency as well as their perspectives on which pedagogical practices

positively influenced their oral English fluency and self-confidence for speaking English.

Qualitative case studies are suitable for presenting various perspectives of a problem or process (Creswell and Poth, 2018). This section outlines the design of the research, including a description of the participants, the researcher's role, an explanation of how participants were protected ethically, and the research question.

Participants

The participants were adult non-English major Chinese doctoral students who formerly studied in a city in China, all of whom had been observed by peers as having made progress in their oral English fluency and their self-confidence for speaking English. Sample selection was purposeful because the invited students were specifically observed by peers as meeting the criteria of having improved their English fluency and raised their self-confidence during their English journeys, therefore defining the procedure as purposive criterion sampling (Mills & Gay, 2019). The sample consisted of six participants, including five females and one male, from varied demographical backgrounds.

Recruitment and selection of participants took place in three stages. First, the researcher contacted, by phone, class small group leaders and a Chinese friend Ellen (pseudonym) who is fluent in English, described the study to them, and asked them to recommend Chinese former PhD students known to them as having begun with oral English and self-confidence deficiencies, but appeared to have improved in both areas. Six of the people invited by Ellen and the group leaders who were interested in participating in the study replied to an informal email invitation (Appendix C). As a third stage in the recruitment process, the researcher informally communicated with the six people by phone while observing their use of oral English and apparent self-confidence for speaking English. Other than asking candidates if they felt their

oral English ability and self-confidence had increased, no formal question list was used, but participant candidates were encouraged to speak freely. During these conversations, the researcher explained the nature of the study and informed the potential participants that they were free to drop out of the study at any time. Through the conversations, all six people confirmed their interest in participating. Finally, the participant candidates received emailed copies of an adult consent form (Appendix B) which further explained the nature of the study and informed the candidates that there would be no compensation offered for participation. The consent forms included Chinese translations. All six candidates signed and returned the forms.

In addition to genders, Table 1 lists the ages participants started learning English, whether or not they had a foreign teacher, their childhood home background, and their majors in undergraduate and PhD studies. Case studies should employ variation in sampling (Creswell and Poth, 2018). Demographic data is provided in Table 1 showing the existence a variety of backgrounds in order to determine whether the factors that positively influenced participants’ English fluency and confidence discovered in this study are generalizable to varied demographics.

Table 1

Participant Demographics

Name (pseudonym)	Gender	Age / grade started learning English	Had a foreign teacher	Childhood home	Major Undergrad/PhD
Rebecca	F	8	Yes	City	History / Modern China History
Laura	F	Grade 3	Yes	Rural	Chinese Grammar
Levi	M	12	Yes	Rural	Biology / Neuroscience
Penny	F	Grade 1	Yes	City	Chinese language & literature / Chinese Classical Philology
Sherry	F	12	Yes	Rural	Linguistics/Linguistics
Kelly	F	9	No	Town	Animal & Plant Quarantine / Agricultural Pest Control

Role of Researcher

The researcher, who lives and teaches in China and therefore has access to Chinese people who have studied English, was an observer of the participants' use of English and their display of apparent self-confidence for speaking English. During the recruiting process, the researcher observed that the participant candidates appeared to be confident because of their eagerness to converse in English. Qualitative researchers collect data themselves, make observations, and employ interviews by designing their own open-ended questions rather than questions designed by other researchers (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The researcher of the current study created interview questions (Appendix A) for the purpose of discovering specific factors that had positively influenced participants' oral English proficiency and self-confidence. Fluency and apparent self-confidence were further observed by the researcher during the interview process.

Measures for Ethical Protection

The researcher assured the anonymity of the participants' identity through the following measures. The universities and the city where the participants resided and studied were not recorded in this study. Participants' names were replaced with pseudonyms. The researcher explained the nature of the study to participants both verbally and in writing, and provided a Chinese translation of this information. All of the participants voluntarily agreed to participate in this study, and each participant received through email, and signed, an adult consent form (Appendix B), which was also translated into Chinese. The researcher was the only person who had access to personal information about the participants and the information was stored with password protection in the researcher's personal computer during the study. In order to avoid any conflict of interest and prevent participants from feeling coerced into giving only positive

answers to interview questions, none of the people invited to participate were students of the researcher during the academic year that the study took place, and all participants were invited to join the study by people other than the researcher. Finally, participants were informed of their option to withdraw at any time during the study for any reason without any consequences.

Research Question

Creswell and Poth (2018) suggested forming one central question followed by sub-questions that serve to refine the overarching central question. The central research question that guided this study was, *which pedagogical practices most effectively raise oral English communication proficiency and boost student self-confidence in Chinese PhD students for communicating orally in English?* Questions that refine the central research question for this study are embedded in the interview questions (Appendix A).

Data Collection

After receiving approval from the Southeastern University Institutional Review Board (IRB), the researcher collected data in a city in China in July and August, 2020. The collection process did not take place within the campus of a university or any other institution where authorization for the study would be required. Interviews were conducted by telephone. The consent forms were sent to participants by email, digitally signed, and returned by email to the researcher. The researcher informed participants that if they desired a paper copy, it could be sent to them by mail. All of the participants declined the offer for paper copies.

Instrument(s) Used in Data Collection

Interviews. Case studies often use interviews as a primary instrument of data collection (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The researcher conducted interviews with the participants in order to ascertain the reasons behind these students' observable upsurge in self-confidence and oral

English fluency and to examine the relationship between participants' self-confidence and their fluency. This study aimed to use interviews to gather data based on the participants' perceptions of factors that led to their improved English fluency and self-confidence, for interviews are conducted with participants in order to "ascertain their perceptions" (Joyner, Rouse & Glatthorn, 2018, p. 86). Appointments for the interviews were set at times most convenient for participants. Each interview lasted approximately 30 minutes, including thanking participants and asking clarifying questions.

Observation. According to McGrath, Palmgren, and Liljedahl (2018), the researcher is also considered to be one of the instruments, and the researcher should be viewed "as a co-creator of data together with the interviewee, where the interviewer's previous knowledge may play an important part in understanding the context or the experiences of the interviewee" (p. 1004). With more than 20 years of experience teaching English in China, during the interviews the researcher's previous knowledge of Chinese learners of English was used to observe and evaluate interviewees' fluency, intonation, pronunciation, listening skills, and indicators of self-confidence while they participated in the interview. These observations were written as field notes for this study. In qualitative research, field notes consist of information that describes what the observer directly sees or hears and reflections describing the researcher's reactions, thoughts, and experience related to what is observed (Mills & Gay, 2019). The researcher of this study wrote in the field notes observations and reflections about participants' fluency, displays of confidence, and overall English communication skills during the interviews. Because the interviews were conducted by telephone, visual observations were not made or recorded. However, fluency indicators such as voice inflections, laughs, pauses, and rhythm were written in the field notes. Observations were not made apart from the interview.

The Otter web application was used to record and transcribe interviews on a laptop computer. Otter is an application that records voice through the computer microphone and simultaneously generates digital transcripts on the computer screen from the voice recordings (Liang & Fu, 2020). The phone speaker function was used during the interviews in this study in order for Otter to receive and transcribe the interviews. An iPhone voice recorder was also available in case internet interruptions would prevent Otter from working. After the interviews, the researcher listened to the recordings, made corrections on the Otter transcriptions, and emailed copies of the transcriptions to participants for verification of accuracy. The final edited copy of the transcripts, which included pseudonyms in place of participants' real names, was saved on a universal serial bus drive and stored in a locked cabinet. The Otter online voice recordings and transcripts were deleted at the conclusion of the study.

Validity of the Interview Instrument

Because the data in qualitative studies is contextualized rather than generalized to larger populations (Mills & Gay, 2019), it was not necessary for the data to be generalized to all Chinese learners of English. However, the open-ended interview questions did provide participants with opportunities to freely tell their stories about what factors led to their increased oral English fluency and self-confidence, therefore providing results that address the purpose of this research. In order to further assure participants understood the questions, the researcher emailed digital copies of the questions to the participants approximately one week before the interviews were conducted. Due to the simplicity of the questions and the English study experiences of the participants, the researcher did not deem it necessary to provide Chinese translations of the questions; however, participants were asked by phone if they understood the questions, to which they all responded affirmatively. Since none of the participants were

students of the researcher at the time of the study, there was no motive for bias on the part of the researcher or reasons for skewed answers from the participants. An additional validity measurement was taken to assure accuracy of the transcripts. First, the researcher listened to the sound recordings of the interviews, compared the vocal content with the digital transcripts generated by the Otter application, and made transcript corrections accordingly. Copies of the transcripts were sent by email to the participants to verify the transcripts were accurate and that the transcripts say what the participants meant to say. Participants pointed out a few minor inaccuracies in the transcript copies that were sent to them and added additional comments. The researcher made corrections accordingly. Inaccuracies were minor and would not have altered the meanings, but this measure was taken because researchers must assure the accuracy of participant quotes (Mills & Gay, 2019). An example of an inaccuracy on the transcripts occurred where the researcher thought the participant said, “topics related to our own researching contents,” which was also written on the Otter transcript, but after seeing the student put the corrected clause into writing, “researching” on the transcript was changed to “research.”

The researcher triangulated data from the six interviews in order to observe common patterns. The process of triangulation involves combining perspectives from different sources to highlight a perspective (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Perspectives on positive factors toward English improvement that were found reoccurring between different participants were highlighted.

Reliability of the Interview Instrument

One of the ways a researcher can gain rapport with participants in qualitative research is to clarify the researcher’s motivation for selecting them as participants (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The individuals who introduced the participant candidates to the researcher explained to the candidates that the purpose of this study was to discover what helped participants increase their

oral English skills and self-confidence, with the motive of providing information that would help future Chinese learners of English. Prior to this study, the researcher was known by the individuals who introduced the participant candidates, thus providing a positive connection with the candidates. Pre-interview informal phone conversations between the researcher and the candidates further established trust and rapport. Participants were not offered any incentive to provide favorable answers to interview questions, and the prospect that their interview responses would help other Chinese learners with English improvement served to motivate participants to provide honest and candid responses.

In order to assure reliability of the data, participants' invitation to review copies of the interview transcriptions not only included inviting them to check to assure correct transcription, but also to make sure the transcriptions adequately conveyed what the participants wanted to say and to give participants an opportunity to add any comments they felt were important to making their English learning journeys understood. An example happened when a student said she meant to say that she grew up in a rural area. The new information was added to the transcript. After assuring all of the transcripts expressed what participants wanted to say, the process of coding was initiated. Reliability can be increased by using codes in data analysis (Creswell and Poth, 2018). In this study, participants' answers to questions were categorically coded to reveal consistencies and patterns between responses and to develop themes.

Procedures

Before conducting each interview, the researcher explained the information on the consent form and the procedure for the interview and asked participants if they had any questions. The researcher also encouraged participants to ask any clarifying questions they might have during the interview and to freely say anything they wanted to about their English

journeys, even if not directly asked by the questions. Participants were also informed that they may decline to answer any questions they were not comfortable with. Being cognizant of their choice, all six participants freely responded to all of the interview questions.

Methods to Address Assumptions of Generalizability

Purposive sampling was used in this study in order to purposefully focus the data on the aim of the research, which was to discover which pedagogical practices positively affected the improvement of oral English fluency and the increase of self-confidence for adult Chinese PhD non-English major students (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The informal nature of the semi-structured interviews, which allowed participants the freedom to describe their English learning journey in their own words, increased the generalizability of the results of the study. Participants were unknown to each other, thus, they were unable to collaborate and intentionally produce agreement in their interview responses, but common generalizable similarities surfaced in the answers to the questions. According to Mills and Gay (2019), qualitative researchers do not generalize their research to larger populations; however, if similar patterns appear in the data from this study's participants, given their varying demographics, factors that increased English fluency for participants may be applicable to other Chinese adult PhD non-English learners.

Even though making case studies generalizable presents a challenge (Creswell & Poth, 2018), according to Yin (2014), case study results are generalizable analytically rather than statistically and instead of being generalized to a population they are generalized to, or compared with, a previous theory. The researcher compared the data in this study with the theory of experiential learning.

Data Analysis

Data derived from the transcripts of the interview responses were coded, themes were identified, and the data was analyzed. Errors in the Otter transcriptions of the interviews were corrected by the researcher listening to the recordings and by participants examining transcripts for errors. After the accuracy of the transcripts was assured, the researcher carefully read the transcripts and the field notes to determine general classifications, and then began the rigorous process of coding. Coding, a major component of case studies, consists of aggregating the data into manageable groups or categories, and then assigning labels to each category (Creswell & Poth, 2018). While reading the field notes and participants' answers to the interview questions, patterns began to emerge, from which the researcher created codes in order to aggregate the data into identifiable categories. Codes were assigned labels based on words or meanings expressed by participants for the purpose of identifying specific categories, and each label was highlighted with an identifying color or symbol. Unique identifiers mentioned in statements that could potentially identify the participants, such as names of universities, names of teachers, and students' hometowns, were removed from the transcripts and field notes.

After several rounds of coding and re-coding, the categories were grouped into themes, or classifications, of factors that positively influenced participants' English fluency and confidence as well as other relevant information that was identified in the data. Factors that raised oral English fluency and self-confidence as a direct result of teacher intervention (pedagogy) were categorized separately from factors that were not said to be directly pedagogical. Data that coincided with the study's theoretical framework, experiential learning (Yardley et al., 2012), were placed in separate categories from data that were not supported by the experiential learning theory.

Research Question

The central research question for this study is *which pedagogical practices most effectively raise oral English communication proficiency and boost student self-confidence in Chinese PhD students for communicating orally in English?* Four entities needed to be categorized in order to address the central question: improved oral English proficiency, increased self-confidence, pedagogical practices, and factors that did not directly involve teacher intervention. In order to address the research question, interview responses were categorized and analyzed according to these four entities before further coding was applied.

Summary

Many Chinese students are unable to make significant improvement in their oral English communication proficiency because they lack the self-confidence to speak in English (Zhang, 2014). The third chapter of this qualitative case study provided a structured description of the methods that were used for collecting and analyzing data in order to identify factors that positively influenced the participants' increase in oral English fluency and self-confidence for speaking English.

The process of data collection through interviews and analysis by coding for this study was typical for case studies (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Participants who were recommended to the researcher by their peers were selected that met the criteria of having significantly raised their English fluency and self-confidence and data collection instruments included interviews and observation. Data were analyzed by carefully studying field notes and interview transcripts, coding, and aggregation of the information into identifiable themes. Methods used for gathering and analyzing of data were explained in this chapter and the results of the data analyzation are described in the next chapter.

IV. RESULTS

The purpose of this single-instrument case study was to discover which pedagogical practices positively influenced Chinese non-English major doctoral students' English-speaking fluency and self-confidence for oral English communication. The study examined students' accounts of factors that led to their increased oral English proficiency and confidence. Chinese people study English from their youth, but a deficiency in self-confidence prevents many students from speaking English (Tridinanti, 2018). The confidence deficiency creates a negative cycle of low oral English fluency due to lack of practice, and lack of practice due to low confidence (Tridinanti, 2018). The goal of the research was to acquire insight into which practices enabled participants to successfully break the negative self-confidence low English skill cycle and raise oral English proficiency and self-confidence for speaking English. Through the lens of the theory of experiential learning, the qualitative approach allowed the participants' narration of their English learning journeys from childhood to PhD learning to be heard and the participants' perceptions of factors that resulted in increased English fluency and self-confidence to be examined.

This study synthesized the reported learning experiences of the six participants in order to discover and generalize factors that positively influenced oral English fluency and self-confidence for speaking English. This chapter provides a detailed analysis of the data to answer the research question; which pedagogical practices most effectively raise oral English

communication proficiency and boost student self-confidence in Chinese PhD students for communicating orally in English?

Methods of Data Collection

Data was collected by telephone interviews with six Chinese students who did not major in English and who had previously taken PhD level English courses at various universities in a single city in China. The six participants met the criteria of being identified by peers as having improved their oral English fluency and increased their self-confidence for communicating in English. All six candidates, five females and one male, accepted an email invitation to participate in this study and all six provided written consent to be interviewed. After interviews were conducted by telephone, real names were replaced with pseudonyms in order to protect the participants' identities. Prior to the interviews, participants signed a bilingual adult consent form (Appendix B).

After responses to the six open-ended questions (Appendix A) were recorded and transcribed by Otter a.i., an application on a technical device, the transcripts were re-typed on a Microsoft Word Document using a laptop computer. The participants received emailed copies of the transcripts and provided feedback to validate the accuracy of the transcriptions to assure the data represented the participants' responses. All six participants provided corrections to minor errors in the transcripts, and four of the participants volunteered additional comments by email and text messages in order to clarify their responses to the interview questions. The additional comments, at the requests of the participants, were integrated into the interview transcripts. The final draft of the transcripts, which included edits made in accordance with the participants' feedback, was saved on a removable disk and stored in a locked cabinet. Otter a.i. files were permanently deleted at the conclusion of the study. After a thorough reading through

the transcript data multiple times to gain an in-depth understanding of the participants' accounts of factors that raised their English levels and self-confidence, data were coded in order to identify themes that focused on the research question and the learning theory that framed this study.

Research Question

The interview protocol consisting of 6 open-ended questions (Appendix A) was designed to answer the research question: *Which pedagogical practices most effectively raise oral English communication proficiency and boost student self-confidence in Chinese PhD non-English major students for communicating in English?*

Findings

Answers to the research question surfaced in the data after the six participants reflected on teachers who had positively influenced their oral English communication proficiency and self-confidence for speaking English. Participant Rebecca credited her PhD English teacher's pedagogy to oral English improvement by stating, "I can improve my speaking if I keep learning... my teacher's way." After listing specific classroom practices assigned by her teacher, Rebecca concluded, "All of them [were] helpful to study English and [gave] me self-confidence." While the activities cited by Rebecca, Sherry, and Penny emphasized pedagogy of having students orally interact with each other, Laura also considered using the textbook to be a useful pedagogical practice. Levi and Penny highlighted dialogue with their foreign teachers as a factor that increased their oral English proficiency.

Descriptions of English learning journeys revealed perspectives of specific factors that raised the oral English fluency for the participants. After the accuracy of the transcripts was validated by the participants, interview data were analyzed. Analyzation commenced by the

creation of a codebook, and through careful examination of the codes, themes that addressed the research question emerged.

Themes

In qualitative studies, researchers derive themes from codes based on information that researchers expected to find before the study and new unexpected information (Creswell & Poth, 2018). In order to maintain objective data analysis and inductively extract data-driven information, perspectives accumulated from teaching experience were bracketed. However, the theoretical framework of this study, theory of experiential learning (TEL), prompted an expectation of certain information to emerge. Some of the student-participation codes that comprised the codebook support TEL and were anticipated before the study because TEL advocates learning through experience (Yardley, Teunissen, & Dornan, 2012). Other codes that were aggregated into themes were unexpected because they did not coincide with TEL.

The codebook consisted of 34 codes representing specific factors participants reported as positive influences on their oral English proficiency and self-confidence for speaking English. Some of the codes overlapped; for example, *speaking with a native English speaker*, and *encouraging more speaking practice* both entail speaking practice, but the first code is more specific than the latter code and both codes were merged into the same theme. After several careful readings through the transcripts, categorical themes among codes, or generalized factors that participants disclosed as positive influences on their English and confidence, were observed. The themes emerged logically and naturally; for example, the codes *pair work* and *group work*, were both kinds of interactive speaking activities and were included in the aggregation of codes into the initial theme of interactive speaking activities. After further analyzation, the interactive speaking activities theme was merged as a sub-theme into the broader theme of speaking and

listening. Codes that addressed the research question as pedagogical practices were initially aggregated into five themes. The original five themes were narrowed down and subsequently collapsed into the two themes displayed in Table 2: Speaking and listening and fostering a learning environment.

Table 2

Description of Themes

Theme	Description
Speaking and Listening	Teacher employs pedagogical practices that require students to use monologue, to practice listening, and to dialogically engage in real English conversations.
Fostering a learning environment	Teacher’s actions or words create a specific kind of classroom environment for learning and practicing English.

Theme 1: Speaking and Listening

The six participants all attested to improved oral English proficiency and increased self-confidence through pedagogical practices and student learning techniques that involved speaking and listening. Sherry attributed increased English fluency and confidence to her teacher’s requirements for students to speak in class and to listen to each other. Rebecca listed several speaking and listening activities and concluded that, “All of them can be helpful to study English and [gave] me self-confidence.” The participants improved oral English fluency through the hands-on experience of speaking and listening, a phenomenon that coincides with the theory of experiential learning (TEL) or learning through real-life experiences (Yardley, Teunissen, & Dornan, 2012).

Through narratives of English learning journeys, participants indicated a greater former deficiency in speaking and listening than in reading. Kelly recounted that in her early years of

English learning her reading ability was “okay” but that her English speaking and listening were poor. Referring to her middle-school English language proficiency, Sherry said she was only good at test writing. The effectiveness of subsequent speaking and listening activities was supported in the field notes when it was observed that Sherry did not display any English listening difficulty during the interview.

The theme of speaking and listening emerged from the consolidation of the four sub-themes displayed in figure 3. The data showed *interactive speaking activities* as the dominant sub-theme of effective pedagogical practices for participants’ increased oral English proficiency and self-confidence. The dialogical nature of interactive speaking activities distinguished this pedagogy from the *speaking in front of others*, which primarily involved monologue and did not always include verbal responses from listeners. Speaking in front of others focused on speaking practice, but learning under *direct teaching*, the third sub-theme, provided listening practice for students. Most of the pedagogical practices cited by participants included interaction between students or between teachers and students, but some of the data indicated linguistic growth resulting from *individual activities*, the fourth sub-theme of speaking and listening.

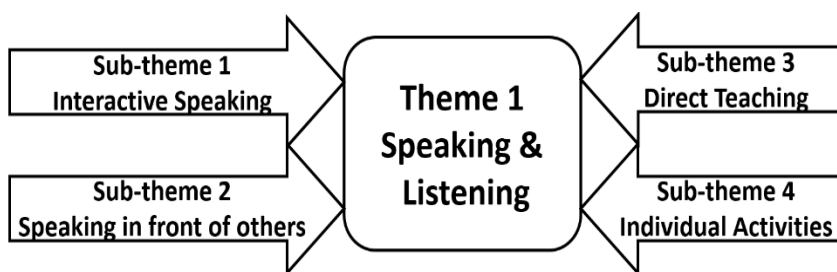


Figure 3: Four sub-themes that comprise the theme of speaking and listening.

Data from the interview responses indicated that speaking activities were a necessary pedagogical practice for positively affecting oral English fluency and self-confidence for

speaking English. The development of the *interactive speaking activities* sub-theme was anticipated because, according to TEL, students learn through participation, real-life experiences, and collaboration with other learners (Yardley, Teunissen, & Dornan, 2012). In accord with TEL, all of the participants expressed the value of speaking activities for improving oral English fluency. For example, Sherry commented:

I think the most helpful thing my English teachers did is that they provided many chances for us to practice and communicate with other students in class. For example...my English teacher prepared many topics for us, such as culture and love. Not only did we need to talk these topics with group members, but also we need[ed] to change seats every time and talk with students in other groups (pair work). I think I learned a lot in the process. Firstly, I was pushed to express myself in English, and I found that it was not as difficult as I thought before.

Sherry's comments revealed two specific interactive pedagogical practices that agreed with statements made by other participants: Group work and pair work. Laura shared, "Group role-playing was an activity that improved students' oral confidence and fluency," and Kelly reported, "weekly group meetings helped me a lot." Participants reported pair work as an effective activity employed by teachers for helping students improve their English fluency. Levi referred to pair work when he stated, "talking with partners [was] also very helpful." A list of classroom activities that positively influenced Rebecca included, "role-play in pairs and rotating" and referring to the same kind of activity, Penny included in her list, "seat changing pair work help[ed] my English and confidence a lot." The type of pair work indicated by Rebecca and Penny involved the teacher lining students up in double rows and providing a question for partners to ask each other. After several minutes, the teacher provided a different question and

directed students to rotate to new partners and ask each other the new question. Eventually, each student was partnered with every classmate at least once. Sherry referred to this type of activity in the passage above when she said, “but also we need to change seats every time and talk with students [from] other groups.” In addition to pair and group work, other pedagogical practices were included in the interactive speaking activities theme.

Penny’s description of pair work included role-play. Rebecca also referred to “role-play in pairs,” and Laura reported increased fluency and confidence through “group role-play.” Role playing involves students socially interacting with each other to simulate a real-life situation, to pretend they are in a particular profession or setting (Puspitorini, 2018). The role-play experiences of the participants were not conducted in front of the class, but in pairs or small groups, thus allowing students to spontaneously express themselves in English without the anxiety of performing before an audience.

Other interactive speaking activities mentioned by participants as positive influences on their English fluency and confidence included debate, creating and telling stories, and Bible study. According to Rebecca, not only was debate a good activity for improving English, but in order to prepare for the debate, students practiced research. Role-play, debate, and the creation of stories were interactive speaking activities usually conducted in groups. Students, working in their small groups, debated as teams against other groups. Rebecca reported story-telling as another valuable group activity. In class, the teacher displayed pictures on the classroom screen and asked students, in groups, to make up stories from the pictures and to share their stories with other groups. Levi said of the Bible study, “It was quite interactive and led by an American. I believe it helped many Chinese to learn the English as well as the Bible.”

Speaking and listening practice through interactive speaking activities was not limited to conversing with Chinese classmates. Participants cited interacting with native English speakers as a positive influence on their oral English proficiency and self-confidence. Chatting with the teacher and a video activity were examples of talking with a native speaker of English. Rebecca's teacher assigned students to find a non-Chinese person, initiate an English conversation with that person, and make a video recording of the conversation to show in class. Penny described a similar assignment where students were to, "find a foreigner in campus, interviewed him or her for at least five minutes, and take a video." After the activity, Penny concluded that the activity [makes] me willing to communicate with more foreigners, raise[d] my oral English fluency." Levi, who said his English improved due to conversations he engaged in with a foreign professor, stated that, "if you communicate, if you talk to a foreigner, you will learn to speak naturally." Penny said, "the more you speak with foreigners, the better oral English you'll have...chatting with foreigners can improve spoken English better than reading English articles and memorizing words by yourself." Penny also credited her conversations over tea with a teacher from California as positively affecting her oral English fluency. Conversing with native English speakers was such a predominant factor in the data for improving oral English that Rebecca and Sherry advised studying abroad. Levi concluded that, "after, you know, speaking with an English speaker, I can improve my English ability, and this is real ability." Laura recommended finding opportunities to talk with foreigners and Kelly advised making friends with foreigners. Talking with native English speakers and other interactive speaking activities that positively influenced participants' oral English and confidence are illustrated in Figure 4.

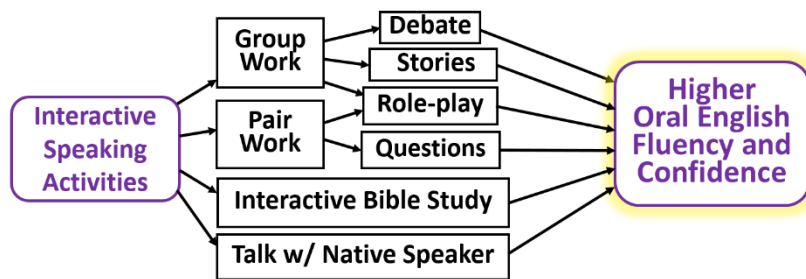


Figure 4: Activities in the sub-theme of interactive speaking activities that positively affected oral English proficiency and self-confidence.

The pedagogical practice of employing interactive speaking not only included specific types of activities, participants also mentioned the value of the content, or topics, of the classroom discussions. Kelly’s report of pedagogy that helped her improve her English skills included the use of familiar topics and topics related to the students’ research. Students in Kelly’s class used prior knowledge from their research to practice English, which coincides with the theory that framed this study, TEL, a theory that builds on previous learning experiences (Yardley et al., 2012). Sherry said that her teacher prepared various topics, such as culture and love, and asked students to discuss the topics in groups and pairs. Penny spoke of the teacher who helped her improve her English, “His classes have different kinds of topics, which [were] very interesting.”

Participants cited self-expression as a positive influence on their English learning. In answer to the interview question of which class activities were most helpful, Sherry reflected on her experiences in classroom group discussions, “everyone needs to listen to others and give some advice.” Sherry said that the activities helped her learn “ideas from other classmates.” Likewise, Penny said her teacher encouraged students to communicate their ideas with classmates. Laura, speaking of her former learning, lamented that because the purpose of

English study was to just prepare for exams, students were only asked to talk about the content of their textbooks. Laura advised students to “try to talk freely.” Reporting on her journey of improving her English communications skills, Rebecca said, “I could speak English and use different words to express my idea and thought.”

All six participants confirmed the need for speaking practice. Levi said, “You need to speak a lot,” and Kelly recommended, “practice in actual talking much.” Rebecca reported that she benefited when the teacher encouraged her “to speak bravely, to practice more.” Laura’s teacher, “asked the students to talk with each other and to have conversations in the classroom,” and Penny said that a teacher who affected her very much encouraged students to “communicate our ideas with other classmates.” Penny summarized the benefit of interactive speaking activities: “I think the most helpful thing my English teacher did is that they provided many chances for us to practice and communicate with other students.”

Participants cited *speaking in front of other people* far less than they talked about interactive speaking activities, but comments about the sub-theme of speaking in front of others were positive. Speaking in front of others is also supported by the theory that framed this study. Jenkins and Clarke (2017) connected speaking in front of the class as a way experiential learning helped disengaged students to become more engaged. The sub-theme of speaking or performing in front of others was derived from the three data codes of drama, presentations, and debate.

The use of drama as a classroom activity was an interactive group activity because group members collaborated together, but the performance nature of drama also fits this activity into the speaking and listening sub-theme of improving English through speaking in front of others. Rebecca stated, “Drama can make me more familiar with dialogue... [drama] was a good way to help our English.” Debate was listed as a code for the sub-theme of interactive speaking

activities because students conducted debates with their groups, but debates were also observed by others, qualifying this activity as part of the performing in front of others sub-theme. As an activity not supported by the theory of experiential learning, preparing and reciting was an unexpected result in the data. Kelly listed “preparing the manuscript in advance” as something that relieved her tension and helped “improve my confidence and raise my oral English fluency.” Laura’s English began improving while attending a private school where one of the strategies was reciting passages from textbooks. Together with talking freely, Laura suggested reading and reciting more. Levi echoed his teacher’s recommendation to recite words before giving a presentation. A marked difference between interactive speaking activities and speaking in front of others is that interactive activities were spontaneous but activities that involved speaking in front of the class generally allowed time for students to prepare in advance.

The data analysis indicated that having students give presentations in front of an audience was an effective pedagogical practice for helping participants improve their English. Laura purported that speaking in public was important for oral fluency and Kelly said she was helped by reporting her work in English. Rebecca cited presentations as something that, “helped me a lot,” and clarified her declaration by saying, “classroom presentations can make me speak bravely before others.” Sherry equated the value of presentations with that of group work; “As for me, the most helpful activities were group discussion and presentations.” Sherry’s teacher did not make students stand alone in front of the class, but integrated presentations with group work by having students present alone only in front of their small groups, and in front of the class together in groups of five to seven students.

Although lecture pedagogy is associated with the traditional Grammar Translation Method (GTM) and not a predominant method connected with experiential learning theory

(Durrani, 2016; Yardley et al., 2012), participants in this study inferred that incidents of the third sub-theme, *direct teaching* benefited their English learning. Rebecca's English was helped by the teacher demonstrating English pronunciation. Penny credited learning culture from her teacher as a motivator for learning English: "the more foreign culture you learn about, the more English you will want to study," and said of her teacher, "he taught me lots of culture about America." Rebecca said learning about culture could "raise interest in English." Laura said her teacher taught some simple sentences, and she mentioned learning about grammar from another teacher. Students practiced English listening and gained knowledge from listening to teachers' stories. Levi was encouraged by his teacher from Jordan who shared the story of his own English learning journey. A Bible study taught in English by an American teacher, also helped Levi. Kelly raised her English proficiency by learning "a lot of words," and although Kelly memorized vocabulary herself, she was also prompted with English words from her teacher. Sherry agreed: "I think it is helpful to accumulate some words that [are] common in our daily life." Participants did not explicitly state that lectures raised their oral English fluency, but the fact that students were given topics to discuss in class implies that the teachers at least talked enough to introduce the topics.

The fourth sub-theme of the speaking and listening theme that developed was *individual activities*. Most individual activities mentioned by participants appeared to be learning strategies or attitudes employed by the participants rather than direct assignments from teachers; however, these individual activities were retained in the data because they positively affected participants' oral English proficiency and self-confidence, and because these activities could be assigned or suggested by teachers as pedagogical practice. Additionally, most of the descriptions of individual activities did not specify whether the activities were self-initiated or recommended by

teachers. The pedagogical practice of providing the right learning tools for inspiring English learning in Rebecca's childhood was not practiced by a classroom teacher. Early in her English learning journey, when Rebecca felt like giving up, her mother bought her some English story books. Rebecca commented on reading these books: "I think this way really raised interest." As a pedagogical practice, teachers could duplicate Rebecca's mother's strategy by giving or lending English storybooks to their students. The individual activity of using books was prompted by some of the participants' teachers, as when Laura's teacher had students work on exercises in the textbook.

An unexpected result in the data analyzation was the recommendation to improve English by traveling outside of China. Participants did not specify whether the suggestion to go abroad came from teachers or if the idea of learning outside of China was student-initiated. Rebecca suggested, "Environment is very important to study, so I think going abroad would be very helpful to students for learning language." Sherry likewise endorsed going abroad as a strategy by anticipating English improvement through her upcoming trip to Hong Kong. At the end of his studies, Levi went to Canada, where he not only put to use the English he learned at university, but continued improving his oral English communication skills by being immersed in an English-speaking environment. Implying that staying in China is not the most ideal way to improve English, Laura lamented, "we have no place to use English." Whether in China or abroad, all of the participants cited talking with native English speakers as a student-initiated strategy for improving oral English fluency.

Participants reported using technology in learning strategies. Rebecca said it really helped her when she listened to English videos and imitated the pronunciation. Laura used an undescribed device called a "language repeater," listened to English music on an MP3 player,

and used the recorder on her cell phone to record her own English pronunciation. After listening to her voice on a phone, Laura compared her pronunciation with the pronunciation of native English speakers. Penny recommended imitating pronunciation and sentences in movies.

Some individual activities that participants reported as positive influences on oral English proficiency may have been employed as classroom practices or initiated by students outside the classroom. Rebecca and Penny recommended learning about culture and Rebecca suggested using music as an English-learning tool. Laura's advice included learning useful expressions, reciting from the textbook, and preparing for conversations in advance.

Additional individual strategies employed by participants were coded as learner attitudes or general advice for improving oral English. Penny's advice for courage was, "don't be afraid of losing face," and "never, never give up." Penny further suggested the attitude that English is a "friend," and further prioritized English as a tool for everyday life. Penny, Kelly, and Sherry recommended frequent use of English and Sherry implied a need for patience when she acknowledged everyone makes mistakes. Levi used body language to communicate and stressed diligence in English learning. Kelly, highlighting prioritizing the main idea more than figuring out the meaning of each word. Kelly also emphasized diligence by recommending preparation for English lessons in advance. Laura prioritized mastering the International Phonetic Alphabet. Levi's attitude toward improving English was that students should unashamedly face their weaknesses, and continue practicing, highlighting a need for patience and diligence. Rebecca stressed being brave enough to speak English. These strategies recommended by participants were diverse, but they all suggested that, in addition to specific individual activities assigned by teachers, learner attitude was essential for raising oral English proficiency and self-confidence.

All six participants confirmed that pedagogical practices involving speaking and listening activities were the most essential factors for raising their oral English proficiency and self-confidence for speaking English. Rebecca emphasized the necessity of putting oral English into use when she concluded, “we should practice English speaking with other people.” Through interactive speaking activities such as pair work and group work, performing and speaking in front of the class, direct teaching, and various individual activities, all of the participants reported improvement in their oral English fluency and increased self-confidence for speaking English.

Theme 2: Fostering a Learning Environment

Rebecca shared, “environment is very important [for] study.” The data analysis indicates the preeminence of interactive speaking activities, speaking in front of other people, and other speaking and listening pedagogies, but learning environment also influences language learning (Horwitz, 2013; Sousa, 2011) and was cited by the participants. Through careful examination of the coded data, the theme of fostering a learning environment developed from the emergence of three sub-categories shown in Figure 4. The seven specific pedagogical actions displayed in Figure 4, which are contained in the three sub-categories, contributed to the learning environments of the participants.

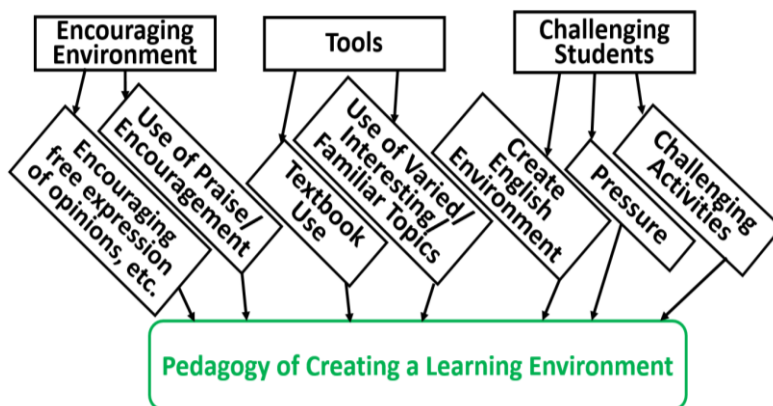


Figure 5: Codes that comprise the theme of learning environment

Participants' teachers fostered an encouraging classroom environment. Laura spoke of her teachers:

They always praised us even if we are bad in pronunciation. I remember they always praised us: "good," "great," "excellent," "very good." And I think it is a good, it is very good for us to strengthen our self-confidence. And just sit and we win praise. It [was] very important when I was young. I think it is a good policy to strengthen our self-confidence.

Levi stated that one of the teachers who was helpful encouraged students "all the time," and another teacher encouraged him when he felt embarrassed. Rebecca was thankful for "lots of help and encouragement" from her PhD teacher.

Participants' teachers not only fostered an encouraging environment through words of encouragement and praise, but the pedagogy also included encouraging students to freely express themselves. Sherry said that in her English class, students learned "ideas from other classmates," and they were required to "listen to others and give some advice." Penny highlighted her teacher encouraging everyone to express their own ideas as a positive influence, and Rebecca, speaking of her PhD English class, said, "I could...express my idea and thought."

Pedagogical practices of the participants' teachers for fostering a learning environment included using textbooks as a teaching tool. Laura credited textbook recitation and textbook exercises as factors that helped her improve her English. However, Laura admitted that the primary benefit of textbook use was something other than oral English fluency: "sometimes they (teachers) just asked us to speak as the textbook, and I think it is very important for my English teacher because as I mentioned, we must take the English examinations just from the textbook." Field notes in the data indicated that Laura sighed at the end of this statement, indicating

negative feelings toward exam-oriented text-book learning, but she admitted, “I think reciting the texts in our textbook fluently is a good measure my teacher took.” Rebecca stated that reading English books in the early years of her English journey gave her a learning start, but that her self-confidence for speaking remained low until her PhD English class.

A classroom environment fostered by the teachers’ choice of topics for classroom discussions reportedly affected participants’ English proficiency. Penny spoke of her PhD teacher, “A teacher...affect[ed] me very much. His classes [had] different kinds of topics, which is very interesting.” Sherry stated “my English teacher prepared many topics for us, such as culture and love.” Kelly’s comments about topics provided valuable insight for this study:

Discussing our related topics have helped my oral English. When the talking involve my familiar topics, my talking will be more fluent. We can choose to discuss topics related to our own research contents and we usually also know the topics discussed by others in advance so we can prepare in advance.

Kelly’s English fluency was positively influenced by practicing English with familiar topics. The participants’ comments showed several aspects of the topics their teachers had students discuss in class. The variety of topics that helped Sherry were “prepared” by her teacher and they were “many.” Topics that helped Penny’s English were interesting and of different kinds, and discussion topics Kelly found useful were familiar, related to students’ research, and were sometimes prepared in advance.

The pedagogical practice of creating a learning environment for the participants included an environment that made the students feel challenged. Four of the six participants spoke positively of the challenge of learning in an English-speaking environment. Levi’s English fluency was helped when he joined a Bible study conducted in English. Levi and Sherry both

cited attending English corners as helpful English environment activities. In response to the interview question of things teachers did that helped the participants' self-confidence, Rebecca recalled being immersed in an English learning environment. Sherry, referring to a good way to improve English, described an environment where students were under pressure, where they were, "pushed to speak English." Sherry also said that the teacher's requirement for students to speak English in class helped them learn communication skills. Laura implied a pedagogy of the use of peer pressure when she said of team (group) work, "everyone does not want to drag down the team with poor performance."

Participants' learning environments also included specific activities that were challenging. Referring to the assignment of videotaping an English conversation with a non-Chinese person, Penny shared:

When I heard this homework, you know I told myself it's impossible, I can't finish it.

It's too hard. But finally, I succeed, I finished my homework very good, at least I think I finished my homework very good, and I even make friends with the girl I interviewed,

Mary (pseudonym). That's boosting my self-confidence. This task is so hard but I

finished it, maybe my oral English is not so bad, perhaps I can do more and reach higher goals and harder tasks. This makes me willing to communicate with more foreigners,

raise my oral English fluency.

Multiple grammar errors in her response did not prevent Penny from fluently and freely sharing in the interview that this activity seemed impossible, but in the end she prevailed and subsequently broke the downward cycle of low self-confidence that deters students from putting forth the necessary effort to improve their English fluency skills. The statement, "it's too hard," along with her tone in this part of the interview, indicated that Penny initially experienced the

anxiety and reluctance to speak that, according to Tridinanti (2018), students often experience due to lack of confidence at the prospect of communicating orally in English. Penny overcame her anxiety and reluctance to speak, and commented that for improving English skills and raising confidence, “hard work is necessary.” Kelly lamented that her childhood English teacher’s lessons did not help her learn English well because they were “not very difficult.” The pedagogical practices of giving encouragement, using tools, and challenging students positively affected the participants’ oral English proficiency and self-confidence for speaking English.

The themes described in this section show a variety of pedagogical practices that raised participants’ oral English proficiency and self-confidence for speaking English. Although direct teaching appeared in the data and participants mentioned many individual learning activities and attitudes, pedagogical practices that entailed speaking by students ranked highest in the data for improving oral English production skills and boosting self-confidence. This self-confidence boost is significant because one of the concepts that framed this study was the mutual inflection that self-confidence deficiencies and oral English proficiency deficiencies exert upon each other. Levi asserted that students’ lack of speaking opportunities resulted in an absence of confidence, but English fluency and confidence simultaneously increased for the participants through increased English speaking practice. All six participants cited teachers encouraging more speaking practice as an essential factor in their English improvement and self-confidence increase. Speaking practice was mentioned by participants more than any other activity. Most of the participants referred to both pair work and group work and multiple references were made to conversing with native English speakers. Within the theme of creating a learning environment, interview transcripts showed comments by all six participants on the practice of using encouragement and praise to raise English fluency and self-confidence, but the total mentions of

learning environment were less than the mentions of speaking activities. Although direct teaching and individual activities provided some benefit to participants, Penny clarified, “Chatting with foreigners can improve spoken English better than reading English articles and memorizing words by yourself.”

Evidence of Quality

To assure the quality of qualitative studies, Creswell and Poth (2018) recommend researchers use at least two validation strategies. A variety of sources and strategies were employed in order to safeguard the quality of the current study. Before the commencement of the research, Southeastern University’s Institutional Review Board reviewed and approved the study. Committee members reviewed each chapter of the study for quality and accuracy. Bracketing of the researcher’s teaching experience, selection of participants through third parties, e.g. group leaders and peers, and a bilingual adult consent form served to prevent biased data. The six participants responded to identical interview questions, and all of the participants reviewed the interview transcripts and provided feedback in order to assure their responses were accurately recorded in the data.

Prolonged engagement with the Chinese education system provided additional quality assurance. Creswell and Poth’s (2018) strategy of prolonged engagement includes learning the culture of the participants. Prior to conducting the current study, more than two decades were spent immersed in Chinese culture, an experience that enhanced the detection of cultural undertones during the interview. One of the many examples of quality assurance through prolonged cultural engagement was Levi’s comment about his oral English proficiency: “I’m still a beginner.” Levi began his English journey before he was a teenager; comments in the field notes show that he appeared to speak confidently during the interview, and after the recording

device was turned off, Levi freely and fluently talked about his faith and other topics. Due to empirical understanding of the culture, it was detected that Levi's claim that he is still a beginner did not indicate a deficiency in self-confidence for speaking English, but highlighted a show of modesty that is common in Chinese culture (Xiong, Wang, & Cai, 2018).

Quality of case studies may be further assured through data coding and theme development (Creswell & Poth, 2018). After multiple readings of the transcripts, data were coded and further aggregated into themes. The methodologist of this dissertation reviewed the codebook and multiple modifications were made to assure the quality of the coded data. Codes that did not address the research question were discarded and each of the two themes in this study were analyzed for the purpose of answering the research question.

Summary

The data analysis presented in this chapter reflected factors that reportedly raised the oral English proficiency and self-confidence of the six participants. Through interviews, all participants shared their experiences in learning English, including pedagogical practices that positively influenced their oral English proficiency and self-confidence for speaking English. The common themes observed in the data analysis indicated that participants' greatest linguistic growth resulted from classroom activities requiring the experience of speaking English, which also coincided with the theory that framed this study, the theory of experiential learning. Discussion of the findings in Chapter 5 includes discussion of data, limitations of the study, implications for future practice, and recommendations for future research.

V. DISCUSSION

This study was conducted to discover which pedagogical practices are effective for raising Chinese non-English major doctoral students' English-speaking fluency and self-confidence for oral English communication. Chinese learners of English study diligently, but a deficiency of self-confidence often leads to a reluctance to speak English (Tridinanti, 2018). Consequently, students experience slow, if any, progress in acquisition of oral English communication skills because anxiety is linked to a negative influence on language ability (Hong, Hwang, Tai, & Chen, 2013). This phenomenon creates an endless cycle: A deficiency of English communication skills often causes self-confidence to remain too low for students to speak English, but refraining from speaking keeps the English levels low, which in turn impedes students' self-confidence (Tridinanti, 2018). The participants in this study recounted their journeys of overcoming the detrimental cycle of the reciprocal negative influence of self-confidence deficiency and low oral English fluency. Participants described pedagogical practices that positively influenced their confidence and oral English proficiency.

This single instrumental case study was focused on the phenomenon of enhanced oral English fluency and confidence for Chinese PhD non-English major students, and specifically during their adult English learning journey in a city in China. The purpose of the study was to discover which pedagogical practices were effective for raising Chinese non-English major doctoral students' English-speaking fluency and self-confidence for oral English communication.

In single instrumental case studies, researchers examine a single phenomenon that is bound by specific location and time (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The participants in this research studied English in one specific city in China during the time of their PhD studies. Case studies involve exploration of phenomena in real-life situations (Paparini, et al., 2020). This study involves the exploration of the real-life English learning experiences of the participants.

After approval was acquired from the Southeastern University IRB and participants signed adult consent forms (Appendix B) agreeing to provide data for the study, an interview protocol was employed. Participants consisted of six adult Chinese students who studied English during their PhD studies as non-English major students. Five females and one male, from diverse demographic backgrounds, participated in the study. All of the participants provided data that addressed the research question by willingly responding to the six interview questions (Appendix A) and providing information about their English learning journeys. The interviews, conducted by phone, were recorded and transcribed; after receiving copies of the interview transcripts via email, participants also verified the accuracy of the transcripts.

Summary of Results

This study was framed by the theory of experiential learning (TEL) which asserts successful learning builds on real-life experiences and is performed together with other people (Yardley et al., 2012). Participants in this study were identified by peers as previously possessing deficiencies in oral English skills and self-confidence for speaking English, but, during their PhD studies participants increased their confidence and oral English fluency. Narratives of participants' early years of their English learning journeys aligned with the description of grammar translation method (GTM), a pedagogy that stands in sharp contrast to TEL. GTM, the predominant pedagogy in Chinese education, focuses on memorization and does

not prioritize real-life learning experiences (Tan, 2016). Levi, one of the participants of this study, regretted that, for the first 10 years of English learning, he “never used it for real communication.” Responses to interview questions suggest that pedagogical practices and learning techniques coinciding with TEL positively influenced participants’ oral English proficiency and self-confidence. Another participant, Sherry, affirmed that one of the factors that raised her oral English fluency was that her professor provided “many chances for us to practice and communicate with other students.”

The data in this study suggested that, given the appropriate pedagogical practices, Chinese adult non-English major students can effectively raise their oral English proficiency and self-confidence for speaking English. The participants, adults who formerly took doctoral English courses, came from varied backgrounds, which indicated age and demographics need not exclude students from raising their oral English proficiency and self-confidence. As described in Chapter 2, social and educational factors in China often lead to deficiencies in self-confidence for speaking English and subsequently, a cycle of stalled oral English improvement (Tridinanti, 2018; Zhang, 2014). The pedagogical practices described in this study reportedly enabled the participants to overcome the barriers of age, demographics, social issues, and Chinese educational practices, and positively influenced participants’ oral English proficiency and self-confidence.

Discussion by Research Question

The participants, adults from varied demographic backgrounds, shared their English learning experiences by responding to six interview questions (Appendix A). All six participants reported increased oral English fluency and self-confidence. The six interview questions were designed to answer the central research question of this study.

Research Question

Which pedagogical practices most effectively raise oral English communication proficiency and boost student self-confidence in Chinese PhD non-English major students for communicating in English?

The six participants recounted their English learning journeys, attested to positive changes from their former English and confidence conditions, and highlighted various factors that they believed raised their oral English communication proficiency and boosted their self-confidence for speaking English. Rebecca described her former condition as “my oral English was poor.” Penny referred to the early years of her English journey as a time when she was unable to communicate freely, but, during the course of her PhD English studies, she “became more confident for speaking English.” Most of the factors cited by participants were direct pedagogical practices, but some factors were described as student learning strategies or attitudes, as Penny stated, “I changed my attitude toward English.” Participants attributed their increased English fluency and self-confidence to pedagogical practices with comments like “A teacher who taught me...affect[ed] me very much,” and “I can improve my speaking if I keep learning English as my teacher’s way.”

Participants’ responses to interview questions provided data for answering the research question for this study. Data analyzation led to aggregation of participant responses into two themes, or categories of factors that reportedly raised participants’ oral English proficiency and self-confidence. The two themes that emerged from the data were *speaking and listening* and *fostering a learning environment*. Data that comprised the two themes provided answers to the research question by revealing pedagogical practices that allegedly raised participants’ oral English fluency and boosted their self-confidence for speaking English.

Speaking and Listening

The first theme, speaking and listening activities assigned or encouraged by teachers, represented the predominant category of pedagogical practices reported by participants as a positive influence on oral English proficiency and confidence. Researchers can describe themes in more detail by dividing themes into sub-themes (Kiger & Varpio, 2020). The theme of speaking and listening included a diversity of practices which were categorized into four sub-themes: interactive speaking, speaking in front of others, direct teaching, and individual activities. Responses to the interview questions indicate that the pedagogical practices described within these four sub-themes raised participants' oral English proficiency and boosted their self-confidence for speaking English.

Interactive Speaking. Participants cited interactive speaking activities more than any other pedagogy as a factor that raised their oral English proficiency and self-confidence. As mentioned in Chapter 2, discussion-based pedagogy is effective for teaching language (Jackson & Chen, 2017; Juniardi et al., 2020). Data from the interviews in this study indicated that the foremost interactive speaking activities teachers used to raise participants' oral English fluency involved group work and pair work. Kelly, the only participant who did not have a foreign teacher, said her group practiced English conversations together weekly. For some of the participants, small groups were assigned by their teachers at the beginning of the semester and students worked in these same groups for the entire term. Group activities that helped participants improve their English included groups participating in debates against other groups, group dramas, and making up stories. Looking at pictures displayed on the classroom screen, group members worked together to create short stories. Afterwards, one or two members of each group told their group's story to another group.

Levi recommended talking with a partner as a technique for improving oral English fluency. According to Penny, Rebecca, and Sherry, their English teachers seated students in double rows to form pairs and gave students questions to ask their partners. After several minutes of discussion, the teacher rotated students to new partners. Eventually, all students had one-on-one conversations with each of their classmates. Group work provided students with a familiar team environment, but according to Sherry, students talked with students from other groups during pair work activities. Group work was described by participants as helpful; whereas it may be easy for a student to refrain from speaking in a group, pair work is an activity that pushes students to actively speak English with their partners. Sherry related her experience with pair work: “I learned a lot in the process. Firstly, I was pushed to express myself in English, and I found that it was not as difficult as I thought before.” If teachers circulate around the classroom to assure students are not reverting to their mother language, pair work provides more speaking opportunities and increases students’ fluency more than other activities (Almanafi & Alghatani, 2020).

Role-play was an interactive speaking activity that participants practiced in both group and pair work. Unlike a rehearsed drama, role-play did not afford participants opportunities to prepare in advance. Teachers created scenarios of various real-life situations for members to act out together in their groups. Some of the situations included introduction of a new boyfriend to one’s family, cross-cultural encounters, and travel. The theory of experiential learning endorses a pedagogical approach of learning through real-life experiences (Yardley et al., 2012). Role-play in the participants’ classrooms was practiced in pair work through scenarios such as conducting job interviews, giving directions, and meeting international travelers.

Other interactive speaking activities that participants recalled as factors that raised their oral English fluency and confidence included talking with native English speakers and Bible study. The Bible study that helped Levi was described as “quite interactive” and was led by a native English speaker; for improving English, Levi advised, “The best way is to find an English speaker.” Other participants also cited talking with native English speakers, including their foreign English teachers, as factors that raised their oral English proficiency. Multiple references in the data indicated that an effective pedagogical practice for raising Oral English ability and self-confidence is to provide opportunities for students to speak with native English speakers, whether providing practice with native speakers means engaging in conversations with foreign teachers or teachers assigning or recommending dialogue with foreigners outside of class time.

One of the participants summed up the value of interactive speaking: “I think the most helpful thing my English teachers did is that they provided many chances for us to practice and communicate with other students in class.” Interactive speaking was the most effective pedagogical practice in the English learning journeys of all six participants.

Speaking in Front of Others. In contrast to dialogical interactive speaking activities, activities that required participants to speak in front of others primarily involved monologue. While speaking in front of others was easier for the participants than interactive speaking because in most cases they had time in advance to prepare, overcoming the anxiety of speaking in front of an audience was challenging. Speaking in front of others consisted of three types of activities: debates, dramas, and presentations.

Debates, for the participants, were group work activities, but, because they were sometimes conducted in front of other groups, they were also coded in the data as speaking in front of others. The class debate was useful to Rebecca because it required students to “prepare

and do some research.” Rebecca’s and Penny’s teachers assigned topics for each small group to debate against another small group. The pedagogical practice of arranging debates in a foreign language class may effectively increase students’ motivation, critical thinking, research skills, and language proficiency, and debating is a real-life activity that fosters an enjoyable learning environment (Cinganotto, 2019).

Dramas, performed early in the semester, helped participants’ groups to bond, provided a chance to overcome speaking hesitations, and gave students who lacked confidence to initiate English conversations an opportunity to research and rehearse in advance. As pedagogical practice in English classes, the use of drama provides learners with an opportunity to experientially participate in language learning, to learn to communicate contextually, to develop teamwork, and to practice interactive English communication (Alasmari & Alshae’el, 2020; Chen, 2019). Rebecca believed that drama helped familiarize her with dialogue and stated, “drama was a good way to help our English.” After participating in a drama, Penny felt that learning English was no longer boring as it had been when studying English merely consisted of reciting grammar and vocabulary. Penny enthusiastically described her group’s drama:

We group members played a drama named GuaSha, which shows the difference between Chinese and American culture...this drama [was] created based on a real story, so every role is so familiar for us, like judge, doctor, police, father and so on. We didn’t feel like we were practice[ing] our oral English. It’s like we just live in America, and we meet this problem, which we need to solve it in English. We wrote our words by ourselves, thinking how to speak can solve this problem. This is very interesting and helpful.

Preparing for the drama was beneficial to Sherry: “In the process of finding material for our drama, we learned a lot about the cultural differences between different countries and the associated stereotypes.”

Direct Teaching. Apart from occasionally soliciting responses from the class, direct teaching consisted primarily of monologue by the teacher and did not provide English conversations for students. Direct teaching was an unexpected sub-theme in the data because this study was framed by the theory of experiential learning which supports learning through real experiences rather than from lectures. Participants indicated that their oral English skills were enhanced, in part, by direct teaching when teachers provided information that students could later use in conversations; when students’ comprehension of vocabulary, grammar and pronunciation was enhanced; and when the topics of teachers’ monologue was interesting enough to hold students’ attention and strengthen their English listening.

Individual Activities. Individual activities that are common in English classes in China include memorization and test preparation but do very little to enhance oral English skills (Zhang & Liu, 2014). Although most of the individual activities participants of this study engaged in during their early years of learning English included studying for exams and textbook exercises, some individual work in their adult English studies included speaking and listening or gaining knowledge that could be used in English conversations; therefore, some individual activities raised the participants’ speaking and listening proficiency. Most of the individual activities mentioned by participants were student attitudes or learning strategies; however, some attitudes and learning strategies were preserved in the data as pedagogical practices because these attitudes and strategies could be assigned or encouraged by teachers and because the participants

did not specify whether these individual attitudes and strategies were self-motivated or encouraged by their teachers.

Participants provided data that suggested oral English proficiency and self-confidence may be enhanced through specific individual learning strategies. Participants recommended going abroad to improve English fluency, and one participant immersed himself in an English environment in Canada to improve his English. Laura implied a need to study abroad by stating that in China they have “no place to use English.” Going abroad coincided with the previously mentioned strategy of conversing with native English speakers. Another individual activity, self-initiated or teacher-assigned, that raised participants’ English speaking and listening proficiency was the use of electronic devices. Although some of the devices mentioned by participants may be outdated, the data indicated that videos, movies, and recording devices are useful tools for improving speaking and listening. Laura listened to recordings of native English speakers and compared her voice on a cell phone recorder with their pronunciation. Penny introduced the practice of imitating pronunciation with English movies. Other individual activities in the data included learning culture, reciting from textbooks, and preparing in advance for English activities.

Other individual strategies in the data appeared as learner attitudes or general advice. Attitudes that helped participants raise their oral English proficiency and self-confidence included patience, perseverance, courage, diligence, and frequent use of English. Although she made multiple pronunciation errors in the interview, Kelly believed that mastering the International Phonetic Alphabet was essential for English pronunciation. The most prominent suggestions provided by participants included being courageous enough to speak without worrying about being embarrassed, in addition to speaking English frequently. Literature

supports the concept of improving oral English proficiency by increased speaking practice both in and out of the classroom (Guo, 2011; Shen & Chui, 2019).

Studies show that teachers in China tend to use exam-oriented and GTM pedagogies rather than provide opportunities for students to practice speaking (Schenck, 2015; Tan, 2016; Zhou, 2017). The data in this study suggested that Chinese PhD non-English major students would experience an increased acceleration in raising oral English proficiency and self-confidence for speaking English through a pedagogy of employing speaking and listening activities that accord with the real-life learning experiences endorsed by the experiential learning theory (Yardley et al., 2012).

Fostering a Learning Environment

The second theme for addressing the research question that emerged from the data related to the environment teachers fostered in the classrooms of participants. Three sub-themes for fostering a learning environment surfaced in the data: an encouraging environment, topic and curriculum tools, and challenging the students. In order to create an encouraging environment, participants indicated that their teachers encouraged students to freely express opinions and ideas and the teachers used words of praise and encouragement. Laura's self-confidence was enhanced when her teacher used words of praise such as "good, great, excellent" even when students knew their English pronunciation was not what it should have been. Rebecca and Levi both referenced teachers who had helped them by offering encouraging words. When participants were too shy or embarrassed to speak in English, an environment of encouragement emboldened them to break the cycle of the reciprocal negative influence of self-confidence deficiency and low or English proficiency. One of Laura's teachers in the early stages of her English learning journey neglected to foster an encouraging environment which perpetuated the

negative cycle by causing students to feel “shy to speak,” but participants found the courage to speak when teachers used praise and when teachers encouraged students to use English to freely express their opinions and ideas.

The pedagogy employed by participants’ teachers fostered a learning environment with the use of tools. Although textbooks were primarily used for exam preparation, Laura believed that orally reciting from her textbook was useful for English improvement. However, a more prominent tool used by participants’ teachers was topic choice. Rather than merely leaving students to figure out their own topics for discussion, the teachers of the participants were intentional about appointing specific topics for classroom discussion. Teachers chose topics that were interesting to the students and topics that were relevant to the students. Kelly’s teacher gave students the choice to “discuss topics related to our own research contents.” In Penny’s class, made up of students of diverse majors, the teacher assigned specific topics for the class debate. Students who majored in philosophy benefited when a group debated for relativism against another group that argued for the existence of absolute truth. Another debate between Darwinism and Intelligent Design related to students who majored in science. Sometimes participants’ teachers selected topics that students were already familiar with, allowing students to practice English by building on their prior knowledge and experiences, which is also a feature of the theory of experiential learning (Gross & Rutland, 2017).

The third sub-theme of the pedagogy of fostering a learning environment was challenging the students. Rather than learning in a passive educational environment, the participants improved their oral English when they felt challenged by their teachers. Although participants’ oral English fluency and confidence were enhanced by words of praise and encouragement, the students also improved their English proficiency when, according to Sherry, they were “pushed

to speak English.” Penny felt challenged to the point of thinking her task was impossible when her teacher assigned the class to initiate and record a conversation outside of class with a native English speaker. After she completed the “impossible” task, Penny recalled that her oral English fluency and self-confidence had increased, and she was motivated to continue improving. Penny further stated that for increasing oral English fluency and self-confidence “hard work is necessary.”

Prior to their PhD studies, participants suffered from poor oral English proficiency and self-confidence deficiency for many reasons, one of which was the absence of being challenged by their teachers. Kelly cited English lessons that were not difficult as a reason for poor oral English production in the early years of her English learning journey. Instead of challenging students to extend their oral English proficiency, one of Kelly’s teachers “taught me simple letters and vocabulary” and had students “just copy sentence[s], so I can’t remember them.” Laura described her early English lessons as “basic.” Students sometimes remain low achievers due to pedagogical practices that assume low achievers are unable to handle the challenge of independent learning (Mazenod et al., 2019). Data in this study suggested that one of the pedagogical practices that enhanced participants’ oral English fluency and confidence was creating a learning environment where students felt challenged or “pushed” to improve their English.

Although some researchers advocated the use of students’ L1 in English learning classrooms (Darmi et al., 2018; Yildiz & Yesilyurt, 2017), the Chinese adult participants in this study cited the challenge of an English-only environment during their PhD English class as a positive influence on their oral English proficiency improvement. Rebecca described the classroom environment that raised her oral English proficiency by saying she was “immersed in

English learning environment.” Sherry, who said her English communication skills were helped because “we were required to speak English,” believed that the best way to improve English was to use English and to create an English environment. Data in this study aligns with studies that confirm immersion in an English environment is effective for improving Chinese students’ English production (Dong et al., 2018; Xiong & Feng, 2018).

According to the data in this study, pedagogical practices that positively influenced participants’ oral English communication proficiency and self-confidence for speaking English included speaking and listening and fostering a learning environment. Interactive speaking activities such as group and pair work were referenced as the predominant speaking and listening activities for raising participants’ oral English fluency and confidence. In addition to an English language environment, the selection of appropriate topics, and pedagogy that fostered a learning environment consisting of a combination of encouragement and challenge were examples of fostering a learning environment that raised oral English proficiency and self-confidence for the participants.

Study Limitations

Although this study yielded the desired data for determining the positive influences of pedagogical practices on PhD non-English major participants, the study was limited by sample size and by the fact that all participants participated in PhD studies in the same city. Because the typical size of a case study is small (Mills & Gay, 2019), the data cannot be generalized as broadly as may be expected from a larger sample. Therefore, the sample in this study may not be representative of all non-English major PhD students in China. The possibility exists that the English learning experiences of students in the city where participants studied may be dissimilar

to the experiences of PhD non-English majors in in other cities; therefore, the generalizability of the results of this study may be limited.

The diversity of participants was limited because Chinese PhD non-English majors who were identified as having deficiency in self-confidence and fluency in the past, and subsequently showed improvement in these areas, were purposively invited to participate in this study. Students who have always possessed high self-confidence may be influenced by different pedagogical practices than students who approach their English studies with lower confidence. Furthermore, learners who are English majors or who are non-PhD students may also be influenced by different pedagogy. Although the participant selection sufficed for the specific objectives of this study, a larger and more diverse sample would have made the study more generalizable.

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic in China, a mandated lockdown prior to the interviews for this study prevented face-to-face interviews. Consequently, the data only included participants' answers to the interview questions and field notes data related to the participants' voice inflexions, but meaning derived from observing participants' body language was absent from the data. A similar study conducted face-to-face may provide additional information by observing meaning inferred in body language.

Implications for Future Practice

Many Chinese learners of English are caught in a cycle of being inhibited from practicing oral English due to self-confidence deficiency while learners' self-confidence is suppressed by their inability to freely speak English even though more speaking practice would increase confidence and speaking ability (Huang & Zhang, 2016; Mak, 2011). According to the theory of experiential learning, which framed this study, students learn more effectively through interactive

experiences that reflect real-life situations (Gross & Rutland, 2017; Yardley et al., 2012); however, China's culture and traditional pedagogy are conducive to exam-oriented English with a focus on grammar and memorization rather than favorable to real-life experiential pedagogy that utilizes interactive communication in the classroom (Schenck, 2015; Zhou, 2017). The participants of this study increased their oral English proficiency as adult PhD students contrary to the controversial notion that, due to age-related neuroplasticity reduction, adult language learners may be disadvantaged (Heimler & Amedi, 2020; Kuhn, Toda, & Gage, 2018).

The purpose of this study was to discover which pedagogical practices were effective for raising Chinese adult non-English major doctoral students' English-speaking fluency and self-confidence for oral English communication. Although one case study with six participants who studied in the same city cannot fully represent all of the Chinese students who have improved their Oral English fluency, this study suggests that, regardless of culture, prevailing educational practices, age, and majors, intentional pedagogical practices can positively influence the oral English proficiency and self-confidence of Adult Chinese non-English major doctoral students. The findings of this study indicate two categories of pedagogical practice that may have implications for English educators of Chinese doctoral students.

Based on the findings, the most prominent category of pedagogical practice recommended for raising oral English proficiency and self-confidence for speaking English is the implementation of speaking and listening activities. Chinese students, who are accustomed to lecture-oriented pedagogy that consists of exams, text-book exercises, and memorization, are often reluctant to participate in speaking activities (Jackson & Chen, 2017; Zhang & Liu, 2014). Rebecca, a participant who majored in history, described this reluctance: "Many students are too shy...to talk with each other in English." After her PhD teacher assigned speaking activities

regardless of students' initial reluctance to speak, Rebecca confidently asserted, "I could speak English and use different words to express my idea and thought. The feeling was so good. I never thought that I could speak English with others so good before." Enhanced oral English proficiency of the participants supports a recommendation that educators implement pedagogy that includes speaking and listening activities, regardless of students' initial reluctance or shyness.

The findings of this study suggested the recommendation of a variety of speaking and listening activities consisting of interactive speaking, speaking in front of others, direct teaching, and individual activities. The participants' unanimous confirmation of the effectiveness of interactive speaking through group and pair work suggests that English teachers could effectively raise learners' oral English proficiency by arranging students into small groups or pairs to practice English through role-play, group drama, debate, and storytelling. Additionally, teachers could provide specific questions for pairs and groups to discuss in English.

The study results also indicated having students speak in front of others was necessary for increased English proficiency and self-confidence. Dramas that were rehearsed before class and conducted in the safety of groups boosted the self-confidence of participants, enabling them to overcome previous reluctance to speak. Participants who gave presentations in their PhD English classes did so either in front of their small groups or in front of the whole class with their groups. Rebecca felt shy about giving a presentation and Sherry was formerly nervous in English class, but after dramas and presentations Rebecca felt she could "speak bravely before others" and Sherry said she could express her views in English publicly. These findings lead to a recommendation of pedagogy that employs extensive speaking activities for improved oral English fluency; however, rather than forcing reluctant students to speak in front of the class

unaccompanied, teachers could arrange for students to speak in front of others in the safety of a group context.

A pedagogy of speaking and listening does not preclude teachers from using direct teaching methods or assigning individual activities, although the data suggests that non-interactive activities should be minimal compared to activities that require students to speak. For raising oral English proficiency and confidence, Laura advised, “You should speak more English.” Kelly suggested, “Practice in actual talking much,” but she also recalled that her teacher guided the speaking activities, which would have required some talking on the part of the teacher. Through direct teaching, students experience English listening practice, and teachers dispense information for students to discuss, introduce vocabulary, and explain grammar points. Individual activities that enhanced participants’ oral English, including the use of recording equipment and reciting from textbooks also have implications for future practice; however, since interactive speaking activities speaking with groups in front of others were more prominent in the data than direct teaching and individual activities, it is recommended that English teachers allot more class time to activities that require students to speak and that teachers minimize direct teaching and individual activities.

In addition to speaking and listening activities, the second theme from the data implied that future practice would be enhanced by a pedagogy of fostering a learning environment. The participants of this study benefited when their teachers created an environment of encouragement, employed specific teaching tools, and challenged the students. Laura’s self-confidence to speak English was boosted by her teacher’s words of praise. In the early years of her English learning journey, Laura said students were “shy” to speak because the teacher did not use encouragement. English teachers need to correct errors in a way that, instead of invoking

fear, fosters an encouraging environment (Leong & Ahmadi, 2017). Although some of the participants' teachers used the tool of textbook exercises, participants in this study mentioned the tool of topic-choosing as an effective pedagogical practice. The data in this study suggests that teachers could be more effective at raising students' oral English proficiency by using prudent topic choices for speaking activities. Participants' English skills were enhanced when debate topics were scientific and philosophical, particularly when the topics corresponded with students' research. Topics for group and pair work were, according to Kelly, interesting and relevant. Although learning environments need to be encouraging and interesting, the data in this study suggests a need for students to be challenged. Sherry spoke positively of being "pushed," and Penny described an assignment as seemingly "impossible" before she completed it and discovered that the assignment raised her oral English fluency and self-confidence. A challenging example that all six participants cited was an English language environment. The implications of this study for English educators include maximum use of speaking and listening such as pair and group work; fostering an encouraging, interesting, and challenging learning environment and employing the pedagogical practices of choosing relevant topics; assigning challenging activities; and maintaining an English language environment.

Recommendations for Future Research

The English learning journeys of six participants who were in PhD programs in the same city were examined in this study. Further research with a larger sampling of participants who studied in a variety of Chinese cities would provide a broader perspective of pedagogical practices that raise oral English proficiency and self-confidence for Chinese adult non-English major PhD students. Maximizing the sampling size and varying the study sites increases the number of perspectives in the data (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

If the current study and other literature indicated a need for more speaking and listening activities for oral English enhancement, then research is needed to determine why teachers in China scarcely utilize speaking and listening pedagogy and to discover ways to encourage teachers to incorporate more speaking and listening into their lessons (Guo, 2011; Shen & Chui, 2019; Tan, 2016). A study conducted by Jackson and Chen (2017) with 109 Chinese students revealed that students hesitated to participate in English conversations while studying abroad due to their lack of previous learning experience with discussion-based pedagogy in China. Future research that consists of interviews or surveys with Chinese teachers of English may provide explanations for teachers' reluctance to implement speaking and listening activities and may suggest strategies to help teachers challenge students to participate in oral English activities similar to the speaking activities described in the current study. In this study, Kelly's early years of English study were marked by self-confidence deficiency and inability to participate in English conversations because the classroom pedagogy consisted of memorization, grammar, and translation, marks of the grammar translation method (GTM) that prevails in Chinese classrooms (Tan, 2016). The English teaching profession would benefit from research that includes interviews with teachers and contributes to the development of English teachers' capacity to expand their pedagogy beyond GMT and implement dynamic classroom activities that enable students to tangibly raise their oral English proficiency and self-confidence for speaking English.

Conclusion

The reciprocal effect of limited oral English proficiency and self-confidence deficiency prevent many students from excelling in oral English communication; therefore, the need exists for pedagogical practices that provide English speaking and listening opportunities, which foster

an environment where students' fears are replaced with encouragement, to inspire self-confidence (Leong & Ahmadi, 2017). This study was conducted to discover specific pedagogical practices that enhanced the participants' oral English and confidence and to answer the central research question: Which pedagogical practices most effectively raise oral English communication proficiency and boost student self-confidence in Chinese PhD non-English major students for communicating in English?

The results of this study confirmed the theory of experiential learning, which framed this study (Yardley et al., 2012). Although Rebecca benefited from English story books and Laura believed learning from a textbook was useful, the pedagogical practices that predominantly enhanced participants' oral English fluency and self-confidence extensively employed activities that required students to learn through life-like experience. Laura emphasized the value of practice, and Levi improved his English through real conversations with a teacher from Jordan. Participants' teachers asked students to discuss real-life topics such as love and culture. Sherry stated that the topics her teacher assigned were "related to my own research." Rebecca and Penny said they improved their English and boosted their confidence when they were required to interview real non-English speaking people.

This study expanded upon the current body of literature regarding pedagogy for helping Chinese students raise their oral English fluency and self-confidence by focusing on pedagogy that enhanced oral English and confidence specifically for the sub-group of Chinese adult non-English major PhD students. The results of this study confirmed that, through certain pedagogical practices, Chinese PhD students can effectively experience increased oral English proficiency and self-confidence for speaking English, in spite of learners' ages, study majors, socio-political influence, and cultural traditions. The results of this study indicated that effective

pedagogical practices for enhancing oral English fluency and self-confidence for Chinese adult PhD non-English majors include students practicing speaking and listening, regardless of students' initial reluctance to speak. Additionally, fostering an English-language learning environment of encouragement with challenging activities was a salient theme for boosting self-confidence and enhancing oral English fluency. Through speaking and listening activities and a favorable learning environment, participants in this study, who previously possessed low oral English proficiency and self-confidence, raised their oral English fluency and confidence during their PhD English program.

Before studying English under a PhD English teacher who employed the pedagogical practices of extensive speaking and listening and of fostering a learning environment, Sherry recalled, "I seldom spoke English...I was not very confident," but after she studied under these pedagogical practices, Sherry attested, "I became more confident, and so I was willing to speak more, which helped me to improve my oral English fluency naturally."

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Appendix A

Interview Guide

Research Question: *Which pedagogical practices most effectively raise oral English communication proficiency and boost student self-confidence in Chinese PhD non-English major students for communicating in English?*

Interview Questions

1. Please tell me about your journey of learning English. How would you comparatively (past compared to present) describe your self-confidence for speaking English?
2. What are some examples of things the teachers of your English classes did that positively affected your *self-confidence* for speaking English? (You may focus on one teacher that was especially helpful, or you may mention multiple teachers.)
3. What are some examples of things the teachers of English classes did or said that positively affected your *oral English fluency*?
4. Which class activities were most helpful for boosting your self-confidence and raising your oral English fluency, and specifically how did those activities help you?
5. What are some of the learning techniques you as a student used that boosted your self-confidence and raised your oral English fluency?
6. What advice would you offer to help Chinese students who find it difficult to raise their oral English fluency and who struggle with self-confidence for speaking English?

Appendix B

Adult Conformed Consent for Interview

ADULT CONSENT FORM

SOUTHEASTERN UNIVERSITY

PROJECT TITLE: A Case Study of Pedagogical Practices and Learning Techniques that Boost Chinese Students' Oral English and Self-Confidence

INVESTIGATORS: Dr. Amy Bratten, PhD, Dr. Janet Deck, PhD, Michael Knapp, MA Ed.

PURPOSE: This study will examine which pedagogical practices helped Chinese students improve their oral English proficiency. This study will also examine which learning techniques helped to raise Chinese students' self-confidence for speaking English. You are being asked to participate because you have made progress in your oral English proficiency and self-confidence for speaking English.

PROCEDURES: You will be asked to answer seven open-ended interview questions describing your English learning journey. Interview questions will be aimed at finding out what teachers did, and what you did, to increase your English fluency and your self-confidence for speaking English. You will not be required to answer additional questions, but you will be free to add any information that you believe is relevant to understanding your English learning journey. The interview will take approximately 30 minutes.

RISKS OF PARTICIPATION: There are no known risk associated with this project which are greater than those ordinarily encountered in daily life.

BENEFITS OF PARTICIPATION: You may be encouraged by recalling your how your English and confidence increased while you were learning English, and you will have the

satisfaction of knowing the data you provide will help fellow Chinese students increase their oral English proficiency and self-confidence for speaking English.

CONFIDENTIALITY: The records of this study will be kept private. Final results of the study will discuss group findings and will not include any information that will identify you. Your real name will not be used in the study. Research records will be stored on a password protected computer in a locked office and only the researchers and individuals responsible for research oversight will have access to the records, and after three years, all data will be deleted. Any audio recordings of the interviews for this study will be deleted immediately after transcripts are made and your affirmation is given of their accuracy.

COMPENSATION: No compensation is offered for participation in this study.

CONTACTS: You may contact any of the researchers at the following address if you desire to discuss your participation in the study and/or request information about the results of the study:

Dr. Amy Bratten, anbratten@seu.edu; Dr. Janet Deck, jldeck@seu.edu; Michael Knapp, mdknapp@seu.edu (Phone: 135-5244-8007).

PARTICIPANT RIGHTS: I understand that my participation is voluntary, that there is no penalty for refusal to participate, and that I am free to withdraw my consent and participation at any time, without penalty.

CONSENT DOCUMENTATION:

I have been fully informed about the procedures listed here. I am aware of what I will be asked to do and of the benefits of my participation. I also understand the following statements:

I affirm that I am 18 years old or older.

I have read and fully understand this consent form. I sign it freely and voluntarily.

I understand that a copy of this form may be given to me.

I hereby give permission for my participation in this study.

Signature of participant

Date

I certify that I have personally explained this document before requesting that the participant sign it.

Signature of Researcher

Date

Appendix C

Script of Invitation to Participate

Dear (participant candidate's name),

You are invited to participate in my doctoral dissertation project at Southeastern University. The aim of the research project is to discover pedagogical practices that have helped Chinese non-English major doctoral students increase their oral English proficiency and self-confidence for speaking English. You have been identified a student who has made great progress in both of these areas.

Your participation in the project would be to answer some interview questions about your English learning journey. The interview should take approximately 30 minutes. Your identity will be kept confidential and your real name will not be used in the study. Participation does not include compensation, but you will have provided information that may help many Chinese students improve their English and self-confidence for using oral English. Your participation is voluntary and you are free to withdraw at any time during the study.

If you would like to participate in this study, we can arrange an interview, in person or by phone, at a time that is convenient for you. If you have any questions, please feel free to ask me.

Thank you!

Michael Knapp

Phone: (86) 135-5244-8007

WeChat ID: MichaelKnapp