The Research Design of Applying Likert Scale to Investigate EFL Teachers' Attitude Towards Using WeChat in Professional Development in China*

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Abstract—**EFL Teacher's professional development plays a significant role in advancing English teaching in China and deserves a concern on the background of the wide use of social media, WeChat. This paper aims to discuss the framework of applying Likert scale in exploring EFL teachers' attitudes towards using WeChat in their professional development so as to provide a preliminary research for the succeeding project.**

Keywords—research design; Likert scale; EFL teachers; WeChat; professional development; China

I. INTRODUCTION

The professional development of teachers has been given consideration with special value in that it has far-reaching impact on teacher's beliefs and behaviors, students' performance as well as educational reforms. (Villegas-Reimers, 2003) Issues of this field are discussed in relation to the definition, approaches or models, conditions and so on (Evans, 2002), among which the focus of endeavors is to convince that the professional development would be effectively enhanced through teachers' learning. Therefore, it deserves exploration when it's subject to the rapid change of the society which offers new opportunity for teachers to update their knowledge and skill for the professional development by many different ways ranging from formal to informal. As technologies have become increasingly accessible and relevant, the new opportunities arise in teacher professional development and direct the research in that aspect in a new background. And the wide use of social media is reckoned as an innovative way to aid teachers' professional development. In China, the last five years has witnessed the dramatic popularity of WeChat, a communicating service facilitating people text and voice message on mobile devices. It is estimated that the monthly active users of WeChat in China amount to 549 million by the end of June 2015(Ma, 2015). Hence, a probe into teachers' professional development in such a context is of significance.

The study is an attempt to investigate EFL teachers' attitudes toward using WeChat in their professional

development in China and intends to provide answers to the questions in the following:

- Are there any benefits of using WeChat in improving EFL teachers' professional development?

- Is there any difference in their attitudes by age, gender and years of teaching experience?

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

As presented above, this paper aims to understand EFL teachers' attitude toward using WeChat in their professional development in China. To set a background to this exploration, it is necessary to first clarify what it means by teachers' professional development with special attention to EFL teachers and then to review the preceding research about the influence of social media on teachers' professional development.

A. Teacher Professional Development

The professional development relates to development of a person's professional role through gaining experience and accumulating knowledge. As for teacher professional development, even though much has been written about this identifiable area, very few definitions may be found and the concept itself may not have been explored. (Evans, 2002) The absence of the explicit definition in the literature poses a problem; however, it accompanies varied interpretation from different perspectives. As a whole, teacher professional development is closely related to learning which is a long-term engagement by participating context-based practice of teaching, assessment, observation, collaboration and reflection over time. (Villegas-Reimers, 2003) Postholm (2012:405) states, "teacher's professional development means teacher learning, how they learn to learn and how they apply their knowledge in practice to support students learning". More specifically, it is argued that professional development needs to include both cognitive and social aspects of learning. In the case of cognitive process, the change in the thinking pattern that relates to the environment brings about the influence on cognitive structure which may lead to the development. As a complex process, teacher learning features the combination of cognitive involvement

and emotional efforts both individually and collectively (Avalos, 2011). In other words, teachers' beliefs, conceptual schemas, motivations and knowledge are expected to be focused to serve the purpose of professional development, which resonates with what is revealed by the study in which teacher professional development is discussed from the perspective of constructivism (Keiny, 1994). In accordance with perspective of social learning, teachers are viewed both individual learners and participates of the social system (Borko, 2004). In that case, teacher learning is expected to take place as a result not only of active individual construction but of practices of wider society. In other words, it can occur in the classroom in the interaction with students, or in talking with colleagues of the professional learning communities.

These two perspectives appear to be independent in the context of teacher professional development. One is about the inner world which relates more to the content; the other is about the outer world which touches more upon courses. To take a holistic view, development can hardly be achieved with broken tie between content and course. In that sense, cognitive and social involvements are virtually dependent and both significantly important for the discussion of teacher professional development.

B. Foreign Language Teachers' Professional Development

Teacher professional development is the continuing experience which extends from the initial training onward and throughout the whole career of teaching. Language teachers, specifically, foreign language teachers are no exception. Rather than the common features, foreign language teachers are characterized with specific professional status on account of working condition, personal goals, attitudes as well as expectations and accordingly the professional development of this recognizable group is worthy of special attention. (Lv, 2014) Larsen-Freeman (1983) concludes four elements in the growth of a language teacher: the awareness of the development, the positive and open attitude, the accumulation of knowledge and the development of the skills. (Larsen-Freeman, cited in lv, 2014))These elements could be generally divided into two aspects, one of which is the objective dimension with attention to knowledge and skill. Knowledge of discipline, culture and language learning& teaching as well as personal communication is significantly vital in affecting language teacher's change of professional development. From the chronological perspective, the knowledge accumulation is not a static practice; instead, language teachers are expected to keep track with the new trends and explore new theories especially concerning language teaching (Richards and Farrell, 2005) Other than the construction and renovation of theoretical framework, the update of skills and practice is also discussed with respect to teaching designing, communication and cooperation, organizing and monitoring as well as doing research. (Lv, 2014)

The other focus is awareness and attitude, which might be reckoned relevant to the subjective dimension of foreign language teacher professional development. Literatures

about motivation, emotion, needs analysis, identity indicate that language teachers' initiative is a functional component of developing their career (Richards, 1983) because they work together to influence the understanding of who the teacher is, which is virtually significant for foreign language teacher in the complex cross-cultural and social context (Vargess et al. , 2005). By using content and discourse analysis, Golombek (2014) has demonstrated that the affective factors such as emotions as a part of one's lived experience offers potential growth points for language teacher's professional development.

C. Social Media & Teacher Professional Development

The preceding discussion about teacher professional development contributes to the point that learning stands at the core of development through the professional circle of a teacher. With an attempt to facilitate teacher learning, researchers have worked on extensive topics about possible ways, methods, and instruments. In a specific scope, workshops, related meetings and short-term courses are reckoned a part of professional development by offering teachers new information on specific aspects of their work (Ganser, 2000). Responsive to the wide use of technology in the society, some modern tools are believed to be useful learning instruments for teacher professional development (Beatrice, 2011). A case in point is the application of social media which can be defined to be the technologies and tools that function to facilitate people in expressing their ideas, content, thoughts, and develop relationship on line. Based on the case study in which some teachers relate to their personal experience of using social media, the research reveals blogging, tweeting and participating in online forums break down the barrier of time and space to provide teachers access to the thinking and viewpoints of education professionals throughout the world (McCullon et al., 2011). The significance of social media for teachers to look outward in pursuit of discipline knowledge growth and pedagogical improvement is as apparent as to look inward in completing their cognition of self-identity. Online space serves as a platform for teachers to express their identity development when using blog to demonstrate themselves as a certain kind of teacher and make more sense of value through the comments from like-minded teacher community. (Luehmann et al., 2008) In reply to the new paradigm shift for EFL teacher professional development, studies has been devoted to the new territory of on-line network covering formal course, forums and informal chatting or comments (Richards et al., 2014; Karavas et al., 2014)

These discussions of understanding teacher professional development with specific involvement of foreign language teachers in the context of modern technology serves as the backdrop to what is coming in the subsequent part of this paper, that is, an application of quantitative instruments of questionnaire and survey in an attempt to explore the attitude of EFL teachers in China toward using WeChat in professional development.

III. METHODS AND INSTRUMENTS

As important tools of finding out statistic support for the study, a questionnaire and a survey are prepared.

A. The Questionnaire

As explained above, this study focuses on EFL teachers in China in respect to their attitudes of using WeChat in professional development. Given this purpose, Likert scale is adopted and developed so as to measure teachers viewpoints, preference or beliefs by expressing the degree ranging from "strongly agree" to "agree", "uncertain", "disagree", and "strongly agree". Respondents' reply to each statement (favorable or unfavorable) would be coded as a particular score with simple weights of 5, 4, 3, 2, and 1 (Oppenheim, 1992). One thing noteworthy is "… unfavorable statements must be scored 1 for 'strongly agree' up to 5 for 'strongly disagree'" (Oppenheim 1992: 196). As a result, the total score by summing up scores of all statements would be the index to place respondents on a continuum from least favorable to most favorable, which in general reveals their attitude. As usual, the first step is to compose item pool of statements. In accordance with the all methods of scale construction, statements should cover main aspects of the research areas so that they can clearly tell those holding favorable from those holding unfavorable attitudes. (Karavas-Doukas, 1996) With reference to four elements of language teacher professional development, that is, knowledge, skill, awareness and attitude combined with affective factors, 18 statements (10 favorable and 8 unfavorable) are eventually selected in the questionnaire.

While the questionnaire could in general imply respondents' attitude after they give answer to the close-ended statements, it is not sufficient enough to reveal their perception about using WeChat. Given this inadequacy, a blank space following the statements is marked for respondents to write freely about their experience and reflection of using WeChat.

B. Survey

The Likert scale is a useful tool to measure respondents' attitude in mind. Whereas, it fails to present the factual details in relation to respondents' information about their personal and professional status that are components of the study to answer the research questions. In this case, a survey is designed in order to provide data for correlation analysis which aims to examine and compare factors resulting in different attitudes.

C. Respondents

The questionnaires and surveys will be distributed to EFL teachers across China with age ranging from 20s to 50s.

D. Instruments and Data Analysis

All the data collected will be analyzed by SPSS and interpreted thereafter.

IV. CONCLUSION

The reflection upon the present situation of EFL teachers is of great value to be researched particularly on the background of the increasingly popular use of social media, like WeChat. Hence this preliminary study, with reference to the previous literature, unfolds the significance, methods and instruments of exploring EFL teachers attitudes towards using WeChat in China and therefore will ushers in the succeeding project in a sensible way.

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