Teachers' Perception of Difficulties Teaching Young Learners English with English-Only Instruction in Mainland China: A Case Study of an English-Only Institute in Shenzhen

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Abstract

English-only instruction (EOI) is widely adopted to enhance young learners' comprehensive English capabilities in China, while little did we know about the difficulties teachers have. This study aimed to determine the difficulties teachers perceive during their English teaching to young learners with EOI in China. This case study's data consisted of a survey, in-class observation, and in-depth interviews with two teachers in an English institute in Shenzhen. Results from thematic analysis of the data show that teachers face three types of difficulties, including teacher-related, student-related, and institutional. Teachers' use of Chinese in lessons, lack of related pedagogic skills and experience, personalities, and self-recognition lead to teacher-related difficulties. Young learners' short attention spans and safety issues are concluded as student-related difficulties. Institutional difficulties are the headmaster's management style and appointed textbooks.

Keywords: English-only instruction, challenges, teachers, young learners

1. Introduction

1.1 Background

In recent years, English-only instruction (EOI) has gained in popularity and has been widely adopted by different English education levels, including young learners. At the same time, many teachers using EOI encounter challenges in teaching.

The English teaching method in China witnessed changes over the past few decades from the prevailing employment of the Grammar Translation Method with learners' first language as a main medium of instruction to the advocation of the Direct Method and Audio-lingual Method using only English in the lesson and to the adaption of Communicating Language Teaching Method leaving little room for the use of L1 (Chiou, 2014). Early in 2001, the Education Department of Guangdong Province published a document requiring that schools that are of better educational resources should adopt international teaching materials, and higher education should have more than 20% of courses using English as a primary language of instruction (Cai, 2001; Chen & Xu, 2009). The Plan of Promoting the Construction of World-Class University and Curriculum issued by the State Council of the PRC in 2015 made a higher demand for cultivating students, and English-only pedagogical method as an innovative teaching mode is of great significance (Duan, 2017). In mainland China nowadays, different levels of schools and organizations widely embrace this instruction mode, and English teaching for young learners is no exception. In Shenzhen, many English learning institutes that recruit only young learners base teaching on all English.

According to a report published in 2014 in Beijing Evening News, China saw a major leap in the number of

English learners, with about four thousand million English learners and counting. The great emphasis on English spawned an influx of learners into English classrooms at an early age in mainland China, who are characterized as immature, hard to concentrate, and entirely new to this language (Zhang & Fang, 2019). A parallel situation is that teachers encounter various difficulties in handling the EOI. In Gong's investigation (2020), 33.33% of ELT teachers at Yingkou Institute of Technology thought that their oral English could not support them to use English only in the lesson. Moreover, Chen and Xu (2009) mentioned that teachers' inadequate capability is the core barrier to conducting EOI. Thus, teachers teaching English to young learners using only English also have difficulties. However, most related EOI research done before was in the context of universities (Cai, 2001; Lu, 2005; Chen & Xu, 2009; Chiou, 2014; Duan, 2017; Chen, Qi, Liang & Sha, 2018; Gong, 2020). Although a few have touched upon EOI among young English learners (Zhao, 2004; Peng, 2015), these were from the perspective of the learners and the method itself. Little has set foot in the challenges teachers encounter teaching young learners with EOI, illuminating a research gap to explore.

This research will be confined to an institute in Shenzhen, China, where English is a foreign language (FL) for citizens, and the first language (L1) is Chinese. The research aims not only to study teachers' difficulties teaching young learners English with EOI but also to arouse teachers' awareness towards EOI and reflection on how to improve their capability of delivering English-only lessons. For one thing, the statistic gathered in this research is illuminating as it is derived from observation and interviews with experienced English teachers bearing a resemblance to most EOI teachers in mainland China to some extent. For another, this study based on teachers' introspection could inspire other educators to examine themselves and achieve betterment. Also, organization offering EOI could seek promotion by making use of this research finding.

1.2 Problem Statement

The Plan of Promoting the Construction of World-Class University and Curriculum issued by the State Council of the PRC in 2015 made a higher demand for cultivating students, and English-only pedagogical method as an innovative teaching mode is of great significance (Duan, 2017). In mainland China nowadays, this instruction mode is widely embraced by different levels of schools and organizations covering the area of English teaching for young learners. In Shenzhen, there is a multitude of schools recruiting young English learners that also base teaching on all English. Having close contact with ELT teachers in these institutes, the author realized they encounter difficulties in only using English in the lesson.

A considerable amount of research discussed the challenges of ELT teachers teaching young learners English without mentioning English-only instruction (e.g., Lalsangpuii, 2019; Straková, 2015) and the difficulties of students or teachers teaching older learners under English-only instruction (e.g., Hua, 2019; Gong, 2020), while little has been done in the difficulties of English teachers teaching young learners using only English in mainland China. Considering that teaching is one of the critical factors determining the quality or result of education, this research is here to dig out the challenges these teachers encounter and how they manage to deal with them to fill the research gap.

1.3 Aim of the Study

This study aims to answer the following: What challenges do English teachers often encounter when they deliver lessons to young learners with English-only instruction in mainland China?

2. Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

The definition of English-only instruction and the difficulties of English teachers will be concluded in this section to fine-tune the direction and focus of this study. The conceptual definition, related research, and methods frequently used in the previous studies are a solid foundation for the study. The whole section will be divided into three major parts, namely the introduction of conceptual groundwork, a thorough review of existing studies, and topic-specific methods adopted in those studies.

2.2 Conceptual Groundwork

When it comes to English-only instruction which can also be called all-English, or whole-English instruction, just as the name implies, it means that teachers should use only English in the lesson, and the use of the mother tongue in the class is not allowed. According to Chiou (2014), whose study was in the background of China, English-only teaching is the opposite of L1-add-on teaching or Chinese-add-on teaching, from which it is concluded that ELT teachers cannot use L1 even to facilitate understanding in English-only classes. In this case, when the difficulties of ELT teachers teaching young learners English with EOI is brought up, it limits the situation in which English teachers can only use English even if young learners may have difficulty understanding. The distinction between English-only and L1-add-on made by Chiou (2014) offers a better insight into the definition of English-only instruction and is relevant and suitable to the aim of this research,

considering that this research is settled in mainland China where English is not a L1.

Previous studies have depicted the taxonomies of teaching difficulties in different ways. Demir (2017) suggested three major types of challenges for ELT teachers teaching English as a FL, namely student-related, teacher-related, and institutional difficulties; specifically speaking, student-related difficulties could be concluded as that students' lack of motivation, incapability to understand, and the disciplinary problems; teacher-related challenges concern with teachers themselves, such as command of the foreign language, pedagogic strategies or personality; institutional difficulties appear because of the textbook, technologies, teaching environment, class size, etc. Intrinsic and extrinsic motivation could be considered from another perspective of finding out teaching challenges (Franzen, Taxer, Schwab & Kuhbandner, 2018). Hasanah and Utami (2019) made a distinction between intrinsic and extrinsic motivation — the former aspect relates to "teacher's trait, such as motivation, enthusiasm, and interpersonal between teachers and students," and the extrinsic one is "coming from the teacher's skill, for example, their competency in instructional material and teaching strategy." Besides, in *A Course in the English Language* written by Wang (2000), the taxonomies of challenges could be in the level of teaching content, including pronunciation, grammar, vocabulary, listening, speaking, reading, writing, and integrated skills, as well as stages of a class, containing pre-class, in-class, and post-class (e.g., having difficulties in lesson plans, classroom management, and assessment respectively). Even though there is a large body of established taxonomies, most previous studies emphasized one aspect of the taxonomy or one taxonomy.

As mentioned above, the one proposed by Demir (2017) would be adopted in this research, with the merits of being more concise and clear-cut and having related interviews and research questions as references. Looking into teachers' challenges through their intrinsic and extrinsic motivations, which was put forward by Frenzel, Taxer, Schwab, and Kuhbandner (2018), may lead to the neglect of the external factors caused by young learners, teaching material, or environment. Thus it is not comprehensive enough. Furthermore, the classification in Wang's book (2000) was lengthy, which may give rise to overlap between different aspects. Because English-only teaching first gained popularity in higher education (Hua, 2020), a considerable body of research related to EOI has been conducted in the context of higher education, including the learning or teaching challenges with English-only instruction in high schools or universities (e.g., Hu & Lei, 2013; Pun & Thomas, 2020). The previous research still lays a solid foundation for this particular study. The definition of all-English teaching and the classification of teachers' difficulties helps to fine-tune and illuminate the direction of the study.

2.3 Review of Existing Studies

Although a lot of the previous studies were concerned about the difficulties of ELT teachers (Mutar, 2019; Garton, 2013; Hasanah & Utami, 2019; Demir-Ayaz, Ozkardas & Ozturan, 2019) with the research results being able to fit in the taxonomies mentioned above (teacher-related, student-related and institutional difficulties), their focuses were quite different including gender, education policy, and particular geographical region. Mutar's study (2019) presumed that ELT difficulties might result from the gender of ELT teachers and finally reported that "teachers' gender did not show a significant difference in their perspective toward the difficulties in teaching English," while Garton (2013) paid more attention to the relationship between Korean policy and ELT challenges. So did Ozkardas and Ozturan (2019), whose studies were connected with Turkey's educational system and policy. Although Hasanah and Utami's (2019) study mentioned the ELT difficulties in China, their research was conducted in a school at the top of a mountain in Tibet that was removed and poor. As a result, this research finding cannot represent most ELT teachers' opinions in mainland China. Besides, some Chinese researchers lied an emphasis on English-only pedagogical settings, while most of which was to probe into the feasibility of EOI and the students' attitude toward EOI in universities in China with various conclusions (Chiou, 2014; Cai, 2001; Chen, Qi, Liang & Sha, 2018; Chen & Xu, 2009; Gong, 2020). In Chiou's study (2014), English-only education may not be effective for low achievers by comparison between English-only teaching and Chinese-add-on teaching. Opinions towards EOI are different; most of the students thought that teachers should have a master's degree to conduct EOI, and it would be beneficial for their language proficiency (Chen, Qi, Liang & Sha, 2018; Chen & Xu, 2009). Previous findings also covered the difficulties of teaching young learners English (Lalsangpuii, 2019; Straková, 2015; Copland, Garton & Burns, 2014; Cameron, 2001), and the significant outcomes were that young learners' receptive skills (reading and listening) developed before productive skills (writing and speaking) and their undeveloped abstract thinking made them hard to understand the grammar rules. Thus English teachers teaching young learners should not only improve their language proficiency to provide better income for them, but also notice the difference between young learners and older learners, avoiding setting unrealistic goals (Straková, 2015); According to Cameron (2001), the main task of language teachers teaching young learners is to understand the way they construct meaning, the space they need for language development, the critical factor of their foreign language development experiences, and the cues of meaning contained in the language.

As English is a world language and has gained a critical position in education, the difficulties of ELT teachers have been extensively studied, but only some are confined to the setting of ELT for young learners with English-only teaching in mainland China. Although some research concerned about the difficulties of ELT was conducted in Asian countries (Mutar, 2019; Hasanah & Utami, 2019; Demir-Ayaz, Ozkardas & Ozturan, 2019), they did not mention the use of EOI and ELT among young learners. Likewise, studies conducted to discover the difficulties of teaching English to young learners did not cover the aspect of EOI (Lalsangpuii, 2019; Straková, 2015; Copland, Garton & Burns, 2014; Cameron, 2001). English-only teaching has been discussed in some studies in China, while these were set in Chinese Universities (Chiou, 2014; Cai, 2001; Chen, Qi, Liang & Sha, 2018; Chen & Xu, 2009; Gong, 2020). Very little empirical research has touched upon the challenges of ELT teachers of young learners in mainland China, with young kids constituting a considerable amount of English learners and being in the very first stage of approaching a completely new language, providing a gap for the study.

2.4 Topic-Specific Methods in Existing Studies

In the previous studies of ELT challenges, a variety of data collection methods were adopted, namely survey, interview, and observation, among which surveys were used most frequently (Chen & Xu, 2009; Gong, 2020; Lalsangpuii, 2019; Mutar, 2019; Garton, 2013; Copland, Garton & Burns, 2014; Chen, Qi, Liang & Sha, 2018; Ayaz, Ozkardas & Ozturan, 2019; Chiou, 2014); Garton (2013), Ayaz, Ozkardas, and Ozturan (2019) and Copland, Garton, and Burns (2014) chose to use open-ended questions in the survey, while the other employed close-ended questions. Chiou (2014) and Chen, Qi, Liang, and Sha (2018) adopted a 4-point Likert scale in the questionnaire survey in order to "prevent neutral and ambiguous response" (Chiou, 2014, p.265) as well as to have the general information of participants' educational background, attitude toward the English-only instruction and difficulties in the English-only classroom. Text-based interviews with teachers or students were also widely embraced by researchers (Gong, 2020; Lalsangpuii, 2019; Hasanah & Utami, 2019; Chiou, 2014) to let participants offer information freely and gain in-depth information based on their responses. In addition, Lalsangpuii (2019) and Copland, Garton, and Burns (2014) adopted field observation in classroom teaching to gain some information that teachers or students may not notice.

From the review of the topic-specific methods in the previous research, most researchers adopted several methods to gain a more comprehensive understanding of the difficulties of ELT teachers (e.g., Gong, 2020; Lalsangpuii, 2019; Straková, 2015; Garton, 2013; Chiou, 2014). However, data collected only through questionnaire surveys with closed-ended questions may miss some important but less prominent points. In the research conducted by Mutar (2019), participants could only select their teaching difficulties from a series of close-ended questions in the questionnaire; in this case, the ELT difficulties were first predicted by the researcher instead of being discovered by the researcher.

To further analyze the data collected in questionnaire surveys, most of the research only used descriptive statistical analysis (Chen & Xu, 2009; Gong, 2020; Lalsangpuii, 2019; Garton, 2013; Chen, Qi, Liang & Sha, 2018; Ayaz, Ozkardas & Ozturan, 2019), and some included both descriptive statistical analysis and inferential analysis (Mutar, 2019; Chiou, 2014). As for data obtained from a text-based interview, it was all transcribed by note-taking and summarizing key points and analyzed to understand what participants were thinking and facilitating researchers to dig out more information from participants' answers (Gong, 2020; Lalsangpuii, 2019; Hasanah & Utami, 2019; Chiou, 2014).

3. Method

3.1 Introduction

This part will cover the whole research process (Figure 1) and elaborate (1) the brief introduction of two participants, (2) the data collection procedure with three methods, and (3) an analysis of the data collected.
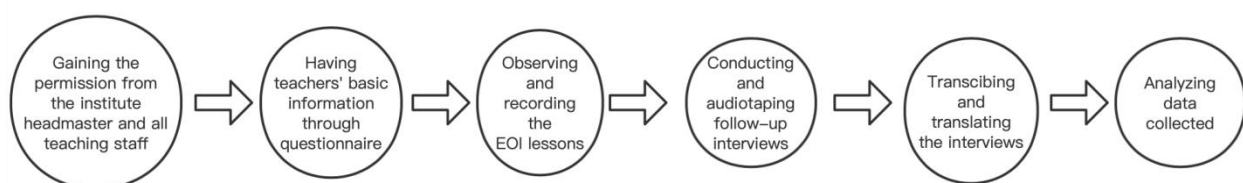

Figure 1. The research procedure

3.2 Participants

This case study is conducted in an institute in Shenzhen with a focus on teaching young learners under the English-only instruction method, in which two English teachers are chosen to be the participants of this research. The maximum class size in this institute is 11 students per class, and the lesson duration is 40 minutes. There are two lessons per week. The curriculum includes in-class courses, oral assessments, and written assessments. Students' achievement is assessed every time they finish learning a unit. Teacher A, a 30-year-old female, has worked in this institute for six years and has a bachelor's degree in Preschool Education. Teacher B, a 26-year-old female, serves here for one year after gaining a bachelor's degree in Business English and a master's degree in English Linguistics. Their students' age ranged from 3 to 7 years old.

3.3 Data Collection Procedure

A case study featured as "an intensive study of a single unit or a small number of units, to understand a larger class of similar units" (Gerring, 2006) is appropriate for this research. The author adopted a qualitative case study applying three data collection strategies: questionnaire, classroom observation, and in-depth interview.

The very beginning before the data collection was to gain permission from the headmaster of the institute and the two participants, each of whom had received a consent form that clarified the aim of the study, the data collection procedure, and the confidentiality of participants' data. Having reached an agreement with research participants, the author gathered information through the following three steps. The first step was to gain some basic information about the two teachers, including their age, educational background, working experience, and difficulties they have encountered so far (open-ended question).

With prior knowledge of the participants and their EOI difficulties, the author then starts to observe the EOI lessons for four months from June 1st, 2022, to August 31st, 2022 (Table 1). One of the institute's teaching policy is having two teachers in one lesson, one as the major instructor and another is the assistant who helps to maintain the discipline and do some simple jobs like sticking the assignment note on students' notebooks and cleaning the classroom. Thus, students have already gotten used to having two teachers in the classroom, which could help maintain an authentic pedagogical environment, and the author was introduced as an assisting teacher doing some essential work like other assisting teachers to observe the class directly. During the class observation, the author video-recorded the lesson with two set cameras, one placed in the front and another in the back. In addition, field notes were also adopted to record any external/environmental factors that influenced the participants' pedagogical decisions, which the video or audio recording could not have detected.

Table 1. Classroom observation

Teacher A	Teacher B
40 min X 2 / week	40 min X 2 /week

The last step is to interview each teacher face-to-face regarding some ambiguities in the previous section. The semi-structured English interviews ranged from 20 to 30 min, audio-recorded and transcribed for subsequent analysis. Questions include not only pre-designed ones but also follow-up inquiries of teachers' responses to generate more information.

3.4 Data Analysis

Thematic analysis is employed in this qualitative study "for identifying, analyzing and reporting patterns within data" (Braun & Clarke, 2006), and its six steps are rigidly followed in analyzing the data, including familiarizing with data, generating codes, generating themes, reviewing potential themes, defining and naming themes and producing the reports. First, the author transcribed all the data gathered from the classroom observation and interview, read the transcription once to check the accuracy, and listened to the recording once to get complete familiarization with the data. Next, the initial codes were systematically generated as many as possible, leaving more room for different interpretations. The listed codes were sorted into various themes, and one sub-theme includes codes representing similar information (Salo, Uibu, Ugaste & Puttonen, 2019). Reviewing and refining the potential themes with a thematic map and ensuring that themes and data are coherent and could be mutually reflected. Afterward, themes were named officially and concisely, and a fine-tuned thematic map (Figure 2) was presented in the result section.

4. Results and Discussions

4.1 Introduction

This section will thoroughly discuss the results based on the thematic maps. As shown in the map (Figure 2), three themes and eight sub-themes are listed in the map, in which the themes are found to be identical to the

themes proposed by Demir (2017), namely teacher-related, student-related, and institutional challenges. The following passage will analyze only the significant and unanimous challenges teachers met.
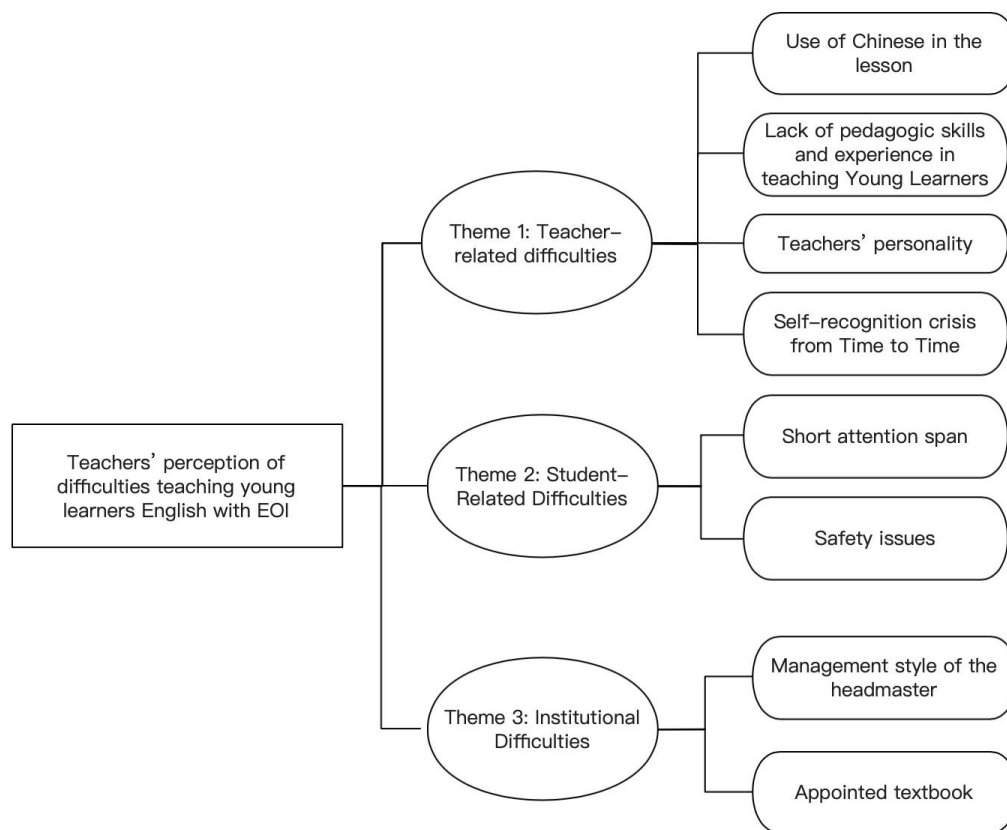

Figure 2. The thematic map

4.2 Theme 1: Teacher-Related Difficulties

4.2.1 Use of Chinese in the Lesson

Based on the in-class observation, Chinese typically occurs when teachers monitor classroom discipline, reason with students, and explicate complex notions to students. For the first situation, teachers agree that speaking Chinese would be more effective in stopping students from interrupting the lesson, as the power of simply saying "stop" or "keep quiet" is less awing compared with switching to students' mother tongue.

Teacher A: Students would feel like I am still teaching if I use English to manage the discipline, and they can only realize how serious I am once I start to use Chinese. Especially when students are talking in the lesson, they are so focused on their little chat that they cannot directly identify whether you are saying, "hey guys, no talking in the lesson," as lesson content or instruction.

Besides, teachers sometimes need to reason with students, like telling them why they need to learn English, why they should not yell at their classmates, why they cannot watch cartoons during the lesson, and so on. In this case, it is also a big challenge for young learners to understand what teachers are talking about without adding Chinese.

Explicating complicated or abstract notions to students in English also troubles these teachers a lot. Although it was possible to explain in English, it would take much time, and some notions might be far beyond students' comprehension, viewing which teachers chose to resort to Chinese regardless that it went against the concept of EOI. Even for a straightforward notion, students might still have difficulty understanding it. Take teaching the difference and usage of "he" and "she" as an example.

Teacher B: Teaching kids the usage of "he" and "she" in English is more challenging since there is no difference in the pronunciation of male and female pronouns in Chinese, and kids naturally think that English might be the same. Although the Chinese characters "he" and "she" are different, our students are so young

that some did not learn writing and reading, so they even cannot recognize these words. In this case, we usually explain to students in Chinese that "he" refers to boys and men, such as your father and your brother, and "she" describes girls and women, such as your mother and your sister.

What Teacher B said can be verified by Zhang's finding (2019), "mother tongue is the basis of second language learning, and negative transfer occurs when first language shows inference which may cause errors in the process of second language acquisition." Negative transfer of L1 is unavoidable in everyone's L2 learning process, especially for children who thought "he" and "she" was the same in characters and pronunciation in Mandarin.

These circumstances mentioned above are the most common situation that put teachers in a dilemma between obeying EOI and promoting teaching efficiency and students' understanding. Furthermore, similar results are found in Yadav's (2012) research that it is necessary and appropriate to use L1 in situations of management of discipline and conduct, the rationale behind activities and methods, teaching difficult points like grammar, and so on; a certain amount of L1 in the lesson could be time-saving and beneficial for beginners of L2.

4.2.2 Lack of Pedagogic Skills and Experience in Teaching Young Learners

Having overseas experience, Teacher B has a good command of English which unfortunately could not offset her disadvantage of lacking professional education background in teaching young learners. In the observation section, the researcher found that Teacher A got an edge with profound experience and skills in dealing with kids as she is fully aware of the characteristics of young English learners.

Teacher A: For young learners, they need more visual and acoustic stimulation. During the lesson, I would use many pictures and short videos of the latest popular cartoon as teaching tools. Moreover, I would play games with them in English, like hide and seek, one of the children's favorite games, during which I first hide all the flashcards with vocabulary, and students need to find the card with the exact word I say. These practices are exciting and educative; students can learn a lot through having fun in the lesson. Most importantly, I would not set unrealistic goals for my students so that they can learn by following their path.

Teacher B's lessons were relatively boring for the children, she did not use a lot of pictures in her lesson, and sometimes she said high-level vocabulary unconsciously. She did not combine games with a teaching point. Whenever she allowed students to play games, it was because students were getting fidgeting. Thus, she thinks that games are a waste of time in the lesson unless students cannot sit still and have to play games to ease their feeling.

Pedagogical methods for young learners and older learners are different. Leaking specific skills and related experience makes the job of EOI even more challenging. Straková (2015) proved that understanding natural language development can help teachers set realistic aims and expectations for students; teachers will choose appropriate techniques for students only if they fully understand the characteristics of young learners and the reality that something works for older learners might cause problems for young learners.

4.2.3 Teachers' Personality

Another primary reason that Teacher B has a tamer class performance is because of her personality. She feels embarrassed and uneasy dancing, singing, and performing in front of students, which she considers lose-face behaviors. It is not easy for a teacher to swallow her pride to sing and dance in front of the class, and sometimes there would be other teachers. It requires a strong heart to perform like a comedian. Using teaching a new vocabulary "spider" as an example, the researcher noticed a dramatic difference between the two teachers.

Teacher B (holding a flashcard): Kids, look at the picture and guess what it is. Yes, it is a spider. Now, please read after me, spider. Good job.

Teacher A (holding a box): Oh my god, kids, guess what is in the box! Oh no, I am too scared! Okay, okay, let me open the box. See, it is a spider! Kids, I am so sacred. Can you protect me? Let's read out loud, and then the spider would run away. Spider!

After the lesson, Teacher B felt frustrated because many students were not engaged. Compared with Teacher B, Teacher A knew how to arouse students' interest and dared to change her tone and pitch like a cartoon character and make funny and dramatic facial expressions.

Teacher B: I have adequately fulfilled the class objective, but the results were unsatisfactory. I wish I could act like Teacher A. She could easily entertain and teach students in an interesting way, which is a big challenge for me. I don't speak that way daily and have never dealt with children, so I don't know how to catch their attention.

More than just being dared to "lose face," to be a good teacher in the eye of kids, teachers also need to show a higher level of extraversion, agreeableness, consciousness, and openness (Vorkapić, 2012). A teacher without either of these personalities would struggle in the EOI classroom for young kids. It is consistent with

Khalilzadeh and Khodi's (2021) finding that teachers' personality is one of the most prominent factors determining the effectiveness of teaching and learning and significantly influencing students' motivation.

4.2.4 Self-Recognition Crisis from Time to Time

Teachers occasionally encounter self-recognition crises, feeling like a babysitter more than an English teacher. Because students are young and immature, teachers must pay attention to their safety issues and other trivia like using toilets, blowing their nose, or changing clothes. During this time, teachers' responsibility went beyond teaching, but taking care of these little kids, which was an unavoidable disruptive force in EOI courses. In the researcher's observation period, there was a kid in the lesson who wet his pants, and then the teacher was responsible for changing the kid's pants and underwear and putting his spare clothes on. Also, students are too young to control their emotions and might cry when angry or sad, and it is common for teachers to comfort them and make them happy in or after class.

Teacher A: At the beginning of my career, I would feel doubtful about my job. All I want to do is teach, but my duty goes beyond that. I would get mad at the student and frustrated about my job whenever I encountered these situations. Later, I adjusted myself in time, realizing that I should not position myself simply as an English teacher but as an educator who conveys knowledge to students and helps students become better. In this case, I pulled myself out of the self-recognition crisis and finally got satisfied with my job.

From what Teacher A had said, it is concluded that as long as one is unaware that the duty of an EOI teacher teaching young learners covers more than imparting knowledge from a textbook, he or she could be overwhelmed by the negative feeling of self-recognition crisis. However, most of the research focused on the recognition crisis of teachers against the attitude of parents and society, stating that teachers are firmly confirmed about the significance and value of their job (Kim, 2013; Harwood & Tukonic, 2016; Nelson & Lewis, 2016; Zhang & Yu, 2017). Few have touched upon the inner struggle of teachers.

4.3 Theme 2: Student-Related Difficulties

4.3.1 Short Attention Span

A short attention span is a major feature of almost every kid (Musthafa, 2010; Copland, Garton, & Burns, 2014), dramatically hindering teachers from conducting effective lessons. They lose track of the course content quickly, which requires a more exquisitely designed lesson from teachers. Suppose students cannot focus on the lesson. In that case, there is a high possibility that they have undisciplined behavior during the course. The signs of students losing attention include chatting with classmates, singing, playing with toys, leaving their seats, running in the classroom, and so on, which not only interrupts teachers but negatively influences other students; it also is a primary cause of EOI teachers using Chinese in the lesson. In this case, keeping students concentrated for 40 minutes is a significant challenge for their teachers, especially in EOI lessons.

This typical characteristic of children poses a challenge to teachers. Copland, Garton, and Burns (2014) also believed that students' small attention span is a challenge for teachers requiring them to be more skilled in planning and classroom management and do more activities inside the classroom to make students more involved.

4.3.2 Safety Issues

Another challenging point in the lesson was that students got physically hurt easily. Unlike older students who are fully aware of dangerous behaviors, kids have no idea whether their movements would hurt other people or themselves. In this institute, teachers start the lesson with an English song, and both teacher and students would sing and dance along with the music. At this time, a teacher should arouse students' emotions and concern about their safety because some students would get so excited that they would swing their arms or legs and accidentally hit other kids. Moreover, kids are curious about everything. For example, they might try to put their finger into the hole in the extension leads and sockets. They cannot realize how dangerous it is at such an earlier age.

During the observation period, a kid got a bump on her head when her classmate was awarded by the teacher and excitedly ran back to his seat in the wrong direction. At this time, teachers need to stop teaching to deal with emergencies. Similar situations happened frequently.

Therefore, teachers must design the lesson carefully and look after their students to prevent them from getting injured. The safety of young learners becomes the priority in classroom management (Abdullah, 2009). In Melvin's (2011) study, he confirmed that teachers have no problems teaching a kid, but they do have trouble ensuring that all the materials used in the classroom are safe and cannot injure students.

4.4 Theme 3: Institutional Challenges

4.4.1 Management Style of the Headmaster

The previous headmaster's management style was outdated and stubborn. She believed a written examination is necessary to assess students' ability, progress, and achievement. She required all the teachers to design tests for each class after a unit ended. Although her intended purpose was good, she did not consider the reality that many students do not know how to write. Consequently, students aged 3 to 6 years old do not know what they are supposed to do with the paper sheet.

Teacher A: I need to explain each exercise to them more than once, as they cannot read sentences that they didn't learn before. And for students who don't know how to write, I also need to grab their hands to help them write. Sometimes, it wastes too much time, and I would just tell them which one is the correct answer. I don't think letting young learners take the written test is appropriate. It would diminish their interest in English learning.

In the second month of the observation period, the previous headmaster resigned due to family issues. The new headmaster is young and energetic, and so is her management style. She changed the written test to an oral test for young learners, during which students only need to answer teachers' questions about the teaching content before oral. Teachers A and B agreed that the new way of assessment is more efficient.

Apart from that, the new headmaster arranges a monthly meeting in which each teacher prepares a short teaching presentation, and after that, the headmaster corrects their pronunciation. The meeting considerably pushes teachers to self-improve their own English and teaching.

As we can see, there would be extra troubles for EOI teachers if the headmaster had an inappropriate management style, as teachers may be forced to do something they think is unpractical or inefficient. A concordant idea was proposed by Samaden (2021) that leadership is also essential in educational settings as the teacher workload and job satisfaction significantly depend on the leadership style of the headmaster.

4.4.2 Appointed Textbook

Since the institute is a chain organization and its textbook is appointed by the headquarter, there is no room for autonomous textbook selection for teachers based on different students' interest and English capability. Some students might have learned similar content in school and would get bored if they had to learn again outside the school. Furthermore, the illustration of the textbooks might not capture students' attention if it is not what they are interested in. Thus, it is also a challenging point for teachers to have no right to select textbooks tailored to their students.

Similar findings were found in previous research (Copland, Garton, & Burns, 2014; Mutar, 2019; Lalsangpuii, 2019), indicating that many teachers have no choice but to use prescribed textbooks, some of which are scarce in the content that interests students and cultural content that enrich students' knowledge with cultural events and contents that supports self-learning.

5. Conclusion

All levels of education widely adopt English-only instruction, and the primary level is no exception to cultivating students with integrated language abilities. Unfortunately, efforts made to explore the difficulties of ELT teachers of young learners were little in mainland China; most of the research done in mainland China is about English-only instruction in universities (e.g., Chiou, 2014; Cai, 2001; Chen, Qi, Liang & Sha, 2018; Chen & Xu, 2009; Gong, 2020). This research investigated English teachers' perception of difficulties in teaching young learners English with English-only instruction in mainland China. Data were gathered in a case study of an English-only institute in Shenzhen through questionnaires, in-class observation, and interviews. Three themes are identified with the application of thematic analysis to the data gathered: teacher-related difficulties, student-related difficulties, and institutional difficulties. Teacher-related difficulties were aroused by using Chinese in lessons, lack of pedagogic skills and experience in teaching young learners, teachers' personalities, and self-recognition crises from time to time. Student-related difficulties were mainly because of young learners' short attention spans and safety issues. Institutional difficulties resulted from the headmaster's management style and appointed textbooks.

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