A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF K-12 FOREIGN LANGUAGE EDUCATION IN AMERICAN AND CHINESE PUBLIC SCHOOLS:
A CASE STUDY OF SIX FOREIGN LANGUAGE TEACHERS

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A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF K-12 FOREIGN LANGUAGE EDUCATION IN AMERICAN AND CHINESE PUBLIC SCHOOLS:
A CASE STUDY OF SIX FOREIGN LANGUAGE TEACHERS

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CHAPTER I
INTRODUCTION

Research Context and Orientation

Non-English languages appear to have become less important in the world; in fact, out of 7 billion people, only a small portion of 300 million people speak English as a first language, whereas as 400 million speak it as a second language (Ehrlich, 2008). However, Altan (2012) argued that the importance of English as a worldwide language has been increasing rapidly. The amount of people who are aware of the necessity of having English skills to get ahead in life is increasing (Altan, 2012). People are seeing that English language skills are needed to achieve both a high social status to the individual and well-paying job opportunities (Altan, 2012).

However, the decrease and even extinction of speaking other languages rather than English should really be a concern considering the current situation. “A new report by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) states that half of all modern languages may vanish by the year 2100” (Moran, 2010). Minor languages are the first to go because many disappear largely because children are taught only major languages. Minorities and disenfranchised peoples who are often victims of war must give up their language and assimilate. When this happens, the language is lost, and along with it are the values and history of an entire community. Language is an important part of any culture, and in the spirit of preserving history, it
should be regarded as important as other cultural treasures (Sahin, 2011). Therefore, foreign language education should be given great importance and should be integrated into core curriculum in schools. It is also significance to the contribution to international peace (Sahin, 2011) and worldwide diversity. However, many research papers stress a great need for individuals with high proficiency in major world languages including English and in other minor foreign languages as well (Brecht & Rivers, 2000; Chmelynski, 2006; Rhodes & Christian, 2002; Sehlaoui, 2008). However, according to the National Association of State Boards of Education, foreign language in America is at risk because “arts and foreign language instruction has been marginalized and is increasingly at risk of being completely eliminated as part of the public schools’ core curriculum” (Griffith, 2003). Even the nation is at risk because its failure to educate its students and its poor education threatens U.S global position and its “five national security fronts: economic growth and competitiveness, physical safety, intellectual property, U.S. global awareness, and U.S. unity and cohesion,” says the report by the Council on Foreign Relations-sponsored Independent Task Force on U.S. Education Reform and National Security in 2012 (Klein, Rice & Levy, 2012). The report noted that even though the United States invests more in K-12 public education than other developed countries, its students still fail to prepare to compare with their global peers(Klein, Rice & Levy, 2012). It is disappointing and disheartening to look at the national statistics on educational outcomes. For example, “Although the United States is a nation of immigrants, roughly eight in ten Americans speak only English and a decreasing number of schools are teaching foreign languages”(Klein et al., 2012).
Education is considered one of America's greatest national security issues. Language can serve as an espionage tool for security issues because knowing foreign languages can improve government officials’ understanding of other countries’ culture. Foreign language proficient people can improve international communication so that trade with other countries can be carried out, which in turn helps improve the security of the nation. In our globally connected age, the U.S. needs to know the rest of the world. Keeping good relationships with neighbours leads to world peace and decreases the possibilities of cultural misunderstanding. The lack of knowledge of the outside world should be confronted; American citizens should not be ignorant of the outside of the histories and cultures of the bulk of the world’s population—found outside the borders of the U.S. For the purpose of serving American interest, it is the time for U.S. citizens to start learning another culture and understanding the outside world. Therefore, learning additional foreign languages is advantageous because it improves its cultural diversity and national stability. It is also the responsibility for language educators to make a difference in the world; to make the people and the government realize the great importance of foreign language education to the nation’s development. China and the United States are both culturally different countries. The two countries also differ from each other in population and economic strength. An in-depth comparison and contrast of the foreign language education situations in the United States of America and the People’s Republic of China will help educators better understand the effectiveness and ineffectiveness of each country’s current foreign language system and, consequentially, develop new solutions. Besides, by looking at and understanding each other’s effectiveness and ineffectiveness of foreign language teaching and learning allows each
country to reflect on its own, removing the dross while keeping the essence, and avoid to make the same mistake that the other country has made.

**Significance and Purpose of the Present Study**

The present study aims to provide a more complete picture of how the U.S. and China have developed their foreign language education, particularly in secondary public schools. An analysis of the foreign language education systems from a historical perspective up until the current foreign language curricula setting situation will be addressed as well in this paper in order to compare and contrast the effective and ineffective aspects of what each country has done and is doing in foreign language education. Additionally, the methods used for teaching a foreign language in both countries will also be discussed in this paper. This gives the language instructors and researchers in both countries an opportunity to look at how foreign languages are taught and allows educators to reflect and improve themselves in terms of foreign language education.

Although the data focuses on a small sample size of six secondary schools’ teachers in public schools from China and U.S., the implication of the findings may cause both countries to recognize the vital importance of a person that can communicate effectively in many languages and across cultures, and for schools to make the teaching and learning of foreign languages a priority in the secondary curriculum. It may also shed some light on the prospects for integrating foreign languages into core curriculum and implementation of the teaching of foreign language as early as possible (Rhodes, 2002).
There is plenty of literature on foreign language education in China and America, including identifying the problems in terms of foreign language educational policies and reform, foreign language instructions, advantages of its implementation, and so forth (Brecht & Rivers, 2000; Chmelynski, 2006 & Rhodes & Christian, 2002). However, there is a lack of empirical studies on the actual discussion with regards of comparing and contrasting what each country has been doing between two countries in foreign language education and an update to the current situation is from teachers’ perspectives. It is thus hoped that this study may make a contribution to the literature, facilitating both countries’ understandings of each other, exploring the problems of both countries, adding new knowledge about the significance of foreign language education, and suggesting the best practices to establish and improve foreign language programs. It is thus also hoped that both country may apply the effective practices and discard the ineffective practices.

**The Present Study**

In order to achieve my goal of this study and guide the organization of my review of the literature, my research questions will be addressed as following:

1. How do foreign language teacher participants from two countries differ in the attitudes towards the study of foreign language in K-12 schools?

2. What are the best practices in K-12 foreign language education in Chinese and American public schools? What is effective and ineffective?

3. What are educators’ recommendations for improving K-12 foreign language education in the U.S. and China?
**Organization of the Thesis**

This thesis is composed of five main parts. Chapter I is the introduction presenting research context and orientation, significance and the purpose of the present study, organization of the thesis and my research questions. Chapter II examines and summarizes the details of how foreign language education is treated in secondary public schools of the two countries regarding the literature. My review of the literature is categorized by three foundational elements indicating best practices in K-12 foreign language instruction. It includes socio-political investment, teachers’ professional development as well as K-12 foreign language curriculum and instruction. Chapter III deals with the research design, methodology and limitation. Chapter IV presents the findings and discussions. Chapter V concludes the thesis with further research suggestions.
CHAPTER II
LITERATURE REVIEW

In the light of literature, I will first examine and discuss the best practices in Chinese and American foreign language education employed in K-12 public schools. Thus, the similarities and differences between two countries’ K-12 foreign language education will be pointed out based on my review of the literature. This allows me to know what is missing so that my research intends to fill. Meanwhile, their effectiveness and ineffectiveness will be also discussed. Next, the advantages of learning another language will be addressed. This chapter will be also guided by my research questions in order to compare my finding to what researchers have already done, and identify my new knowledge to the literature.

The Structure of K-12 Foreign Language Education in China and the U.S.

What are the best practices in K-12 foreign language teaching and learning in Chinese and American public schools? What is effective and ineffective?

Based on my review of the literature, three categories have emerged to indicate the best practices in K-12 foreign language education. These categories include socio-political investment, teachers’ professional development, and curriculum and instruction. I will discuss how each of these categories is situated within the literature from both
China and the U.S., so that researchers and educators can get to know each country’s K-12 foreign language education systematically.

The three categories that I selected to discuss in this chapter are attributed to my understandings of what are required for successful K-12 foreign language education, according to my review of the literature. It is possible that more categories might be defined and added after my study in Chapter III. The present research questions were also developed based on those three categories. To be more specific, the first research question was created based on category one, social-political investment, whereas the second and third questions will cover categories two and three, teachers’ professional development and curriculum and instructions. In addition, my focus group will also discuss the topics around those three categories in order to know how foreign language education is situated from foreign language instructors’ perspectives in both countries. It is my concern that teachers could add more information to the literature in every fundamental element.

**Category 1: Socio-political Investment in K-12 Foreign Language Education**

In this section, I will briefly examine the development of K-12 foreign language education in China and U.S. from a socio-political perspective. In order to do this, the historical development of foreign language teaching and learning must be examined. It is well accepted that any educational policy reform and innovation are more likely to be determined by its government and policy makers. Also, it must be noted that societies do not typically form overnight and that there is a large amount of time involved in the socio-political policies of a civilization. How the current K-12 foreign language education is structured and operated is mainly decided by how much it is invested from
social and political aspects. At this point, the social factor is defined as cultural influence, such as people’s attitudes whereas the political aspect as policy making by its government, such as funding. Understanding its development of early foreign language education in China and U.S. from a historical perspective allows us to gain a more developed insight into the differences between the effectiveness and ineffectiveness in Chinese and American K-12 FL education.

In China. The rise of foreign language learning in China is due to its economic development and political policy changes by different previous leadership in Chinese government. Adamson (2004) discussed the history of language in Chinese Education given its imperialist association and the Soviet alliance in early 1950s. The Chinese Communist Party is the party in power, but it was the Soviet Union that brought Communism to China. Being the foremost supporter of Chinese Communism, Russia also became the most studied foreign language (Adamson, 2004). Another priority of the Communist Party was to achieve mass literacy. However, the rationale of studying Russian was not clear due to the backwardness of the society in China at that time. Predictably, English was rarely in the curriculum at any level in the early 1950s (Adamson, 2004).

It is also described in the book How the Chinese Teach English that there were only a few places in early China that used to be affected by English culture because of Western colonization (2003). Therefore, it is predictable that the number of English learners at that time were very few, which made English develop very slowly. “Indeed, so many erstwhile English teachers switched to Russian that by 1957 there were only
seventy-three junior middle school English teachers in the entire country” (Adamson, 2004, p. 89).

However, with the English Bourgeois Revolution and the Industrial Revolution, an increasingly powerful English colonial empire began to expand overseas and brought English to the world (Lu, 2009). Particularly in 1978, the new era was brought to China because of the “reform and opening-up policy” presented by Deng Xiaoping, the former president of China. Decades earlier, Deng Xiaoping spelled out clearly his plan for China: “Poverty is not socialism. To be rich is glorious” (Herrmann, Markus & Terhechte, 2012, p. 7). As stated in the book *How the Chinese Teach English* (2003) that “China’s reform movement, characterized by enhanced exchanges with other countries, international economic trade, and tourism, has affected social life; Reform, coupled with swift developments in science and technology and economic globalization, demands English mastery” (p. 26).

As the focus in China shifted to the economic construction, the Chinese Communist Party determined to open China to the world, particularly to western countries. When Deng’s economic reforms were entrenched, China increased cooperation and communication with other countries in the world dramatically, and a need to educate international managers for the future was certain. English has been used as an official language in around 50 countries. People who speak English as a second language are far beyond the ones who speak English as a native language intellectually (Lu, 2009).

Technological and diplomatic needs led to a decision to teach English as much as Russian in 1956, and the number of junior middle school English teachers had soon
bounded by 25-fold (Adamson, 2004). In order to further reform and accelerate “quality education,” schools began to offer English classes gradually, occasionally starting early from elementary schools in some districts. English taught as a foreign language in China has been given great importance to Chinese education system. It is a compulsory course for all Chinese students from primary school, even earlier from kindergarten in some cities to university (Lu, 2012). English is integrated into the core curriculum, and students have to pass the National English test in order to get higher education (Lu, 2012). The National College Entrance Examination is a highly centralized testing system to select high school graduates for higher education and all universities and colleges recruit through it. English is one of the core subjects in the National College Entrance Examinations together with Chinese and Math. Successfully passing the exam and going on to higher education is one of the most important achievements in one’s life because it guarantees a better chance to get a good job after graduation and automatically qualifies one for being part of the intellectual elite (Zhang, 2003). Therefore, it is advantageous that English as a foreign language learning in basic education is highly emphasized.

In the U.S. Compared to foreign language development in China, it is a lot more complicated in the United States. American history spans a few hundred years and reflects a nation built on immigration from different cultures with diverse languages. America is a post-colonial country that used to be colonized and expanded mostly by Europeans. Millions of foreign-language speakers immigrated to the United States between 1850 and 1880 (Ramsey, 2009). “Nothing contributed to America’s linguistic diversity more than the large numbers of people in the nation who spoke a language other than English” (Ramsey, 2009, p. 273). America is an immigrate country composed
of a great diversity in language and culture. It differs greatly from how Chinese culture developed. China has Mandarin as the official language and other dialects differ by regions coexisted. Since the majority of the nation is Han nationality, Chinese people, to some extent, share the same tradition and culture but add their own cultural elements to reserve difference based on region.

The term “melting pot” was used to describe the assimilation of immigrants to the USA during the last century (Jacoby, 2009). As all the different elements melted together into a whole with a common culture, the culture of what was never left, but was assimilated into something much more complex as a whole (Jacoby, 2009). However, some proponents of multiculturalism challenged it, arguing that the cultural differences within society should be preserved and are valuable. Just as Sehlaoui (2013) made comments on the recent immigrants’ awareness of their status in America that “they may not be able to merge into U.S. society as seamlessly as their earlier counterparts did, hence they resolve to maintain their ethnic identities” (p. 199). He agreed on the description that the USA is now more like a mosaic, or a salad-bowl, a country made up of people with different cultures and languages, living together in harmony (Sehlaoui, 2013). Therefore, the diversity of languages and cultures are considered as one symbol of America. It is amazing to know that the number of languages listed for the USA is 238 (Raymond, 2005). The new concept of multiculturalism that is centered on the thought in respect of the value of cultural differences is becoming more popular and of more concern recently.

Because of American economic power and its importance throughout the world, English is considered a symbol of power. Perhaps because many Americans view their
country as a global leader, always on the forefront of social innovation in an increasingly English-speaking world, it seems pointless for many Americans to study another foreign language due to the superiority of simply being native English. Christian, Pufahl, and Rhodes (2005) criticized this narrow perspective of being long indifferent to the study of foreign languages. They pointed out the successful features of what other countries did, making language instruction a central part of education. For instance, “today in Europe more than 50% of adults speak a second language fluently, whereas only about 9% of adults in the U.S. are highly proficient in a second language” (Christian et al., 2005, p. 226). In Australia, 25% of students now learn an Asian language (Asia Society, 2002). The globalization and world events have called for the USA to recognize the great need for individuals with the high competencies in world languages so that “they can retain their competitive edge and be able to communicate with the rest of the world” (Christian et al., 2005; Sehlaoui, 2008).

Kordsmeier, Arn, and Rogers (2000) conducted a mailed survey of 171 human resource managers of multicultural corporations. In their survey, they asked three questions: (a) How extensive are your foreign language? (b) What fluencies are needed? and (c) Where does your company look to obtain foreign language training for your employees? The result showed that 78.9% of managers indicated that fluency in another language was needed in their companies, which also agreed with Inman (1987). Foreign language knowledge is a major and initial consideration for hiring, promotion, and retention decisions for employees. Kordsmeier et al. (2000) also suggested “business students should be made aware of the importance of such skills in their career preparation” (p. 171). As the corporation and communication between countries become
more intense, the demand for the intellectuals who have skills of being fluent in two or more languages are increasingly significant to all the fields in the world, particularly in world business.

Professor Sehlaoui (2008) noted that numerous professional organizations today have sprung up aimed at promoting foreign language education in various ways in recent years besides the programs and efforts made by the government. Those organizations are:

- The American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL)
- Modern Language Association of America (MLA)
- The National Foreign Language Center (NFLC)
- The Center for Applied Linguistics (CAL)
- The American Philological Society (APS)
- National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE)
- Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL)
- The American Speech and Hearing Association (ASHA)
- The National Association for Foreign Student Affairs (NAFSA)
- The National Association of Bilingual Education (NABE)
- The Linguistic Society of America (LSA)
- The American Association for Applied Linguistics (AAAL)
- The International Association for World English (IAWE) (Sehlaoui, 2008, p. 197).

Sehlaoui agreed with Alatis (2001) that those associations should work together in order to promote the development of foreign language education in the USA. Curtain
and Dahlberg (2009), in their book *Languages and Children*, reported that some federal legislation supported the growth of early language programs and so-called critical languages, including Chinese, Arabic, Russian, Korean, and Hindi. The Foreign Language Assistance Program (FLAP) and the National Security Language Initiative (NSLI) are the two federal and professional initiatives targeting foreign language instruction, particularly in elementary school and secondary school. They made great efforts and contributions to the momentum for language learning in the last decade (Curtain & Dahlberg, 2009).

In addition, many experts in language education and linguistics concluded that children should get started learning additional language at an early age. “Start Early--Stay Long” was the motto of the initiative established in 1992 by the ACTFL, the umbrella of organization or language teachers at all levels (Curtain & Dahlberg, 2009). The CLA in 2005 conducted a survey to collect information about the policies and practices in 19 countries in diverse religions of the world in order to gain a deep insight of what other countries was doing and how they succeeded in foreign language education (Christian et al., 2005). “An early start” is one of the common features that successful language programs shared. It is a requirement for the majority of students to begin leaning additional language from elementary schools. This exploratory study reported that, for example:

- in Thailand, English is a compulsory subject beginning in first grade, and
- a new policy in Morocco has students beginning French in third grade and English in fifth. In Luxembourg, students are required to begin studying German in first grade and French the following year (Christian et al., 2005, p. 227).
Continuity in language study from one level of schooling to the next is also of great importance of language learning besides early start. Unfortunately, the difficult connection of foreign language levels in schooling is a major challenge to the U.S. (Pufahl & Rhodes, 2011).

Due to the statistics which reflected the picture of foreign language instruction in 2008 by CAL, U.S. K-12 foreign language education was no better--even worse--over the past decade in elementary and secondary school nationwide, whereas it has remained stable at high school level (Rhodes & Pufahl, 2011). It seems interesting to note that 2008 was the year that the “No Child Left Behind” educational policy was made. “About one-third of all public schools with foreign language programs reported that their foreign language instruction had been affected by NCLB ”because foreign languages learning is not included in the law’s accountability measures(Rhodes & Pufahl, 2011, p. 270). Instead, math and reading instruction are the focus of NCLB. A large majority of schools commented on a negative effect of NCLB (Rhodes & Pufahl, 2011). For example, a public elementary school provided written comments citing, “Funds and time have been directed to reading and math. In some cases, we pull students from foreign language and other non-tested content classes in order to provide more extensive reading and math support”(Rhodes & Pufahl, 2011, p. 271). Another public school explained in detail how they adjusted to NCLB:

When our district is faced with budget cuts (now every year), we are put on the chopping block since Math, Language Arts, and now Science are more important, and FLES [Foreign Language in the Elementary School] is a luxury. Fortunately, with a supportive School Board and a focus on content-related instruction (teaching key objectives from the [state tests] for Math, Language Arts, and Science, through French) we have been able to maintain our excellent program. Rather than lament and complain about
the NCLB legislation, we’ve been proactive and made it work for us (Rhodes & Pufahl, 2011, p. 271).

Pufahl and Rhodes (2011) summarized that foreign language instruction remained stable at the high school level based on the report whereas it significantly decreased in elementary and secondary schools in 2008. They advocated that Americans should begin to recognize the vital importance of an American citizen that can speak more than one language to communicate effectively in the global and multicultural world, for schools to incorporate foreign language teaching into core curriculum, for government to support K-12 foreign language teaching and for learning in public schools by providing more funding.

Improvement has been made in the past few years in U.S. elementary and secondary schools that still offered foreign languages (Curtain & Dahlberg, 2009; Christian et al., 2005; Pufahl & Rhodes, 2011; Sehlaoui, 2008). In the report, the researchers observed some positive trends in terms of the development of foreign language education. Those trends included: more Chinese and Arabic languages were offered and taught in elementary and secondary schools; language teachers spent more time using target languages in classroom; technology and literature-culture have been increasingly integrated in language instruction; growing number of immersion programs which allows students to achieve to high levels of language proficiency (Pufahl & Rhodes, 2011).

However, there is still a huge mismatch between what is happening in our schools and what the country is demanding (Pufahl & Rhodes, 2011; Sahin, 2011). This is also the case in China. The research conducted by Pufahl and Rhodes (2011) revealed
that “the vast majority of American students are not even given the opportunity to study a foreign language before middle school and many not until they reach high school” (p. 272). It is too bad that American foreign language education lags behind, compared to many other countries that “have established policies and practices that make foreign languages an essential part of the school curriculum, the same status as mathematics, reading, writing, and are required for university entrance ”such as some European countries, China, Thailand, Australia, for example (Christian et al., 2005, p. 227).

The reason why significant progress has not been made towards the almost unchanged situation of foreign language education in the United Stated draws attention from educators and researchers. Pufahl and Rhodes (2011) attributed it to many policy makers’ and educators’ indifference to the vital significance of the ability to communicate in languages other than English. This reason has also been pointed out and stressed by Christian and Pufahal (2005) in their study. Another reason is because of their lack of knowledge of the well established cognitive, academic and social advantages of learning another language (Kaushanskaya & Marian, 2009; Pufahl & Rhodes, 2011).

**Category 2: Professional Development in Foreign Language Teaching**

I selected teachers’ professional development as the second essential fundamental element for a successful K-12 foreign language program because well-trained and prepared teachers are more effective than those who are not. It does not only ensure schools to have qualified foreign language instruction for students but also improves teachers’ career development themselves. Foreign language educational content must stay current according to social standards, such as modern and
conventional usage of words. This requires that foreign language teachers should change with the times in terms of their professional language knowledge and teaching approaches. In this category, the definition of professional development, how it is currently situated in both China and U.S. as well as some recommendation provided by researchers, will be addressed based on my review of the literature.

**Teachers’ professional development.** Teachers’ professional development refers to a continuous journey and a process of never-ending growth for a teacher’s entire career; it is reflected in his knowledge, experience and attitude (Wang, 2010). Therefore, teachers’ professional development, to some extent, is a process for teachers to renew, evolve, and improve themselves continuously in the different aspects of professional beliefs, knowledge, ability and friendship. It is aimed at developing and improving teacher’s instructional strategy, professional beliefs, teaching attitudes, and experience; it is a sustainable development (Lange, 1990). A teacher’s continuing self-education is somehow equally valuable to educate students or even more important because a teacher’s professional development is not only an obligation for a teacher but also an important approach to enrich his career life. It is also quite true that the quality of education depends on the quality of teachers (Ye, Bai, Wang & Tao, 2001).

Hughes (2009) discussed that teacher training differs greatly from teacher professional development. He argued that the former might be defined as preparation for professional practice usually through formal courses at colleges or universities resulting in some kind of recognized certificate (Hughes, 2009). It is a pre-service learning aiming at improving a teacher’s practical skill so that he or she can be qualified and knowledgeable in delivering information to the students; however, teacher professional
development refers to a teacher development in-service and what should be learned is all determined by teachers themselves (Hughes, 2009). Teachers are learning by engaging in professional practice and teaching experience, usually through various kinds of resources, such as the internet (Hughes, 2009), which allows the learning process to be more flexible and practical. This argument is also agreed by Wallace (1991), who presented three models of teacher learning: the applied science, craft, and reflective models. Wallace (1991) argued that teacher training is essentially receptive, being taught by research and theory, and there is very little room for his or her own initiative in creating new practical ideas and thoughts; whereas in contrast to a trainee, teacher professional development is more likely to be an in-service learning process which is active and spontaneous, reflecting on his or her own experience and applying what they have learned into their own in order to develop their professional competences.

Researchers are trying to figure out the effective approaches of teacher professional development in foreign language teaching. For example, Wang (2010) discussed that teaching reflection, action research in teaching, in-service teacher development training and seminars are the most effective ways to enhance foreign language teacher professional development.

**In China.** With the development of times and the increasingly important role of English teaching and learning in China, the society and the New English Curriculum made reforms in requiring more on English teachers’ professional quality and development, particularly in basic education, which contains elementary and secondary education (Wang, 2007). It is true that China has made great progress in foreign language education since the Curriculum Reform started and the new Syllabus Standard
was implemented in 2001 (Chen, 2008). Particularly, the number of school learning English in elementary school increased dramatically from 9.7% in 2000 to 60.5% in 2006 (Chen, 2008).

However, some major challenges that need to be addressed for successful English literacy teaching and learning in basic education in China are becoming the great concern for language educators, such as shortage of qualified English teachers, and lack of teacher training in English literacy acquisition theory and pedagogy (Zhang, 2012).

The fundamental aim of teacher’s professional development is emphasized as a crucial factor for the successful implementation of the New Curriculum Standards presented in 2001, so, to some extent it is a new and great challenge for English educators (Shen, 2010). In other words, as a new wave of educational reform, the New English Curriculum reform initiated by Chinese government stresses the significance of qualified teachers for its successful implementation. Therefore, how to improve English teachers’ professional development effectively is beginning to concern educational researchers and policy makers. As a result, many teacher-training projects for improving teachers’ professional development have been initiated (Shen, 2010; Wang, 2010; Zhou, 2009), such as periodic academic exchange meetings. Different kinds of activities for improving teachers’ professional competence promote the development of the Basic English education in China (Zhou, 2009).

To put it into perspective, off-job training and full-time schooling used to be considered as the most effective approaches to enhance professional development of English teachers (Zhou, 2009); however, this viewpoint has been questioned recently by some researchers and educators. It is not realistic for all English teachers getting a
chance to have off-job training restricted by funding from school (Zhou, 2009). A qualified English teacher does not only require strong ability of professional academic knowledge but also pedagogical content knowledge, knowing what teaching approaches fit the content, and this can only be learned through teaching practice in classroom (Chen, 2003). Nowadays, the English teaching does not meet the requirement of times and social development and several prominent problems exist in professional development of elementary and secondary English teachers in China (Pan & Ding, 2012).

“English Development in Elementary School” (Hou, 2012) reported that many elementary schools are affected by the lack of qualified English teachers, particularly in rural area. The number of elementary English teachers graduated from English major is tiny. It is even worse that many of them are used to work in other job area, switching their jobs in English teaching just by means of some job-transfer training (Hou, 2012). It is inevitable that these teachers do not have solid fundamental knowledge, have weakness in pronunciation and oral language competence, and have difficulty in fluency. The result is that teachers may appear to be physically and mentally exhausted as a result of pressure from work, and other issues have been gradually exposed.

In order to solve these problems, some approaches and recommendations to enhance professional development of English teachers are put forward by some educators and researchers: enriching English teacher’s subject knowledge, enhancing professionalism, establishing learning community, developing and applying effective teaching strategies (Pan & Ding, 2012). In addition, schools should be responsible for providing necessary support to help teachers achieve success in their professional
development, such as giving teachers guidance so that they are able to make plans for their professional development (Shen, 2010).

**In the U.S.** Many school and school districts reported their problems of finding and hiring qualified foreign language teachers (Murphy, DeArmond, & Guin, 2003). It is reported that 25% of elementary schools and 30% of secondary schools that have foreign language programs were negatively affected by the lack of qualified language teachers (Rhodes & Pufahl, 2011). As a result, the statistics explains that there is a loud call for foreign/world language departments to expand the numbers of languages they offer.

The report also argued that “more than one quarter of all elementary school foreign language teachers are not certified at all. In contrast, the majority of secondary school teachers were certified, either for foreign language teaching at the secondary level or at the K–12 level” (Rhodes & Pufahl, 2011, p. 268). Sixty-three percent and 73% of elementary and secondary schools foreign language teachers, respectively, have engaged in subject-specific professional development or in-service training in 2008 which was similar to the year of 1997 (Rhodes & Pufahl, 2011). One quarter (25%) of elementary and 30% of secondary schools offering language programs reported having difficulty in finding and hiring qualified foreign language teachers. As we can tell from these statistics, the shortage of qualified foreign language teachers is also a big problem and challenge of K-12 foreign language teaching and learning.

**Category 3: Foreign Language Curriculum and Instruction**

A review of how K-12 foreign language curriculum and instruction in China and U.S is currently structured is of great significance because it provides a respectively comprehensive view for educators and researchers to find out the progress and analyze
the problems that each country has. In this category, I will discuss the amount of foreign language teaching, language and program types offered, teaching materials and approaches, assessment, and community of foreign language learning specifically in both countries.

**In China.** During the recent decades of open-door policy reform and modernization, China has dramatically increased its economic and political ties to the international community since the 1970s (Lu, 2012). This change, as a result, has promoted increasingly great interest in English acquisition due to its significant role in promoting communication and cooperation with the rest of world, especially in business and trade (Lu, 2012). Learning English has become more of a national priority for China. The spread of English (Li & Moreira, 2009) and the early starting age lowering from 11 years to 9 years (Nunan, 2004) of learning English have made it the dominant foreign language in China that no other language can challenge. Moreover, English, which has been recognized as an essential tool for scientific and technological advancement in the support of Chinese government, will ensure its continuous dominant role in the foreseeable future (Li & Moreira, 2009).

English is a compulsory core subject from middle school to university (Li & Moreira, 2009), and also one of the most important subjects in the National College Entrance Examinations together with Chinese and Math (Zhang, 2003). English language classes are offered by all public schools from kindergarten to university with language teaching as well as cultural knowledge of English speaking nations (Li & Moreira, 2009). English education developed very fast in recent years especially in primary schools, especially in some major Chinese cities (Beijing, Shanghai,
Guangzhou) with early English immersion programs (Knell et al., 2007). However, many challenges and problems exist in public education, such as the limit of the teacher, teaching material, content of courses, “children’s limited access to appropriate print resources in English, lack of research on, and hence knowledge of, how young children develop English literacy in a foreign language context concurrently with acquiring literacy skills in their first language” (Zhang, 2012, p. 68). The teaching condition has not been able to catch up with the expansion of the rapid growing number of enrollment in Chinese public universities (Li & Moreira, 2009). Ma (2006) predicted that the number of teachers will not grow as fast as the number of students in the near future, and more seriously, the teacher-student ratio, 1:130 in 2006 will dramatically increase in the near future, and as a result, English teachers will have too much workload and spend less time in professional development. As a consequence, “their out of date teaching knowledge and techniques (based on a piece of chalk, a blackboard and a teacher), and large-sized classes (80 or more) in which teachers talk, and students listen or repeat, give students little chance to practice their English”(Li & Moreira, 2009, p. 184). The teacher-centered traditional teaching methodology and the highly emphasized examination with focus on reading and writing due to the educational system, and the norm of grammar learning lead to the acquisition of a kind of “deaf and dumb English”(Li & Moreira, 2009). As a result, lacking of speaking and listening skills is the major problem of Chinese students. Exam-oriented forces teachers, parents, and students to prioritize the score above everything else. “In schools, textbook content has tended to repeat itself at all levels, not even changing much at tertiary level”(Li & Moreira, 2009, p. 184). “With little sense of evolution or exploration, students have begun to hate
learning English, considering it boring and ineffective and, above all, unable to provide language skills for practical usage” (Li, 2005, p. 32). Students are required to recite words and dialogs that even native speakers do not use in the textbooks.

In the U.S. Pufahl and Rhodes conducted a random, nationwide survey in 2007-08 school year on more than 5,000 U.S. public and private elementary and secondary schools. The study discussed how well U.S. schools are preparing students to become global citizens who can communicate effectively in languages other than English, and the current K-12 foreign language curriculum construction. Results indicated current patterns and shifts of foreign language education in K-12. After collection of all the data from the survey, a computer statistics program called SAS was used to analyze the results. In addition to examining overall results for the survey collected during the year in 2008, the data from the 1997 (Rhodes & Branaman, 1999) and 2008 surveys for statistical increases or decreases for comparable items was also analyzed in this study.

Results showed that overall foreign language instruction has decreased over the past 10 years and the achievement gap, widened in spite of some positive developments (Rhodes & Pufahl, 2011).

Amount of Foreign Language Teaching

The percentage of elementary public schools offering foreign languages fell significantly between 1997 and 2008, from 24% to 15% (see Figure 1). There is a statistically significant drop, from 86% in 1997 to 79% in 2008, of secondary schools offering foreign languages, particularly at the middle school level, 17% less than before over last decade (see Figure 2). The number of public elementary school students enrolled in language programs decreased from 2.5 million to 2.2 million in the 10 years
between 1997 and 2008. It is the same as it is in secondary public schools, a decline of enrollment in language programs from 52% to 41%.

*Figure 1. Elementary schools teaching foreign languages (by school type) (1987, 1997, 2008) (Rhodes & Pufahl, 2011, p. 261)*

*Figure 2. Foreign language instruction in secondary schools (by school level) (1987, 1997, 2008) (Rhodes & Pufahl, 2011, p. 262)*
Rhodes and Pufahl (2011) reported in the study that the reasons why some schools are not planning to offer languages are:

- Lack of funding
- Decision-making at the district level, not school level
- Languages not seen as a core component of an elementary school curriculum
- Previously existing program no longer feasible
- Shortage of language teachers
- Extracurricular foreign language instruction available. (p. 262)

Lack of demand might be considered as another reason why some schools are not planning to offer language.

**Languages and Program Types Offered**

Spanish was the most commonly taught language class among those schools that offered foreign languages. At the elementary school level, 88% offered language instruction taught Spanish in 2008, 11% more than in 1997 (see Figure 3). Secondary schools that offered Spanish instruction kept the same percentage in 2008 as in 1997, 93% (see Figure 4). However, it is reported in the study that since the overall foreign languages offered in public elementary and secondary schools in 2008 became fewer than in 1997: the percentage of public schools teaching Spanish nationwide actually dropped in the last 10 years, with elementary schools teaching Spanish decreasing from 19% to 12% and middle schools decreased from 62% to 55%.

More schools offered Chinese and Arabic in 2008 compared to 1997 among the schools that have foreign language instruction, although it is still low. Fewer schools taught French and German at both levels. The exploratory model was the most
commonly offered foreign language program among public elementary schools, with the 47%, compared to the other two models, language focus programs (39%) and the immersion model (14%)(see Figure 5). Most secondary schools with language programs offered language-focused programs which emphasize on four language basic language skills: listening, speaking, reading and writing. A significant increase of offering Advanced Placement (AP) language programs from 1987 to 2008 was indicated in the survey.

Figure 3. Languages offered by elementary schools with language programs (1997, 2008) (Rhodes & Pufahl, 2011, p. 263)
Over three-quarters (78%) of elementary schools and the vast majority of secondary schools with language programs reported having an established foreign language curriculum (Rhodes & Pufahl, 2011). Different types of teaching materials were more often used in 2008 compared to 1997, particularly with the increase of the use of literature from the target culture and technology-based instructional materials being remarkable from 1997 to 2008 (Rhodes & Pufahl, 2011). There was a noticeable increase in the number of teachers using the target language in class at least 75% of the time in 2008, compared to 1997 in both levels. A variety of strategies were used to assess students’ language proficiency in both elementary and secondary schools. The assessment was focused on how well students performed in comprehension, both listening and reading. Oral proficiency was also required to be assessed through various ways: “asking students to use illustrations to indicate understanding, having students
explain in English what they heard or read in the target language, and having students engage in oral language activities to assess their oral proficiency” (Rhodes & Pufahl, 2011, p. 266).

In addition, ensuring the continuity in language study from one level of schooling to the next, which is called articulation, remained a major challenge. It was reported that about 50% of elementary schools had no articulated sequence of language instruction when students moved to the middle schools (Rhodes & Pufahl, 2011). This kind of difficult connection among foreign language levels is widespread throughout the whole country (Rhodes & Pufahl, 2011).

**Advantages of Learning Another Language**

As the line between domestic and international affairs blurs, there is an increasing demand for the intellectuals who are able to communicate in languages other than English to meet the diversity of the world, such as in world business. Learning another language is not only about the language itself, but also about the cultures included. “Knowledge of cultures will promote effective leadership abroad” (Stewart, 2007, p. 9) and help students gain more opportunities in their career preparation particularly in business (Kordsmeier & Rogers, 2000).

Grosse conducted a survey of 2,500 randomly selected alumni from the graduating classes of 1970 through 2002 of Thunderbird, The Garvin School of International Management in 2004, aiming at examining whether or not the alumni had received a competitive advantage in their careers from their foreign language skills and cultural knowledge. The result indicated that over 80% of the respondents acknowledged that their foreign language skills and cultural knowledge have benefited them in their
professional careers (see Figure 5) and considered them important in their career development (Grosse, 2004). The report also indicated various rewards: benefits and recognition for respondents' language skills by companies: travel opportunities, overseas assignments, written and oral recognition, promotion, and raises (Grosse, 2004). The foreign languages that respondents would like to learn in the United States were also discussed in the study. Almost one-fourth (24.4%) of the respondents would like to learn Chinese, which is the biggest category of the foreign languages that native speakers in the U.S. preferred, compared to Spanish, French, German, and Japanese (see Table 1) (Grosse, 2004). It explains that learning a foreign language is practical and further students’ success in the future (Grosse, 2004).

Figure 5. Competitive advantage of foreign language proficiency and cultural knowledge (Grosse U.G., 2004, p360).

Macool (2005) discussed what language learning for is with the reference of “Terry Davis, Secretary General of the Council of Europe, speaking in Strasbourg on 24 September 2004 in a Speech to mark the European Day of Languages.”
Language learning is a powerful tool for building tolerant, peaceful and inclusive multicultural societies. The experience of learning a new language helps to develop openness to other cultures and acceptance of different ways of life and beliefs. It raises awareness of linguistic and cultural diversity and promotes tolerance of people with a different lifestyle.
Languages improve mutual communication and understanding, breaking down barriers among countries. They enrich the cultural and linguistic development of our society.

A number of researchers also found significant associations between learning another language and creativity (Ghonsooly & Showqi, 2012). Ghonsooly and Showqi conducted quantitative research of whether or not learning another language can enhance creativity. The results revealed that it enhances all four divergent thinking abilities: i.e., fluency, elaboration, originality, and flexibility. “Such enhancement can be attributed to specific cognitive practices that language learning brings and the psychological consequences of being trained under a system different from school system” (Ghonsooly&Showqi, 2012, p69).

Some researchers even advocate that students should start foreign language learning as early as possible. By taking a look at the successfully well-established foreign language curriculum in other countries, they all share one thing in common: that is, studying another language at a very early age at least from elementary school, some of them even start from kindergarten. For example, Europe and Asia start offering foreign languages in elementary, where research has shown that language learning is most effective (Pufahl, Rhodes & Christian, 2001). The present study conducted by Ghonsooly and Showqi (2012) found “evidence that a younger starting age makes a modest difference to both phonological and basic morphosyntactic abilities, even in a situation of minimal input” (2012).
In this chapter, I will first outline the overall design of the present study, then briefly introduce the research participants, and turn to data collection methods and procedures and lastly deal with data analysis instruments and procedures.

**Overall Design**

To answer the research questions, the case study was chosen as a research format for the present study because of the six advantageous characteristics proposed by Adelman et al (1976). First, they claim that case study data is “strong in reality” and thus provides a “natural” basis for generalization. Second, case studies allow generalizations about an instance or from that to a class. Third, case studies can represent a variety of viewpoints and can offer support to alternative interpretations. Next, case studies may form an archive of descriptive material available for subsequent reinterpretation. Fifth, case studies are “a step to action.” Their insights may be put to use for a range of purposes such as, staff development, within-institutional feedback, formative evaluation, and educational policymaking. Finally, case studies present research or evaluation data in a more accessible form than conventional research reports, capable of serving multiple audiences. “At its best, case study allows the reader to judge the implications of a study for himself” (Adelman et al, p. 149).
As McDonough and McDonough (1997) argued, a case study “is not itself a research method nor the equivalent of one: it employs methods and techniques in the investigation of an object of interest.” However, Stake (1995 cited in McDonough & McDonough) claimed that “qualitative researchers take pride in discovering and portraying the multiple views of the case. The interview is the main road to multiple realities” (p. 208). His view is most relevant to the present study that involved six teachers different in age, seniority and education backgrounds. Therefore, the present study took the form of case study, focused group. More specifically, this would enable the researcher to discover and portray the multiple views of the actual foreign language education structured in China and U.S. in order to look at if it agrees with the literature or disagree. Besides, the implication of the findings may cause both countries to recognize the vital importance of a person that can communicate effectively in many languages and across cultures, and for schools to make the teaching and learning of foreign languages a priority in the secondary curriculum. It also allowed teachers to voice their concerns from their heart regarding foreign language education.

To be specific, my study focused on a small sample size of focus group involving three foreign language instructors in public middle schools from China, and three in the U.S. The two research instruments that were used in this study were online surveys and focus group. Due to the fact that the researcher is currently in America, the focus group of Chinese teachers was conducted via web conference instead of face to face, whereas American focus group was conducted face to face. This might affect the validity of the study and could be one of the limitations of my study.
Research Participants

The participants were all currently employed in public middle schools involved in the systematic foreign language teaching in the U.S. and China. Among the six focused group subjects, five were females and one was male. Their age ranged from 29 years to 51 years. In terms of teaching experience, they ranged from 4 years to 12 years (see Table 2).

Table 2. Background to Focus Group Subjects

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subject</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Years of teaching experience</th>
<th>Language</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Susan</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Spanish</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Linda</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Spanish</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Qing</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>Chinese</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bing</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>English</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jie</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>English</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chu</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>English</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The six participants were chosen for the focused group based on purposive sampling from the online survey. The selection of the subjects was primarily based on if they had at least 3 years’ teaching experiences and were currently employed in public middle school. In order to allow the results to be comparable and make sense to be a comparative study, I also tried to make sure both focus groups from China and U.S. were similar based on school background as much as possible, such as schools’ location, reputation, size, etc. However, it is impossible to find the same school exactly from both
countries. Therefore, a variable regarding this issue could not be avoided in this study, and so it could be another limitation of this study. In the meanwhile, I allowed for maximum variation in terms of their age, and teacher training background. Below is a brief profile of these six teachers according to online survey questions.

Susan is an American who has 3 years’ experience as a full-time Spanish teacher working with seventh and eighth grade students in a public middle school. She went to college in Spain and graduated as a Spanish major. While teaching Spanish in school, she got her Spanish teacher license and certification at a university in the U.S. The school where she teaches is located is a city with a population of 34,674 at the 2012 estimate. It is a suburban community with nine K-12 public schools. Susan has five Spanish classes each day, teaching seventh and eighth grade students.

Linda is an American who works at the same middle school with Susan. They are the only two Spanish teachers there. She taught Spanish in a different middle school for 3 years, and this is her second year teaching in her current school. She is now working with both seventh and eighth grade students, the same as Susan. She also went to college in Spain and graduated as a Spanish major. Linda teaches four Spanish classes each day and one class for duty.

Qing is a Chinese who came to the U.S. 6 years ago. She graduated from a university in China and came to the U.S. to teach Chinese in a public middle school. She has 5 years of teaching experience in the U.S. The school where she works is located in a mid-sized city and has Grades 5-8 and a total enrollment of around 400 students. During the years of teaching Chinese in the U.S., she also earned master's degree in teaching Chinese. Her 3 years of teaching experience and ongoing training experiences
helped her establish a solid background in foreign language theory and pedagogy. She was actively in participating in foreign language conferences and visiting other teachers’ classes, which she learned about some new teaching methodologies and practices.

Bing, Jie and Chu teach English at the same public middle school in China. This school is characterized with good reputation of English language education in the city where it is located. Therefore, the school is also named as a foreign language school. The school is located in a mid-sized historical city. It has grade levels from one to three and a total enrollment of around 1,200 students.

Bing is in her 11th year of teaching middle school students. She majored in English education from normal school in China and received her teaching certificate while she was in school 11 years ago. During her 10 years of teaching, she also went to school part time and completed her master’s degree majoring in English linguistics.

Jie has a total of 26 years of teaching experience and has been working with high school students for 15 years. He is well known as an “outstanding teacher” in the city where the school is located, even though he does not have a master’s degree. Taught with a grammar translation approach, he admitted that his teaching stemmed largely from this approach.

Chu has 8 years of English teaching experience. She received her bachelor’s degree in English for business and administration in China and her master’s degree in the TESOL (Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages) program in Hong Kong.

**Data Collection**

Data collection methods used for the present study consisted of online surveys and focus groups. In terms of procedure, a web-grounded survey was conducted in order
to know the basic information of the participants. The questions addressed the following variables: demographics, teaching experiences (i.e., years spent teaching, language, class schedule, etc.), foreign language curricula in the schools where they work, professional development (i.e. certificate, training, overseas language learning experience, teaching method, etc.). The links to an online survey created by Google Forms were sent to candidates individually in order to determine who would like to be participants for the focus group. Based on the results from the online questionnaire, six foreign language teachers were selected to be involved in this study. They were divided into two groups. One group consisted of three teachers in the U.S. and the other consisted of three teachers in China.

Next, focus groups (three teachers in China and three teachers in the U.S.) were conducted. An online conference for the Chinese focus group was conducted using Blackboard Collaborate, a program in which I can create a meeting space for getting three participants and myself involved in discussion online. The focus group from the U.S. was conducted face to face. The questions were open-ended around those three categories, and both interviews lasted between 40 minutes and 1 hour.

I collected data through an online survey (Appendix A) before carrying out the focus groups. This allowed me to narrow down which participants were able to meet. Data gained through the focus group provides a more purposeful and in-depth exploration of how foreign language education is structured from teachers’ perspective. Different approaches of data gathering allowed “the opportunity of greater credibility and greater plausibility of interpretation” (McDonough & McDonough, 1997).
Focus Group

I carried out two semi-structured focus groups, one with three foreign language teachers from China via a virtual room because of the geographic restriction and the other with three teachers from America via a face-to-face focus group. Hopkins (cited in McDonough & McDonough, 1997) claimed that a focus group is the most productive because individuals can “spark” each other into perceptive lines of discussion. Semi-structured interviews, rather than structured or unstructured interviews, were employed to give the teachers a degree of power and control over the course of the interview (Nunan, 1992) and to give the researcher a great deal of flexibility; for example, in changing the order of questions and for more extensive follow-up of responses (McDonough & McDonough, 1997; Nunan 1992). Before the interviews began, I explained the nature of the research and the purpose of the interview to the teachers and answered their questions (Nunan 1992). Each focus group, which lasted one hour or so, was conducted in English to allow the teachers to express their ideas fully. The focus group that was conducted was recorded in order for date analysis.

The focus group (see Appendix B for Focus Group Protocol) included three questions as an outline and extended questions based on the outline. The questions guided by three topics which are the same as the three categories discussed in the literature review: (a) Social political investment, (b) teachers’ professional development, and (c) curriculum and instruction. Those categories were created by the researcher’s assumption on what elements could possibly affect foreign language education to be successful. It is worth noting that most of the questions asked at the focus group were
open-ended questions, and it aimed at understanding the respondents’ point of view rather than making generalisations about behaviours.

**Data Analysis**

Initial data analysis began after the completion of the ground survey questionnaire online in order to narrow down which of the participants were able to be interviewed. The selection of the subjects was primarily based on if they had at least three years’ teaching experience and currently employed in public middle school. Moreover, in order to allow the data to be more comparable for this study, both focus groups should be as similar, based on school background, as possible, such as schools’ location, reputation, size, etc.

Data analysis after the first focus group (three English teachers from China) began, and continued throughout the whole period of data collection. This concurrent collection and analysis process not only enabled the researcher to identify themes emerging from teacher comments, but also served as a check that sufficient and appropriately focused information was being gathered before the completion of the field work (Smith, 1996). Both interviews were recorded and transcribed.

This chapter has introduced the overall design of the present study, the setting and participants, data collection methods and procedures, and data analysis instruments and procedures. To promote reliability and validity of the present study, the qualitative data were collected and analysed; two instruments, online questionnaire and focused group interviews were employed in data collection and data analysis. The findings of this study will be dealt with in the next chapter.
In this chapter, I will present my findings by using extracts from the focus group interviews ‘to provide supporting evidence for the findings and permit the teachers’ voices to be heard directly’ (Carless, 2003). The research questions presented in this study will be answered according to the discussion with six teachers from China and America. Since my research questions were designed based on my understanding of what are essential and fundamental elements of a successful foreign language education in my review of the literature that are social political investment, teachers’ professional development, and curriculum and instruction. It is possible that teachers could add some other elements that are considered as important to a successful foreign language education during the discussion. It is also important to note that more elements, which would not have been covered by teachers in the discussion with the focus group, may arise in the future study.

**Research Question 1**

How do foreign language teacher participants from two countries differ in the attitudes towards the study of foreign language in K-12 schools?
Influence of Social and Political Aspects

This subsection presents how social and political aspects influence the development and current situation of the foreign language education systems employed in each country separately in the eyes of the teachers.

In China. My review of literature reveals that the importance of English to the K-12 educational system in China is because English, as the major foreign language offered by elementary, middle and high schools is included in the core curriculum, together with Math and Mandarin. It is inevitable that English as a foreign language in basic education is highly emphasized.

It is also reflected upon from the government’s investment, social impact and teachers’ input. Working in a context where great emphasis was placed on English teaching and learning by the society, government and the educational system, all three English teachers from China, not surprisingly, agreed on the increasingly important role of English education in China.

Jie, the eldest and most experienced English teacher among those three teachers, was amazed at the fast-changing people’s attitudes towards English learning and its importance in the past 20 years.

English is highly emphasized together with the other two core subjects in our school. It has not only been emphasized in our school but also the same in all schools during the period of nine years of compulsory education. It even starts to be considered to be important from kindergarten. It’s not hard to see how important English education here from tons of private English language training institutions nowadays outside schools existing. They offer all kinds of programs specifically to meet different people’s needs. I think this is best exemplified in those institutions that help students get higher test scores, such as TOFEL, IELTS, different business English certification, etc. For example, The New Oriental, China’s largest private education provider with 324
learning centers and schools, is best-known for its exam preparation training courses.

Bing smiled and nodded agreement with Jack’s comments. She also identified examinations as a major issue and stated:

I think examinations are a major factor that inhibits the importance of English learning at the school. The leaders, the society, schools, and even parents attach great importance to the results of the examinations. If English were not a core subject in our curriculum, I highly doubt it would be as important as it is right now. But anyways, the truth now is that everyone in China knows English is a world language and we need to learn it.

The social or the cultural influence attaches great importance to English teaching and learning in China. Otherwise, those tons of private English schools would not be able to become an educational-industrial complex.

Chu reflected upon herself regarding the impact of private English schools on her schooling.

English seems to become popular and important since the late 1970s along with my generation growing up. As China becomes more open to the rest of world and increasing number of world business with other countries, it is inevitable that there is a great demand of people for this society who can be fluent in English as businessman or translators, etc. I took intensified TOFEL classes before going to Hong Kong working on my Masters’ degree because passing TOFEL at a certain test score according to the school’s requirement is required. It did help though by the way. The private English training schools do not only offer programs for elementary, middle and high schools’ students but also for kids in kindergarten. For example, Jia yin English training institution. Parents are always willing to spend money on kids’ education, especially something related to core subjects.

The impact of the test-driven educational system in China, especially the College Entrance Examination (Chinese Gaocao), has been emerging as a critical factor influencing the planning and implementation of English teaching and learning at the school. It was agreed by all three English teachers that successfully passing the exam
and going on to higher education is one of the most important achievements in one’s life because it guarantees a better chance to get a good job after graduation and automatically qualifies one for being part of the intellectual elite (Zhang, 2003). When asked the question regarding what factors impact on their attitudes, Chu expressed her concern: “I just heard a very interesting comment from one of my students about the importance of studying English. He said, "English is famous," instead of "English is popular." His expression does not exactly make too much sense, but I can tell what he was trying to say. It is about active and passive attitude of learning English. He seems not to be happy with it.

Jie and Bing expressed their worries about the consequences of the test driven educational system in China. Bing was shocked to know around 85% of her students admitted that their purpose of learning English is to get a higher score in the test so that they will be able to have more opportunity to be admitted in a better high school or university. Jie also pointed out that getting an admission to college is not the end of learning English because non-English major students must continue studying English for 2 years in college in order to pass CET-4 and CET-6 (College English Test 4 & 6). Besides, having those certificates is one of the basic requirements for a company to determine if students could go to the second round job interview. Most first and second tier universities even establish a rule that students cannot graduate unless they pass CET-4.

The important status of English learning in China does not only derive from cultural influence but also from the great efforts the Chinese government has been putting into it. English is also one of the tests that students need to take for graduate
schools, together with Chinese, Math and politics. Since all public schools are managed by the government, how important it is, to some extent, all depends on the policy makers.

**In the U.S.** In contrast to the important role of learning English for Chinese people, foreign language education in the U.S. is not considered as significant as it is in China. Three foreign language teachers from America all agree on this point. Qing grew up and received her entire basic education in China. She also has been teaching Chinese in America for 5 years. Therefore, she knows about how different foreign language is situated in both countries. “Learning a foreign language in the U.S. is not as significant as it is in China because foreign language in the U.S. is an optional course. It differs from China which regards English as a compulsory course.”

Foreign language education is not considered as a core subject in the U.S. Qing pointed out that core subjects in American K-12 education are Math, Language Arts, Social Studies and Science, while the rest of the subjects are specials, such as Art, Music, foreign languages, etc. However, Linda was not for sure about where they fall. She agreed that they do not consider it as core in her school, but it is sort of between exploratory and core. So they are not quite important enough yet to be core but they are not too exploratory.

You do need it for credits though at your high school level. So it is a credit there. So they kind of care about a little bit more at high school level. You passing the course they care about more than here I would think. Students have to have two or three years of studying a foreign language for college.

Her point explained why the report showed that foreign language instruction remained stable at the high school level by Pufahl and Rhodes (2011). Susan and Qing completely agreed with Linda’s explanations regarding how foreign language learning is
structured in the U.S. Some credits taken in middle schools can be considered as high school credits, such as the school where Qing is teaching. It depends.

Chinese is a compulsory course in my school and it is regarded as high school credits in my school. But some schools that consider foreign language classes as exploratory cannot have them as high school credits. Some public middle schools offer multiple foreign languages besides Chinese, such as Spanish, French, and German. Besides, students can decide not to take any foreign language class but other classes instead. But taking Chinese class is a requirement for kids in my school but again Chinese also cannot be considered as a core subject. It is just a high school credits course.

Based on the information from the interview, the fact is that foreign language education has not been paid enough attention as the other core subjects according to how it is placed in the entire educational system. This conclusion confirms with what literature said. Even though the current situation is not so optimistic, but teachers still have the confidence of making it better to be accepted and emphasized. This could be noticed from Linda’s comment, below.

This can be a little native and close-minded and that’s the reason we are here. So the more you can show them that a different culture, not weird, just different and you can give that appreciation for a different language and different culture. I think then they start to like a little more. Maybe they learn something.

In my review of literature, “About one-third of all public schools with foreign language programs reported that their foreign language instruction had been affected by NCLB” because of foreign languages learning is not included in the law’s accountability measures(Rhodes & Pufahl, 2011, p. 270). Instead, math and reading instruction are the focus of NCLB. A large majority of schools commented on a negative effect of No Child Left Behind (NCLB)(Rhodes & Pufahl, 2011). For example, a public elementary school provided written comments cited, “Funds and time have been directed to reading and
math. In some cases, we pull students from foreign language and other non-tested content classes in order to provide more extensive reading and math support” (Rhodes & Pufahl, 2011, p. 271). However, when asked if they feel any negative effect of NCLB to their language teaching, such as funding, all three teachers, surprisingly, disagree with it and they did not see it affected in their schools. Two of them from the same middle school are very satisfied with their teaching, students’ learning and schools value even though it is a lot of work, but it’s getting better. Susan indicated:

Here it’s really good because they start in third grade learning Spanish so kids are already excited. Families are very excited about language. But I see a difference where it starts at high school. I think kids are a little less open minded. But with this school, I think, we’re very excited about Spanish.

Even though NCLB policy did not affect the foreign language teaching in their school, one of the three teachers commented on its weak position compared to other core subjects. Qing indicated:

Regarding the government’s support to teachers, the situation here is completely different from China. In China, teachers’ funding seldom are considered to be cut as a priority. Instead, in the U.S., once the government wants to cut down the budget, education is always the first choice. Compared to the core subject teachers, the school funding for Arts, history, foreign language teachers would be cut first.

Regarding how much they are satisfied with the support of funding from their schools, Linda and Susan explained that they don’t have a problem with funding. They have good technology. They both have Smartboards. They have a Spanish fund so they can buy books each year, whatever they need for their use. So they don’t have any difficulty with money and they feel they got everything that we need.
In contrast, Qing was not satisfied as much as the other two teachers with her school. She gave nine out ten for evaluating her school value towards how foreign language is situated in her school. She explained:

I have my own classroom and I don’t need to share classroom with other teachers. I don’t need to worry about if I have enough kids who want to learn Chinese to keep my job because every kid here needs to learn Chinese because it is a compulsory subject here and considered as one high school credit. If I need textbooks, my school will buy them. But it is impossible to get everything I want. For example, I plan to organize a fair trip. The plan would be approved as long as my school think the transportation fee could be covered. I wanted to take kids to downtown. However, because of the high expenses, it was disapproved by my school.

In addition to many policy makers’ and educators’ indifference to the vital significance of the ability to communicate in languages other than English (Pufahl & Rhodes, 2011), all teachers thought that foreign language learning also depends on family. Susan noted that sometimes parents say there is no reason to learn Spanish but she saw that very little. It was maybe 10% of what she heard. But sometimes it starts in the family. Qing stated the situation in her class:

Some parents are very supportive of my teaching and kids’ learning while some are not because they probably never learned a foreign language in their entire lives or got out of their hometowns to see the outside world. Some parents think learning Chinese is important because they have business in China, and so they need to fly to China frequently. Speaking Chinese definitely will be able to help doing business. But not every parent and kids are the same as this.

To sum up, the attitudes towards foreign language teaching and learning in basic education differ in China and America. Foreign language education is highly emphasized in China, while it is not paid enough attention in America, but teachers have confidence that it will become better and better. Those discussions are in agreement of
what literature says in the previous chapter. The major attributing factors seem to be, again, its social/cultural influence, political investment, and family’s value.

**Research Question 2**

What are the best practices in K-12 foreign language education in Chinese and American public schools? What is effective and ineffective?

This subsection presents the effectiveness and ineffectiveness that both countries have been working with its foreign language education. Teachers’ professional development, as well as curriculum and instruction will be emphasized based on the discussion with the focus group.

**Teachers’ Professional Development**

**In China.** Zhou (2009) conducted a survey on investigating the current situation of teachers’ professional development among 134 English teachers from 12 middle schools in 2007. It is reported that 91.8% of English teachers understood the importance of professional development and 93.2% of them considered professional development as an important approach to improve their teaching ability. Therefore, a factor affecting the quality of English teaching is determined by teachers’ professional development. The interview data suggests that there is a relationship between teachers’ professional development and the degree of their teaching ability. For example, Jie had a strong belief in the value of his professional development and had a sound understanding of different approaches to develop it. His in-service refresher courses through different methods left him with a higher level of confidence in his teaching ability and comfort dealing with updating pedagogy. Therefore, even though he is the eldest of these three teachers, a corresponding higher incidence of multiple teaching approaches was found in
his lessons. He consistently attended to English teaching conferences, presenting his research papers and being active in having conversations with other experienced teachers from other schools. Meanwhile, he also paid attention to reflect upon his teaching through keeping writing teaching journals, and sometimes he took videos of his class so that he should be able to observe his effectiveness in teaching and learn from the ineffectiveness. It is common sense that usually, at his age, the teachers are more likely to have teaching language in an old traditional way, such as the grammar translation approach, and be ignorant of improving students’ communicative competence. However, Jack always has been paying attention to update his knowledge in pedagogy and his professional development.

Bing and Chu seemed to me that they were more likely to be passive in improving themselves rather than being active in taking care of their professional development. They had participated in different kinds of ongoing training requested by school, such as visiting colleagues’ classes, attending some conferences, participating short period TESL training lectured by visiting professors. Cherry complained that:

I know professional development is meaningful and a good way to improve my teaching ability, but I just don’t have time to really think about this. I have two classes to take care and six classes each week. Besides, I also need to do research and publish paper in order to keep my title. Plus grading and supervising their morning reading section and coaching their study at night on duty. It is just so much work to do.

Her complaint is also proved in Zhou’s study (2007). It is reported in his study that 48.5% of English teachers in middle schools spent less than one hour on their professional studies on average. Besides the strenuous teaching tasks, grading students’ assignment and coaching took them a lot of time. Moreover, some of these teachers are shortsighted in their career planning and they are not very active in enhancing their...
professional development. However, in terms of the percentage of certified English teachers, Bing stated that most teachers were certified as language teachers in secondary schools except some teachers who work in small villages. Some schools also provide opportunities for teachers to go short periods of studying overseas but the number is very few because of school funding. Chu noted that teachers were very excited about going abroad to improve their own language proficiency and teaching pedagogy but unfortunately it was usually restricted by school funding.

**In the U.S.** In terms of the awareness, actual implantation and requirement for teachers’ professional development, America seems to have done a better job than China based on interviewing the three foreign language teachers in the U.S. The report conducted by Rhodes and Pufahl in 2011 noted that 30% of secondary schools which have foreign language programs were negatively affected by the lack of qualified language teachers and 30% secondary schools offering language programs reported having difficulty in finding and hiring qualified foreign language teachers. However, it is completely opposite from what I heard from the teachers from the interview. Linda and Susan both have overseas Spanish learning experience because they went to college in Spain. In addition, they both have Spanish teaching certification and it is a requirement to be certified in order to actually teach in school. Susan noted that:

> I think the majority of teachers--I know most of my friends from college studied abroad. I think it is pretty common. Even something is very small, couple weeks. I don’t know a lot of people to go a whole year, but they go a semester or summer. It is important for understanding language, learning the language.

Qing is different from those two Spanish teachers since her nationality is Chinese. She mentioned that there are only four English speakers who teach Chinese language in her state in total and most teachers who teach Chinese are Chinese native
speaks. “Chinese is the most difficult language for English speakers to learn. You can achieve intermediate level in 484 hours of studying French and Spanish but it requires three times as much time to achieve the same level when studying Chinese.” All three teachers agree that, in America, it is required that all foreign language teachers be certified and at least have a bachelor’s degree. As their ongoing training develops, most teachers should be able to have their Master degree eventually. Qing indicated that,

Teachers in the U.S. are required to have ongoing training. We need to renew our teaching license every 5 years by getting at least six university credits about language teaching in 5 years. I need to pay for those credits by myself. This is a rule for schools to supervise teachers to always keep updating their knowledge and enhancing their personal development.

In addition to six college level language teaching credits required, some language teachers also take an opportunity actively to attend conferences, visit other teachers’ classes and learn from each other in order to enhance their professional development. Three teachers in the interview all had such experiences. It seems to me that foreign language teachers have more stress than English teachers in China because I was amazed at how much workload they have every day. Susan has five classes each day working with both eighth and ninth graders, while Linda has four classes each day, also working with both levels. They also need to meet with their students every single day. Qing has seventh and eighth graders as well. She needs to meet her students every other day but she is the only Chinese language teacher in her school. She has around 200 students in total. The three teachers’ workload is a lot more than English teachers in China, but they did not express any dissatisfaction or complaint of their current situation. Instead, they care more about their professional development. The factors to cause this difference might be attributed to the examination and the degree of its importance in each country.
Foreign language teachers might not have such stress from test scores since foreign languages are not considered as a core subject in America.

To sum up, both countries have given great importance to foreign language teachers’ quality in basic education. The same requirement has been applied to both countries that all foreign language teachers should be certified to teach language while the U.S. has been paying more attention to teachers’ ongoing training than China does since it is considered as a rule and requirement that all teachers should complete at least six credits of college-level, content-related classes in order to renew their licenses. Instead, English teachers in China just need to put things right once and it will be for all.

**Curriculum and Instruction**

**In China.** As discussed in the above section, English as a core subject from middle school to university (Li & Moreira, 2009), and also as one of the most important subjects (together with Chinese and math) in the National College Entrance Examinations (Zhang, 2004), is offered by all public schools from kindergarten to university with language teaching as well as cultural knowledge of English-speaking nations (Li & Moreira, 2009). English education develops very quickly in recent years especially in primary schools, as well as some major Chinese cities (Beijing, Shanghai, Guangzhou) with early English immersion programs (Knell et al., 2007). There is no doubt that it is being given great importance by the government, culture, school, parents, and students. However, many challenges and problems exist in public education, such as the limit of the teacher, teaching material, content of courses and so on. Jack expressed his concern about the limit of qualified teachers:

> English teachers in China have too much workload and have too much stress from test scores. Teachers’ wages depend on students’ test scores in
some schools. Under this pressure, especially young teachers have no time to reflect on their teaching and really think about their professional development. What they care more about is how to improve students’ test scores. It is inevitable that a lot of teachers only teach some textbook knowledge, so-called ‘forced-feeding method of teaching.

Bing and Chu agreed on the idea presented by Jie and feel the same with about young teachers. The teacher-centered traditional teaching methodology and the highly emphasized examination with focus on reading and writing due to the educational system, and the norm of grammar learning lead to the acquisition of a kind of “deaf and dumb English” (Li & Moreira, 2009). As a result, a lack of speaking and listening skills is the major problem of Chinese students. An exam-oriented focus forces teachers, parents and students to put the score in the first place. Bing indicated that "Students’ motivation of English learning mainly depends on external factor, test score, while only 15.5% students are motivated to learn English because of the internal factor, such as, they are interested in learning English and consider it as fun.”

Some students may be interested in English at the beginning, but as long as it is getting more closely related to their test scores and future, the stress coming from the score begins to reduce their interest in enjoying learning English. Chu received systematic training on ESL theory and techniques when she was working on her Master’s degree at a university in Hong Kong. She had a different view regarding this issue:

I don’t see there is any contradiction between test score and using effective teaching techniques in my classroom. Instead, it helps kids’ test scores. I emphasize on kids’ communicative competence rather than grammar. It doesn’t mean I don’t care about grammar but just the priority is not the same as the traditional teaching method, grammar translation approach. I can see my kids are enjoying of learning English and their scores are not bad. I think the biggest issue for teachers should be that they are not brave enough to try new things.
When asked about the effectiveness and ineffectiveness of English teaching and learning, all three teachers, surprisingly, complained that the English teaching usually requires additional preparation of materials and that there is an acute lack of suitable resourcing for English teaching within the school library. The English resources in the market are more inclined to help students promote their test scores rather than paying attention to students’ language skills and practical use. It is a common practice in China that teachers are required to cover the textbook. Although the head of the English Department supported the integration of different resources, such as original English literature, she emphasized the importance of “finishing the textbook” on several occasions. Bing cited her remarks at the very first department meeting:

We shall make sure that we finish the book in time. Not finishing the book before the citywide end-of-term examination is a serious issue. It may be regarded as a ‘teaching accident’ and have serious consequences.

Again, this emphasis on the completion of the textbook is closely related to the examinations, in which students are tested on vocabulary and grammar learned in the textbooks.

Listening, speaking, reading and writing are the four basic skills of English in the language learning process. Three teachers expressed their different opinions on which one is their concentration in class. Jie noted that the four skills are auxiliary to each other. The emphasis is not the same in different stages. Listening and speaking should be focused for the beginning learners in order to increase their interest of studying English and communicative competence. Whereas later on, as the student is continuing development in listening and speaking, reading and writing should be added gradually. Bing argued that she spent more time in promoting students’ reading and writing instead
of listening and speaking because speaking is not included in the National College Examination. Besides the listening score is just for reference so most students do not really care about speaking and listening. Again, this emphasis on reading and writing is closely related to examination. Cherry was disappointed and frustrated about the negative effect that test scores brought. She put forward an idea that it is time for all educators, researchers and educational policy makers to take it seriously regarding how to assess students’ academic achievement more effectively.

**In the U.S.** In my review of the literature, some research showed that improvement has been made between the U.S. elementary and secondary schools that still offered foreign languages (Christian et al., 2005; Curtain & Dahlberg, 2009; Pufahl & Rhodes, 2011; Sehlaoui, 2008). In the report, the researchers observed some positive trends in terms of the development of the foreign language education: more Chinese and Arabic languages were offered and taught in elementary and secondary schools; language teachers spent more time using target languages in classroom; technology and literature-culture have been increasingly integrated in language instruction; and growing numbers of immersion programs which allows students to achieve to high levels of language proficiency (Pufahl & Rhodes, 2011). Those improvements mentioned above were all covered during the interview the two Spanish teachers and one Chinese language teacher. Qing indicated that:

> I began to teach Chinese five years ago. Well, before that time, there was [sic] very few Chinese teachers here. The number of Chinese teachers is increasing recently. But still only 1 or 2 percent of American public schools offer Chinese class because most schools offer Spanish and French. German is fading out though.
All three teachers prefer trying to use target languages in the classroom as much as they can, but it is very basic and nothing may go over their heads. They spoke English most of time when explaining the rules of activities. They tried their best to provide target languages in learning environment to get them immersed. “The more they hear it, the more they absorb it,” noted Susan.

As we discussed in the previous subsection, since foreign language is not considered as a core subject in America, it has not been paid enough attention to the same like math, reading literacy and science by government, schools, culture, parents and students. However, Susan emphasized the advantages of learning Spanish, how Spanish helps her kids to be successful in academic achievement and how much her kids love Spanish:

Kids here love Spanish. We do a lot with literacy, which is a big thing now in middle school. Helping kids with literacy. So ours are based a lot on that, reading and writing. So it also helps with other subjects with that. It helps Spanish especially is so common throughout the world. Kids travel even if they are on vacation somewhere they use it. They see people here I’ve used it here at school to translate. So I think that’s a big advantage when they see it in the world today. They see how many advantages it has.

The exploratory model was the most commonly offered foreign language program among public elementary schools, with a percentage of 47% (Rhodes & Pufahl, 2011). Most secondary schools with language programs offered language focus programs which emphasized the four language basic skills: listening, speaking, reading and writing (Rhodes & Pufahl, 2011). Susan and Linda felt it hard to define the Spanish program in their school. Susan noted that:

It is sort of between exploratory and core. So we are not quite important enough yet to be core but we are not too exploratory. Every seventh grader takes 9 weeks of Spanish. Then eighth graders can have the option to take
Spanish One. Based on recommendation. Spanish, it is an exploratory we call it. So we are really excited about doing it. We can do an exploratory. There is no grammar, just whatever topic or story, or adjectives, whatever you want to do. We can work into that exploratory.

Qing explained how foreign language curriculum is structured in general.

Usually kids start to learn foreign languages from eighth grade but our school offers Chinese from seventh grade. It depends on the district. Some schools start to offer foreign language programs from seventh grade as exploratory class. Each semester has different language classes offered. When kids are promoted to eighth grade, they can decide which foreign language they want to take. When they get into high school, foreign languages are high school credits that are required for applying to college.

Linda added that this is the first year they have done third to fourth grade. So each year they try to expand a little more. That’s the earliest they start at third grade for now but just one day a week. When discussing when the best period for students to start a foreign language is, three teachers all wished it could start as early as possible: kindergarten if they could because it would make it a lot easier. Susan explained that it helps the kids be more automatic with their language and makes it easier for them to learn. They don’t have the anxiety that they have in the middle school or high school. Just like they learn their first language, they can do their second language.

Linda agreed and commented that, “they usually sound better too. They sound more like native speakers and they sound more natural if they start it earlier.” Susan believed that there is a kind of a critical period there for age especially when it comes with accent and autonomy.

When asked about which skills they pay more attention to in class, Susan pays attention to reading and listening first, speaking and writing later. Qing stresses more on listening and speaking since students are at a beginning level. Regarding the teaching techniques, three teachers generally do not prefer using traditional teacher-centered
teaching methods. They attach great importance to students’ practical use and their communicative competence. Susan indicated: “We use what we call comprehensible input where we base our writing and reading, on things they can understand. Very simple language and using a lot of motions and TPR, a lot of stories and readings.”

Linda believes that it is ineffective to do it the traditional way where you did the vocabulary list and the memorizing, handouts, worksheets. It is more effective to be interactive and give them as much input of words that are used frequently instead of words that are used once a while. They use TPRs, doing a lot of circling. Over and over and circling those words they are focusing on.

In the meanwhile, it is noted that all three teachers did integrated technology in their language teaching in class. They have a Smartboard, projector, computer lab, iPad, and students are allowed to use Smart phones when it is needed. Qing asked her students to do a lot of projects through technology, such as Voki, Voicethread, and Webquest. Each kid in her class is equipped with a laptop. “Some kids are very good at technology, even better than me because they have opportunities to learn technology in different classes.” Susan and Linda did not assign students to do projects by computer a lot because “that’s a lot of work to run out to the computer lab, drag out all your 30 kids there and drag all them back down in 40 minutes.” But they had students do interactive activities on Smartboard, allowed them to use their cell phones as a mini-dictionary to look up new vocabulary, and play games related to content for fun. Even though technology integration into classrooms plays a more important role in education, Susan believes when it comes to technology, human interaction is more important. That is why
they also had students sing Spanish songs, and dance, teaching through lively class activities.

All in all, curriculum and instruction in both countries have their own characteristics. It is hard to tell which one is more rational and effective because behind the curriculum, they both have their own attributing factors to make it effective or ineffective. However, there should be some aspects that need improvement and make it better.

**Research Question 3**

What are educators’ recommendations for improving foreign language education in the U.S. and China?

It is inevitable that there are some places that teachers are not satisfied with in both countries’ K-12 foreign language education. In the interview, English teachers in China expressed their expectations of updating teachers’ knowledge of English teaching techniques and establishing a more comprehensive assessment to evaluate students’ academic achievement instead of just looking at students’ performance on examination. Meanwhile, foreign language teachers in the U.S. hoped that foreign language education will be given more importance by the government, culture, society and family. They hoped students are able to start to learn another language earlier. A Venn diagram (see Figure 6) will be created based on the participants’ discussion in the semi structure interview. This allows the readers to graphically see any connections and relations regarding similarities and differences of the foreign language education in K-12 public schools. Meanwhile, I will also break up the Venn diagram based on those three
categories/elements functioning as independent variables somehow to see how similar and different in foreign language teaching and learning between two countries.
Figure 6. Venn diagram of China vs. U.S. foreign language curriculum based on the discussion with six teachers
CHAPTER V
CONCLUSION

Main Findings

The present study has contributed knowledge for a more complete picture of how the U.S. and China have developed their foreign language education—specifically in secondary public schools. It has shown the similarities and differences that China and America have in developing each foreign language education through an analysis of three fundamental/essential elements--social/political investment, teachers’ professional development, and curriculum and instruction, which are considered as the most important factors to successful K-12 foreign language environments. Besides these necessary elements for successful K-12 foreign language curriculum, parental influence is another important factor put forward by the teachers in the focused group interview. In order to be more specific about the connection that links to the literature with my study under each category, the main findings are concluded as followed:

Socio-political Investment

In China. My findings from the study are that all three English teachers from China, not surprisingly, agreed on the increasingly important role of English language education in China. English language education’s role does not arrive from cultural influence, but from the great efforts the Chinese government has been putting into it. Those findings confirm what I have found from the literature. English taught as a
foreign language in China has been given a great importance to the Chinese education system, and it is a compulsory course for all Chinese students from primary school, even earlier from kindergarten in some cities, to university (Lu, 2012).

In addition, the three teachers also strongly confirmed the critical impact of the test-driven educational system to the planning and implementation of English teaching and learning at the school, especially the College Entrance Examination (Chinese Gaocao) which determines a student’s future career development. This point agrees with Zhang (2003), who stated why English in basic education is highly emphasized in China in this study’s literature review.

**In the U.S.** According to the results of the focus group discussion in my findings, foreign language education in America is not considered as culturally or politically important as it is in China. Foreign language education has not been paid enough attention as the other core subjects. Qing, a teacher in the focus group teaching Chinese in the U.S. pointed out that foreign language education is not included in the core curriculum in K-12 educational system in America, and therefore, it is not considered as important as other core subjects—Math, Language Arts, Social Studies and Science. The funding depends on the district, which determines the amount of foreign languages that can be offered and its importance at the school. Generally, high schools care more about it because students need it for credits in college. This is explained in Pufahl and Rhodes’ (2011) report (in the literature review) how foreign language instruction has remained stable at the high school level as compared to elementary and middle schools. My findings from the study confirm what literature says.
Regarding the negative impact of NCLB policy on foreign language instruction, my findings differ from what I found from the literature. In my review of literature, according the report by Pufahl and Rhodes (2011), foreign language instruction had been affected by NCLB because of it is not included in the law’s accountability measures. However, the three teachers in the focus group did not see any negative effect from this policy. Two of those foreign language teachers are very satisfied with their funding. The other one commented on its weak position compared to other core subjects. In my review of the literature, it is stated that there is still a huge mismatch between what is happening in schools and what the country is demanding (Pufahl & Rhodes, 2011; Sahin, 2011), but improvement has been made in the past few years in the U.S. elementary and secondary schools that still offered foreign languages (Curtain & Dahlberg, 2009; Christian et al., 2005; Pufahl & Rhodes, 2011; Sehlaoui, 2008). This is also confirmed by the three foreign language teachers in my findings. They are very optimistic about foreign language development in the future. They believe it is getting better and better through the efforts of the society and educators’ influence.

Besides the social-political influence to the status of foreign language education agreed with my review of my literature, my findings also add one more attributing factor which is parental influence to foreign language education. The family’s value to foreign language education is important because three language teachers all realized the different attitudes in their classes between the students whose families are very supportive of learning a foreign language and whose families are not.
Teachers’ professional development

In China. My findings from the study are that the majority of teachers aware that enhancing their professional development is very important and they consider professional development as an important approach to improve their teaching ability. This agrees with what it is said in my review of the literature from the report conducted by Zhou (2009). The three teachers discussed the approaches to develop it. They are having conversation and sharing ideas with different experienced teachers, reflecting on their teaching through keeping writing teaching journals, attending conferences, and so on. They also have participated in different kinds of ongoing training required by their schools, such as visiting colleague’s classes, attending short period TESL training and lectures by visiting professors, and so forth.

However, my study with focus group also found that teachers complained their heavy workload and stress from the tests which affected their motivation of spending time on professional development. This is confirmed with Zhou’s study (2007) in my literature review that 48.5% of English teachers in middle schools spent less than one hour on their professional studies on average. The English teaching does not meet the requirement of times and social development and several prominent exist in professional development of elementary and secondary English teachers (Pan & Ding, 2012).

It is pointed out in my study that most teachers were certified as a language teacher in secondary schools except some teachers work in the small villages. Some schools provided opportunity for teachers to go short periods of studying overseas, but the number is very few because of school funding. Those challenges and difficulties
discussed in the focused group confirm with the researchers’ concern in my review of the literature, for example, shortage of qualified English teachers, and lack of teachers training in English literacy acquisition theory and pedagogy (Zhang, 2012).

**In the U.S.** In terms of the awareness, actual implementation and requirement for teachers’ professional development, more foreign language teachers in America are required and schools tend to be stricter with it from my findings. Most foreign language teachers were certified and have overseas learning experience according to the discussion with the focus group. This is different from what it is said in the literature review. Rhodes and Pufahl noted in 2011 that schools which have foreign language programs were negatively affected by the lack of qualified teachers and they have difficulties in finding and hiring certified teachers. Three teachers also pointed out that they are required to complete six college level language teaching course credits every five years in order to renew their licenses. Besides that, they need to attend to conferences and visit classes to enhance their professional development, thus creating a heavy workload. However, they have less stress because foreign languages are not considered as a core subject in America, so they don’t have stress from the test that much compared to the English teachers in China.

**Foreign Language Curriculum and Instruction**

**In China.** My findings agree with what I found from the literature regarding the important role of English in the Chinese education curriculum. However, many challenges and problems exist in public education based on the focus group discussion, such as the limit of teacher, old teaching material, teacher-centered traditional teaching methodology, the highly empathized examination with focus on reading and writing and
so on (Li, Moreira, 2009). In my study, all three teachers complained that the English teaching usually requires additional preparation for materials; however, there is an acute lack of suitable resourcing for English teaching within the school library. The English resources in the market are more inclined to help students promote their test scores rather than paying attention to students’ language skill and practical use. One teacher in the focus group mentioned that although the head of the English Department supported the integration of different resources, such as original English literature, the importance of “finishing the textbook” is emphasized more often. Such a focus of language instruction toward reading and writing tests aroused the teachers’ concern of the ignorance of the importance of listening and speaking instruction. They were frustrated and disappointed about the negative effect that test scores brought and expected researchers and policy makers to think of a more comprehensive and effective method to assess students’ academic achievement. The problems discussed in the focused group were also confirmed by the studies addressed in the literature review (Li & Moreira, 2009; Li, 2005).

**In the U.S.** My findings from the study showed that improvement has been made between the U.S. elementary and secondary schools that still offered foreign languages. For example, more Chinese and Arabic languages were offered and taught; language teachers spent more time using target languages in classroom; technology and literature-culture have been increasingly integrated in language instruction; and growing numbers of immersion programs which allows students to achieve to high levels of language proficiency. Those improvement confirmed in my literature review with some studies conducted by Christian et al., 2005; Curtain & Dahlderg, 2009; Pufahl &
Rhodes, 2011; Sehlaui, 2008. In my study, three teachers attach great importance to students’ practical use and their communicative competence, and they avoid of using old traditional lecture-centered teaching approach because they thought it is ineffective. In addition, the advantages of learning another language and students should start to learn another language as early as possible were emphasized by six foreign language teachers from both countries in my study. This confirmed with what researchers (Kordsmeiser & Rogers, 2000; Grosse, 2004; Ghonsooly & Showqi, 2012, etc.) stated in my literature review.

This study has also compared and contrasted both the effective and ineffective aspects of what each country has been doing for a foreign language education and what can be improved in the future. This gives the language instructors and researchers in both countries an opportunity to look at how foreign languages are situated. It also allows educators to reflect and improve themselves, and explores the best practices to establish a successful foreign language program.

**Implications**

My findings from this study might be able to be used to help practitioners and researchers in second language acquisition synthesize better practices for establishing and improving foreign languages in K-12 programs.

On the whole, much of what the teachers said about the current K-12 foreign language education confirm what it is said in the literature; however, some do not. The agreement and disagreement between the literature and teachers’ perspectives have previously been discussed in Chapter IV—findings and discussion specifically. There is one thing that needs to be clarified. The statements expressed by teachers that
disconfirmed with the literature might be affected by the limitation of randomly
sampling teachers. According to my review of the literature as well as findings from the
focus group, the results of the present study seems to imply and suggest five best
practices or essential elements for establishing and improving K-12 foreign language
programs. To help practitioners and researchers in the field to build more effective
foreign language programs, attention should be paid to the following areas.

**Increasing People’s Understandings of the Importance of Learning Another
Language**

As reported in Chapter IV, China seems to have a sound understanding of the
value of the K-12 foreign language education more than the U.S.; the K-12 foreign
language programs are far more emphasized by Chinese policy makers, society, public
schools, and family. As it is both agreed by Zhang (2004) and the focus group, English
is considered a core subject in the Chinese educational system. English is also one of the
most important subjects in the College entrance examination, which is a test that plays a
large role in determining students’ future academic career. Discarding the negative
external factors of high stakes test, they actually help motivate students to learn another
language. Li (1984) supported this by stating that ‘the examination is the piper that calls
the tune” (p. 13). Perhaps in this light, the importance of foreign language will become
more important only when foreign languages are added into the U.S. core curriculum.
Increasing high school foreign language credits in the U.S. and increasing the percentage
of language focus programs and immersion models, rather than simply an exploratory
model, may be additionally helpful in expanding foreign language education. It is thus
suggested that American policy makers and society members must begin to realize the
importance of learning another language to its nation’s development. It may take some initiatives to make improvement, such as increasing educational budgets and providing more funding to foreign language programs. Arguably, the increase of global corporations and business practices should compel Americans to linguistically expand. Ultimately, for the purpose of serving American interests, it is time for U.S. citizens to start learning about other cultures and understanding the outside world, thus keeping good relationships with global neighbours. Doing so might help promote world peace and decrease the possibilities of cultural misunderstandings. Moreover, it is also suggested by the focus group that parents should also set up good examples in order to influence their children to learn another language.

**Enhancing Teachers’ Professional Development**

As discussed in Chapter II, some researchers pointed out the important connection between of teachers’ professional development to the quality of education. Ye (2001) stated that the quality of education depends on the quality of teachers. This was also highly agreed on by all six foreign language teachers. Therefore, it is suggested that it is not only the responsibility for teachers to have the awareness of professional development, but also should schools provide teachers more opportunities for enhancement and training. Employing reflective teaching journals, action research, and in-service teacher development training and seminars are the most effective ways to enhance foreign language teacher professional development (Wang, 2010). Moreover, referring to the discussion of the foreign language teachers from America, schools or educational department should formulate policies to supervise, assess, and encourage
teachers to take action. Meanwhile, teachers’ voices of the incapability of achieving better professional development must also be considered seriously.

**Updating Teachers’ Knowledge of Second Language Teaching Techniques**

As analyzed earlier in Chapters II and V, English teachers in China at the schools seem to lack second language teaching knowledge and techniques. The teacher-centered traditional teaching methodology and the highly emphasized examination with focus on reading, writing, and standard grammar lead to only acquiring a kind of “deaf and dumb English” (Li & Moreira, 2009). As a consequence, speaking and listening are the weakness and often the biggest challenge for Chinese English learners. However, the foreign language teachers from the U.S., in the focus group, explained how they apply their knowledge of second language acquisition into lessons, such as comprehensive input, TPR, and other recent developments in foreign language education. These ESL teaching techniques help students to be more engaged and motivated in language learning, as well as developing communicative competencies. It is thus recommended that Chinese foreign language teachers must continue to update their second language learning acquisition techniques by being active in reading research articles and theories, attending foreign language conferences, reflecting on their teaching, and learning from the experienced teachers. Schools need to provide more opportunities for teachers to go overseas to acquire the latest and more effective teaching techniques.

**Establishing a More Comprehensive Assessment to Evaluate Students’ Academic Achievement**

As it is referred to the discussion with the focus group, all three English teachers expressed their concerns about the consequences of high-stake test to the students’
passive learning and teachers’ overwhelming workload. Exam-orientation forces teachers, parents, and students to consider the test score to be the priority. According to one teacher from the focus group, 15.5% students are motivated by internal factors to learn English in China. It is thus suggested that high-stake test do not work perfectly either for students’ learning or teachers’ teaching and generally should be avoided. The failure and negative effects of what China’s test driven educational system brought should be a warning to America, and this ineffective practice should be corrected and substituted by a more comprehensive assessment that evaluate students’ overall language achievement.

**Teaching Students a Second Language as Early as Possible**

With reference to the study findings, six teachers in the focus group all agreed on the advantages of starting foreign language education as early as possible. Susan, a Spanish language teacher from America in the focus group, explained that, “it helps the kids be more automatic with their language makes it easier for them to learn. They don’t have the anxiety that they have in the middle school or high school. Just like they learn their first language, they can do their second language.” Linda, who is colleague of Susan, also agreed and commented that “they usually sound better too. They sound more like native speakers and they sound more natural if they start it earlier.” It is also arguable, for what Susan believes, that there is a critical period for language acquisition for age, especially when it comes with accent and autonomy (Lightbown & Spada, 2006). It is thus suggested that foreign language programs should be started as early as possible. It is also suggested that the management of these programs could be unified, systemized, and standardized.
**Increasing Technology Integration into Foreign Language Lesson Plans**

In the information age, technology is becoming to be applied to different fields, and education is one of them. As discussed by the foreign language teachers from the U.S. in the focus group, technology is frequently used in the school, district, and work environment to facilitate students’ learning and teachers’ teaching. Teachers are more open to integrate different technologies into lessons to make the class to be more productive and engaging. It is thus suggested that foreign language teachers should be aware of the importance of technology integration into classroom, and active in learning technological productivity tools to help teaching and learning.

**Limitations**

This study has added to the literature new knowledge about the differences between the two countries’ foreign language teaching and learning in K-12 public schools and will also enhance both countries’ understanding in terms of effectiveness and ineffectiveness in foreign language education; however, the data collected based on the focus group cannot necessarily be generalized to the wider population. Teachers’ perspectives to the research questions might change in the future and some data that is collected over longitudinal case studies is not always relevant or particularly useful. The different ways of conducting an interview, one via virtual room and the other one is regular face to face may have lead to inconsistencies during data collection and limited the study’s findings. Finally, the best practices for a successful K-12 foreign language education were put forwarded based on both Chinese and American literature and focus group and these practices may not be applicable to all countries need to be considered and examined on a basis of each country’s conditions.
Recommendations for Future Study

The three categories that I selected to discuss in the literature review and guide my focus group were attributed to my understandings of what are required for successful K-12 foreign language education. Due to my limited understanding of what makes a successful foreign language education program, I did not think to include how parental influence could also be considered a vital category. Although I did not intentionally set out to research or explore this category, it deserves to be suggested for future research because it was continually brought up during my study by each of the six teachers, and it is also considered very important in the literature.

It is suggested that the future study could focus on the parental influence to K-12 foreign language education in public schools because this is another important element that is considered to affect peoples’ attitudes towards foreign language education presented by the focus group in my study. According to the data from the focus group discussion in my study, Bing, who is an English teacher in China stated that Chinese parents attach great importance to their children' English learning because it is one of the most important core subjects in the test. Chu, who is an middle school English teacher in the focus group agreed with Chu's statement. She also noted that "parents are always willing to spend money on kids' education, especially something related to core subjects". Regarding the opinions of parental influence from foreign language teachers in American focus group, all three teachers thought that the students' attitudes towards foreign language learning also depends on family. Susan noted that sometimes parents say there is no reason to learn Spanish. She saw that very little, maybe 10% of what she heard. But sometimes it starts in the family. Qing stated the situation in her class:
"Some parents are very supportive of my teaching and kids’ learning while some are not because they probably never learned a foreign language in their entire lives or got out of their hometowns to see the outside world. Some parents think learning Chinese is important because they have business in China, and so they need to fly to China frequently. Speaking Chinese definitely will be able to help doing business. But not every parent and kids are the same as this."

In addition to the evidence that explains the importance of parental influence to children's foreign language learning from the results of my study, in reviewing the literature on parental influence on the academic achievement and motivation among children in general, Wigfield et al. (2006) did not only confirm its significant role to children's academic achievement and motivation, but also identified four influential parental factors: (1) parental, familial and neighborhood characteristics; (2) parents’ general beliefs and behaviors; (3) parents’ child-specific beliefs; and (4) parent-specific behaviors. The parental, familial, and neighborhood characteristics include parental education, occupation, household income, marital status, number of children and cultural traditions (Wigfield et al., 2006). All four of these factors influence the child's achievement and motivation to various degree, and they interact with each other together with a fifth factor, which is, the child and sibling characteristics (e.g. genders, aptitudes, attitudes, personalities, and birth order) (Wigfield et al., 2006). In the context of foreign language learning, the parental use of the target language at work were also found to be influential (Enever, 2011). In other words, students' performance in foreign language, to some extent, depends on parents' educational levels on foreign language education. This argument is also confirmed by a study conducted by Zou and Zhang (2011) among secondary students in Shanghai, China, that students' English performance showed differences possibly because of their parents' educational levels.
Moreover, a comparative study of K-12 foreign language education between public schools and private schools might be another suggestion for future study because, in this study, I only focused on foreign language education in public schools. The six teachers who participated in the focus group have never worked in private schools, so I failed to get any information from our discussion regarding the private education sector. Therefore, it would be interesting to see if there is any difference between foreign language education in public schools and private schools. In reviewing the literature on private education regarding foreign language programs, in terms of plans to offer foreign languages in the next two years, Pufahl and Rhodes (2011) reported that "public high schools with foreign language programs, 48% of all students were enrolled in language classes, compared with 73% of students in private schools" (p. 267). This report indicates more interest among privates schools than public schools in the U.S. The overall decline in public elementary school language instruction was sharp, from 24% in 1997 to 15% in 2008, whereas, the percentage of private elementary schools offering foreign language programs remained steady at more than 50% of schools (Pufahl and Rhodes, 2011). It seems to me that private schools provide more opportunities for students to learn another foreign language. However, according to the report, American public schools offer more immersion programs than private schools, and "more public schools than private schools reported teacher participation in professional development" (Pufahl and Rhodes, 2011, p. 208). Therefore, at this point, there is a difference between foreign language education in public schools and private schools. Then why is there a difference?
Future research in this field could examine the reasons behind the differences, if any are found, between foreign language education in private and public schools concerning socio-economic structures, philosophical purposes, and parental influence on school policy. One of the reasons why I think the future study could focus on those three aspects is that the attitudes towards studying a foreign language might not be the same among different classes in the society. In addition, people’s philosophy regarding the motivation of studying a foreign language might be also different, which helps determine the purpose of learning another language. Moreover, as I stated before, I discovered that parental influences younger students’ motivation to learn a foreign language. This influence might also be different between parents who send their children to private or public schools.
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APPENDICES
Teacher Survey——Foreign Language Education in K-12

Sex
- Female
- Male

Age
- Under 21
- 21-30
- 30-40
- 40-50
- 50+

School & Location

Foreign language teaching experiences (years)
- 3-5
- 6-8
- 9-11
- 10-20
- 20+

What foreign language are you teaching?

Which level are you teaching?
How many classes do you teach each week?

How many foreign language teachers in your school?

How important do you think it is to integrate foreign language teaching into the core curriculum?

- [ ] Very important
- [ ] Important
- [ ] Neither important nor unimportant
- [ ] Unimportant
- [ ] Not at all important

What languages are offered in your school?

Do you have teaching license or teaching certificate?

- [ ] Yes
- [ ] No

Do you have foreign language study overseas experiences?

- [ ] Yes
- [ ] No

What is your highest degree?

- [ ] Associate
- [ ] Bachelor
- [ ] Master
- [ ] Doctor

Is foreign language included into the core curriculum in your school?
How many foreign language teachers in your school?

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APPENDIX B

FOCUS GROUP INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

The discussion will be directed and guided by the following three general questions:

1. Based on your teaching experiences and observation, what do you think about the person’s attitude towards K-12 foreign language teaching and learning? What are the factors that cause people to have that attitude? (Anything related to culture, history, society, government, etc.)

2. What is effective and ineffective about K-12 foreign language education particularly in public schools? (Curriculum and instruction, teachers’ professional development, school funding, socio-political investment, etc.)

3. What are your recommendations for improving K-12 foreign language education? (socio-political investment, teacher’s professional development, curriculum & instruction, etc.)
APPENDIX C
CONSENT FORM

The University of Akron Consent Form

Title of Research:
Differences between K-12 Foreign Language Education in American and Chinese Public Schools

Principal Investigator: Sha Li

Explanation of Study:
Sha Li, graduate student of the College of Education at the University of Akron, would like to invite you to participate in a discussion regarding the topic "Differences between K-12 Foreign Language Education in American and Chinese Public School" through both survey and interview. This study is designed to investigate how K-12 foreign language education in American and Chinese public schools is structured and what is effective and ineffective from teachers’ perspectives. Your participation in this study will help achieve a better understanding of each country’s K-12 foreign language education system and explore the problems that both countries have when adding new knowledge about the significance of foreign language education.

You must be currently employed as a foreign language instructor in K-12 public schools and have at least 3 years of foreign language teaching experiences to participate in this study. This study includes an online survey and a web conference as well. The links and instruction to join in both investigations will be sent directly to your email address in advance. You are very welcomed to ask any question if you are unclear about the instructions. The questions will cover demographics, teaching experiences (i.e. years spent in teaching, language, class schedule, etc.), foreign language curricula settings in the schools where participants work, and professional development (i.e. certificate, training, overseas language learning experience, teaching method, etc.). A web
conference for interviewing both focus groups will be conducted online at Blackboard Collaborate. A Doodle will be sent to you via email in order to determine the best available time for all participants for involvement in the web conference. In addition, the link to participate the conference will be emailed to you and you will be notified after your completion of the online questionnaire. The interview will be open ended questions and last approximately 40 minutes to one hour. It will be also recorded and saved in the researcher's computer.

There is no right or wrong answer. You can refuse to answer any or as many of the questions as you wish. You may also choose to withdraw from this study at any time and request that your answers not be used. If you choose to withdraw, your answers will be deleted from the file.

Risks and Discomforts:

There are no risks or discomforts associated with this study.

Confidentiality and Records:

You will not be identified individually and the investigator will be the only one who can have access to the raw data including survey and interview recordings. The raw data will be saved and kept in the computer.
Contact Information:

Once the study is completed, we would be glad to give the results to you. In the meantime, if you have any questions regarding this study, please contact:

Sha Li  
College of Education  
The University of Akron  
(330) 510-8187  
sl92@zips.uakron.edu

I have received an explanation of the study and agree to participate. I understand that my participation in this study is strictly voluntary.

I AGREE. PROCEED TO THE NEXT PAGE ____  NO. STOP THE SURVEY______