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Thai and non-Thai English language teachers' beliefs and practices of teaching English to low-proficiency Chinese tertiary students in Thailand

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Abstract

Code-switching or using a native language (L1) is commonly employed in an EFL classroom to facilitate comprehension to low-proficiency learners. However, in a context where teachers and learners do not share the same mother tongue, it causes some challenges to language teachers. As teachers' beliefs directly influence their practices, and research on teachers' beliefs in teaching low proficiency learners has been limited, this study aims to investigate teachers' beliefs and practices relating to this regard to better understand the phenomena. A qualitative approach was adopted for the study. Five teachers of English at a university in southern Thailand participated in the study. Their beliefs were investigated through semi-structured interviews, and their practices were observed throughout the first half of the semester to explore how they taught or how to tackle the language barriers. The results reveal that teachers' beliefs and practices were interwoven. Most teacher participants viewed low-proficiency learners as those who had low motivation and lacked language competence to produce the target language. The major challenges were related to students' low motivation and low proficiency which caused difficulties in communication and instruction. With reference to their practices, this study indicates that L1 still played an important role even when teachers and students could not communicate through their native language. Other practices were frequently observed included simplification, restatement, asking students to spell out the words, and visualization. The results of the study, therefore, provide insights into teachers' beliefs and guide teachers' practices relating to these instructional phenomena.

Keywords: Low-proficiency learners; code-switching; first language (L1); teachers' beliefs, teachers' practices

1. Introduction

Code-switching or using a native language (first language: L1) has long been debatable in Second Language Acquisition (SLA). Even though L1 could provide advantages and disadvantages to language learners in English classes, it is generally accepted that L1 is used as a means to facilitate comprehension, especially for beginners or low proficiency learners (de la Fuente & Goldenberg, 2020). However, in a context where teachers and learners do not share the same mother tongue and where English is a mandatory means of instructions and communication, it is impossible to do so.

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Consequently, it inevitably poses some challenges for language teachers who are assigned to teach such low proficiency mixed-L1 learners.

The English language plays a significant role as it has been increasingly used as a medium of instruction in higher education. Statistically, in 2011 there were over 4.3 million foreign tertiary students worldwide, enrolling outside their home country (OECD, 2013). Among international students, Chinese students are one of the majority groups of international students in several nations including Thailand, making 46.4% of total foreign students (Office of Higher Education of Thailand, 2010 in Yin, et al., 2015). Therefore, the growing number of Chinese students necessitates language teachers conducting classes and interacting with low proficiency students, enrolled in any given English-medium instruction degree programs.

According to Kubanyiova & Feryok (2015), beliefs play a significant role in teachers' decision making and pedagogical practices. Borg (2001, p. 186) defines belief as "a proposition which may be consciously or unconsciously held, is evaluative in that it is accepted as true by the individual, and is, therefore, imbued with emotive commitment; further, it serves as a guide to thought and behavior." As beliefs influence how teachers interpret, apply, and implement pedagogical approaches (Dos Santos, 2018), understanding teachers' beliefs can help gain insights into teachers' decisions and practices. Most importantly, beliefs are directly related to success or failure in the teaching and learning process (Campbell et al., 2014). Thus, understanding what beliefs teachers hold can result in their instructional improvement which is deemed important as they are key persons who teach English to language learners.

Research on teachers' beliefs and practices has investigated general and domain-specific areas. The explorations deal with language learner autonomy (e.g. Borg & Alshumaimeri, 2019), reading instruction (e.g. Anders & Evans, 2019; Brannan, et al., 2020), writing instruction (e.g., Yu et al., 2020), listening instruction (e.g. Sah & Shah, 2020) speaking instruction (Farrell & Yang, 2019), grammar instruction (e.g. Al-Qutaiti, & Ahmad, 2018; Sato & Oyanedel, 2019), vocabulary instruction (e.g. Bancha, 2019), and pronunciation instruction (e.g. Nguyen & Newton, 2020). However, studies focusing on teachers' beliefs relating to teaching English to low-proficiency learners have been limited. This study, therefore, aims to explore teachers' beliefs and practices in this particular area.

More specifically, this study investigated Thai and non-Thai English language teachers' beliefs and practices in teaching English to low-proficiency Chinese students with whom they did not share the same native language. As beliefs influence teachers' practices, examining the beliefs teachers hold would allow language teachers to improve their instructional practice and to promote professional learning (de Vries et al., 2014). This research hopes to provide insights into what beliefs teachers have constructed in teaching low-proficiency learners, which have been underexplored. Further, the results would be a springboard for teachers and curriculum designers to gain insights into what takes place in actual classes where some communication barriers between teachers and students are most likely to occur.

1.1. Literature review

1.1.1. Language Teachers' Beliefs

In research related to education, the intellective element of teaching has been recognized as primary in successful teaching (Moini, 2009). Pursuing the significance of research in general education, the teaching of language is now being viewed as a complicated intellectual process (Borg, 2003) because it is a procedure 'which is defined by dynamic interactions among cognition, context and experience' (Borg, 2015, p. 275). Unquestionably, in the intellective pattern, the inner thought

procedure found in educators, as well as their outward demeanor, is significant to understand teaching.

A study on teacher's beliefs has investigated what language teachers know and how they think, believe, and act (Kubanyiova & Feryok, 2015). Other research discovers that teachers possess beliefs of their language learning and teaching, and these beliefs shape their teaching ideas and techniques implemented in classrooms (Dos Santos, 2018; Gilakjani & Sabouri, 2017). As these beliefs affect their goals, procedures, materials, classroom interaction patterns, and roles (Borg, 2015), investigating teachers' beliefs is essential because recognizing how beliefs have been constructed facilitates a better understanding and improvement of teachers' practices.

Additionally, several studies similarly shared three main sources of teachers' beliefs which greatly influence their practices. Teachers' own learning or schooling experience is the first source of belief construction. Beliefs are constructed through teachers' experience as a learner (Bancha, 2019). According to Lortie (2002), the term apprenticeship of observation is coined in reference to the observation of teaching as language learners. The learning experience teachers have undergone when they were students has formed their instructional practices. The second source of teachers' beliefs is the teacher education program (Sanchez & Borg, 2014). What the teachers learn from their professional education constructs their pedagogical knowledge of the subject matter, teaching methods, student learning, and the role of teachers, all of which contribute to their teaching. Teachers decide and plan their instructions based on their theoretical beliefs about teaching and learning (Borg, 2015). Third, teachers' direct teaching experience is another source of teachers' knowledge (Bancha, 2019; Dos Santos, 2018). Their teaching experience influences and eventually shapes their classroom practices.

The purpose of this study is, therefore, to examine teachers' beliefs, used as the theoretical framework to understand what beliefs teachers hold in teaching low proficiency learners.

1.1.2. Related Studies Relating to Practices of Teaching English to Low Proficiency Learners

Scholars such as Holt and Gaer (1993 in Holt, 1995) suggest techniques of teaching low-level adult ESL (English as a Second Language) learners who share similar characteristics of beginning-level learners. Their suggestions include activating their schemata through building on their experiences, using learners as resources, sequencing the activities from less to more challenging, using cooperative learning between more capable and less capable peers, employing a variety of teaching techniques to serve different learning styles, and utilizing varied teaching materials, such as realia, flashcards, games, and pictures. As proposed by the researchers, a variety of teaching repertoires and strategies should be implemented with these learners.

Numerous researches into low-proficiency learners have investigated learning strategies (such as Derakhshan, & Shakki, 2018; Fukuda, 2018; Javed & Ali, 2018), learners' beliefs (Huang & Tsai, 2003), interaction behaviors (Miura, 2021), implementation of peer collaborative learning to improve language skills (Huang et al., 2017; Niu, et al., 2018) and effects of different tasks (Dao & McDonough, 2017). It is clear that the aforementioned studies focus mainly on learners rather than teachers.

In other research on pedagogical practices of low proficiency learners, some teaching repertoires and strategies were examined. It shows that L1 or code-switching has been incorporated to foster understanding to low-proficiency learners. For instance, Kambe (2016) implemented L2-L1 interactional strategy and L1-L2 vocabulary activities to foster a meaning negotiation strategy with low-proficiency Japanese university students to enable them to discuss in English. Firkins et al. (2007) used group work and code-switching to scaffold low-proficiency students to write procedural texts.

Apart from code-switching, other direct teaching methods were employed. To illustrate, Mekala & Ponmani (2017) provided direct written corrective feedback to enhance low proficiency university students' writing skills. Kobayashi (2018) used metacognitive instruction (listening tasks to mediate listening processes and self-concept) for successful communication. Lam (2010) taught oral communication to low proficiency secondary school students in Hong Kong to help them to communicate in ESL oral classrooms. Similarly, Sato et al. (2019) introduced communication strategies to low proficiency Japanese university students to enable them to successfully achieve language tasks. These studies evidently show that teachers seemed to prioritize strategies to facilitate communication. Furthermore, it is worth noting that they were conducted in the context of homogenous learners by nationality in that L1 plays an important role in fostering understanding of the lessons provided to low proficiency learners. In addition, communication strategies as priorities were emphasized to foster effective communication.

While the above-mentioned research focuses mainly on the homogenous classrooms by nationality, the following studies deal with the practices that teachers implemented in a heterogeneous class with multicultural low proficiency students. An investigation by Cohen (1991) shows some successful techniques of teaching language to classes, mixed with majority students, whose L1 is English and minority students with different mother tongues in the US. Her work revealed that opportunities of working and talking among peers allowed learners to understand the lessons better and improve their English language. Concurrently, Glenton (2004) found that peer learning could reduce the problems of languages in a mixed nationality class as students were more confident talking to peers than to teachers. The underlying theory underpinning this concept is scaffolding or peer cooperative learning which students used each other or more capable students as resources for learning (Vygotsky, 1978 in Smagorinsky, 2018).

Another example by Ismaili (2015) investigated non-native English-speaking teachers and Macedonian students' satisfaction of L1, employed in English classes at a university in multilingual, multiethnic, and multicultural settings in Macedonia. Her findings indicated that in a diverse setting, L1 still played a significant role in actual classes. One of the reasons was that amongst these two teacher participants, one of them was Albanian who could speak all three languages of the Macedonian official language, Albanian ethnic language, and English, which made it possible for her to use all the students' L1. As shown earlier, code-switching and peer cooperative learning were found prominently used by teachers.

This explanatory study has reviewed teaching techniques and strategies, which earlier research has found, in order to gain more understanding of what has not been previously discovered (Burns & Grove, 2010).

1.2. Research questions

What are teachers' beliefs relating to teaching English to low-proficiency Chinese students?

What are teachers' practices relating to teaching English to low-proficiency Chinese students?

2. Method

An exploratory qualitative approach was adopted to collect data from teacher participants and to understand the phenomena.

2.1. Participants

Purposive sampling was used to select the samples in this study. Participants were two Thai and three English native university teachers, assigned to teach different English courses (as shown in Table 1) to Chinese students at the time of the data collection. A consent letter was sent to the teacher participants to ask for cooperation to participate in the interviews and to ask for permission to observe their classes. The teachers have agreed to volunteer to participate in the semi-structured interviews and allowed classroom observations of their classes.

Seventy-one Chinese students have agreed to participate in the study. According to Prince of Songkla University's English language proficiency requirement, they were classified as low-proficiency students. Verbal consent was also needed to ask for students' permission to observe their learning behaviors in class. A pseudonym was applied to protect their identity as outlined in ethical codes (Saunders et al., 2015). None of these teachers understood the Chinese language. Their profile, describing courses observed, educational background, the length of teaching experience, and their nationality was presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Teachers' Profile

Teacher	Courses Observed	Educational Background	Teaching Experience	Teachers' Nationality
T1	English for International Program I	B.A. (Business Administration)	8 years	American
T2	English for Job Application	PhD. (English as an International Program)	10 years	Thai
T3	English for Effective Communication	M.A. (Education)	7 years	Australian
T4	English for Business	M.A. (Teaching English as a Foreign Language)	16 years	Thai
T5	English for International Program II	Ed. D. (Teaching Methodology and Culture Awareness)	16 years	British

2.2. Instruments and data collection procedures

Two main data gathering tools were semi-structured interviews and class observation. A semi-structured interview was used to provide answers concerning teachers' beliefs. In order to validate this research tool, the interview questions were checked for grammatical accuracy by an English native teacher and content validity was also examined by two Thai teachers of English. It was then tried out with a teacher who did not participate in the study. After the interview questions were revised, they were used after the last session of the classroom observation to assure that all the teacher participants have had experience teaching low-proficiency students or have previously taught these Chinese students. The interview was conducted in English with individual teachers at their convenience.

Classroom observations could help clarity another research question in relation to the teachers' practices. In this project, teaching techniques or strategies all teacher participants used to teach or deal with their low-proficiency Chinese students and students' responses were thoroughly observed, noted, and recorded for seven to eight weeks throughout the first half of the first semester 2020/2021, and two video cameras (both at the front and back of the classrooms) were used to record the observed classes. In total, their 35 3-hour classes were recorded.

2.3 Data analysis

Data gathered from the semi-structured interviews about teachers' beliefs and practices were transcribed and analyzed using thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006). To confirm the reliability

of themes, two lecturers of English with an academic title of Assistant Professor and a degree in Applied Linguistics were asked to read the transcriptions of the interviews and to approve the themes. Classroom observations were also transcribed and analyzed using discourse analysis (Li & Walsh, 2011). Not all but only selected observation data were interpreted according to contexts and purposes (Weatherall et al., 2010) of examining how teachers interacted with individual students, especially when the former taught or conducted their class activities.

3. Results

3.1. Beliefs Relating to Teaching English to Low Proficiency Students

In response to the first research question, the semi-structured interview was the main source to address teachers' beliefs on teaching English to low-proficiency Chinese students. The findings were based on three themes, generated from the interview data: characteristics of low proficiency students, instructional challenges, and teaching techniques suitable for low proficiency students. The detailed discovery of these three concepts is reported as follows:

3.1.1.Characteristics of Low Proficiency Students

The interview data show that all teacher participants held similar beliefs concerning characteristics of low proficiency students. When asked, "What does a low-proficiency learner mean in your opinion?", two teachers (T1 and T2) viewed low proficiency as insufficient competence of English in both receptive and productive skills. To elaborate on this, according to T2,

> *"As a teacher, you would know that when you speak, you know that students do not understand you. I always ask questions both to the whole class and individuals. … those (low proficiency) students would struggle, or sometimes they turned to their friends and asked what the teacher said."*

While T1 and T2 focused more on the overall competence level, T3 and T4 paid more attention to students' productive skills. In T3's words,

> *"Low proficiency means that they can't. It is more on production. If they can't produce the language, it is low proficiency. … it is more of what they can do, what they can't."*

T5 viewed low proficiency students as those who were not ready and needed more time for improvement as he mentioned,

> *"It means those who need more help. They need more time. They need more time with reading, speaking and so on. So, they absolutely need more time."*

The above statements show teachers' beliefs of low proficiency students as those who could not understand, could not communicate in English by themselves (in speaking or writing) and needed more scaffolding (help and support) from teachers and peers. Further, they suggest that low-proficiency learners are those who do not have adequate English competence to enable them to communicate successfully in the target language by themselves. These findings are in line with those by Alfian (2018) and Fukada (2019) who found that low-proficiency learners refer to those who are low-achieving, less successful, or unsuccessful language learners. Furthermore, they support Huang & Tsai (2003) whose discovery indicates that low proficiency learners tend to have less positive language learning aptitude than their high-proficiency counterparts.

3.1.2. Challenges of Teaching Low Proficiency Students

When asked if it was difficult to teach this particular group of students, the teacher participants have expressed different opinions in this regard. It was found that learners' low motivation was the first challenge that two teachers (T2 and T4) mentioned. For instance, in T2's words,

> *"They have done this (learning English) for over 12 years. They are still beginners. So, they do not like to learn English. I think the most important thing is that they don't like to learn English."*

A possible explanation might be that the students' participants in the study were Chinese who were familiar with repetitive rote-learning and memorization which was a teaching and learning style, predominantly used in China (Guo et al., 2017; Zhan & Wan, 2016). This style of learning a foreign language demotivates students to learn English (Gong et al., 2020; Zhong, 2015). Consistent with Xiao's (2012) work, this study found that low proficiency learners had low motivation, they found learning English very difficult, and they tended not to be able to complete tasks. In addition, these results confirm those of Fukada (2019) who found that not only did low proficiency learners have low motivation to learn languages but they also had negative attitudes towards any given target language.

In contrast to T2 and T4 whose beliefs relating to learners' motivation of learning a target language, T1 and T5 placed their beliefs on the ability to communicate which made teaching this group of students different from high proficiency students as shown in the following excerpts.

Excerpt 1

> *With competent students, you can just ask them first, but this group, they can't even speak the language. OMG, I even think they could not understand even when I asked them to take quizzes. You know, they don't understand. I was thinking when I was speaking English, I doubt most of them didn't understand my English. (T1)*

The data show that students with poor English proficiency could encounter hardship in learning. As suggested by Excerpt 1, communication was the second instructional challenge. Therefore, it would be fair to argue that these students were passive learners who were familiar with traditional whole-class direct instruction or lecturing style as a result of the teaching culture in several Chinese institutions (Yin et al., 2016), where they were consequently provided with few opportunities to practice listening and speaking English (Zhan & Wan, 2016).

Another challenge was in relation to teachers' willingness to teach. Their mindsets or teaching attitudes influenced their beliefs and practices. According to T1,

Excerpt 2

> *For this group, I have to think and have a mindset to do everything to make them understand. … When I taught this group, I used intonation, body language. I act out to show them when I speak. It sounds silly but when you have students with low proficiency, I tried everything. … For me sometimes, it really discouraged me. …They are nice, but it is the truth that they didn't understand English.*

This particular excerpt reveals that the teacher's disposition of willingness to teach or their mindset guided him as to how to teach (Borg, 2015).

3.1.3. Teaching Techniques Suitable for Low Proficiency Students

The interview data show a wide range of teaching techniques which individual teachers used, regardless of what similar or different beliefs they held. Five main teaching techniques emerged from the data: (1) code-switching, (2) technology, (3) simplification, (4) questioning, and (5) peer/co-operative learning.

Code-switching

The first technique, the code-switching or L1 translation, was reported using by T2 and T3 in their classes with low proficiency students. The reasons to use this practice were shown below.

Excerpt 3

> *I think the suitable strategy with low proficiency students is to use their mother tongue. If you listen to a foreign language for more than 15 minutes. … you feel tired and bored. So, code-switching to their L1 will help them reach or to improve (T2).*

Excerpt 4

> *I think you need to do more group work with their level. Include low proficiency in the group because it must be worst in the class if you were students who didn't know what was going on. You really need to make sure they understand the question. That can be used with L1, get them to translate into L1 back and forth (T3).*

The above accounts demonstrate that teachers' beliefs that information was best mediated through L1. Further, in the circumstances where teachers shared different mother tongues with the students, the provision of L1 translation by Chinese students was considered acceptable in their opinion as they realized that students needed assistance. These findings indicate that teachers believed that code-switching is an effective teaching method, which helps clarify course contents, especially difficult concepts and supports learning of the target language (Gu & Benson, 2015). The results, hence, endorse Grant and Nguyen's (2017) study in which they found that university teachers used code-switching to clarify class instructions and to cover course contents.

Technology

Technology, the second technique, was discussed in the interviews with T2 and T4, who believed that it could mediate learning for low-proficiency students. They both agreed on the use of technology to motivate students as shown in the following excerpts. T2 remarked her reason to incorporate technology with learning that

> *"Students are engaged a lot with technology. Maybe they could feel more comfortable practicing using technology."*

Her remark shows that precedence was given to an affective factor, which could make students feel more relaxing or comfortable when learning English. Another reason to use technology was given by T4 who stated that,

> *"…Kahoot, right? Get them to get correct answers within ten or twenty seconds, right? To motivate them from a boring lesson, right?"*

The above statements evidently demonstrate that T2 and T4 have placed the importance on an affective factor of positive feelings (feeling of fun from games) and motivation that could affect learning a target language (Lasagabaster, 2017) and technology could promote motivation in language learning (Ahmadi & Reza, 2018). The findings are in line with those by Tayan (2017) who found that both university teachers and students in the Middle East recognized that the use of technology facilitates communication and provides learners with greater motivation to learn a target language.

Simplification

Simplification came as the third technique as shown in the interview data with T1. According to the teacher, through verbal and non-verbal communication,

"I used sign language, the body language you know, anything I could do at that time. ...With individual students, I tried a few times, but impossible, I tried to simplify again. I tried everything I could to help me communicate with them."

The interview illustrates that T1's believed that linguistic simplification of vocabulary and language structures, and demonstration enable the students to understand the lessons. As addressed in the reference above, to clarify instruction and scaffold learning, the teachers simplify course contents in order to make it more comprehensible for the learners (Krashen, 2017). This particular discovery is consistent with that of Freeman (2016) and Richards (2017), suggesting that ESL teachers need discourse skills or the ability to maintain communication in English instruction.

Questioning

The fourth technique, found to assist low proficiency students was questioning. T4 further explained how she assured if the students understood what they were learning through questions. As T4 pointed out,

"I try to think about the questions. Maybe yes-no questions sometimes, WH-questions because I want to have them think, like focus on questions."

The data above proposes that questioning was an effective technique that the teacher believed could enhance the students' English comprehension. The findings strongly support a previous study by Fitriati, et al. (2017), showing that teachers questioned to engage students in classroom interaction, and to encourage them to give verbal responses which eventually lead them to understand lessons.

Peer Learning

The sixth and last technique, peer learning, was reported by T5 who discussed the advantages of active learning or peer learning to enhance English for low proficiency students. In his words,

"Teachers should use active learning. Lecturing does not work. ... Peer learning is the most effective. ... Students take care of each other, they understand each other, their difficulties, equality..."

The interview reveals that the teacher considered that scaffolding in which more capable peers support or guide less capable ones could facilitate learning (Vygotsky, 1978 in Smagorinsky, 2018). These results verify studies by Cohen (1991) and Glenton (2004) who confirm the effectiveness of peer learning or scaffolding in which more capable learners assist less capable peers.

3.2. Practices Relating to Teaching English to Low Proficiency Students

The second research question asks: What are teachers' practices relating to teaching English to low-proficiency Chinese students? The findings were mainly drawn from classroom observations. Discourse Analysis (DA) was the framework that illustrated the observational extracts (Appendix). Data were presented responding to the main theme of how the teachers conducted their classes. More specifically, how the teachers dealt with the communication barriers during classes was examined.

The results presented below were derived from classrooms conducted with groups of Chinese students with a mixed ability. There appeared core six strategies that the teachers reported and implemented in actual classes. The details of those strategies are described as follows:

3.2.1. Code-switching or L1 Translation

The classroom observations evidently suggest that students' L1 (the native language of Chinese) was the strategy that all teachers relied on, even though teachers and students did not share the same L1 and none of the teachers could speak Chinese. However, this strategy was used slightly differently.

Four teachers (T1, T2, T3, and T5) asked high-proficiency students to translate what they explained from English into Chinese. For example, T1 stated that,

> *"I let the others speak (translated into Chinese) for them and then they understand." (Interview).*

As described by T2,

> *"When I explained something to them, I asked one or two students who were very good to translate it into Chinese." (Interview).*

T5 elaborated on his reasons for the use of this practice. In his words,

> *"L1 is a part of language learning. When students' proficiency is very low, it might help."*

The descriptions above indicate that teachers' beliefs in the advantages of L1 influence their practices (Borg, 2015).

Unlike the other four teachers, T4 did not intentionally ask her students to translate. However, as observed, high-proficiency students would translate what the teacher said into Chinese to help their classmates. The dialogue below illustrates a situation that took place in her class.

Excerpt 5

Situation: The teacher asked individual students why they did not complete the quiz she assigned.

Line Number	Speaker	
1	T1	((The teacher approached a student.)) You did not do the quiz. (0.3)
2	S1	((Silence))
3	T1	Why don't you do the quiz? (0.5)
4	S1	((Silence))
5	S2	((He spoke in Chinese.))
6	S1	Sorry.

As shown above, T4 tried to ask the students about the quiz assignment. After two attempts (lines 1 and 4), one classmate translated what she said into Chinese (line 5). In this case, even though T4 did not explicitly ask any high proficiency students to help translate the question, L1 was inevitably used (Chinese) to enable the class to move further. It could be argued that code-switching was a clear and simple way that could ease the interactions between teachers and students.

Therefore, it would be fair to claim that L1 was a possible option the teachers could use to enable students to understand their intended messages and achieve the objectives of the lessons. Consistent with previous studies (e.g., David et al., 2015; Firkins et al., 2007; Kambe, 2016), these findings confirmed that L1 was effective as a means to foster comprehension to low proficiency students, even in the circumstances where the teachers did not share the same mother tongue with the students.

3.2.2. Restatement

The next example was related to how better English competent students helped their peers to communicate with teachers in English. Interestingly, such incidents occurred in all teachers' classes.

Excerpt 6

Situation: The teacher asked students to take turns to give a presentation.

Line Number	Speaker	
1	S1	((A student raised his hand.)) I want to present.
2	T3	((Look at the student)). Sorry↑. Say that again ↑.
3	S1	((A student raised his hand.)) I want to present.
4	T3	((Move closer)). What?
5	S2	He wants to be the second one. He wants to present.

The extract above demonstrates that the teacher was trying to understand the student's message (line 2). However, after a few attempts, a high-proficiency student would automatically help by repeating what his classmate said (line 5). This instance suggests that poorly-pronounced words caused difficulties and obstructed the class to move forward. Therefore, it could be argued that the unfamiliarity of pronunciation by teachers and students was one of the barriers in teaching and learning (Maniam & Vaithinathan, 2018; Presadă & Badea, 2018). Hence, these results support Darcy's (2018) study, indicating the role of clear pronunciation which improves comprehension and helps minimize effort for interlocutors.

3.2.3. Spelling

Spelling was found to be useful when pronunciation became an issue. In other words, teachers asked the students to spell the word aloud. This strategy was detected in several classes, especially in T4's. One instance was presented in Excerpt 7 below.

Excerpt 7

Situation: T4 was giving the whole class an assignment. She then asked individual students to name their interested country.

Line Number	Speaker	
1	T4	((The teacher approached a student.)) Choose a country you wish to do the business with. Give me a name of the country. (0.3)
2	S1	France ((His pronunciation was not clear.))
3	T4	((Shake her head)). (0.3) Sorry.
4	S1	France ((His pronunciation was still not clear, but he spoke louder.))
5	T4	((Shake her head)). (0.5) Can you spell that?
6	S1	F-R-A-N-C-E
7	T4	(Write it down on the board) Next, please.

This dialogue illustrates that S1 correctly understood the teachers' instruction as he was able to respond to her question (lines 2 and 4). Interestingly, it was also observed that high proficiency students did not help repeat what his friend said. Instead, S1 tried to interact with the teacher again by himself (lines 2 and 4). As clearly shown, when it became difficult for the teacher to understand the student, asking the learner to spell out the word could solve communicative obstacles. Consistently, this finding supports the work of Ranbom & Connine's (2011) who discovered that linking pronunciation with spelling or knowing spelling-sound correspondences helps interlocutors familiarize themselves and recognize words.

3.2.4. Visualization: Drawing

Other class observations show that T1 and T3 used visualizing techniques to facilitate comprehension and to draw students' attention. T3 reported the use of pictures in his class as below,

"I often use Google to do searching of pictures" (Interview, T3).

It was also found that that picture eases the comprehension between teachers and students as illustrated in Excerpt 8 below.

Excerpt 8

Situation: T1 began his class by talking about different cities around the world as a means to get students prepared before he moved on to the next part.

Line Number	Speaker	
1	T1	((The teacher approached a student.)) Is your hometown near the coast? ((0.3)
2	S1	((Silence)) ((The student uses her mobile phone to look up for the word.))
3	T1	((Draw a line while speaking)) This is a land. The blue part is the sea. Is your hometown near the sea(0.3)
4	S1	Yes. How write? ((Gesture of writing))
5	T1	((Write the word on the board)).
6	S1	((Look up in a dictionary))

With students' limited communicative competence, the teacher drew pictures to explain the meaning of coast. Then, the student would like to assure the meaning of the target word, so she asked the teacher to write down the word on the whiteboard, and then searched for the meaning again. This incident demonstrates that the drawing technique facilitates the understanding of the meaning of the target word, corroborating the study of Adoniou (2013) who used drawing with his primary school students in English medium writing classes to help them understand vocabulary.

3.2.5. Visualization: Board

Similar to the Excerpt above, writing messages was found to be another technique, applied by four teachers (T1, T2, T3, and T4). The observations show that the whiteboard was used a great deal in any one class. Additionally, it was used mainly to write down target words and related messages, not only when students requested but also when teachers noticed that students did not understand what the teachers meant. Excerpt 9 below illustrates how T4 introduced a target word.

Excerpt 9

Situation: The teacher talked about a business plan.

Line Number	Speaker	
1	T4	((The teacher asked the whole class.)) Do you know this word, invest?
2	S1	Can you write it down?
3	T4	Sure. ((The word was written down on the whiteboard.))
4	S2	Invest.
5	T4	Right, invest. What does it mean?
6	S3	You want to build something, you invest.
7	T4	When you invest, you want to build a house. So, what is it?

In this observation, the teacher wanted to assure if the students knew the meaning of the target word ('Do you know this word, invest?' in line 1), and then the students asked her to write down the

word on the board (line 2). The dialogue obviously shows that knowing spelling eases understanding between the interlocutors and to know vocabulary is essential (Webb & Nation, 2017).

In addition to noting vocabulary down on the whiteboard, teachers used written messages to communicate with the students. Writing down the messages on the board and posting them on Learning Management System 2 (LMS2), board and power point slides were frequently seen in their classes.

3.2.6. Elaboration, Simplification, and Comprehension Check

In the following Excerpt, three sub-communicative strategies were observed: elaboration (line 5), simplification (line 9), and comprehension check (line 7) which T4 used to assure that students understand the intended message.

Excerpt 10

Situation: The teacher talked about different cities around the world.

Line Number	Speaker	
1	T4	((The teacher asked the whole class.)) I want you to find out their culture. What is culture? (0.3)
2	SS	((Silence))
3	T4	What is culture? (0.3)
4	S1	No
5	T4	((Point at the slide)). For example, on the book, they eat together after business meeting. Say three main things about culture. OK? Three different culture you have to know if you want to do business with people in that country. For example, people take a nap. You can't meet them after lunch. Don't forget to give me the references. For example, if you take it from the website, give me URL. Next week you need to give information on PPT and share with your friends. Maybe just one minute. If you have photos. For example, Canada, you can show the landmark to let your friends know. Start from where it is and then start the topic. OK?
6	SS	((Silence))
7	T4	What do you have to do?
8	SS	((Silence))
9	T4	Let me review to you. First you need to find a landmark of the country. Second, find good time to do business with people and office hours.
10	S2	Hour?
11	T4	So what is your assignment?
12	SS	((Silence))
13	T4	((Write short instructions of the assignment on the whiteboard))

The extract above shows a long description (line 5), in which the teacher was assigning her students to prepare a presentation. Elaboration was the first strategy the teacher used to interact with her students. After the teacher asked a question to check if the students understood the key concept ('What is culture?' in line 1), she then explained by giving situations or contexts to guide the meaning of culture ('For example, people take a nap. You can't meet them after lunch.' in line 5). This incident indicates that to enable her students to understand the messages that she was trying to convey, the teacher initially explained the meaning of the target word. This observation suggests that teacher

believed in the importance of a lexical feature or vocabulary as a basis of communication. It is, therefore, essential to clarify the meaning of the key term to help students' comprehension.

Nevertheless, the elaboration strategy could not help the students completely understand what the teacher was trying to express, as seen from students' reactions in line 6. Their silence obviously indicates that they still could not follow the instructions. The teacher then employed the second strategy of questioning to check their understanding (line7). As shown in line 8, when none of the students responded, the teacher then used simplification or short sentences and simpler structures to explain to them (line 9). She once again checked for their understanding by asking another question in a different way (line 11). After a few efforts were made, the teacher eventually wrote what she meant to convey on the whiteboard. The findings not only show that the teacher tried different communicative strategies in order to interact with her students in the target language but they also confirm that vocabulary was found to be crucial. After the main concept was clarified, the language simplification was then applied.

It could be argued that the teacher's decision to use different techniques took place after she has learned what techniques could enable her students to better understand her messages. As the teacher was aware of her students' limited English competence, she finally changed from verbal to written instructions. Consistent with the results of the study by Ghorbanian and Jabbarpoor (2017), this exploratory research revealed the positive roles of simplification and elaboration on language learning. However, it also discovered that the teacher eventually used written texts as the final possible solution to their intended messages. Therefore, the results of this investigation synchronized with Prabhu's (1990), confirming that teachers decided what teaching methods should be implemented based on their sense of plausibility of what best suited their learners.

4. Conclusions

The core findings of this study reveal that teachers hold different beliefs regarding teaching English to low-proficiency Chinese students, which results in the use of varied instructional practices. More importantly, their practices reflect their beliefs. To scaffold low-proficiency learners, code-switching is considered effective even in a class where interlocutors share different native languages. According to class observations, students' L1 was frequently used to scaffold less capable Chinese students, and to enable the class to proceed. Along with the use of L1 to facilitate teaching and comprehension, other techniques included peer/co-operative learning, visualization, simplification, elaboration, and questioning have been applied.

The results of this research contribute to expanding the body of research revealing how teachers' beliefs influence their practices of teaching English to low-proficiency students. The data gathered, however, might not be sufficient for making conclusive remarks about the complex process of beliefs and practices of teaching English to low-proficiency students in higher education. They, nonetheless, provide a context within which further research can be compared. This study has put an emphasis exclusively on Chinese students and has investigated teachers' beliefs and practices for merely one semester of the academic year 2020/2021. Subsequently, a longitudinal study is recommended to gain more insights into the phenomena.

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Appendix A. Transcription convention of discourse analysis

T:	- teacher
S1: S2: etc,	- identified student
SS:	- several learners at once or the whole class
/ok/ok/ok/	- overlapping or simultaneous utterances by more than one learner
[do you understand?]	
[I see]	- overlap between teacher and learner
=	- turn latching: one turn follows another without any pause
…	- pause of one second or less marked by three periods
(4.0/0.4)	- silence; length given in seconds or micro-seconds
?	- rising intonation – question or other
WHAT	- emphatic speech
((xxx))	- a stretch of unintelligible speech with the length given in seconds
((T gestures the students to start))	- researcher's comments
°said quietly°	- soft speech, said more quietly than usual
↑↓	- rising or falling intonation
C-U-S-T-O-M-E-R	- spelling
(.)	- a micro-pause
::	- lengthening of syllable

(Adopted and adapted from Walsh, 2011)