What Factors “Work” for Teacher Organizational Learning in Shanghai Middle Schools? A Grounded Theory Approach

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Teaching quality has long been regarded as a key factor in the success of education reform. Teacher organizational learning in China has been regarded as an important factor to the high-quality teaching and the outstanding academic performance of students. However, there is a dearth of research regarding teacher organizational learning in China. This small-scale study investigated the factors affecting teacher organizational learning in Shanghai. The grounded theory approach was conducted in nine middle schools and 25 selected teachers participated. The three main themes as emerged in our studies include leadership for learning, school climate of enhancing learning, and teacher agency. Compared with the existed literature, the findings offer some new ideas about how educational cultural and educational administration contexts in China filter teacher organizational learning.

Keywords: teacher organizational learning, influencing factors, Shanghai, grounded theory approach

Introduction

Since the mid-1990s, concerns have been raised regarding education quality and student performance delineated as “the Swords of Damocles” suspended at the head of primary and secondary schools. Massive school reform movements swept across the world, such as school restructuring, school-based management, and school improvement. Unfortunately, all these reforms related to accountability, curriculum, standards, and assessments are only the starting points of school improvement and unlikely to lead the expected results (Darling-Hammond, 1996; Higgins, Ishimaru, Holcombe, & Fowler, 2012). Teacher quality influences students directly and plays an important role in the success of school reform (Darling-Hammond, 1999; Darling-Hammond, Wei, Andree, Richardson, & Orphanos, 2009). In this regard, understanding how to motivate teachers to become active and cooperative learners, and then facilitate the professional development of teachers is a crucial step to improve student performance (Feiman-Nemser, 2001; Hattie, 2013).

Since the last three decades, organizational learning has been an emerging topic in business and education realm and has drawn considerable attention of researchers and practitioners. There is an agreement on the positive relationship between organizational learning and organizational performance in the business field (Lopez, Peón, & Ordás, 2005; Chen & Zheng, 2005; García-Morales, Jiménez-Barrionuevo, & Gutiérrez-Gutiérrez, 2012). China has a long tradition of valuing collectivism, which emphasizes on strong collaboration. Middle schools in China have abundant experiences in teacher organizational learning, such as

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observe and teach demonstration lessons, teaching-study groups, school-based learning, teacher group mentoring, and collective lesson preparation. After investigating the basic education in Shanghai, Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) concluded that the subject-based “teaching-study” in mainland China, a form of organizational learning, was one of the key elements to the outstanding performance on the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) of Shanghai (OECD, 2011). Also, it is an important lesson for teacher education of Western countries (Strauss, 2013). However, substantial and rigorous empirical studies about teacher organizational learning are thin in mainland China (Zhang, Lu, & Peng, 2011). In Western countries, teachers’ autonomy is grounded in the norms of privacy (Little, 1990). Organizational learning was often criticized as organizational control “in disguise”, whose purpose was to deprofessionalization of teachers (Hairon & Dimmock, 2012). It is not surprising that teacher organizational learning practices have been restrained to some extent. As a field, teacher organizational learning mechanism was poorly understood (Geijsel, Sleegers, Stoel, & Krüger, 2009). Theoretical foundations of teacher organizational learning still lag behind the practice. So, this study responds to recent calls to action for teacher organizational learning.

Literature Review

We begin with a brief review of influence factors on organizational learning both in business and education fields. Many efforts have been done to identify the factors affecting organizational learning in business circles and can be divided into structural level, people level, and cultural level (Popper & Lipshitz, 1998; Jyothibabu, Farooq, & Pradhan, 2010). The elements of structural level mainly referred to institutionalized structural and procedural arrangements designed to encourage organizational learning, such as the size of the organization, functional specialization, time, forums for learning (Collinson & Cook, 2004), accountability system (Popper & Lipshitz, 2000), and issue orientation that related to democratization, power equalization, and participation (Popper & Lipshitz, 2000). Studies on people level referred to the personal attitudes and disposition which related to belief in reciprocity, sharing, and desire to learn (Collinson & Cook, 2004). Studies on cultural level pointed that trust, shared values, and organizational climate that encouraging adventure, innovation, difference, and experiment will improve organizational learning (Silins, Mulford, & Zarins, 2002; Garvin, Edmondson, & Gino, 2008).

Teacher organizational learning is an effective method to improve the quality of teachers and promote the success of educational reform (Schechter & Qadach, 2012). It is essential to investigate the key factors influencing teacher organizational learning. Available researches about the factors affecting teacher organizational learning are as follows: Leithwood, Leonard, and Sharratt (1998) conducted a multiple-case study by selecting 114 teachers in 14 schools from British Columbia, Newfoundland, Ontario. The findings of the study identified nine key variables that fostered teacher organizational learning. These variables were divided into three levels: out-of-school variables (district, community, and ministry), transformational leadership, and in-school variables (vision, culture, structure, strategy, policy, and resources). They emphasized transformational leadership as the most important condition. After surveying 1,197 teaching staff from 67 schools in Hong Kong, Lam and Pang (2003) pointed that there were two main categories affecting school organizational learning: external environment (political, economic, social, and cultural) and internal school organization (transformational leadership, positive culture, and supportive structure). Compared with the contextual conditions, internal school conditions make more contribution to the organizational learning. The

research findings confirmed the conclusions from Leithwood et al. (1998). Zhang et al. (2011) carried out a case study to identify the influence factors and obstacles to teacher organizational learning. They pointed that a supportive management structure, with a clear goal of school development, effective channels in information sharing and exchange, supportive culture for innovation and creation, and high degree of trust and collaboration among staff members, has a positive impact on teachers' organizational learning ability in Shenzhen middle schools. However, the case study sample was small ($N = 4$). We need more samples to confirm the findings. In Hong Kong, Cai (2010) carried out a study by quantitative and qualitative methods. The findings showed that obstacles to teacher organizational learning could be categorized into three levels: personal level, school level, and education bureau. Among these, personal level includes teacher cognitive power, confidence to work, and work mindset; school level covers the culture of expressing opinions, sharing, organization structure, and school leadership; and education bureau refers to the positive influence of policy-makers of education.

The rest of available literatures mainly focus on supportive organizational learning culture (McCharen, Song, & Martens, 2011), collective efficiency of teachers (Schechter & Qadach, 2012), learning time and platform available (Collinson & Cook, 2004), shared mental models (Fauske & Raybould, 2005), psychological safety, and experimentation that reinforces learning (Higgins et al., 2012). The findings of these earlier studies have been very helpful in conducting the current study in China.

Although researchers have learned a great deal about the factors influencing teacher organizational learning, most of the studies contextualised in Anglo-American and Hong Kong contexts. Less is known about the factors influencing teacher organizational learning in mainland China (Zhang et al., 2011). Actually, differences exist among the schools in mainland China, Western countries, and Hong Kong in terms of organizational structure, institutions, and culture (Cheng, 2010). Those factors will lead to the difference in teacher organizational learning.

Method

Design

The current study has been conducted by using qualitative research and the grounded-theory approach to analyze the viewpoints of teachers regarding the factors affecting teacher organizational learning. As noted at the outset, the primary aim of this research is to identify the factors affecting teacher organizational learning in Shanghai middle schools, the education hub of China.

Study Sample and Data Collection

In order to draw a more distinct boundary of study, the nominators were provided with the following working definition of organizational learning before the interviews: In order to improve student performance, teachers acquire new knowledge initiatively, share with each other, analyze and integrate knowledge together, and preserve useful knowledge into organization by using all kinds of methods so that other members can acquire and use it again (Schechter & Qadach, 2012). This definition was chosen since it is more conducive to establish a broad yet bounded understanding for the interviewees. Given the purpose of the study, random sampling and purposeful sampling methods were used to collect data. Interviews were conducted until no more new themes emerged from the analysis. We finally selected 25 teachers who came from nine middle schools in Shanghai as the objects of the in-depth interview (at least 50 minutes per person). All these selected case-schools represented different educational quality of middle schools in Shanghai, including key schools,

general schools, and weak schools. Gender, years of teaching experience, and educational background of the teachers were also considered during the interviews to acquire useful information (see Table 1). The questions focused on their experiences about organizational learning as follows:

1. What factors will influence the willingness of teachers to participate in organizational learning activities?
2. What reasons will lead to different results of teacher organizational learning?
3. What measures can be improved by your school to enhance the willingness of teachers to participate in organizational learning?

Table 1

Demographic Characteristics of Participants and Schools

Name (Pseudonym)	Gender	Years of teaching experience	Educational background	Key school
Connick Huang	Male	2	Bachelor	No
Lee Li	Male	12	Bachelor	No
Jack Wang	Male	2	Master	No
Nancy Liu	Female	5	Master	Yes
David Li	Male	2	Doctor	Yes
Anna Liu	Female	10	Bachelor	No
Andy Chen	Male	15	Bachelor	No
Henry Zhao	Male	11	Bachelor	Yes
John Liu	Male	7	Bachelor	Yes
Helen Li	Male	25	Bachelor	Yes
Amber Li	Female	2	Master	No
Beata Liu	Female	1	Bachelor	No
Jora Hu	Male	3	Master	No
Rose Xia	Female	9	Master	Yes
Kevin Lu	Male	10	Bachelor	Yes
Jacob Hu	Male	2	Master	Yes
Zoey Chen	Female	4	Master	Yes
Benjamin Li	Male	9	Master	No
Lisa Ou	Female	20	Bachelor	No
Joseph Mi	Male	7	Bachelor	Yes
Cindy Wu	Female	4	Bachelor	Yes
Paul Ma	Male	13	Master	Yes
Diana He	Female	9	Bachelor	Yes
Edith Liu	Female	21	Bachelor	No
William Qian	Male	15	Bachelor	No

Data Analysis

Nvivo™ 8 software was used to code, retrieve, and organize the transcripts in order to analyze the semi-structured interviews. A research team was organized (including one professor, one assistant professor, and two doctoral students from the educational administration) to discuss the codings, themes, and key findings. Material collected was coded according to the procedures put forward by Corbin and Strauss (1998). Firstly, we studied the interview with the microscopic examination and “Data are broken down into discrete parts, closely examined and compared for similarities and differences” (Corbin & Strauss, 1998, p. 102). Any passages related to the factors influencing organizational learning were identified and labeled with adequate codes (open

coding). The process of grounded theory building is shown in Figure 1. After conducting 25 interviews, we obtained 307 codes totally. Secondly, in order to seek for a higher level of conceptual abstraction, these codes were reassembled to generate code properties. Then, we assigned the 307 codes into 18 distinctive concepts (axial coding). After that, three themes were emerged: (a) leadership for learning; (b) school climate of promoting learning; and (c) teacher agency (selective coding). Compared with the available literature, some new elements have been identified. Theoretical framework has been shown schematically in Table 2.

Figure 1. Grounded theory building process (Adapted from Rodon & Pastor, 2007).

Table 2

Factors Affecting Teacher Organizational Learning in Shanghai Middle Schools

Research topic	Selective coding	Axial coding	Open coding
Leadership for learning	Give priority to teaching affairs	The principle values teaching research activities	Set a good example of learning; Pay attention to teacher organizational learning; Supervise teacher organizational learning; Participate in teacher organizational learning; Offer incentives to teacher organizational learning.
		Other work serves the need of teacher organizational learning	Provide needed resources for teacher organizational learning; Improve teaching condition; Provide sufficient time and platform for teacher organizational learning.
	Encourage the empowerment of teacher leaders	Manage teacher organizational learning	Make on-going teacher organizational learning plans; Establish fair evaluation systems; Arrange teacher organizational learning activities; Monitor teacher organizational learning process; Provide timely feedback on teacher organizational learning outcomes.
		Provide a good role model for teacher organizational learning	Excellent interpersonal communication skills; Have a good professional quality; Willing to share personal experience.

(Table 2 to be continued)

Leadership for learning	Motivate teachers by the shared organizational vision	Put forward school development vision	Put forward a clear, measurable, and time-based school development vision; Associate school development vision to teacher organizational learning.
		Promote the school visions to be recognized	Communicate the development visions to teachers; Associate teacher development with school development; Inspire teacher organizational commitment.
School climate of promoting learning	Commitment of teachers to organizational learning	Effectiveness of organizational learning activities	Practicability of teacher organizational learning content; Diversified forms of teacher organizational learning; Organize teacher organizational learning in an efficient way.
		Harmonious interpersonal relationships among colleagues	Harmonious interpersonal relationship among teachers; Harmonious interpersonal relationship between leaders and teachers.
		Similar ideas of educational value	Similar attitude to the teaching work; Similar ideas of education.
	Satisfied communication atmosphere	More convenient and diversified directions of communication	Promote the communication methods among teachers more convenient; Make the communication channels among teachers more diversified.
		Diversified content of communication	Value the supportive communication content; Directive communication is clear
	Organizational justice	Distributive justice	Proper learning rewards; Equal salary.
		Procedural justice	Establish the transparent evaluation in professional title system; Have equal opportunities for teachers to career development.
Teacher agency	Teaching efficiency	Support for teachers from parents and colleague	Parents will do their best to support the teachers' teaching work; Teachers seek help from colleagues when they need.
		The efficiency about students learning	Learning capacity of students; Learning attitude of students; Teachers' influence on students.
	Work orientations	Job orientation	Wage drives; Task drives.
		Career orientation	Career development; Job qualification; Working responsibility.
		Calling orientation	Incentive by the inner meaning of work; Love for work; Moral imperative to work hard.

Ethical and Rigor Considerations of the Study

In order to protect the confidentiality and autonomy of the participants, all participants were informed about the purpose of the study. Audiotapes were given pseudonyms in order to protect their privacy and they were deleted after transcribed. Member checking (sending the written records back to the interviewees) was done to avoid bias and misunderstanding. Triangulation was attained through field observation in their schools.

Results

The purpose of this research was to identify the key factors influencing middle school teacher organizational learning in Shanghai. Table 2 illustrates the key findings of the study. For the purpose of the

study, data analysis of 25 interviewed teachers yielded three central themes. These themes include leadership for learning, school climate of promoting learning, and teacher agency.

Leadership for Learning

Many significant studies on organizational learning conducted in various settings have revealed that school principals hold the keys to the effectiveness of organizational learning (Garvin et al., 2008). Without the support from principals, the implementation of teacher organizational learning seldom succeeds. Transformational leadership is the most frequently mentioned in the literature (Leithwood et al., 1998; Lam & Pang, 2003). In this study, we found that principals give priority to teaching affairs, encourage teacher leaders to participate in teaching affairs, and put forward school vision related to teaching learning. These methods have a positive influence on creating and sustaining a supportive environment which is helpful for teacher organizational learning. We labeled the theme “leadership for learning”. Compared with transformational leadership, leadership for learning is more focused on the specific learning behaviors of leaders associated with facilitating teacher organizational learning.

Giving priority to teaching affairs. China is conceived as a high power distance (Geert & Jan, 1991) and strong hierarchy commitment society. In China, people have a high acceptance of unequal power and often take it for granted. Being an official is the life goal and value pursuit of many people in China. The value idea is deeply rooted among people and makes teachers producing a worship and awe for the principals. So, they are very concerned with the attitude of leaders. Since 1985, “principal responsibility system” was introduced to primary and secondary schools in China. School principals were authorized direct responsibility and required to deal with lots of school issues, such as instructional activities, teaching researches, and managerial decisions (Wilson & Xue, 2013). Conditioned by the rank prestige bestowed up the leaders in the Confucian culture (Lam & Pang, 2003), it is not surprising that school leaders play a central role in supporting teacher organizational learning and have undoubtedly authority in the perspective of teachers. Many teachers are used to respecting and obeying the leadership authority, in hope that they can perform the expected and recognized behaviors in front of the principals to seek their recognition. If principals are role models of learning, participating in teacher organizational learning actively and providing needed resource, then it will affect the enthusiasm of teachers to participate in organizational learning. These activities are likely to flourish. Lisa Ou commented how the principals influenced the willness of teachers to participate in organizational learning:

Guidance from principal is very important. Our principal often participates in teachers’ learning activities. He gives us some advice and monitors the implementation of the activity. Also, the principal cares the examination results and gives timely feedback. All these will create academic pressures on us and motivate us to work more conscientious. Some of us want to give the principal a positive impression.

School leaders who actively identify and remove the factors hindering teacher organizational learning in the schools and reduce too much red tape unrelated to teaching will promote teacher organizational learning. When it comes to the resource allocation in the schools, leaders will give priority to the teaching needs and make all the other school works in the service of teacher organizational learning. In the words of Kevin Lu:

Our principal signals the importance of spending time on problem identification, knowledge sharing, and knowledge integration among teachers. In order to guarantee sufficient learning time, she will reduce the frequency of meetings. She rarely asks teachers to hand in material unrelated to teaching just response to administrative departments of education. Therefore, our teachers have more time for reflection and can arrange time more freely compared with other schools.

Jacob Hu added:

My principle provides time, resource, and venues for teacher learning. The high proportion of office expenses of school is dedicated to teachers' learning activities. Every teacher has 200 yuan to buy books per year. We often invite professors to give lectures to teachers and almost every teacher has the opportunities to participate in the in-service training programs. So teachers can access more new knowledge and broaden their horizons.

Encouraging the empowerment of teacher leaders. One of the factors mentioned repeatedly by teachers in the interviews was the model demonstration role played by teacher leaders, who not only be good learners themselves but also organize teacher organizational learning activities and facilitate other teachers' learning. Teacher leaders in this study mainly referred to the assistant principals for curriculum and instruction, department heads, and subject leaders in the schools or those teachers who have an influence on other teachers though without official roles. In primary and secondary schools in China, principals as the key person need to perform a variety of political, managerial, and instructional affairs for the purpose of maintaining effective functioning of schools (Jiang, 2006; Hallinger, 2009). On one hand, many principals have already been far away from classroom teaching. On the other hand, disciplinary knowledge becomes harder in middle schools. So, it could be unrealistic to expect that principals overcome great pressure and focus too much on the teaching of all disciplines while ignoring management affairs (Hallinger, 2005; 2009). Actually, this is not beneficial toward the betterment of schools and it is one of the important reasons that instructional leadership is still a controversial issue (Feng, 2012). However, teacher leaders are accommodated as classroom teachers at the same time. They communicate more often with classroom teachers and possess more expertise in the subject area compared with principals. So, principals have to invite teacher leaders to participate in the decision-making of teaching affairs and expand the school leadership influence more widely. In the words of David Li:

The director of our teacher training office works very hard. He organizes activities well, and he gives us notices of training activities in advance, coordinates teaching arrangement of teachers, and monitors the process of training activity. When the program finishes, he asks for advice and provides the school leaders timely feedback. Therefore, everyone can benefit a lot from the learning activities and flung themselves into it.

Henry Zhao, an assistant principal for instruction, noted the importance of empowerment in the schools:

Although our principal does not usually stay in school, the teaching work is arranged in a perfect order. Our principal is good at encouraging teacher leaders to devote themselves to the development of the school. In other words, he is a leaders' leader. Empowerment is a kind of motivation which makes teacher leaders feel that they own the power to handle school issues.

Motivation of the shared vision of the organization. When teachers share a strong vision of the organization, it is helpful to formulate the expected behavior norms of teachers and creat positive outcomes (Higgins et al., 2012). So, it is an important responsibility of school leaders to put forward developmental vision which is beneficial to make the cultivation of students as the focus of work, reflect high academic performance expectation from students, and hold moral power which can inspire teachers beyond the self-interest. Besides, vision itself should be feasible and according to the personal developmental goal of teachers. In China, many schools use slogans that are well-designed, memorable, and easily accepted to popularize the vision content, for the purpose to motivate, understand, and accept by teachers quickly. Beata

Liu works at a new middle school, just as she said:

As a newly established school, many slogans are put forward by our leaders to reflect expectations of school on teachers. For example, our school raises such a slogan this year: “Recognition from parents, praise from government, and commendation from society in five years”.

However, just put forward the vision is not enough. It is important for leaders to promote teachers’ commitment to school vision. Teachers interviewed put forward many useful measures to promote teachers’ work together in the realization of organizational vision, among which are the implementation of rewarding and punishment measures, appropriate working pressure, and combination of personal development goal and school vision. They thought that these measures contribute significantly to guide teachers’ behaviors and enhance their commitment to the vision. In the words of Zoey Chen:

Our principal often said that interests of teachers and school are related to each other. Only when we work together to improve student performance, can teachers be given better wages and higher job status. So, we are united to create a better learning atmosphere both for the development of school and ours.

School Climate of Promoting Learning

Commitment of teachers to organizational learning. Practicability of learning content, harmonious interpersonal relationships among colleagues, and similar ideas of educational value are useful to promote the commitment of teachers to organizational learning. Because of large class size (more than 50 students per class) in Chinese middle schools (OECD, 2012), teaching tasks are heavy for many teachers. They are overly stressed because they have to spend most of their school hours on giving class, marking pupils’ work, etc.. Only when organizational learning activities are organized effectively and learning content is very practical will the teachers be interested in it and participate actively. Organizational learning is a kind of cooperative behavior, which refers to the interaction among organization members. Strong colleague relationships lead to positive attitude towards work, job security, and job satisfaction, and the efficiency of organization improved. Quality of interpersonal relationship is a crucial factor in determining the organizational commitment in China (Chen & Zheng, 2005). Thus, it affects the willingness of teachers to participate in organizational learning.

Just as Lisa Ou said:

Sometimes, we are too busy to invest time in organizational learning. So, the point is that how to organize learning activities more effectively and teachers can benefit a lot from activities instead of just coping with demands from superiors.

William Qian added:

Our leaders often said that we should treat the school as our homes. All of us are families that support each other. Leaders are very nice to teachers. They often invite us to have a chat in their offices. This is a kind of trust and respect for teachers. Then, our teachers feel emboldened to put forward good advice initiatively and are pleased to care for school.

Family culture is supreme in the value system of China. It can be found in the interviews that school leaders are good at employing the emotional strategy of family culture which featured Chinese heritage to promote the interpersonal relationship among teachers in the organization and expand the emotions of family relationship into schools. It is useful to increase the loyalty of teachers to the schools rather than considering rewards from material or pursuing fame. Meanwhile, a harmonious relationship also decreases the transaction

cost of school management.

Teachers’ perception on organizational justice. Based on the data obtained through interviews, teachers’ perception on organizational justice mainly focuses on the distributive justice and procedural justice. Procedural justice refers to the transparency and coherence of organizational policies which are related to the personal interest of teachers in the schools. Distributive justice refers to the perception of teachers on the positive feedback to their efforts in teaching accordingly.

Rose Xia was unsatisfied with the teacher evaluation system in her school and pointed out that:

School policies are constantly changed. They are often decided by the will of leaders. In our school, the promotion system of teachers changed every year in order to give priority to the privileged. Such unfairness leads to the accumulation of teachers’ negative emotion, worsening the relationship among colleague, and then affects enthusiasm of teachers in organizational learning.

In the words of Benjamin Li:

To those teachers who participated in the organizational learning actively, school should give timely rewards. For instance, in the activity which is named master-prentice mode, the team with better performance can get material rewards or honorary awards. It is a kind of incentive for the master-teachers and novice teachers. Both of them would put more passion on learning activities.

To properly handle teachers’ feeling of fairness is a kind of complex management. Since teaching work is implicit sometimes and cannot be measured with the principle of more pay for more work. The overemphasis on the pay and repay among members of the organization will lead to the excessive competition, which is unbeneficial to cooperation of the organization. However, it is not possible to ask opinions of every teacher when it reaches to the policy-making process within the schools. So, it is necessary for the leaders to ease and balance the contradiction caused by the unfairness of the organization by all kinds of artistic ways of management. For example, in order to enhance the transparency and coherence of organizational policies, school leaders can take more time to ask and listen to suggestions from teachers. It is not only to make teachers feel valued but also a good way to seek their understanding during the implementing of new policies. Meanwhile, leaders can distill teachers’ feeling on personal gains and losses by emphasizing collective interests.

Satisfied communication atmosphere in schools. Organizational learning is a socialized process, the process of collecting, sharing, analyzing, integrating, extracting, and reusing knowledge is closely related to communication between members of organization. The channels of communication which relate to teacher organizational learning include formal meetings, bulletin boards, handbooks, and diversified informal communications. The content of communication can be divided into supportive communication and directive communication. Supportive communication includes such emotional support as the constructive opinions, positive feedback, trust, and friendship between superiors and teachers, and directive communication mainly appears during transmission of information between leaders and the subordinates.

Beata Liu is a novice teacher with one year’s working experience. She emphasized the value of communication among novice teachers.

As a novice teacher, I often feel discouraged by the difficulties encountered in the daily teaching experience. Sometimes, those feelings may not be understood by senior teachers. Fortunately, there are many novice teachers in my subject-based research group and the problems we encounter are similar. So, we often encourage each other and solve

problems together. We benefit a lot from the communication.

Jora Hu added that:

The school principal is so kind that he often shows concern for teachers and helps to deal with the difficulties teachers encounter in teaching or in the life. Just entering this school, I reported my life difficulties to the principal and he handled it very soon. I was impressed by his courteous help. It will encourage me to work hard in return.

Teacher Agency

The available studies on the factors affecting teacher organizational learning mainly focus on the intervention from external environment while caring less the role of teachers' attitude toward organizational learning (Riveros, Newton, & Burgess, 2012). Actually, the key to the success of educational reform is not simply the need to change the organizational structure, but also the change of behaviors, attitudes, and thinking modes of teachers toward the reform (Riveros et al., 2012). Many interviewees mentioned that teaching efficiency and working value orientation of teachers affect their willingness toward organizational learning.

Teaching efficiency. Human motivation is primarily derived from the outcomes of expectations. Learning attitudes and academic performance of students will affect teachers' enthusiasm for participating in organizational learning. In the words of Jack Wang:

There are many migrant children in our school. These kids come from poor family background and they get less care of their parents. They did not develop good behavior and habits from childhood. So, their academic performance is very poor. Their dropout rate is high every year because of the strong mobility of their parents. It is hard to get the sense of achievement from those students. So, the learning climate among teachers in our school is not good.

Diana He works at a key school and students in his school are all very outstanding. So, her feeling of teaching efficiency is strongly different from Jack Wang:

I think students affect the learning attitude of teachers. Our school is a key school. Students' qualities are excellent and they have high learning initiatives. Sometimes, these students will raise difficult questions which teachers are unable to satisfy them with suitable answers. So, teachers in our school have a strong sense of crisis which inspires them to learn something new with colleagues.

The value orientation of work. Teachers with different work orientations have different working attitude and behavior. Teachers with a job orientation toward work are primarily interested in the material rewards from work. The primary purpose of work is merely a way to make a living. Teachers with a career orientation work to achieve the prestige, power, recognition, and professional development. There are also some teachers with the orientation of calling who have a deep love for the work itself. They care about the meaning of work itself and the enjoyment from the work. In the words of Andy Chen:

To be frank, rather than spending time on communicating with colleagues about teaching to improve students' academic performance, it would be better to play cards with my friends or spending more time with family. I have got high academic title and many honors in my work. Now, my attention centered on my home gradually and I have less enthusiasm in my work.

Jora Hu has leaded a study group of flipped classroom in his school for three years. They have no financial support from school. However, it does not affect their passion:

Only when you have a deep love for education and concern about the growth of students definitely will you throw

yourself into the work. In my school, teachers who interested in flipped classroom organized a learning team three years ago. We met together once per week to communicate with the latest information. Many teachers quitted after their fresh feelings fading. Those adhering to the present are teachers who love education sincerely.

It can be found in the interviews that teachers with the orientation of making a living or profession are mainly prompted by the expectations or pressures from the external environment. Their main purpose of working hard is the improvement of life quality or better career development prospect. However, teachers with the orientation of career regard learning as a way of life. Sometimes, their behaviors of learning or organizational learning occurred unconsciously and they created learning opportunities actively even without external support. Therefore, the duration of such dynamic is much longer and the learning effect is more outstanding.

Discussion and Conclusion

The primary purpose of this study was to generate the factors influencing teacher organizational learning in Shanghai. Like most studies about organizational learning, premise of this study was “The organizational learning has a positive correlation with organizational efficiency”. In fact, organizational learning is not equal to organizational improvement. Interviewees in our study also mentioned that sometimes teacher organizational learning in the schools are still superficial. It not only occupies extra time and energy of teachers, but also wastes the educational recourse of schools. So, it should only be considered when the costs are really worth pursuing and mental preparation has been done by the schools and teachers (Huxham & Vangen, 2005). Previous studies on organizational learning mostly focused on the positive effects and regarded it as a panacea to increase the efficiency of the organization while ignoring the resource-consuming activities during the process of organizational learning. It could be concluded that such studies were biased to a certain extent. Further, empirical research is needed to examine the negative effects of organizational learning. By comparing the findings of grounded theory and available literature researches, research implications are discussed below.

In this study, it has been found that work of teacher leaders, especially the middle-level leaders, who had the formal position and were in charge of teaching affairs in the schools, was vital to the well functioning of teacher organizational learning activities. So far, limited numbers of studies and few targeted professional development opportunities have aimed especially at the middle-level leaders in mainland China. Most of middle-level leaders were selected from excellent classroom teachers who had outstanding performance in teaching while ignoring the effective knowledge, skills, personality characteristics, and psychological quality of positions needed. Many schools lack the clear role definitions about middle-level leaders, so some teachers complained that sometimes middle-level leaders could not maintain a well balance in the complex position that neither fully classroom teachers nor full-time administrators and still spend most of their time on classroom teaching. In consideration of the important role played by middle-level leaders, both practitioners and theorists need to pay more attention to this field in the future.

In Western literature, teacher empowerment, job autonomy, and sharing decision-making have a statistically significant direct impact on teacher organizational learning, which has reached consensus. They were closely link to the sense of efficacy which is helpful to motivate teachers to participate in organizational learning (Leithwood et al., 1998; Geijsel et al., 2009; McCharen et al., 2011; Marks & Louis, 1999). However, interviewees in this study have rarely mentioned those factors which were related to the shift of power and

influence relationships within the schools. It further confirmed the research findings conducted in Singapore and Hong Kong schools of Confucian cultural circle (Lam & Pang, 2003; Hairon & Dimmock, 2012). Some interviewees expressed that they have full freedom in their classrooms and they did not care about the decisions which were not directly related to their self-interest or their classroom teaching. On one hand, Confucian culture has been emphasizing on the respect for teachers in East Asia. According to the “2013 Global Teacher Status Index” (Dolton & Marcenaro-Gutierrez, 2013), China ranked number one in terms of respecting their teachers, comparing with all other European and Anglo-Saxon countries. Under this faith, teachers in China win more esteem and trust than Western societies. On the other hand, according to an old Asian saying that “The nail that sticks out gets hammered down”, Asians are typically used to obeying decisions of superiors instead of voicing their own opinion in public.

Based on the ideas generated from interviewees in this study, motivations on organizational learning were basically extrinsic, which have been mainly promoted by the attentions from superiors and reward systems. Genuine interest in learning per se and the intrinsic motivation stem from the orientation of career were less referred by the interviewees. However, that extrinsic motivation had limited impact. This would be useful in explaining why some teachers reach their highest academic titles while they have not usually driving forces to learn continually. Of course, it was not easy to get a comprehensive conclusion through 25 interviewees from nine middle schools in Shanghai. In future, more empirical and broad level studies are needed to confirm our findings.

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