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## Chinese University Leaders' Perceptions of Effective Transnational Professional Development

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### Introduction

China is seeking to build a more innovative and equal society through learning from others. An example in the education sector is capacity development for university leaders from less developed regions in China. In 2012, the Chinese Ministry of Education (MOE) launched a five-year training project to send 1000 university leaders from Chinese central and

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western regions to receive further training abroad (MOE, 2012). The purpose of this project is to enhance capacity development for Chinese university leaders (CULs), to bring ‘good’ practices from abroad, to modernize higher education in less developed regions in China, and to build a more innovative and equal society in the long run. The receiving countries include Australia, Canada, Finland, Germany, Ireland, the Netherlands, the UK, and the USA. Finland, a small Nordic country, was chosen as one destination due to its excellent reputation in terms of innovation and equality. This chapter focuses on an educational leadership development programme between China and Finland.

Previous studies on CULs’ study abroad programmes have been done in different contexts. Wang (2007) examined Chinese educational leaders’ conceptions of learning and leadership after doing an Australian offshore programme from 2002 to 2003. Cook (2008) explored what CULs have learned from their study experience at the University of Michigan (USA) and how they used the knowledge to improve their universities. In another research, the same scholar (2014) described the practices that have evolved over time for hosting CULs’ professional development programmes. Hölttä, Pekkola, and Cai (2009) studied the possibilities of exporting Finnish expertise to China by training CULs in Finland and regard this initiative as a suitable approach to implement Finnish internationalization strategies concerning China. Yu (2014) analysed the content and format of university leadership study abroad programmes from 2003 to 2012, organized by the National Academy of Education Administration (NAEA<sup>1</sup>), China. Finally, Xu and Lai (2015) looked into the development strategies of universities in Germany by analysing the strategic management of Leuphana University of Luneburg. Nevertheless, none of these studies have explored the trainees’ (namely CULs’) perceptions on what they see as being effective professional development for educators like themselves.

Against this background, this chapter aims to identify the features of Effective Transnational Professional Development (ETPD) from CULs’ perspectives during and after undertaking these training programmes. In

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<sup>1</sup>NAEA sits directly under the MOE and is responsible for development and delivery of national educational leadership and management training programmes in the education sector.

this study, the term 'university leaders' refers to university (vice) chairmen and (vice) presidents from regional universities in less developed regions in (central and western) China. The term 'transnational professional development (TPD)' refers to two Finnish training programmes for CULs: (1) a three-day Finnish training seminar for 100 CULs in China organized in November 2014 (referred as T1 hereafter); and (2) a 21-day Finnish training programme for 20 CULs in Finland from May to June 2015 (referred as T2 hereafter). The two Finnish training programmes, complementing each other, are part of the Chinese government's five-year training project. The term 'training programme' is used interchangeably with the term 'study abroad programme' in this chapter. It is noted that although this chapter takes the Finnish training programmes as an example, it looks into broader pictures of training programmes that CULs have attended in other developed countries (e.g. Australia, Germany, the UK, and the USA). By doing so, the chapter will generate more comparative findings. It is also noteworthy that the chapter is not interested in what CULs have learnt from training, instead, it focuses more on their perceptions of ETPD, although their learning outcomes will be inevitably mentioned.

The chapter begins by presenting the conceptual framework on transnational education (TNE) and effective professional development. This is followed by description of data and methodology, and continues with my analysis of CULs' perceptions on ETPD.

## Theoretical Framework

### Transnational Education: Transnational Professional Development for CULs as an Example

Internationalisation of higher education (IHE) has become a prominent trend in higher education around the world in the past decades. The development of IHE brought about a relatively new but increasing phenomenon—transnational education (TNE). According to the UNESCO/Council of Europe (2001), TNE includes:

All types of higher education study programmes, or sets of courses of study, or educational services (including those of distance education) in which the learners are located in a country different from the one where the awarding institution is based. Such programmes may belong to the education system of a State different from the State in which it operates, or may operate independently of any national education system.

Here, the educational services include, among others, ‘training modules that lead to professional development’ (UNESCO/Council of Europe, 2001). In the present study, TNE refers to the provision of two Finnish training programmes for CULs that lead to professional development, which can be regarded as transnational professional development (TPD).

Four general approaches to transnational postsecondary education can be discussed: mutual understanding, skilled migration, revenue generation, and capacity building (Gu, 2009; OECD, 2006). The capacity building approach views TNE as a means to meet an unmet demand and help build capacity for quality higher education (OECD, 2006). Gu (2009) argues that the rationale of developing TNE in China is to enhance the overall educational system, to diversify educational supply, to build capacity for colleges and universities, and to attract and develop human resources. Therefore, the Finnish training programmes can be regarded as capacity development for CULs.

A number of studies have focused primarily on the features of transnational higher education (TNHE) in China (e.g. Yang, 2008), the challenges, and critical issues strategies in China (e.g. Helms, 2008). Additionally, there has been a growing increase in published work on preparing teachers for transnational teaching (e.g. Keevers, 2014) and transnational partnership in historical, geographic, social, and cultural contexts (e.g. Montgomery, 2016). Further, some studies have examined the impacts of TNE on host countries (British Council, 2014), and teachers’/students’ perceptions of autonomy regarding TNHE in China (Mok & Han, 2016). While research on the transnational provision of degree programmes (e.g. Yang, 2008; Montgomery, 2016) is a well-established and growing feature of higher education, the transnational provision of short-term professional development is a novel research area.

Despite the fact that numerous transnational activities have been conducted for CULs on a global scale, very few studies have looked into effectiveness and outcomes of such TPD from trainees' perspectives. Whether such TPD is effective or not remains unclear. The present chapter aims to fill this research gap by exploring CULs' perceptions on ETPD.

## Effective Professional Development

Guskey (2000, p. 16) defines professional development as 'processes and activities designed to enhance the professional knowledge, skills, and attitudes of educators so that they might, in turn, improve the learning of students.' This definition means that staff development consists of a broad range of processes and activities that contribute to the learning of educators. He considers that professional development is a process that is intentional, ongoing, and systemic (ibid.).

There has been extensive discussion in the literature on effective professional development for educational leaders. There are a number of studies on the features or characteristics of effective professional development (i.e. Guskey, 2003; Hunzicker, 2010); others are concerned with the design of professional development for leaders (i.e. Cacioppe, 1998; Sparks, 2002), as well as the evaluation of professional development (i.e. Guskey, 2000; Hannum & Martineau, 2008). There is also a growing interest in school leaders' perceptions of professional development inside the system (i.e. Zhang, 2010; Wilson & Xue, 2013) and in the transnational context (Xing & Dervin, 2014). However, to my knowledge, no research about CULs' perceptions on ETPD was identified.

## Research Methodology

### About the Finnish Training Programmes

As mentioned earlier, this study includes two Finnish training programmes for CULs. T1 was a three-day training seminar for 100 CULs from central and western regions in China, taking place in Kunming,

Yunnan Province, China, in November 2014. It was jointly organized by the NAEA, the Cultural and Education Section of British Embassy, the University of Tampere<sup>2</sup> (UTA), and Yunnan Normal University (YNNU). The theme was ‘Regional University Transformation: International Experience and Local Practice’. The NAEA utilized its training base located at YNNU to host T1. The British and Finnish representatives were invited to share their experience of university transformation with CULs. The British representatives only attended the first-day seminar while the Finnish representatives attended the whole seminar. T2 was a 21-day Finnish training programme for 20 CULs that took place in Finland in summer 2015. The NAEA led T2. The UTA, in cooperation with other Finnish universities, offered T2. The theme was ‘University Transformation and Development’. The duration of the whole training was 31 days, consisting of 7-day pre-training in China, 21-day training in Finland, and 3-day post-training in China. Both trainings have three similarities and overlaps:

- They are capacity development for CULs from less developed regions in China, tackling the issue of university transformation. T1 is a kind of pilot-testing and preparation for T2. T2 is the continuation and extension of T1.
- The NAEA and the UTA are the main actors of both trainings. The NAEA is the training organizer from China, while UTA is the main training provider from Finland.
- Both trainers and trainees come from different universities and institutions in each country. UTA cooperated with other Finnish universities to conduct both trainings. The trainers included Chinese and Finnish trainers in T1 while only Finnish trainers in T2. Regarding trainees, every Chinese trainee in both trainings represented his/her own university.

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<sup>2</sup>The University of Tampere and Tampere University of Technology were merged to create Tampere University from 1 January 2019.

## Data Collection

I collected data from 12 CULs at both trainings (six per training) in Yunnan in 2014 and in Beijing in 2015. All the participants were male, since female participants were not available then. Among them, seven were vice presidents, two were presidents, two were chairmen, and one was vice-chairman (see Table 3.1). All the participants had a similar background. They were aged 46–50 and held a certain number of years of experience working as university leaders in China. Nine of them held master's degrees and the rest had PhD degrees. Additionally, they had little knowledge of Finland and Finnish education, and none of them had been to Finland. However, five of them had attended similar training programmes in other developed countries (two in the USA, one in the UK, one in Japan, and one in France, Germany, and Australia). Therefore, they had broader views on effective professional development. They represented 12 different regional universities from less developed regions in China, of which 8 were newly established regional universities<sup>3</sup> (NRUs), and 4 are traditional regional universities (TRUs). They thus faced similar challenges and are under the Chinese government's agenda of university transformation.

The data collection methods include interviews and learning reports. The interviews were conducted for participants from both trainings during and immediately after completing the training, while the learning reports were collected after two weeks of completing T2. There are three reasons: Firstly, the immediate interviews with the participants enabled me to get fresh data. Secondly, the participants were only available to be interviewed during and immediately after completing the training. Lastly, the participants from T1 were not required to submit learning reports while those from T2 had to submit learning reports as compulsory homework. The list of participants in Table 3.1 corresponds to the order of their positions.

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<sup>3</sup>In the context of China, newly established universities mean institutions authorized to approve bachelor's degrees by the MOE after higher education expansion in 1999. These universities account for about half the number of existing universities in China (Xu, 2014).

**Table 3.1** Profiles of participants and data

No	Role	Main responsibilities	University typology	Training programme	Other training attended	Interview	Learning report	Coding
1	Vice president	Budgeting & research	TRU	T1	USA	Yes	N/A	T1-VP1
2		Teaching			UK			T1-VP2
3		Budgeting & teaching			T1-VP3			
4		Budgeting & students' affairs			T1-VP4			
5		Teaching	NRU	T2			T2-VP5	
6		Teaching					T2-VP6	
7		Safety					T2-VP7	
8	President	Overall administration	TRU	T2		Yes	T2-P1	
9					T2-P2			
10	Chairman	Party	NRU	T1	USA	Yes	N/A	T1-C1
11				T2	Japan		T2-C2	
12	Vice chairman	Audit	TRU	T1	France, Germany, Australia		N/A	T1-VC1

Note: In Chinese universities, usually there is one Communist Party chairman, one president, three–five vice chairmen, and three–five vice presidents. The president can be the vice chairman at the same time. The chairman side is usually responsible for managing political education, publicity, audit, teacher union, and students’ affairs. The president side is responsible for managing personnel, budgeting, teaching, research, and logistics matters.

I followed ethical guidelines. Permission to conduct the research was first obtained from my supervisor, the NAEA, and the UTA prior to going into the field. Then I gained permission from CULs by signing consent forms. Coding featured with training programmes and participants’ profiles was carried out when reporting the findings. For instance, T1-VP1 meant a vice president who participated in T1.

### Data Analysis

The data were analysed in accordance with data-driven qualitative approaches, employing qualitative thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006). These analytical methods were selected as appropriate because I was interested in CULs’ individual perceptions and experiences, rather than in testing some theories or hypotheses. Five steps were applied in data analysis. Firstly, I became familiar with the data through reading and re-reading the transcriptions several times and checking their accuracy against the recorded interviews and submitted learning reports. Then, the transcriptions were initially coded in order of similar contents and from



micro to macro level. Thirdly, the transcriptions were coded in order of participants and from macro to micro level. New items were identified in this step. Next, the transcriptions were coded in order of training process (before, during, and after training). Finally, the themes that emerged from the data were further examined and redefined into four groups: contents, formats, methods, and social aspects.

The validation of the research can be seen from three aspects. Firstly, the diversified participants yield diversified perspectives. Each participant represents a specific university. Also, the sensitivity of their roles as different university leaders is properly addressed through coding. Secondly, they hold comparative views on ETPD. All of them have taken the Finnish training programmes either in China or in Finland. Five of them were also trained in other developed countries. The training examples from other countries are presented as well in the findings. Then, the combination of T1 (3 days in China) and T2 (21 days in Finland) yield richer findings. The interaction between these two trainings makes the research more dynamic.

## Findings

This section discusses how CULs understand ETPD. I examined the participants' perceptions about the features of ETPD. Four themes can be defined on the basis of the data: contents, methods, formats, and social aspects (see Table 3.2). Each theme consists of subthemes which reveal the participants' realities and wishes. The realities include both positive and negative aspects of the trainings while the wishes (written in italics) mean their wishes and suggestions for future ETPD. The following sections focus on each theme one by one.

### Contents: Needs, Aims, and People

#### Targeted Group and Needs

Findings show that the targeted group is the first step to achieve ETPD. This includes targeted university and trainees.

**Table 3.2** Summary of findings

Themes	Subthemes	Realities and <i>wishes</i>
Contents	Targeted group and needs	Targeted university ( <i>training for medical universities</i> ) Targeted trainees Needs-based ( <i>conduct surveys in advance</i> )
	Clear aims	Division of aims Aligning of aims and participants' selections
	Competent trainers	Expert in the field University pedagogy
Methods	Variety of activities	Lectures, visits, and seminars Meet Chinese authority and nationals in host country Face-to-face communication
	Peer learning	Peer sharing Peer teaching ( <i>the involvement of more Finnish and Chinese practitioners</i> ) Peer dialogue ( <i>more professional dialogue amongst university leaders</i> ) <i>Establish a communication platform for those who have trained abroad</i>
	Training materials delivery	Language translation <i>Distribution of materials afterwards</i> <i>e-learning platform</i>
Formats	Integration of theory and practice	Case studies <i>Specific curriculum cases</i> <i>More comparative university cases</i> Problem-based learning Advanced educational philosophy
	Adequate length and time	Long-term training <i>More time for field visits</i>
Social aspects	Networking and cooperating beyond training	Sign cooperative agreement <i>Cooperate with foreign universities to train Chinese teachers</i>
	Logistics	Excellent service Improper training time

In response to targeted university, five participants (T1-VP1, T1-VP2, T1-VP3, T1-VP4, and T2-VP6) reported that the same type of university should be put together in a same training group as they were in a similar situation and understood each other better. Such arrangement would allow them to discuss common issues, including concerns, challenges,

achievements, and experiences on university transformation and draw lessons from each other. For example, both T1-VP1 and T1-VP2 wished to have a training programme for medical universities (where they came from), as this was not realized in T1, or in other previous trainings. As T1-VP2 said, 'The training I have taken so far is always for general universities. Honestly, it can only open my mind and horizon, but cannot help me resolve practical problems'.

Regarding targeted trainees, five participants (T1-VP1, T1-VC1, T1-C1, T2-VP5, and T2-VP6) commented that having the training with those in the same roles could lead to ETPD, as they had commonalities to share and discuss. T1-VP1 said: 'I am in charge of budgeting at my university. It is difficult for me to have deeper discussion with T1-VP2, whose duty is teaching at his university'. In addition, three participants (T2-VP6, T2-VP7, and T2-C2) shared another view that sending university chairmen and presidents to study abroad was better than sending vice chairmen (presidents), since they were the key persons to lead change afterwards. T1-VP1 explained: 'It is not easy for vice chairmen or vice presidents to make changes although we have seen good practices abroad.'

Half of the participants indicated that meeting and satisfying presidents' specific needs was the core of ETPD. The higher satisfaction degree of needs, the more ETPD. CULs felt that, as they came from different backgrounds with different skills, they were in need of professional development suiting their individual needs. To gain a better understanding of such needs, a communication channel between trainers and trainees must exist. T1-C1 suggested:

Prior to training, training providers should conduct a survey to inquire about the needs and make a list of menus for us to choose. Then they can focus on these needs and adapt the training accordingly. (T1-C1)

Unfortunately, this was not done in T1. T1-VC1 said: 'There was no survey in T1'. I guess there are so many university participants and few resources (including time and people) for the NAEA to do this work for a three-day training programme. However, this was realized in his own university training programmes:

My university organized two training programmes in Australia at the same time: one was university administration training at the University of Technology, Sydney, the other was medical education training at the University of Sydney. Both programmes, lasted 21 days, were very specific and targeted. The Australian training providers conducted very thorough survey in advance to match our specific needs. I think this is excellent! (T1-VC1)

### **Clear Aims**

Five participants (T1-VP1, T1-VP2, T2-VP5, T1-VP, and T2-P2) agreed that ETPD should have clear aims that focused on certain aspects of training and not on too many topics. This occurred when the needs were explicitly identified. They felt the aims could be divided into sub-aims, under which research questions could be provided. Prior to training, every trainee should have one to two research questions and try to solve the questions after training. Finally, they could share learning results with each other, and the overall aims of training would be maximally achieved. T2-VP5 provided an example: 'In T2, we voluntarily formed four small groups based on four themes. Each group was concentrating on one topic. We were able to learn more'. T1-VP1 also stressed: 'The aim of training and selection of participants should go hand in hand'. In other words, the selection of candidates should be based on training aims.

### **Competent Trainers**

Four participants (T1-VP3, T2-VP5, T2-P2, and T2-C2) considered highly qualified trainers were essential to ETPD. The trainers should be experts in their field and well prepared for the training in advance. As T1-VP3 said, 'I am happy with all the trainers in T1. The works they have presented during the seminar represent the latest research on regional university transformation in China. Their views were fresh, insightful, and inspiring. I can see that they did their homework well'. In addition, they preferred to include more practitioners in TPD. More findings on this will be presented later.

Unfortunately, this was not fully realized in T2; T2-C2 complained about some poor Finnish teaching:

In general, we do not like the general academic teaching by some Finnish lectures. They spoke too much about Finnish education which can be easily found from books and online. We are coming to Finland to learn new things, not to listen to the repeated stories. And we are much more interested in communicating with Finnish university leaders than academics. (T2-C2)

Nevertheless, three participants (T2-VP5, T2-P2, and T2-C2) highly praised the excellent university pedagogy in Finland, which was regarded as essential for enhancing ETPD. They found Finnish trainers were good at handling students' interruptions and co-teaching in class. With more than 20 years of university teaching experience in China, T2-VP5 reflected:

Finnish trainers encouraged us to interrupt in class if we had any questions or different opinions. They see interruptions as a useful way of promoting learning. Also, it was my first time to see two lecturers teach together in one class. Their perfect cooperation, elegant manners and comprehensive knowledge impressed me deeply. I think such university pedagogy is absolutely useful for Chinese teachers to learn. (T2-VP5)

Meanwhile, they acknowledged the fact that this could be challenging for many Chinese teachers and trainers, especially for senior teachers. The reason is that both Chinese teachers and students have been used to teacher-centred pedagogy.

## **Methods: Activities, Peer Learning, and Delivery of Materials**

### **Variety of Activities**

The majority of participants agreed that including a variety of activities enhances ETPD. They agreed that *seeing was believing*. In T2, they

attended 27 lectures at five different Finnish universities and visited university campuses, libraries, research centres, laboratories, student entrepreneurship centres, industries, and the City of Tampere. They also visited the Chinese Embassy in Finland and met Chinese researchers and students at Finnish universities. Further, they attended two seminars: a Sino-Finnish education dialogue, held at Finnish Ministry of Education and Culture in Helsinki; the other seminar was about Chinese regional university transformation, held at the UTA. The participants enjoyed these seminars which provided them with broader pictures of Finnish education from historical, social, economic, and cultural perspectives. They were impressed by the Finnish approach to education equality, possibilities of choice, and highly educated teachers. Two representative examples were given:

As a part of education equality, I am deeply touched by Finnish efforts to 'no one left behind'. Students with learning difficulties and disabilities are so lucky in Finland. They are not abandoned by society and teachers. Instead, they enjoy more educational resources and social care. (T2-C2)

In the Finnish education system, there are no dead ends and students can always have the opportunities to re-choose. (T2-VP6)

Further, T2-P1 and T2-C2 argued that the training was effective because they were invited to deliver a speech on Chinese regional university transformation in the second seminar. This meant that information flow went both ways. They had prepared well for the speech. This experience helped them reflect on their thoughts and practices, gain an in-depth understanding of higher education, and compare Chinese and Finnish education systems. It also helped Finnish trainers better understand Chinese higher education system and regional university transformation.

The face-to-face meeting with foreign university teachers enabled CULs to reshape their mindsets and enhance their sense of responsibility. T1-VP2 recalled his experience of attending another training in the UK in 2013:

I was impressed by British university teachers' work ethics: professionalism and dedication to work... I met a distinguished chief scientist and professor in a British university. Although he was extremely busy, he could always find time for his students. Once I saw him discussing the research progress with his PhD student during lunch time... I am also a student supervisor at my university. When I am too busy I let the students figure out by themselves. Honestly, I do not feel I have a strong sense of responsibility... Now I am willing to offer my time to students. (T1-VP2)

## Peer Learning

Half of the participants agreed that peer learning, including peer sharing, peer teaching, and peer dialogues, could promote ETPD.

T2-VP7 and T2-P2 acknowledged the importance of sharing thoughts among trainees after training. They regarded this as an effective way to promote mutual learning, and endorsed how useful such experience was: 'After returning back to China, we continued with another day summary session. Everyone was asked to share their thoughts on training abroad. The discussions were active and everyone loved it! One day was too short and we would like to have more time'. In addition, three participants (T1-VP4, T2-VP7, and T2-C2) would like to share learning experiences amongst colleagues at their own universities. T1-VP4 and T2-VP7 would report learning results to the university leadership meeting for further discussions, while T2-C2 planned to organize a symposium for staff and carry out some reforms at his university.

The involvement of experienced and highly successful university leaders in the training programmes contributed to ETPD, because they possessed first-hand knowledge of university context, better understood their needs, and were in a position to share their practical experience. Unfortunately, this was not achieved in T1. T1-VC1 put it this way:

It was a pity that the right regional university presidents were not invited. The issues presented by trainers from the NAEA were useful. Nevertheless, there was a lack of right regional university presidents. Only one Chinese university president shared his experience, but it was a kind of elite university... At least I know some regional universities which are really doing well

in university transformation. We could find the answers of some unresolved questions if they were invited. In this regard, the Chinese peers know better about local contexts than foreign peers. (T1-VC1)

However, in the pre-training of T2, a university president of a regional university, who had attended a similar training programme in the USA, was invited to lecture on regional university transformation. T2-P2 explains:

Now the university has a special office called Government Liaison Office. The office frequently meets local government and sees what the university can do for the government. I like this very much. (T2-P2)

Therefore, the participants suggested three wishes for future training. The first wish was the involvement of more Finnish and Chinese practitioners as trainers. The reason is Finnish practitioners are mirrors for CULs (T2-VP7 and T1-C1), and Chinese practitioners know better about local context (T1-VC1). The combination of both would create a dynamic ETPD.

The second wish was professional dialogue amongst university leaders during training. This was partly achieved in T2. T2-C2 stressed:

The dialogues amongst presidents are one of the key elements for ETPD. Those who become university leaders have the heart for China, and strive to make Chinese education better. Training abroad is a unique way to bring CULs to the world platform and have professional dialogues with foreign peers. It is absolutely needed and more should be offered in the future. (T2-C2)

The third one was to establish a communication platform in China amongst those who had attended similar training programmes abroad. This was suggested by T1-VP2. The purpose is to see what has changed afterwards, how they made changes, how they reflected such changes, and what suggestions they have for future training. Doing so, future TPD efficacy could be improved.



## **Training Materials' Delivery**

Findings reveal that good delivery of training materials increases ETPD, including accurate language translation, distribution of materials, and the use of an E-learning platform.

Three participants (T1-VP2, T1-VP4, and T1-C1) reported that highly qualified language translations of lecture layouts and simultaneous interpretation during training were absolutely necessary to make TPD effective. The fact is that most participants have limited English skills, and thus rely on interpreters during training. They highly praised the professional simultaneous interpreters and sophisticated translation equipment applied in T1, as information was passed on correctly and in a timely manner to Chinese trainees and foreign trainers. The sophisticated translation equipment was particularly useful on the first-day of T1, where more than 100 participants were in a big conference hall.

Regarding wishes, four participants (T1-VP1, T1-VP2, T1-VP3, and T1-VP4) wished to get these learning materials following training. The reason was that T1 was quite intensive; they did not have enough time to catch up with all the details and consolidate the knowledge learnt during training. Thus, three of them suggested that the NAEA sort out and send the training materials to the participants afterwards. T1-VP3 echoed in particular: 'setting up an E-learning platform for participants so that everyone can access the training materials later'.

## **Formats: Theory and Practice, and Duration**

### **Integration of Theory and Practice**

Three fourth of the participants agreed that integration of theory and practice was indispensable for ETPD. They felt professional development must be down to earth and be able to teach university leaders how to solve practical problems. Three key elements were identified as being particularly beneficial: case studies, problem-based learning, and advanced educational philosophy.

Half of the participants perceived that thorough university cases (aligned with theory or policy) must be integrated to enhance ETPD. This helped CULs deeply understand the operation systems of foreign universities. Participants in T1 favoured the initiative of including representatives from both Finland and the UK, which provided them with multiple practices and solutions. T1-C1 and T2-C2 agreed that the comparative cases studies from different countries helped them see global higher education trends better and helped them to relate to their own contexts. However, they were dissatisfied with insufficient and unmatched cases. Comments such as ‘Only national policy was covered, but no appropriate university cases were provided in T1’ (T1-VC1), and ‘The cases were superficial in T2 and I would like to see how the curriculum is exactly conducted in a specific programme’ (T2-VP5) indicate the drawback of case studies in both Trainings. Therefore, T1-C1 and T2-C2 wished to have more comparative university cases from different countries in designing training abroad. By doing so, the learning experience would be richer.

T1-VP4 and T2-P2 regarded problem-based learning useful to promote ETPD. T1-VP4 commented that he joined in the training with many questions to be solved. Therefore, using tasks in the training would help him relate to his own contexts and solve similar problems in practical work. T2-P2 stressed the importance of preparation:

To build ETPD, university leaders must do homework in advance. This could include preparing for questions, reading the assigned literature, familiarizing with foreign education systems, etc. The earlier and more questions we prepare, the better results. Our government invested lots of money to send us abroad for capacity development. We should value such opportunities and take them seriously. We cannot just go abroad with an empty head. (T2-P2)

This is in line with T2-VP5’s report: ‘I do value such a great learning opportunity and carefully prepare more than 20 questions relating to UAS in advance.’

Four participants (T1-VP3, T1-C1, T2-P1, and T2-C2) claimed that innovative educational philosophy was an indispensable element to

improve ETPD. It included student-centredness, strategic thinking, the mission of university, and so on. They felt ETPD provided them with new thoughts and inspirations to solve challenges, as they were exploring a new context. T1-VP2 said:

ETPD should pay close attention to train presidents' competencies of strategic thinking and decision-making. Strategic thinking is crucial to university leaders and I have seen how this was well presented in British universities. Decision-making is the ability to make correct decisions in a complex environment. Both competencies can be learnt. (T1-VP2)

This is in line with T2-C2's description of differences between CULs and foreign university leaders:

The first thing the UTA president shared with us was strategic planning and university mission. Many Chinese university presidents will start with university introduction: How big is the university? How many students and staff? How many key laboratories and research centres does the university have?... Few of them consider these questions: Why do we run a university? Whom do we run it for? What kind of university do we aim for? How to run a university? And how to educate students? Some can talk clearly while others may never think about these questions. (T2-C2)

### **Adequate Length and Time**

T1-VP1 and T1-VP3 commented that professional development with adequate length and time was effective. They felt ETPD required sufficient time to be developed step by step and could not be done overnight. T1-VP3 suggested 'organizing long-term training at different time periods so that university leaders have time to consolidate knowledge and apply what they have learnt into practice'. T2-P1 and T2-P2 complained about the limited time of university visits. They had to rush and only scratch the surface of Finnish universities. They did not have enough time to discuss some planned issues either.

## **Social Aspects: Networking and Logistics**

### **Networking and Cooperating Beyond Training**

Half of the participants perceived networking of professional communities essential for ETPD. During T2, three of them (T2-VP5, T2-P1, and T2-C2) signed cooperation agreements with Finnish universities on behalf of their own universities. Although it was not planned, they were satisfied with such extra and positive achievement.

In T1, T1-VP4 expressed his strong willingness to develop networking with Finnish universities, ‘my university would like to establish a formal relationship with a Finnish university and explore deeper cooperation for staff professional development. This could be done either by inviting the Finnish trainers to train Chinese teachers in China, or by sending Chinese teachers to be trained in Finland’.

### **Logistics**

Participants agreed that well-organized logistics was an indispensable element of ETPD. They were satisfied with excellent service in both trainings. The training schedule was rich and time was well utilized. T1-VP3 said: ‘Although T1 is only three days, the service is excellent, including transport, training rooms, accommodation, and food. Everything is inside one campus and easy to access.’ T2-P1 echoed: ‘The training schedule was rich and full in Finland. Everything was detailed and well-organized. Almost every working day we started from 8:30 to 17:00. Although there was no time to take a nap, like what we have in China, no one complained.’ However, T2-VP6 was unsatisfied with the inappropriate training time. As he said, ‘It was a pity that we did not have the chance to have discussions with Finnish students and could not see more, because they were on holiday in May’.

Finally, all the participants highly stress the importance of local context while learning TPD:

ETPD must combine international experience and local practice together. China is a huge country: every province is different, every city is different, and every university is different. We cannot blindly copy international experience without carefully considering local context. (T1-VC1)

## Discussion and Conclusion

This chapter aimed to increase understanding of how CULs perceive ETPD in a transnational context, particularly in Finland. Their training experiences in other developed countries are also covered in order to gain broader perspectives on ETPD. The findings, which were based on an analysis of CULs' subjective experiences, highlight many issues that deserve further investigation.

The findings confirm that effective professional development is featured in various learning opportunities (Hannum & Martineau, 2008), problem-based learning (Davis et al., 2005), cohort learning (Barnett et al., 2000; Dyer & Renn, 2010), self-reflection (Davis et al., 2005), clear aims (Guskey, 2000), networking (Barnett et al., 2000), and the availability of competent trainers (Levine, 2005). They are also consistent with studies that address the practices of training planning, topics, logistics and pedagogy for training CULs (Cook, 2014), as well as rushed visits in training abroad (Yu, 2014; Xing & Dervin, 2014). However, issues such as some poor Finnish lectures, improper choice of Chinese trainers, insufficient and unmatched cases, and inappropriate training time seem not to have received enough attention in current training programmes.

CULs put forward certain wishes for ETPD. The wishes include more targeted training for certain universities, conducting surveys prior to training, the involvement of more practitioners, professional dialogues, a communication platform for those have trained abroad, an E-learning platform for training materials delivery, more comparative case studies on university and curriculum, more time for field visits, and cooperative training between Chinese and foreign universities. They also stress the importance of 'seeing is believing' and 'doing homework' for ETPD. In

other words, TPD can become more effective when CULs are located in a different educational environment and a different culture and society, since the positive shock changes their mindset and enhances their responsibilities as educational leaders. TPD also becomes effective when both trainers and trainees fully prepare for training in terms of questions, education systems, and cultural difference in advance.

The data variations in T1 and T2 need to be taken into consideration. In T1, participants seem to report more data on the targeted university, translation, training material delivery, and the establishment of a communication platform. In T2, participants appear to report more data on Finnish university pedagogy, visit time, peer dialogues, and networking. Such variations can be explained from two aspects. Firstly, the duration and size of the two trainings are different. T1 is a very brief (3-day) training seminar with many CULs (100 people) in China, while T2 is a longer (21-day) training programme with fewer participants (20 people) in Finland. It can be difficult to offer a targeted training that matches every university leader in a limited time. As a consequence, in T1, it is extremely important to deliver qualified translations during training and training materials afterwards. In T2, sub-groups aligned with sub-aims can be organized due to the nature of small group and longer duration. Secondly, the participants' training experience can affect such variations. The issue of establishing a communication platform for those who have trained abroad is raised in T1, since the participant has trained abroad earlier and realized the importance of further communication. In T2 CULs have experienced different pedagogy, visited institutions, and had dialogues with foreign peers, while there was no visit in T1.

One limitation of the current study is the unbalanced number of participants. Most participants are vice presidents while fewer participants are presidents, chairmen, or vice chairmen. The involvement of more presidents, chairmen, and vice chairmen can yield more diversified findings. Yet, the study solicits CULs' views on ETPD from a comparative perspective, given the fact that CULs have attended the Finnish training programmes either in China or in Finland and that five of them had even taken training in other countries. It yields an organic and realistic picture of ETPD from the trainees' perceptions and draws thought-provoking implications for the practice of TPD for CULs in particular. The first

implication is that CULs' perceptions must be taken into consideration for building qualified and effective TPD. It sounds simple, but unfortunately, their voices have not always been heard. Therefore, efforts from both the Chinese training organizer and foreign training providers are required in order to achieve a common goal for ETPD. Secondly, ETPD requires qualified teaching from Chinese trainers as well, especially when training takes place in China, because they know the realities of the local context. Rather than working alone, foreign training institutions must find proper ways to cooperate with Chinese partners to carry on TPD. This has also been confirmed by previous research (Hölttä et al., 2009; Cook, 2014). Future research is needed to study what CULs have learnt and implemented after TPD, and how to build a quality assurance system for TPD. In conclusion, TPD will become dramatically more effective when the trainees' perspectives and local contexts are carefully considered.

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