

# Looking Back at the New Knowledge Bases of EFL Teacher Education

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This article discusses the trend of reconceptualizing EFL teachers' knowledge base to avoid the separation between theory and practice, which is in particular reflected on the establishment of some new EFL teachers' knowledge domains. However, the horizontal categorizing approaches of teachers' knowledge establish another gap between theory and practice and the hierarchical approach formulates so much abstract knowledge for teachers. The construct of knowledge of EFL classroom interaction is a pilot inquiry to create an interface between "theory knowledge" and "practice knowledge" from the teachers' needs. In the end of the article, a rough knowledge framework is constructed for EFL classroom interaction on teachers' needs.

*Keywords:* EFL Teachers' Knowledge Base; Knowledge Domains; the Knowledge of EFL Classroom Interaction

## Introduction

In recent years, a great debate continued in language teacher education across millennium (Jourdenais, 2009: p. 650). The fuse is the argument on the role of SLA (second language acquisition). One party insists that the role of applied linguistics and SLA is ancillary and "should not be the primary subject of language teacher education (Freeman, 1989)". The other party holds the contrary opinion. In the end, the two parties concede respectively. Freeman (2004) accepted SLA or knowledge of language was still in an important position in language teacher education. Tarone & Allwright (2005: p. 19), representatives of the opponents, admitted that social constructivist and individualist were important in language teacher education. In their arguments, "the noninterface fallacy (Tarone & Allwright, 2005: p. 12)" is a hot topic. This fallacy is to do "way with academic content courses" and to make "the teacher learning situation identical to the target teaching situation" (Tarone & Allwright, 2005: p. 12). On this fallacy, it is easy to find out the debate originates from the idea which occupy the first position in language teacher education, academic knowledge or personal practical knowledge. This article aims to analyze these trends of reconceptualizing EFL teachers' knowledge bases under this debate circumstance, to summarize the merits and shortcomings of various categorizing approaches of EFL teachers' knowledge bases and to propose a new construct of the knowledge of EFL classroom interaction.

## The Reasons for Reconceptualizing EFL Teachers' Knowledge Base

As professional reform occurred, an advocacy was popular

for establishing a new and systematic knowledge base in teacher education. It is believed that there exists "a codified and codifiable aggregation of knowledge, skill, understanding, and technology, of ethics and disposition, of collective responsibility-as well as a means for representing and communicating it (Shulman, 1987)" in teaching. This trend also influences EFL teacher education. In EFL teacher education, it is busy criticizing the traditional "lagged behind" teaching models and reconceptualizing "advanced" one. Reconceptualizing teachers' knowledge base is included in this movement because it is the base of curriculum design and the central act of the reform in EFL teacher education. Simply put, there are at least three reasons to reconceptualize EFL teachers' knowledge base.

The need of professional movement. In fact, at the end of the nineteenth century, teaching, as a major, was listed on college curriculum. In the 1940s and 1950s, American Normal Universities had all transited to Teacher College completely. Although teaching, as a major, had got a legitimate position in colleges and universities, there are many critiques on its quality (Liu Jing, 2009: p. 181). In this case, several reports are presented to improve teaching as a profession and the New Reform on teacher education was proceeding rapidly (Shulman, 1987). Various approaches were proposed for promoting teaching professional, such as reflection-in-action (Schon, 1987). Professionalizing of teaching is based on a more fundamental premise that a standard of teacher education must be raised and articulated clearly in terms of the requirement of professional movement. In other words, it is necessary to establish some new knowledge bases for teaching.

The need of bridging the big gap between theory and practice. This gap handicaps the efficiency of applying research findings

to EFL teaching practice, which may result in a great waste. For example, applied linguistics is a fundamental source for EFL teaching at the beginning (Richards, 2011: p. 20). Nevertheless, the academic knowledge of linguistics are far away from teaching after teaching methods became unpopular, which leads to the great debate (Jourdenais, 2009: p. 650) we just mentioned. It is necessary to bridge theory and practice in teacher education and the first step is to undertake a new knowledge base.

The need of education globalization. In the report of Transforming Teacher Education, it is clear to point out “all systems of teacher preparation have to rethink their core assumptions and processes in the new global context (Kumaravadivelu, 2011: p. 2)”. In education globalization, the traditional ways of teacher education is criticized because the teachers are viewed as a blank vessel (Freeman & Johnson, 1998), in which what teacher education do is to help teachers “comprehend and eventually master the content knowledge (Kumaravadivelu, 2011: p. 8). In global context, however, it is expected that teachers “to play the role of reflective practitioner, who deeply think about the principles, practices, practices and processes of classroom instruction and bring to their task a considerable degree of creativity, artistry, and context sensitivity (Kumaravadivelu, 2011: p. 9)”. Apparently, there are completely different viewpoints on the teachers’ status in education globalization from that in traditional teacher education. Reconceptualizing EFL teachers’ knowledge base is of urgency.

### Reconceptualizing EFL Teachers’ Knowledge Base, Especially the Domains of the Knowledge

As we noticed, it is urgent to reconceptualize EFL knowl-

edge base. The new knowledge base should mention the teachers, their practice and the interface between theory and practice. Freeman & Johnson (1998) openly declared to reconceptualize the knowledge base of language teacher education on which there are four points should be taken into account for the new knowledge bases of language teacher education: the activity of teaching itself, the teacher, the contexts, the pedagogy. Concerned about these points, most of scholars try to keep balance and put forward multifarious knowledge domains. To conclude, there are three categories according to different categorizing forms: horizontal categorizing method; hierarchical categorizing method; combining the two methods. **Table 1** presents some typical examples of horizontal categorizing method.

From the table, many domains are included in the researches on EFL teachers’ knowledge base. In these reconceptualization researches, a new curriculum often follows (e.g. Richards, 1998, 2011). Gong Yafu (in press) even proposes his new knowledge base as a standard for being qualified teacher. However, a puzzle easily emerged that theory and practice are in independent positions even if coining PCK. Gong Yafu lists it as one important part of teachers’ knowledge, PCK is coined for combining theory and practice, but as Shulman (1987) said it was “the blending of content and pedagogy into an understanding of how particular topics, problems, or issues are organized, represented, and adapted to the diverse interest and abilities of learners, and presented for instruction (Shulman, 1987)”. What we can infer is that PCK is an integrated body of knowledge and all the knowledge domains can not separate. However, we don’t know how these knowledge issues blend. Thus, these knowledge domain just make a claim to combine the theory and

**Table 1.**  
EFL teachers’ knowledge domains horizontally.

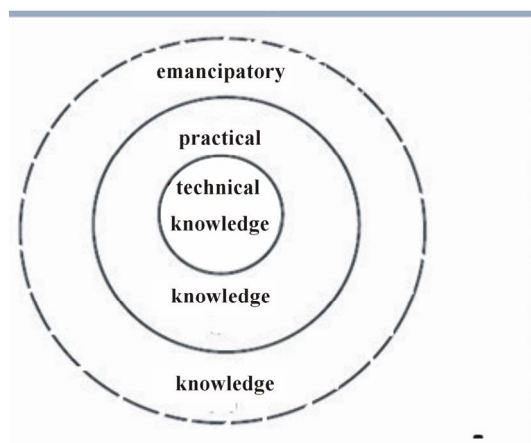
Researcher	Categories of TEFL teachers’ knowledge base	Method
Richards (1998: pp. 8-12)	Theories of teaching Teaching skills Communicational skill Subject matter knowledge Personal reasoning Decision making Contextual knowledge	Literature analysis
Tsui (2003: pp. 250-251)	Knowledge of English Language pedagogical knowledge Language learning knowledge Knowledge of managing learning Other curriculum knowledge Knowledge about the learner	Empirical study
Andrews (1999, cited from Zhu Xiaoyan, 2004: p. 61)	TLA (Teacher language awareness) Subject matter cognition Knowledge of learners Knowledge of curriculum Knowledge of pedagogy Knowledge of context	Literature analysis and empirical study
Gong Yafu (in press)	Subject matter knowledge Pedagogical knowledge Pedagogical content knowledge Knowledge of the learners and their characteristics Knowledge of educational contexts Knowledge of the curriculum and educational ends	Empirical study
Han Gang (2011)	Pedagogical knowledge Theoretical knowledge Practical knowledge Educational knowledge	Empirical study

practice. Additionally, the interrelationship among these domains has not attracted too much attention in **Table 1**. For example, theoretical knowledge, theories of teaching or content knowledge are still set apart from practical knowledge. Practical knowledge is described less distinctly on the relation to the theoretical knowledge. Just as Richard (2011: p. 16) said “they are not in any hierarchical relationship and there is some overlap among them”. It is apparent that what most scholars do is to clarify what kind of knowledge EFL teachers may have, such as Gong Yafu, etc. If these knowledge items are in horizontal position, it is worthy noticing how the interface between theory and practice builds up.

In this case, hierarchical categorizing method is proposed, which binds theory and practice together. Zhang Gang (2009: p. 162) points out a concentric circle form to describe EFL knowledge base. Emancipating, practical and technical levels are introduced as **Figure 1**.

This figure presents EFL teachers’ knowledge in a multilayer circle. The central one is technical knowledge, the middle is practical knowledge and the outside is emancipatory. In teaching act, teachers need applying some, even all of them. Although this figure combines theory and practice together closely, it hasn’t been explained in detail and is uneasy to operate to build up personal theories. Besides, there are other researches based on this categorizing method. For instance, Wang Rong & Han Gang (2005) point out that it is important to maintain harmonious situation of technical knowledge and practical knowledge. Particularly, life knowledge, critical knowledge and practical knowledge should work in harmonious. However, these categories are extremely abstract and is not easy for teachers to experience and digest.

Luckily, Tsui (2003) combines the two methods. Although she categorizes EFL teachers’ knowledge into separate items, she points out “the delineation of teacher knowledge as consisting of separate domains is more analytical than real (Tsui, 2003: p. 247)” and concludes three features of relations among these knowledge issues in teaching act after an empirical study of four EFL teachers, that is, the integration of knowledge, in relation with specific context and situated possibility, “theorizing” (theorizing practical knowledge) and “practicalizing” (practicalizing theoretical knowledge) (Tsui, 2003: pp. 246-257). In other words, she makes a detailed categories and a clear explanation on the interplay of these new domains. Particularly, the



**Figure 1.**  
EFL teachers’ knowledge base (Zhang, 2009: p. 162).

third feature describes the relations between theory and practice directly and explicitly. Moreover, she thinks that “the transformation of formal knowledge to personal practical knowledge through personal interpretation of formal knowledge in the teachers’ own specific contexts of work (Tsui, 2003: p. 265)” and “making explicit the tacit knowledge (Tsui, 2003: p. 265)” are two critical differences between expert teachers and nonexpert teachers.

To sum, the purpose of reconceptualizing EFL teachers’ knowledge is to bridge teaching theory and practice, to elevate EFL teachers’ status and finally to establish EFL teaching profession in society. Many scholars engaged in it and illustrated different knowledge domains from various perspectives. New EFL teachers’ knowledge bases are built up on three categorizing approaches: horizontal approach; hierarchical approach; combing both. The first two approaches have good points and bad points as well. The last approach is a try to absorb their good points.

## Suggestions

EFL teacher education takes advantage of these new knowledge bases greatly, on which many curriculum design explicated that teaching practice should be emphasized deeply and teachers are encouraged to reflect their experience, beliefs and teaching decision in order to “theorization” or “practicalization”. For example, the Suggestions on Promoting Teacher Education Curriculum Reform (Education Ministry, 2011) was enacted in China, in which pre-service teachers are required to engage in teaching practicum of at least 18 weeks during the period of studying in their normal universities. Nevertheless, these knowledge bases are not fittable for in-service teachers. Surely, from pre-service teachers, researches’ and education policymakers’ perspectives, these domains are rich, systematical and sophisticated. EFL in-service teachers, however, have not much time to consider various knowledge domains. What they mostly mention is not a variety of knowledge domains, but their classroom teaching (Liu & Meng, 2009). If a large body of EFL teachers can not enjoy the benefits from it, the efficiency should be suspected of the teacher education reform and the reconceptualizing act of EFL knowledge base. After all, it is the teacher who determines whether the reform succeeds or not. Therefore, it is suggested to reconceptualize EFL knowledge base from the teachers’ need. Between theory and practice, it is the teacher who conceptualizes and experiences their relevance (Graves, 2009: p. 120). Only based on their needs are they stimulated to frame or reframe the knowledge base at best.

Constructing new knowledge base should understand schools and schooling as the social and cultural context for teaching learning (Freeman & Johnson, 2005: p. 28). Take teacher education in China as example. On three quantitative researches on EFL in-service teachers’ reflection objectives in China, most teachers focus on classroom teaching and attach attention to students’ behavior (Meng, 2011; Liu & Meng, 2009; Xu & Li, 2012). Some studies on pre-service teachers also get the similar findings. For example, Wang Rong (2012) found out EFL teachers’ talk and classroom interaction appear frequently in pre-service teachers’ reflection reports. Since EFL teachers concerned about classroom teaching, it is necessary to construct knowledge of classroom interaction because interaction is the fundamental fact of L2 classroom (Allwright, 1984). Besides, in EFL classroom, interaction carries two roles: the object of

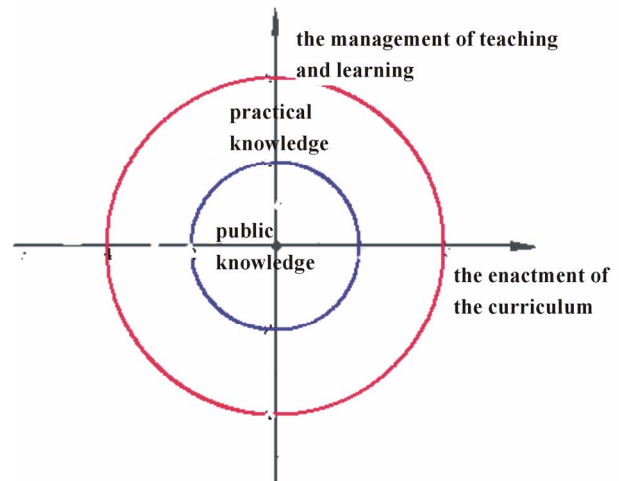
teaching and the carrier of teaching, while in other subject classroom it just carries the role of the latter. Classroom interaction is hence more important than that in other subject lessons. Possessing Classroom Interactional Competence (Walsh, 2006: p. 130) becomes one essential language competence for a TEFL teacher. One point should be noticed that it refers to verbal interaction specially. Due to the importance of interaction in classroom teaching and EFL teachers' needs, it is helpful to construct the knowledge of classroom interaction.

With reference to the merits and shortcoming of the above-mentioned knowledge bases, the knowledge of EFL classroom interaction should represent the close connection between theory and practice, the human agency of the teacher and explicit knowledge domains. The concentric circle form can be borrowed because a circle entailing different knowledge is an integrated body. Two dimensions are listed clearly for teachers to understand and digest. Here presents a figure of the knowledge of EFL classroom interaction.

As shown in **Figure 2**, there are two dimensions: the classroom management of teaching and learning; the enactment of curriculum. They represent two aspects of PCK proposed by Tsui (2003: pp. 65-66). In essence, the knowledge of EFL classroom interaction is a kind of pedagogical content knowledge. It involves public knowledge and practical knowledge as well. In teaching, the teacher will use both of them. Teaching, however, should base on a specific curriculum and the teacher should manage the classroom. Curriculum represents the subject discipline aim. For example, New National curriculum standards for senior English (2012) formulates that the students must acquire language knowledge, language skills, learning strategies, culture awareness and good attitudes in English teaching in China. All the teaching materials and practice should proceed under the guidance of the curriculum, so does classroom interaction. To manage teaching and learning is to create or sustain "an orderly environment so students can engage in meaningful academic learning, it also aims to enhance students' social and moral growth (Evertson & Weinstein, 2006: p. 4; as cited in Kumaravadevelu, 2011: p. 29)". Nevertheless, there are very few teacher education programs that "offer well-organized, hands-on experience in management strategies (Kumaravadevelu, 2011: p. 31)". In fact, interaction can reflect and realize the management of teaching and learning in classroom. Kumaravadevelu (2011: p. 30) points out two important aspects of the management of learning: topic management and talk management. In verbal interaction, the teacher should care about topic and talk as well. Topic relates to the content of classroom talk and talk is linked to the topic closely. For example, IRF (initiate-response-feedback) is often found in classroom and every move proceeds around the initiating topic. In a word, the knowledge of EFL classroom interaction should mention the curriculum and the management of learning, that is, in accordance with the curriculum requirement, manage the topic and talk.

## Conclusions

In conclusion, it is necessary to reconceptualize EFL teachers' knowledge base for professional development. The three categorizing methods have good points and bad points as well. Owing to the individual characteristic of the act of teaching, reconceptualization is suggested to start from the teachers' needs, especially for in-service teachers. Based on three large-



**Figure 2.**  
The dimensions of the knowledge of EFL classroom interaction.

scale quantitative investigation on in-service teachers' reflection objectives in China, classroom teaching is focused mostly. Consequently, the teacher can try to conceptualize their knowledge from reflecting classroom teaching. What's more, interaction is the fundamental fact of L2 classroom, so the teacher can start from establishing their knowledge of EFL classroom interaction. Eventually, a pilot and rough framework is established by hierarchal categorizing method for the knowledge of EFL classroom interaction. It is composed of the management of teaching and learning dimension and the enactment of the curriculum dimension. Its nature is practical content knowledge, which is a blending of technical knowledge and practical knowledge.

The current study coins the knowledge of EFL classroom interaction based on the overview of new knowledge bases of EFL teacher education. It is without doubt that the creation of a new term in social science needs more extensive and intensive research supports. The future researches on the knowledge of EFL classroom interaction can explore other perspectives on the reasons why it is important and worthy of being emphasized in EFL teachers' knowledge base.

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