

Research on the Professional Development Environment of Russian Language Teachers in China's Universities

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Academics explore teacher development by examining teachers' internal factors and the external environment that impacts their professional progress. As Freeman (2002) aptly states, "context is everything" (p. 11), and this notion works in different ways (Kelchtermans, 2014). Postholm (2012) also underscores the pivotal role of the social environment in an individual's learning and development. To conduct thorough research and gain a comprehensive understanding of the teacher learning process, an in-depth examination of the sociocultural context within which this process unfolds is imperative (Freeman & Johnson, 1998, p. 407). While previous studies often adopted a behavioral perspective, focusing on individuals' perceptions of the environment (Moos, 1974; Roth, 1999), the book *Research on the Professional Development Environment of Russian Language Teachers in China's Universities* provides empirical insights into the seven-decade evolution of Russian teachers' development in China. Grounded in humanistic and social-cultural theories, the study sheds light on the interaction between less-commonly-taught-language teachers and their environment, offering insights into the multidimensional aspects of Russian language teachers' professional development in China.

This volume is structured into three sections. The first section (Chapters 1–3) establishes the theoretical framework and research methodology for investigating the developmental environment of Russian language teachers in China's Universities. The second section (Chapters 4–9) constitutes

the focal point of the study, conducting an empirical study of the development environment of Russian teachers in China. This section involves a survey and research targeting a specific group of Russian language teachers to uncover the correlation between teachers and the environment, based on the understanding of the professional development environment of Russian language teachers over the past 70 years. The third and final section (Chapter 10) concludes and presents the future outlook. It summarizes the research on the development of Russian language teachers in China, identifies research limitations and the space for future development, and offers suggestions for the development of less-commonly-taught-language teachers.

The first part delves into the theoretical underpinnings of ontology, epistemology, and methodology concerning the environment, laying the groundwork for the entire study. Chapter 1 emphasizes the necessity of researching the development environment for teachers by examining the concepts of "environmental person" and "rational person." It briefly reviews research on foreign language teachers and ultimately comes to the decision to investigate the environment of Chinese Russian language teachers from the perspectives of sociocultural theory and ecological environment. Chapter 2 outlines the overall situation of Russian language education in China over the past 70 years from multiple dimensions, including the main phases, educational policies, training models, textbook compilation, key organizations, and activities, laying the historical context for the empirical research undertaken in the second section. Chapter 3 provides a comprehensive overview of the research findings on the developmental environment of foreign language teachers from three perspectives: traditional psychology, sociocultural theory, and ecosystem theory. The insights gained from these perspectives collectively establish

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the theoretical foundation for the empirical study in the second section. Together, these three chapters provide readers with essential background knowledge on the research of Russian language teacher development.

The second part, as the core section of the book, consists of six chapters. Employing qualitative research methods, this section conducts empirical research on the development environment of Russian language teachers in China. Chapter 4, the overarching chapter of the section, is grounded in ecosystem theory. It conducts a longitudinal study of the professional development of Chinese Russian language teachers over the past 70 years, examining the dimensions of macrosystems, exosystems, mesosystems, and microsystems. The research findings reveal that the self-development of Russian language teachers emerges through interactions among sociocultural environment, external environment, school environment, and personal environment, with the sociocultural environment playing a particularly prominent role. Based on these findings, the author also proposes several suggestions for improving the development environment for Russian language teachers.

The remaining five chapters present in-depth examinations of the environment of Russian language teachers' development in different periods. Chapter 5 investigates the development environment of Russian language teachers during the initial 17 years of the founding of the New China (1949–1966). Grounded in ecosystem theory, this chapter specifically examines the early foreign language education policies in New China. The research data for this study is derived from interviews, reminiscences, and oral memories provided by four senior Russian language teachers. This study examines the correlation between the professional growth of Russian language educators and their environment from the four aspects of ecosystem theory. The findings reveal that in the early years of the People's Republic of China, the establishment of extensive and peripheral foreign language education systems created a favourable environment for the growth and development of Russian language teachers. Nevertheless, the absence of a cohesive community of Russian language teachers and the unresolved issue of a standardized textbook system presented specific challenges to advancing their teaching and research competence.

Chapter 6 investigates the developmental environment for Russian language teachers during the complex period (1967–1991). This investigation explores the emotional experiences of Russian teachers during this period through interviews with three Russian language teachers of varying ages. Critical

information is extracted using narrative questionnaires, framing the study around the four dimensions of ecosystem theory. In this chapter, a model for the teacher development environment during the complex period of Russian language teaching in China is developed.

Chapters 7 to 9 discuss the development environment of Russian language teachers since the proposal of the “One Belt, One Road” initiative in 2013. Chapter 7 focuses on the professional adaptation of Russian language teachers in the new era. Based on sociocultural theory, this chapter conducted qualitative analyses of two novices who returned from Russia and graduated from China, aiming to explore the professional adaptation of new Russian language teachers. The study finds that the differences in professional adaptation between the two new Russian teachers are attributed to their personal emotional and personal experiences.

Chapter 8 explores the interactive relationship between two important documents of language education policy, the “*New National Standards (Foreign Language and Literature)*” and the “*Teaching Guidelines (Russian)*,” and teacher agency. Through interviews and classroom observations with four Russian teachers, this chapter explores the factors impacting Russian teacher agency, structuring around the four systems of ecosystem theory. The study yielded the following findings: (1) The comprehensive system generally enhances the capabilities of Russian language teachers; (2) Russian language teachers identify opportunities for their growth through ongoing interaction with the intermediate system; (3) The individual qualities of teachers constitute a potential microsystem, and its influence on teachers' initiative should not be overlooked.

Chapter 9 focuses on the agency of Chinese Russian language teachers in the context of the “*Declaration on the Construction of New Liberal Arts*.” Grounded in ecosystem theory, this chapter discusses the agency of Chinese Russian language teachers across the macrosystem, exosystem, mesosystem, and microsystem. The study reveals that Russian language teachers generally hold a positive attitude toward the new educational policy. However, the mobilization of their potential is directly related to their institutions' policies. Additionally, the teachers' career planning and personality characteristics play a pivotal role in shaping their interaction with the environment, thereby influencing their prospects for development..

The third part (Chapter 10) constitutes the research conclusions and prospects of the entire book. Chapter 10 delves into theoretical analysis and model formulation

regarding the progression of Russian language instructors in New China during the last 70 years, reflecting on the individuality and commonality of research on the development environment of non-common language teachers. It presents recommendations such as strengthening teachers' subject awareness, and universities prioritizing this particular group of less-commonly-taught-language teachers. It also provides a concise overview of the limitations and offers insights into prospects.

This volume holds significant pioneering value as the first empirical study on less-commonly-taught-language teachers in China. By focusing on the specific group of Chinese Russian language teachers, the volume conducts a localized study of their professional development environment. This not only furnishes empirical evidence for the construction of the development environment for less-commonly-taught-language teachers in China and international peer dialogue, but also serves as an inspiration for advancing the development of less-commonly-taught-language teachers and creating a high-quality professional development environment for them.

This book exhibits distinctive features on both theoretical and methodological fronts. Theoretically, the study challenges the conventional notion that teachers are constrained by their environment (Devlin, 2002; Dorman, 2000). Instead, the study adopts a humanistic perspective, delving into the professional development of Russian language teachers drawing on sociocultural theory and ecosystem theory. It highlights the significance of macro, external, meso, and microenvironments in shaping the adaptation and agency of these teachers. This introduces a novel perspective to the study of teacher development environment. Methodologically, this book diverges from prior empirical portrayals (Jia, 2002) and adopts mainly qualitative research methods. Using Nvivo software and employing three-level coding, this study summarizes and extracts the environmental factors contributing to Russian language teachers' development. It aims to understand how Chinese Russian language teachers have responded to national policy development and adapted and developed their careers over the past 70 years. This qualitative and visual study provides a new paradigm for case studies of Russian language teachers. In terms of data, this book collects data through interviews, notes, classroom observations, and WeChat chat records. The acquisition of first-hand data is conducive to honest and objective recording and reproducing the professional development and psychological experiences of all Russian teachers in China, enhancing the authenticity and reliability of the research findings.

In addition, this book provides diachronic research paradigms and temporal clues on the development of Russian language teachers. This study examines the correlation between the progression of Russian language teachers and the dimensions of time and space. Anchored in Russian language education policies, it explores the professional development environment of Russian language teachers during three different periods: the early years of the establishment of New China, the complex period of Sino-Russian relations, and the period since the introduction of the Belt and Road Initiative. The research probes into the impact of micro-environments, educational policies, ideologies, and Sino-Russian relations on the development of teachers during each of these periods.

Ultimately, this book possesses significant practical and societal worth. One notable contribution is its role as a reference point for the development research of less-commonly-taught-language teachers. By examining Russian language teachers' social and cultural context and psychological well-being, the book establishes a hierarchical framework for the professional development of Russian language teachers, offering practical insights for the study of less-commonly-taught-language teachers. Furthermore, this study has the potential to attract the interest of both domestic and international scholars towards the Russian language teaching community, as well as other less-commonly-taught-language teachers. This can offer substantial support for the advancement of Russian language teachers and facilitate the high-quality progress of Chinese Russian language education.

However, there is still room for improvement in this study. Firstly, this study focuses on Chinese Russian language teachers' career development, career adaptation, and agency. Future research endeavors could address additional specific issues, including teachers' professional identity, occupational anxiety, and happiness, to gain a comprehensive understanding of the interaction between the Chinese Russian language teacher community and the environment. Secondly, considering that some Russian teachers in the new era are proficient in Russian as well as other languages like English and Ukrainian, future research could explore the career development environment for multilingual teachers and tap into the advantages and potential of these versatile talents.

Drawing on the humanistic ecosystem theory and sociocultural theory, this book comprehensively investigates the development trajectories of several generations of Chinese Russian language teachers. Employing empirical methods, it systematically examines the intricate interaction between less-commonly-taught-language teachers and the environment.

This not only contributes to a deeper understanding of the educational landscape for instructors of less-commonly-taught-languages but also opens up broader avenues for their advancement and scholarly exploration. Hence, we highly recommend this book to educators and scholars specializing in the subject of teaching research, particularly those engaged in less-commonly-taught-language teaching and research.

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