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Compounding the impact of teaching development programs in China and Hong Kong SAR: Using the Professional Standards Framework to deepen learning and improve teaching self-efficacy

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Compounding the impact of teaching development programs in China and Hong Kong SAR: Using the PSF to deepen learning and improve teaching self-efficacy

Globalisation and massification are creating significant expansion in the higher education sector in Asia and forcing institutions to professionalise their teaching. Merely implementing academic development, however, does not ensure an improvement in teaching quality. We report an action research project that demonstrated that the combination of competency-based teaching development through *Teaching Advantage Global* and professional recognition through fellowship of the Higher Education Academy significantly improves the teaching self-efficacy of academics in China and Hong Kong SAR. The results of this research demonstrate that professional development and recognition can uniquely support and evidence sector-wide strategic change.

Keywords: academic development; Teaching Advantage Global; professional standards framework (PSF); action research; teaching self-efficacy

Introduction

Over the last 15 years, East Asia has ‘become the epicentre of global higher education activity’ (Calderon, 2018, p. 9). In China, for example, increasing population growth, state investment, and participation in higher education has driven enrolments to almost 44 million students in 2016, the largest number of enrolments of any nation (Calderon, 2018). The sector is expanding so fast that China is predicted to achieve a gross enrolment ratio comparable to the United States in the next 20 to 25 years (Calderon, 2018).

As higher education activity intensifies in East Asia, the sector is increasingly aiming to improve the quality of teaching in order to drive global competitiveness (Calderon, 2018). One strategy that is typically used to develop teaching capability, often as a result of policy mandates, is to professionalise teaching using academic development programs (Boud and

Brew, 2013; Shaw, 2018). However, academic professional development is sometimes criticised for lacking meaningful impact on the individuals and metrics it is designed to improve (Chalmers, 2011; Shaw, 2018). Consequently, we explore whether professional development and professional recognition can be meaningfully compounded to improve teaching self-efficacy and affect real change in the sector.

Background

Higher education institutions are currently experiencing changing demand in learning and teaching due to two related mega-trends: globalisation and massification (Deni, Zainal, & Malakolunthu, 2014). Massification has created large, diverse cohorts of students who need to be employable on the international stage, while globalisation has motivated the introduction of significant quality assurance processes that aim to improve teaching quality to meet student demand (Deni, et al., 2014).

Mok (2005, 2018) often discusses the role quality assurance plays in rapidly developing Asian economies, noting that Hong Kong universities aim to assure their teaching quality in order to increase their national competitiveness. However, assuring teaching quality is not straightforward. Yin and Wang (2015, p. 1033) report that higher education in China has experienced a ‘dramatic expansion’ of student numbers, but simultaneously a worrying decline in the quality of teaching and learning. Consequently, higher education institutions in Asia are seeking robust ways to develop and recognise high quality teaching capability.

Academics typically enter and sometimes continue in academia with limited teaching development due to the prioritisation of disciplinary research (Boud and Brew, 2013; Myatt, Gannaway, Chia, Fraser, & McDonald, 2018). This limits quality teaching, which can be defined as ‘the use of pedagogical techniques to produce learning outcomes for students’

(Hénard and Roseveare, 2012, p. 7). According to Hénard and Roseveare (2012, p. 7), teaching quality is multi-dimensional and includes ‘the effective design of curriculum and course content, a variety of learning contexts (including guided independent study, project-based learning, collaborative learning, experimentation, etc.), soliciting and using feedback, and effective assessment of learning outcomes’. Quality teaching occurs in flexible, purpose-designed learning environments within a broader system of student support (Hénard and Roseveare, 2012).

Academic development mimics the ongoing professional learning required in industries such as engineering, pharmacy, and accounting to maintain skills and further develop practice (Daniels, 2017). Introducing programs that focus on improving teaching quality, such as award-bearing postgraduate courses or professional development offerings, allows ‘a university to make claims about teaching performance’ (Peseta, Brew, McShane, & Barrie, 2007, p. 223). However, academic development does not typically evidence or recognise appropriate teaching quality.

An additional strategy that aims to recognise high quality teaching is to accredit academic development programs against professional standards, which align with professional recognition to provide evidence of good teaching. Professional standards aim to delineate a set of competencies that practicing academics should attain (Daniels, 2017) and allow academics to demonstrate their achievement of a standard of professional practice.

The most frequently referenced professional standard in higher education is the Professional Standards Framework (PSF) developed in the United Kingdom (Shaw, 2018), which underpins a recognition scheme offered by AdvanceHE (formerly known as the Higher Education Academy; HEA). It enhances the quality of teaching by providing ‘a general description of the activities, knowledges and values central to learning and teaching support

roles' (The Higher Education Academy, 2011; Turner, Oliver, McKenna, Deepwell, & Shrives, 2013, p. 9).

Academics who reflect on their scholarly practice using the activities, knowledges, and values of the PSF can apply to become a fellow of the HEA. There are four categories of recognition—Associate Fellow, Fellow, Senior Fellow and Principal Fellow—that demonstrate different competencies aligned to a descriptor. We use the term 'fellow' to refer to anyone who holds a category of fellowship and the term 'Fellow' to denote those who have been recognised as meeting Descriptor 2 (Fellow) category of the PSF.

Although the PSF originated in the UK, it has pursued an expansive global agenda that has led to institutional memberships of AdvanceHE in a wide range of countries including Australia, Bahrain, China, New Zealand, Singapore, Taiwan, and Thailand. Universities across Asia are now beginning to accredit their professional development programs with AdvanceHE as a form of global benchmarking and professional recognition of teaching quality (Asghar and Pilkington, 2018).

To date, however, it is unclear whether implementing professional development or professional recognition of teaching in Asia has a meaningful impact on teaching quality. Academics often resist engaging in continuing professional development (Deaker, Stein, & Spiller, 2016). Although Botham (2018) found that academics experienced improvements to scholarly and reflective practice following professional development, many academics consider professional development to be a "box ticking exercise" due to its tight alignment with quality assurance (Chalmers, 2011; Shaw, 2018). This obligation results in resistance to what academics perceive to be 'managerialist initiatives that do not chime with the attitudes, values and practices of academic staff' (Shaw, 2018, p. 147; Spowart, Turner, Shenton, & Kneale, 2016). Furthermore, it is difficult to link academic professional development with genuine improvements in student learning (Chalmers, 2011).

Professional recognition, particularly recognition underpinned by the PSF, also attracts significant criticism. Although some academics engage in professional recognition due to their deep personal commitment to teaching quality, others are driven to engage by institutional mandates (Peat, 2014, 2015; Shaw, 2018; van der Sluis, Burden, & Huet, 2016). Many institutions have embedded requirements for teaching qualifications into their hiring, promotion and probation policy (Peat, 2014, 2015; Turner, et al., 2013). This policy places engagement with professional recognition in danger of becoming purely instrumental (Peat, 2014, 2015; Turner, et al., 2013) and may limit true developmental impact over the long term (Shaw, 2018). Applying ‘codified professional standards’ (Shaw, 2018, p. 145) when assessing teaching capability has also been criticised as being overly rigid, as it fails to allow for creativity and freedom in teaching practice (Jarvis, 2019) and fails to recognise indigeneity or cultural characteristics (Buissink, Diamond, Hallas, Swann, & Sciascia, 2017). Thus, it is not clear whether professional development or recognition genuinely improve teaching quality.

One way to assess the impact of professional development and professional recognition on teaching quality is to investigate academics’ teaching self-efficacy as a result of participating in such programs. Self-efficacy is ‘[p]eople’s judgments of their capabilities to organize and execute courses of action required to attain designated types of performances’ (Bandura, 1986, p. 391). This is a useful concept when considering the impact of professional development and recognition because an individual’s belief in their capability to perform an action drives behavioural change, maintenance, and generalisation (Schunk, 1991). Indeed, Botham (2018) found that one of the benefits of participating in professional development that aligned to the PSF and led to fellowship was a boost in confidence and a validation of practice.

Following Bandura's (1977) logic, academics who have a low perception of their capability to teach (or capability to learn how to teach more effectively) will avoid professional development and forego professional recognition, whereas academics who feel efficacious in teaching will work harder and persist longer on taxing teaching tasks, effecting actual behaviour change that results in improved teaching quality. This effect is enduring and insulating, as '[s]uccesses raise efficacy and failure lowers it, but once a strong sense of efficacy is developed, a failure may not have much impact' (Schunk, 1991, p. 208).

Consequently, this research investigated the unique strategic impact of professional development and recognition in the rapidly developing Chinese and Hong Kong SAR higher education sector using action research. We extend an earlier intervention detailed in Greer, Cathcart and Neale (2016) to investigate whether the combination of a competency-based teaching development program called *Teaching Advantage Global* and professional recognition through HEA fellowship could uniquely improve the teaching self-efficacy of academics in China and Hong Kong SAR. Specifically, we answer two research questions:

- (1) Does the delivery of a PSF-aligned professional development program in teaching increase the teaching self-efficacy of academics in Shanghai, Chengdu, and Hong Kong SAR?
- (2) Does professional recognition through the HEA Fellowship scheme increase the teaching self-efficacy of academics in Shanghai, Chengdu, and Hong Kong SAR??

The intervention is designed using the principles of Cognitive Apprenticeship Theory (Collins, Brown, & Holum, 1991), which is a social learning process that aims to make expert thinking visible as learners engage in a community of inquiry. The intervention is assessed by measuring changes in teaching self-efficacy (Bandura, 1977, 1986) following professional development and then mentoring and submission for professional recognition.

Method

We conducted an action research project using Barnard and colleagues' (2011) version of Susman and Evered's (1978) five-stage action research model. Action research aims to be future-oriented, collaborative, and situationally grounded in order to develop capacity and generate theory in action (Susman and Evered, 1978).

Stage 1: Identifying and defining the problem

It is unclear whether implementing professional development and professional recognition of teaching in China and Hong Kong SAR is having a meaningful impact on teaching quality.

Our research investigates whether a scholarly, competency-based teaching development program designed to create a community of practice could increase teaching self-efficacy, and if so, whether teaching self-efficacy could further improve through mentoring to achieve professional recognition of teaching quality.

Stage 2: Selecting a course of action

Academic development programs and professional recognition can take a range of forms. We needed to determine which design would best impact on teaching quality. We assessed potential courses of action by conducting a literature review of professional development and recognition options, advantages, and disadvantages, which provided an evidence-based course of action. We found that the most impactful models of both professional development and recognition are:

- underpinned by the scholarship of teaching and learning (Laksov, 2018),
- engender communities of practice or inquiry (James and Lokhtina, 2018),
- encourage praxis (Daniels, 2017),

- delivered by practicing academics with situated contextual knowledge of teaching (Bamber and Stefani, 2016; Greer, et al., 2016), and
- focused on good teaching quality rather than excellence or performativity (Kuiper and Stein, 2019).

Ideal forms of academic development move away from a “tips and tricks” approach to generic skill building and towards supporting academics ‘in identifying their own challenges in their own academic environments, and turn these into opportunities for change and development’ (Geertsema and Laksov, 2019, p. 3). Given the academic mobility associated with the globalisation of higher education, professional development and recognition should be meaningful across institutional and national contexts.

Stage 3: Taking a course of action

Program design

Next, we actioned strategies to develop a scholarly, competency-based teaching development program that allowed participants in China and Hong Kong SAR to improve their teaching quality. Two of the researchers had worked on an institutional program of competency-based teaching development for doctoral students called *Teaching Advantage* (see Greer, et al., 2016 for detail), so we extended this design using the principles identified in Stage 2 to meet the needs of the Chinese and Hong Kong SAR higher education sector. We named this new program *Teaching Advantage Global* to both acknowledge its roots and clearly signal the international nature of the content and context.

When designing *Teaching Advantage Global*, we retained the underpinning theoretical framework of Cognitive Apprenticeship Theory (Collins, et al., 1991). Although apprenticeship models are often criticised for failing to make implicit aspects of expert practice explicit to the apprentice (Austin, 2009; Collins, et al., 1991), cognitive

apprenticeship addresses this by offering ‘a model of instruction that works to make thinking visible’ (Collins, et al., 1991, p. 6). Offering this professional development program in an Asian context meant that making the underpinning philosophy and goals transparent was key to creating mutual gains for the delivery team, the participants, and the institutional leads of the universities where the program was offered.

Cognitive apprenticeship exposes learners to the logic and strategies that experienced practitioners activate when applying their knowledge and experience to practical tasks (Collins, et al., 1991). This social learning approach encourages a community of inquiry to unpack expert thinking through instructional methods such as modelling practice, coaching the apprentice through tasks, and scaffolding skill-appropriate development (Collins, et al., 1991). This model empowers participants to reflect on their learning within the context of their practice: to consider whether *Teaching Advantage Global* was providing learning opportunities that were relevant to educators in the region.

By retaining the framework of Cognitive Apprenticeship Theory (Collins, et al., 1991), we also retained the facilitation style matching this paradigm. The program was facilitated by practicing academics active in teaching and research. This creates situated learning, as the varied experience and expertise of each academic enriched the community of inquiry (Austin, 2009). If the facilitators were practicing academics from a range of disciplines, we predicted it would be easier to co-construct learning by identifying and addressing the teaching challenges that were common across the community.

Next, we revised the program content to more appropriately and sensitively situate it within the Chinese and Hong Kong SAR context. For example, discussions of Australian approaches to teaching quality assurance were replaced with a discussion of global benchmarking and local quality assurance authorities. The role of higher education within society and the focus on desirable graduate attributes were shaped by Chinese governmental

strategies and the policy context (Zhu and Li, 2018). Discussions of active learning pedagogies were also revised to acknowledge the sensitivity of challenging norms of teaching practice that historically centre the academic rather than the students, and better reflect the cultures of educators and students (Yin and Wang, 2015). For example, the didactic “academic as expert” perspective was explicitly integrated into the program and directly acknowledged, but participants were guided to imagine the richer learning that might emerge if students were offered an opportunity to learn more actively with that expert. The evidence for each concept was referenced to provide a starting point for further engagement with the scholarship of learning and teaching. In revising the content, we retained the alignment of the program with the PSF (The Higher Education Academy, 2011) and clearly linked to each dimension of professional practice.

Finally, in order to provide professional recognition, we added a formal mentoring and application program to *Teaching Advantage Global*. The mentoring and application program was underpinned by the reflective practitioner model of professional learning (Brockbank, 2012), which helped each applicant to examine and describe their practice in a non-hierarchical, non-judgemental way. The mentoring was designed to support program participants to reflect on their practice and develop an application for Fellowship of the HEA. Such mentoring also continued the community of inquiry developed during the face-to-face component of the professional development program and helped establish international collegial networks.

Program implementation

The program centred on the idea of mutual gains for educators in China, Hong Kong SAR and Australia. This included practice exchange, insights into the national context, and new research and teaching partnerships. We implemented the program in two stages. First, 19

academics from 10 universities across Queensland, Australia were recruited to deliver *Teaching Advantage Global*. The Australian academics were selected on the basis of their excellence in learning and teaching and their desire to learn more about the Chinese and Hong Kong SAR higher education context. Many were national learning and teaching award winners, and most were Senior or Principal Fellows of the HEA.

Next, invitations to host the program were issued to a range of Chinese and Hong Kong SAR universities. Agreement was reached to offer the program at three sites—Shanghai, China; Chengdu, China; and Hong Kong SAR—on the basis that half of the participants would be from the hosting institution, and the remaining places offered to staff from other universities in the region. English was the agreed language of instruction for the program. Up to six Australian academics travelled to each location to deliver the three-day, face-to-face program of professional development.

During the program, participants engaged in experiential learning activities and formed a community of inquiry to unpack scholarly approaches to teaching, unit coordination, and academic career progression. The face-to-face delivery was supported by a number of online resources and spaces, such as a Teaching Philosophy creation app, a learning management system with online resources, a WeChat community discussion, and an alumni LinkedIn group. Care was taken to ensure these resources and spaces would be accessible in China.

In total, 179 academics from 49 universities proximal to Shanghai (n= 43), Chengdu (n= 61), and Hong Kong SAR (n= 69) participated in the professional development intervention. Participants were twice as likely to be female (66.5%) than male (30.2%) and had a mean age of 43.5 years (Mean= 43.5, SD= 7.29, Min= 28 years, Max= 65 years). The majority of participants reported being born in China (n= 124) or Hong Kong (n= 24), but a range of other countries were represented including Britain (n=9), the United States of

America (n= 6), Australian (n= 3), Malaysia (n= 1), South Korea (n= 1), South Africa (n=1), New Zealand (n= 1), and Sweden (n=1). Over 85% of participants reported that they attended every session.

The teaching experience of participants varied significantly. Just under 10% of participants reported that they had never lectured. For the 90% of participants who had lectured previously, their experience ranged from a single semester of lecturing to 50 semesters of lecturing. Just over 65% of attendees had five years of experience lecturing or less, suggesting that early career academics comprised the majority of the cohort. This is unsurprising given that an early career academic is also most likely to seek out professional development of this nature (Botham, 2018).

Second, following the face-to-face delivery, 60 participants were randomly selected from expressions of interest to obtain mentoring and seek professional recognition via an application for Associate Fellow, Fellow or Senior Fellow of the HEA as appropriate to their level of experience. Although demand for mentoring and submission of professional recognition was high, participation was capped due to the limited number of mentors available. Each of the participants was mentored in the two months following the professional development intervention by one of the 19 academics using technology such as Zoom and Skype. The mentoring comprised at least two meetings with the mentor and formative written feedback on two drafts of the fellowship application. Given this program design, our research investigates the effect of seeking recognition via mentored support.

Stage 4: Assessing the course of action

In order to assess the ability of professional development and professional recognition to uniquely impact the teaching self-efficacy of academics in China and Hong Kong SAR, we triangulated four forms of data. First, we measured teaching self-efficacy by asked

participants to rate their confidence undertaking 25 teaching tasks using a scale adapted from Hemmings and Kay (2009) (see Table 1). The data were collected immediately prior to the delivery of the professional development intervention (Time 1), immediately following the professional development intervention (Time 2), and immediately following the mentoring and submission for reward and recognition (Time 3). Surveys were matched over the three time points using deidentified codes. Of the 179 academics that participated, 112 submitted responses that could be matched across Time 1 and Time 2. An additional 29 participants submitted responses that could be matched across three time points.

[INSERT TABLE 1 ABOUT HERE]

A two-tailed, paired samples t test ($\alpha = .05$) was used to compare 112 participants' teaching self-efficacy immediately before ($\text{Mean}_{\text{Time1}} = 7.38$, $\text{SD} = 1.15$) and after the professional development intervention ($\text{Mean}_{\text{Time2}} = 7.96$, $\text{SD} = .94$). The improvement in teaching self-efficacy is statistically significant, $t(111) = -7.368$, $p < .001$. Cohen's d for this test was -0.56 , suggesting a medium effect size. This suggests that participating in *Teaching Advantage Global* significantly improved teaching self-efficacy, thus answering Research Question 1.

A one-way repeated measures ANOVA was used to compare 29 participants' teaching self-efficacy immediately before ($\text{Mean}_{\text{Time1}} = 7.35$, $\text{SD} = 1.27$) and after the professional development intervention ($\text{Mean}_{\text{Time2}} = 7.87$, $\text{SD} = 1.05$), and again following the mentoring and submission for reward and recognition ($\text{Mean}_{\text{Time3}} = 8.42$, $\text{SD} = .97$). Box plots indicated that the assumption of normality was supported, while Mauchly's test indicated that the assumption of sphericity was not violated. The ANOVA shows that there is a large and significant difference in teaching self-efficacy over time, $F(2, 50) = 12.649$, $p < .001$, partial $\eta^2 = .336$. Pairwise comparisons using a Bonferroni adjustment show that Time 1 and Time 2 ratings of teaching self-efficacy are significantly different, and that Time 2 and Time

3 ratings are just significantly different. This suggests that the mentoring and submission for professional recognition significantly improves teaching self-efficacy beyond what can be achieved via professional development, thus answering Research Question 2.

We also examined post-intervention evaluations for evidence of improved teaching self-efficacy. In general feedback, numerous participants mentioned specific skills they thought had improved during the program, including writing a well-structured teaching philosophy (LK546), constructively aligning teaching (CG057), providing constructive feedback to students (YC032), improving teaching impact (YC032), seeking out pedagogy through the scholarship (XZ123), and applying for HEA fellowship (LK546). This skill development resulted in greater teaching confidence, which made seeking recognition more achievable:

Firstly, it helped me rethink my teaching philosophy. Secondly, I got some teaching skills and ideas from the showcase. Thirdly, I have more confidence in teaching career. Finally, I have more courage to show my teaching experiences and outcomes to others and love to apply for HEA. (LM949, lecturing for 10 years)

1. Inspire me a lot. 2. Give me many practical method. 3. Give me confidence to apply the Associate Fellow of the HEA. (YM925, lecturing for one year)

Feedback indicated that participants could see this skill development was underpinned by scholarship, which was sometimes contested or debated:

Participating...help[ed] me understand teaching more thoroughly and systematically. This workshop covers almost all parts of the teaching process, and it provides evidence-based learning and teaching examples to illustrate a lot heatedly-discussed teaching issues. I got a lot of useful suggestions from this workshop to modify and improve my teaching. (XW881, lecturing for 10 years)

As a result, many of the participants mentioned their confidence was due to the fact they were ‘mastering teaching to be professional’ (L581, no lecturing data provided) and ‘clarify[ing]

the concepts of professional values' (HC126, some lecturing experience). For some participants, the intervention appeared to be a transformative experience:

I feel it opens a new door to my academic life. All the professors are so nice, helpful, patient. I'm also happy to meet some friends and teachers of other schools. I could feel the warm sunshine from Australia. (PP534, lecturing for five years)

For others, it was a reflective process:

[The program h]elped me thematise, reflect and reconsider my teaching values and pedagogies. Helped me relate it to current best practice. Helped me recognise areas for improvement or redirection. (KP433, no lecturing data provided)

There was evidence that a community of practice had developed during the program.

Participants reported that they experienced 'lots of meaningful exchanges with other teachers from other HK institutions' (AC914, lecturing for seven years), a variety of interdisciplinary perspectives (CM689, no lecturing experience), the ability to build professional connections with academics from other universities (CM689, no lecturing experience), and also the opportunity to build a social support network:

I have reviewed what my previous teacher development has offered me and expanded my vision in my profession. I feel that I am now a part of a global community of teaching. (HZ893, some lecturing experience)

I have a chance to refresh my understanding of [SoTL] and to learn new skill and tools to develop my teaching philosophy. Exchang[ing] ideas with other colleagues from other universities helped me to have new ways to teach and I definitely learnt from the interactive and interesting lessons. (LE209, lecturing for four years)

Sincerely appreciate the opportunity to meet and participate in this event. Trust it will have mutual benefit to us but also to our teachers. I personally not only enjoyed the exchange and sharing of knowledge but believe it will add true value to my teaching and involvement with SWJTU and other entities in China. (MA288, lecturing for five years)

Participants reported that they in turn were ‘determined to apply and contribute in the HEA community’ (ZA000, no lecturing data provided) because it was ‘a rare opportunity for academics to share successful stories on teaching’ (LX470, lecturing for eight years). Using the Cognitive Apprenticeship approach (Collins, et al., 1991), the program built a strong sense of belonging for participants in their discipline, university, Chinese academic community, and HEA community (see Figure 1). This sense of belonging appears stronger in the collectivist Chinese culture than the more individualistic Hong Kong culture. Hong Kong academics’ lower sense of belonging to the broader Chinese academic community but stronger sense of belonging to the global HEA community may be reflective of their colonial history as well as political tensions in the area.

[INSERT FIGURE 1 ABOUT HERE]

Participants’ teaching self-efficacy was measured immediately following the intervention, so we cannot assess developmental impact over the long term (Shaw, 2018). An alternate indicator of performance, however, is the success rates of participants who submitted applications for professional recognition. When their applications were independently assessed, 97% of participants were granted Fellowship. Of the 60 participants who submitted fellowship applications, four were awarded Senior Fellowship, 36 were awarded Fellowship, and 18 were awarded Associate Fellowship. These success rates suggest that academics who are confident in their ability to undertake teaching tasks can meaningfully reflect on their practice and achieve recognition for their teaching.

Stage 5: Specifying learning

One of the main motives for developing the original *Teaching Advantage* program in Australia was to address the sense of isolation and inadequacy that blights the experience of

many early career academics (Greer, et al., 2016). *Teaching Advantage Global* tested the impact of the program within a Chinese and Hong Kong SAR context. By inviting Chinese and Hong Kong SAR academics to partner with Australian academics to develop a claim for recognition as an HEA fellow, the program also created opportunities for mutual learning using the PSF as a common framework or language (Purcell, 2012) to think about learning and teaching.

Although professional development can be perceived as a “box ticking exercise” (Shaw, 2018), participants’ engagement with professional development positively impacted their teaching self-efficacy, supporting Botham’s (2018) finding that development leads to a boost in confidence. Further, participants who elected to engage with the program shared similar experiences and challenges, not only with institutional colleagues but with others from the region. Although contextualising professional development using local policy, culture, and practice was sometimes challenging, there appears to be a growing globalisation of the academic experience. Just as Chinese students’ approaches to studying are broadly similar to their Western counterparts (Price et al., 2011), our findings point to Chinese and Australian educators sharing similar concerns about learning and teaching.

When seeking professional recognition, the PSF created a space where reflection on teaching could happen and cross-disciplinary and cross-national discussions could occur. However, the PSF was developed by and for the UK sector. It is only in the last five years that institutions outside of the UK have sought to engage with the framework and it has been translated into other languages. While the PSF has been criticised for being overly rigid (Jarvis, 2019) and failing to recognise indigeneity or cultural character (Bussink et al., 2017), participants did not report that this was overly problematic during the intervention. This may partially be explained by the fact that the PSF could be read in English or Mandarin, which may facilitate better engagement with the framework.

Overall, the intervention demonstrated that the ability to apply for professional recognition was valued by Chinese academics and that seeking recognition as an HEA fellow further enhances teaching self-efficacy beyond completing professional development. Mutual benefits were achieved through Teaching Advantage Global, which may create a platform for new partnerships and collaborations between scholars and educators internationally.

Conclusion

Academics globally are experiencing increasing pressure to professionalise their teaching to improve teaching quality (Shaw, 2018). This pressure is particularly evident in East Asia where the higher education sector is intensifying its efforts to improve teaching quality (Calderon, 2018). This research investigated the unique strategic impact of professional development and recognition in the rapidly developing Chinese and Hong Kong SAR higher education sectors. We reported action research that demonstrated that competency-based teaching development through Teaching Advantage Global and professional recognition through fellowship of the HEA uniquely improve the teaching self-efficacy of academics in China and Hong Kong SAR. These findings have important implications for how international professional development and professional recognition can be meaningfully compounded to accelerate sector-wide strategic change.

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Table 1. Measure of Teaching Self-Efficacy adapted from Hemmings and Kay (2009)

Summated Scale	Ten-point Likert scale anchored at endpoints (1= not at all confident, 10= completely confident)	Time 1		Time 2		Time 3	
		Item-Total Correlation	Component Loadings	Item-Total Correlation	Component Loadings	Item-Total Correlation	Component Loadings
Items	Assigning grades	0.676	.802	0.742	.828	0.767	.845
	Providing feedback on assessment items	0.755	.842	0.796	.766	0.849	.863
	Assessing students' skills	0.694	.757	0.747	.798	0.661	.863
	Responding to student feedback	0.723	.819	0.716	.852	0.808	.707
	Coordinating subjects	0.779	.739	0.726	.840	0.899	.768
	Marking assignments	0.684	.808	0.736	.883	0.817	.928
	Designing subject assessment	0.760	.772	0.785	.837	0.848	.892
	Setting exams	0.707	.785	0.795	.881	0.707	.926
	Preparing assignments	0.744	.808	0.771	.887	0.810	.749
	Consulting with colleagues about coursework	0.697	.723	0.749	.722	0.711	.596
	Supervising teaching in a subject	0.724	.643	0.796	.708	0.777	.591
	Developing subjects	0.750	.662	0.804	.663	0.860	.775
	Consulting with students	0.753	.832	0.565	.559	0.688	.684
	Preparing tutorials	0.682	.636	0.711	.605	0.788	.519
	Delivering tutorials	0.764	.728	0.706	.638	0.759	.496
	Facilitating student discussion in class	0.648	.523	0.668	.426	0.800	.583
	Delivering lectures	0.519	.381	0.638	.392	0.818	.863
	Revising teaching strategies	0.685	.580	0.680	.443	0.821	.569
	Keeping up to date and revising lecture material	0.606	.537	0.659	.473	0.742	.542
	Preparing handouts	0.623	.497	0.693	.553	0.770	.566
	Selecting reading materials	0.666	.502	0.770	.702	0.882	.867
	Designing blended teaching activities	0.558	.366	0.552	.334	0.475	.218
	Successfully applying for HEA Fellowship	0.588	.419	0.568	.362	0.470	.162
	Creating a teaching portfolio	0.691	.472	0.674	.411	0.660	.465
	Writing a journal paper about a learning and teaching topic	0.638	.446	0.612	.470	0.502	.356
	Cronbach's alpha	.957		.962		.971	

Figure 1: Participants' Sense of Belonging to Academic Communities

