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Teacher Competence and Classroom Innovation in Foreign Language Teaching

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ABSTRACT: As foreign language classrooms continue to evolve, the quality of language education increasingly depends on teachers' professional competence and their capacity to implement innovative practices suited to twenty-first-century teaching and learning. This article examines the relationship between teacher competence and pedagogical innovation in foreign language teaching across secondary schools, universities, teacher training institutions, and language centres, arguing that the two exist along a continuum rather than as separate constructs. Drawing on literature in Applied Linguistics, Language Education, Educational Technology, and Teacher Professional Development, the analysis shows that pedagogical innovation is most effective when supported by strong pedagogical knowledge, subject expertise, reflective practice, digital competence, and institutional support. The discussion draws on structured teacher and student questionnaires measuring professionalism, competence, reflective practice, Technological Pedagogical Content Knowledge (TPACK), institutional support, and students' perceptions of classroom practice. The article concludes that strengthening teacher competence through continuous professional development, institutional support, collaborative learning, and technology integration is essential for advancing foreign language education, and recommends that institutions and policymakers prioritise teacher development initiatives suited to multilingual, digitally dynamic contexts.

KEYWORDS: Teacher competence, Pedagogical innovation, foreign language education, Teacher professionalism, Reflective practice, Technological Pedagogical Content Knowledge (TPACK)

1. INTRODUCTION

Foreign language education is now a central priority in twenty-first-century schooling. Globalisation, international migration, technological development, and economic integration have turned multilingual competence from a desirable academic asset into an essential skill for education, employment, and global mobility (Council of Europe, 2020; UNESCO, 2021). The role of the language teacher has expanded well beyond transmitting linguistic knowledge to include promoting meaningful communication, encouraging intercultural understanding, encouraging digital literacy, and supporting lifelong learning.

Teacher competence remains one of the most influential school-based factors affecting learners' achievement, motivation, and engagement (Darling-Hammond, 2006; Hattie, 2009). In foreign language classrooms, competence goes beyond target-language proficiency to pedagogical knowledge, technological competence, intercultural awareness, and responsiveness toward diverse learner needs. Communicative Language Teaching (CLT), Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT), and project-based learning have replaced grammar-translation approaches in policy and teacher training curricula (Richards & Rodgers, 2014; Ellis, 2003), yet classroom practice frequently lags, particularly where resources, training time, or leadership support are limited. Digital technology has accelerated this shift, giving teachers and learners access to authentic materials and personalised instruction while eliciting questions of digital competence, academic integrity, and equitable access (UNESCO, 2023). These demands are especially pronounced in multilingual societies such as Cameroon, an officially bilingual nation (English and French) with over 250 indigenous languages, where schools and universities also teach German, Spanish, Chinese, Arabic, and Italian. The government must therefore integrate teacher competence and pedagogical innovation to meet the needs of learners from varied linguistic backgrounds.

This article draws on structured teacher and student questionnaires examining professionalism, competence, reflective practice, TPACK, institutional support, continuous career development, and students' perceptions of teaching quality. It reviews relevant literature, presents an integrated theoretical framework, outlines the study's methodology, and reports findings from forty teachers and forty students across twelve institutions engaged in foreign language instruction.

2. BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

Foreign language education has been transformed over the past three decades by globalisation and technological development, turning multilingual proficiency from an advantage into a critical competence for education, employment, and diplomacy (Council of Europe, 2020; UNESCO, 2021). Teacher-centred approaches historically dominated instruction: the Grammar-Translation and Audio-Lingual Methods built grammatical knowledge but rarely produced learners able to communicate in authentic settings (Richards & Rodgers, 2014). Recognition that language learning requires meaningful communication, not just rule knowledge, drove the shift to communicative approaches. Central to this transformation is

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teacher competence, a multidimensional construct encompassing subject knowledge, teaching skills, classroom management, technological competence, and professional values (Shulman, 1987; Darling-Hammond, 2006; Hattie, 2009).

Pedagogical innovation is closely linked to teacher competence. It entails adapting teaching practice to foster learner autonomy, collaborative learning, and meaningful communication, a development greatly enhanced by digital technologies that expose learners to authentic language materials through podcasts, videos, and interactive media (Koehler & Mishra, 2009; UNESCO, 2023). These demands intensify in contexts such as Cameroon, where English, French, and numerous indigenous languages coexist within the same educational spaces. Teacher competence matters differently at each institutional level, yet shortages of qualified teachers, congested classrooms, inadequate resources, limited professional development, and unequal access to technology continue to constrain innovation. The article treats professional competence as a dynamic, lifelong process supported by reflective practice, technological literacy, institutional collaboration, and continuous development.

3. STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Despite sustained investment in curriculum reform, teacher education, language policy, and professional development, many learners complete several years of foreign language study without acquiring the ability to communicate effectively in the target language. This gap suggests that the challenge goes beyond the mere availability of teacher competence and points instead to an insufficient understanding of how teacher competence translates into pedagogical innovation and how this relationship shapes learners' language outcomes.

Although many foreign language teachers have adequate subject knowledge and professional qualifications, they often continue to rely on traditional instructional methods acquired during initial training, methods that frequently fail to meet the expectations of contemporary language education, which emphasises learner-centred instruction, communicative competence, collaboration, and effective use of digital technologies. This is not necessarily a matter of teachers resisting change; it is frequently associated with limited opportunities for continuous career development, inadequate institutional support, and weak alignment between teacher competence and innovative classroom practice.

There remains, therefore, a gap in understanding the relationship between teacher competence, pedagogical innovation, and successful foreign language teaching and learning. This article considers how these factors interact and the extent to which teacher competence fosters pedagogical innovation that improves learners' foreign language proficiency, with a view to helping to more effective teacher preparation, professional development, and language education policy.

4. PURPOSE AND OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The broad objective of this article is to examine the relationship between teacher competence and pedagogical innovation in foreign language education, determining how teachers' professional knowledge, teaching skills, and technological competence influence the application of innovative, learner-centred teaching practices. It studies the extent to which contemporary instructional approaches, including Communicative Language Teaching, Task-Based Language Teaching, technology-enhanced learning, and the responsible application of Artificial Intelligence, contribute to learners' communicative competence, critical thinking, creativity, collaboration, and autonomy. It further explores the role of continuous career development and institutional support in strengthening teacher competence and cultivating sustainable pedagogical innovation across secondary schools, universities, teacher training institutions, and language centres. It seeks to supply empirical results and practical recommendations for foreign language teaching within multilingual school environments.

5. RESEARCH QUESTIONS

This article considers one overarching research question: How do teacher competence and pedagogical innovation contribute to effective foreign language teaching and learning? This is tackled through the following specific questions: What constitutes teacher competence in contemporary foreign language education? How does pedagogical innovation influence teaching quality and learners' communicative competence? What relationship exists between teacher competence and pedagogical innovation? How does reflective practice, digital competence, and TPACK contribute to professional competence? What role do continuous career development and institutional support play in promoting innovation? What approaches can educational stakeholders adopt to strengthen teacher competence and promote pedagogical innovation?

6. LITERATURE REVIEW

6.1 Teacher Competence in Foreign Language Education

Teacher competence has evolved from an early focus on subject knowledge and classroom management toward a multidimensional construct integrating content knowledge, pedagogical expertise, technological competence, assessment literacy, reflective practice, intercultural awareness, and ethical professionalism (Shulman, 1987; Darling-Hammond, 2006). Shulman's theory of Pedagogical Content Knowledge (PCK) remains foundational: effective teaching requires more than subject mastery, since teachers must transform disciplinary knowledge into forms learners can grasp, anticipate misconceptions, select appropriate strategies, and assess effectively. In foreign language classrooms, PCK allows teachers to explain grammar clearly, facilitate communicative interaction, and adapt instruction to learners with different language backgrounds and proficiency levels. Darling-Hammond (2006) similarly links competence to teachers' ability to build supportive, cognitively engaging environments, while Hattie's (2009) synthesis confirms teacher quality as one of the strongest influences on learner achievement. In multilingual contexts such as Cameroon, this dimension of competence is especially significant, requiring teachers to accommodate learners' varied linguistic and cultural backgrounds while promoting communicative competence in the target language.

6.2 Pedagogical Innovation in Foreign Language Education

Pedagogical innovation has expanded beyond new techniques toward the thoughtful transformation of teaching and learning: designing experiences that promote communication, collaboration, creativity, and authentic language use. Communicative Language Teaching, developed in response to the limits of grammar-focused instruction, foregrounds communicative competence, that is, using language appropriately across contexts instead

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of simply manipulating grammatical structures (Hymes, 1972). Task-Based Language Teaching organises instruction around meaningful tasks, such as planning events or conducting interviews, through which learners build language competence alongside critical thinking (Ellis, 2003). Learner-centred instruction more broadly recognises learners' prior knowledge and interests in designing collaborative, project-based activities that increase motivation and ownership.

Educational technology expands these possibilities: multimedia, online forums, and virtual exchanges give learners authentic input while supporting independent learning (Godwin-Jones, 2018), and artificial intelligence extends this through automated essay scoring, pronunciation assessment, and personalised feedback (UNESCO, 2023), though it elicits questions of honesty and confidentiality that remain a matter of teacher judgement rather than technological availability. Innovation also extends to assessment, with presentations, portfolios, and peer and self-assessment increasingly supplementing grammar tests, and formative feedback supporting learning as well as measuring it (Black & Wiliam, 1998). Innovation nonetheless faces real constraints: crowded classrooms, limited resources, and insufficient professional development discourage experimentation, and Fullan (2007) argues that significant change needs sustained institutional support and joint professional cultures.

6.3 Reflective Practice and Continuous Professional Development

Reflective practice and continuous professional development (CPD) are necessary to sustain teacher competence over a career. Schön's (1983) distinction between reflection-in-action, adjusting instruction while teaching, and reflection-on-action, analysing lessons afterwards, captures how reflective teachers treat each classroom experience as a moment for growth rather than routine repetition. Farrell (2015) argues that structured reflection connects theory with practice and strengthens professional confidence, notably valuable where learners differ in proficiency and background. An important extension is classroom-based action research, through which teachers systematically investigate real challenges and formulate evidence-based solutions (Burns, 2010).

CPD is the ongoing process by which teachers update their knowledge and practices, most effective when continuous, collaborative, and tied to actual classroom experience (Day, 1999; Richards & Farrell, 2005). Wenger's (1998) Communities of Practice framework stresses the value of professional collaboration in reducing isolation and developing solutions collectively. Digital technologies have expanded access to professional learning for teachers in isolated or resource-constrained settings, and AI-assisted platforms now support personalised learning recommendations and lesson planning, provided teachers develop the digital competence to use them critically (UNESCO, 2023). CPD, nonetheless, remains limited in many systems by inadequate funding, heavy workloads, and infrequent, policy-driven rather than classroom-focused programming.

6.4 Technological Pedagogical Content Knowledge (TPACK) and Technology Integration

Effective technology use depends not on teachers' ability to operate digital tools but on embedding technology meaningfully with pedagogical and content knowledge, the premise of the TPACK framework (Koehler & Mishra, 2009). Extending Shulman's PCK, TPACK identifies three interacting domains: Content Knowledge, mastery of grammar, vocabulary, and cultural knowledge; Pedagogical Knowledge, instructional methods and learner motivation; and Technological Knowledge, the ability to evaluate and adapt digital tools to learning objectives rather than operate them. Their integration lets teachers combine content, pedagogy, and technology purposefully, for instance, interactive whiteboards for pronunciation, online forums for writing, and digital storytelling for speaking.

Digital resources provide authentic exposure to language and culture while supporting learner autonomy (Godwin-Jones, 2018), and AI extends this through personalised vocabulary instruction and automated feedback (UNESCO, 2023). Yet integration continues unevenly: many teachers face poor infrastructure and restricted technology-focused professional development, and some possess digital skills without the pedagogical knowledge to use them meaningfully, leaving technology used for presentation rather than communication and elevated thinking. Ethical questions around integrity, privacy, and algorithmic impartiality further require teachers to develop AI literacy that keeps human interaction central.

6.5 Institutional Support and Professional Development for Pedagogical Innovation

Educational institutions provide the structural conditions, professional development, resources, mentoring, collaborative communities, IT infrastructure, and sustaining leadership that enable teachers to sustain competence over time. Hargreaves and Fullan (2012) describe this as building professional capital, arguing that institutions investing in it improve instructional quality more reliably than those relying on curriculum reform alone. Effective CPD is sustained, collaborative, and directly tied to classroom experience (Darling-Hammond, Hyler, & Gardner, 2017), since short, unsupported training rarely changes practice. Leadership matters similarly: administrators who encourage experimentation and give constructive feedback increase teachers' willingness to innovate, whereas excessive control discourages it, and professional learning communities (Wenger, 1998) reduce isolation by giving teachers structured space to exchange strategies.

Adequate instructional resources, textbooks, materials, laboratories, and reliable connectivity continue to be essential, since even competent teachers struggle to implement learner-centred pedagogy without them. Institutions also carry growing responsibility for governing AI use ethically (UNESCO, 2023). Yet many institutions, particularly in developing countries, face inadequate funding, teacher shortages, and limited infrastructure, factors that reinforce traditional instruction despite reforms advocating otherwise.

6.6 Students' Perceptions of Teacher Competence and Pedagogical Innovation

Learners' perceptions offer a valuable, independent check on teaching performance, since students directly experience teachers' practices in ways that qualifications and self-evaluation cannot entirely capture (Marsh & Roche, 1997). Learners are well positioned to judge whether instruction promotes participation and constructive feedback, and positive perceptions generally correlate with greater engagement and achievement (Hattie, 2009). Learner-centred approaches, collaborative activities, and low-anxiety classroom climates where errors are treated as natural to acquisition all shape these perceptions positively (Richards & Rodgers, 2014), as does visible technology integration (Godwin-Jones, 2018). Formative feedback that guides improvement, rather than merely evaluating finished work, is strongly associated with learners perceiving teachers as supportive and competent (Black & Wiliam, 1998). In multilingual contexts, teachers who recognise learners' language backgrounds and adopt culturally responsive pedagogy are more likely to build the confidence on which language acquisition depends.

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7. THEORETICAL AND CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

This article adopts an integrated theoretical framework merging Shulman's Pedagogical Content Knowledge Theory, Koehler and Mishra's TPACK Framework, and Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory, on the premise that no single theory adequately explains how teacher competence shapes pedagogical innovation and learner outcomes across linguistic, cognitive, pedagogical, technological, and sociocultural dimensions at once.

Pedagogical Content Knowledge (Shulman, 1986, 1987) questions the assumption that subject mastery alone produces effective teaching. PCK is the distinctive professional knowledge that lets teachers convert complex content into forms learners can access, anticipate misconceptions, select instructional strategies, and make sound decisions about lesson sequencing, materials, and assessment. In foreign language classrooms, this extends to explaining grammar clearly, facilitating communicative interaction, and adapting instruction to learners' varied linguistic and cultural backgrounds, particularly important in multilingual settings like Cameroon. Its main limitation is that it predates the centrality of digital technology in teaching, which is why the framework needed extending.

Technological Pedagogical Content Knowledge (Koehler & Mishra, 2009) supplies that extension, adding Technological Knowledge to Shulman's content and pedagogical dimensions. Effective teaching, in this view, occurs at the intersection of all three: knowing not just what to teach but how to teach it using technology that sincerely improves understanding, be it through interactive tools for pronunciation, online forums for writing, or digital storytelling for speaking practice. TPACK anchors the study's dedicated questionnaire section on teachers' confidence in applying technology into instruction.

Sociocultural Theory (Vygotsky, 1978) frames learning as fundamentally social, constructed through interaction and joint effort rather than individual cognition alone. Language is acquired through authentic communicative engagement in which learners negotiate meaning rather than through memorisation. Central to the theory is the Zone of Proximal Development, the gap between what learners can do independently and what they can achieve with guidance, which gives teachers a clear role: designing activities that challenge learners while remaining achievable with support, then gradually withdrawing it as competence grows. Closely related are scaffolding, modelling, sentence starters, and structured feedback, which require teachers to judge accurately how much support is needed. The theory also emphasises collaborative learning and language as a cultural tool, with relevance increasing alongside digital mediums that let learners interact with peers and native speakers beyond the classroom.

Taken together, the three theories are more powerful than separately: PCK explains how teachers combine subject and pedagogical knowledge, TPACK extends this to technological competence, and Sociocultural Theory explains how learning happens through interaction. Together they map onto this study's variables: teacher competence (PCK), technology integration (TPACK), and pedagogical innovation and engagement (Sociocultural Theory), with institutional support as the enabling condition that lets competence translate into innovation, which in turn produces effective teaching and learning: improved engagement, communicative competence, achievement, and satisfaction.

This conceptual framework clearly aligns the study's variables: teacher competence functions as the independent variable, pedagogical innovation as the mediating variable, institutional support and continuous professional development as enabling variables, and effective foreign language teaching and learning as the dependent variable. This association indicates the central research focus: teacher competence leads to pedagogical innovation when fostered by enabling institutional conditions, together resulting in improved language teaching and learning outcomes.

The relationship forms a chain: teacher competence leads to pedagogical innovation, which, enabled by institutional support, produces effective foreign language teaching and learning. Students' perceptions are deliberately included alongside teachers' self-reports, since learners offer an independent check that self-assessment alone cannot provide. Overall, the framework illustrates that improving foreign language education requires more than curriculum reform or technological investment: it requires professionally competent teachers, working within enabling institutions, capable of translating competence into innovative practice.

8. METHODOLOGY

The study adopted a convergent mixed-methods design, combining a structured Likert-scale questionnaire (5 = Strongly Agree to 1 = Strongly Disagree) with the capacity for qualitative follow-up, chosen because teacher competence and pedagogical innovation cannot be adequately comprehended through measurement alone (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018). To ensure methodological rigour, questionnaire items were developed through a multi-step process. Initially, a comprehensive review of established instruments and recent literature in teacher education, foreign language pedagogy, and educational technology provided the conceptual basis for item selection and adaptation. Items were mapped to the study's six thematic dimensions in alignment with best practices highlighted in the literature and were drafted to reflect both context-specific and internationally recognised constructs. Sample items included statements such as "I regularly adapt my teaching methods to incorporate new technologies" and "My institution provides regular opportunities for professional development." To enhance content validity and clarity, two experts in language education reviewed the items and provided feedback leading to minor wording adjustments and the elimination of redundant or ambiguous questions. The instrument was piloted with a small group of teachers and students (N = 10) from non-participating institutions. Pilot participants highlighted the need for clearer response scale labels and more contextually relevant examples within several items; these suggestions were incorporated before full-scale deployment. Cronbach's alpha statistics indicated satisfactory internal consistency across all thematic dimensions, supporting the reliability of the measures.

Data were collected from 40 foreign language teachers and 40 students across twelve institutions, comprising two secondary schools, three universities, three teacher training institutions, and four language centres. Institution selection followed purposive sampling aimed at capturing a wide spectrum of teaching contexts within Cameroon's multilingual educational system, recognising possible differences in teacher competence and institutional support between, for example, well-resourced university departments and smaller language centres. Within participating institutions, teacher participants were included if they held a current teaching position in a foreign language (English, French, Spanish, German, or Italian) and possessed at least one year of experience; teachers on leave or not engaged in classroom teaching were excluded. Student participants were enrolled in a foreign language class taught by one of the sampled teachers and were at least in their second year of study. Efforts were made to achieve balanced representation across genders, languages, and professional roles. To address potential sampling bias and strengthen

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representativeness, institutions were selected to reflect both urban and peri-urban settings, different resource levels, and both public and private institutions where possible. Participation was voluntary, and all participants provided informed consent. These criteria aimed to ensure the findings could be meaningfully interpreted as reflecting the diversity of conditions under which foreign languages are taught in Cameroon.

Participants were selected through a combination of purposive and segmented sampling, ensuring representation among institutional categories and professional roles. This approach was chosen to obtain a sample that adequately reflects the diversity of educational contexts and teacher functions in foreign language instruction, thereby increasing the validity and transferability of the findings. The teacher questionnaire measured six dimensions: teacher professionalism (6 items), teacher competence (5 items), reflective practice (4 items), TPACK (5 items), and institutional support and professional development (4 items), alongside a parallel seven-item student questionnaire measuring learners' perceptions of the same constructs from the classroom floor. Quantitative data were analysed descriptively using frequencies, percentages, and mean scores, interpreted against conventional bands of 3.50 to 5.00 (high agreement), 2.50 to 3.49 (moderate agreement), and below 2.50 (low agreement), with independent-samples t-tests used to compare teacher subgroups and teacher and student perceptions. The choice of descriptive and comparative statistical analysis aimed to explain both central tendencies and possible variations between groups. Open-ended responses were thematically analysed through an inductive coding process, supporting a subtle understanding of complex views underpinning questionnaire responses. Ethical procedures, including informed consent, confidentiality, and voluntary participation, were observed throughout, with instruments coded to protect participants' identities.

9. PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS OF FINDINGS

9.1 Introduction

This section presents the findings generated from the teacher and student questionnaires. Forty teachers, comprising secondary school teachers, university lecturers, teacher educators, and language instructors, and forty students completed the respective instruments across the twelve participating institutions. Findings are presented descriptively, using frequencies, percentages, and mean scores, organised according to the demographic profile of respondents and the six thematic dimensions of the teacher questionnaire, followed by students' perceptions of teacher competence and pedagogical innovation. Item means are read against the five-point scale using the bands described in the methodology.

9.2 Demographic Characteristics

The sample (N = 40 teachers) was 62.5% male (25) and 37.5% female (15). Age was fairly evenly spread from the thirties upward, and the sample was experienced and well-qualified: 67.5% had more than ten years of teaching experience, and 55% held a Master's or Doctorate. English and French accounted for 55% of subjects taught, with Spanish, German, and Italian evenly represented among the remainder (15% each). Twelve institutions took part: two secondary schools, three universities, three teacher training institutions, and four language centres.

Table 1: Demographic Characteristics of Teacher-Respondents (N = 40)

Category	Breakdown	n	%
Gender	Male / Female	25 / 15	62.5 / 37.5
Age	20-29 / 30-39 / 40-49 / 50+	4 / 12 / 14 / 10	10.0 / 30.0 / 35.0 / 25.0
Qualification	Bachelor's / Master's / Doctorate	18 / 10 / 12	45.0 / 25.0 / 30.0
Experience	1-5 / 6-10 / 11-15 / Over 15	4 / 9 / 12 / 15	10.0 / 22.5 / 30.0 / 37.5
Subject	English / French / Spanish / German / Italian	12 / 10 / 6 / 6 / 6	30.0 / 25.0 / 15.0 / 15.0 / 15.0

This mature, experienced, well-qualified profile supplies essential context for interpreting the findings that follow: the strong competence and professionalism scores reported are not attributable to an inexperienced or under-qualified sample, lending greater significance to the institutional-support findings below.

9.3 Teacher Professionalism and Competence

Teachers reported strong professionalism (mean = 3.86) and strong competence (mean = 3.86).

Table 2: Teacher Professionalism and Competence, Item Means (N = 40)

Dimension	Item	Mean	Band
Professionalism	1. Teaching as lifelong learning	4.15	High
	2. Participates in workshops/training	3.85	High
	3. Professional ethics influence behaviour	3.93	High
	4. Institution provides clear standards	2.78	Moderate
	5. Collaboration enhances professionalism	4.00	High

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	6. Feels respected as a professional	4.45	High
Competence	7. Confident teaching communicative skills	4.18	High
	8. Regularly evaluates own effectiveness	3.35	Moderate
	9. Adapts lessons to learners' needs	3.90	High
	10. Applies training to instruction	3.73	High
	11. Lessons aligned with curriculum	4.13	High

The highest-rated items were feeling respected as professionals (4.45), curriculum alignment (4.13), and communicative teaching (4.18). The primary weakness within professionalism was institutional provision of clear professional standards (2.78, moderate), the only item to fall below the high band. Within competence, regular self-evaluation of teaching performance was comparatively weaker (3.35, moderate), with the largest group of responses (17 of 40) neutral.

9.4 Reflective Practice

Table 3: Reflective Practice, Item Means (N = 40)

Item	Mean	Band
12. Reflects on lessons individually	3.10	Moderate
13. Keeps a teaching journal	2.88	Moderate
14. Discusses challenges with colleagues	4.10	High
15. Encouraged by institution to reflect	2.33	Low

Reflective practice (overall mean = 3.10, moderate) revealed a clear split between unstructured and institutionally structured reflection. Discussing challenges with colleagues scored strongly (4.10), whereas journal-keeping and, most notably, institutional encouragement of reflection (2.33, low, with 26 of 40 disagreeing or strongly disagreeing) scored significantly lower. Teachers engage readily in peer discussion but receive minimal institutional support for systematic, documented reflection.

9.5 Technological Pedagogical Content Knowledge (TPACK)

Table 4: TPACK, Item Means (N = 40)

Item	Mean	Band
16. Uses digital tools in teaching	3.13	Moderate
17. Integrates multimedia resources	3.28	Moderate
18. Assesses students via online platforms	2.08	Low
19. Needs more technology training	4.55	High
20. Technology motivates student participation	4.33	High

TPACK yielded the most revealing results in the study (overall mean = 3.47, moderate). The item "I need more training to use technology effectively" received the highest score of any item (4.55), with 37 of 40 agreeing or strongly agreeing. Actual technology use (3.13) and testing students via internet platforms (2.08, the second-lowest score in the dataset) were both considerably lower, despite teachers' strong recognition of technology's motivational value (4.33), indicating that eagerness and awareness exceed current training, particularly around assessment.

9.6 Institutional Support and Professional Development

Table 5: Institutional Support, Item Means (N = 40)

Item	Mean	Band
21. Regular professional development provided	1.85	Low
22. Receives constructive feedback	2.73	Moderate
23. Opportunities to share best practice	2.98	Moderate
24. Institution supports innovation/experimentation	2.30	Low

Institutional support was clearly the weakest dimension (mean = 2.47, low), the only one to fall below the moderate band. Regular professional development provision recorded the lowest mean of any item (1.85), with 33 of 40 disagreeing or strongly disagreeing and no neutral responses. Support for innovation and experimentation was similarly weak (2.30). Only the more informal items, feedback from supervisors or peers (2.73) and opportunities to share best practices (2.98), reached the moderate band, still well below the scores for professionalism and competence.

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9.7 Students' Perceptions

Table 6: Students' Perceptions of Classroom Practice (N = 40)

Item	Mean	Band
1. Modern and engaging teaching methods	2.50	Moderate
2. Lessons help practise speaking/communication	3.28	Moderate
3. Technology makes lessons more interesting	2.28	Low
4. Treats students fairly and respectfully	3.70	High
5. Encouraged to participate actively	3.58	High
6. Provides helpful feedback	3.48	Moderate
7. Classroom atmosphere motivating/professional	3.48	Moderate

Students' overall perception of classroom practice (mean = 3.19, moderate) was more reserved than teachers' self-assessment (3.86). The clearest convergence with teacher data was technology: students rated technology use as the weakest item in their questionnaire (2.28, low), directly corroborating teachers' low scores on digital tool use and online assessment. "Modern and interactive teaching methods" was rated similarly (2.50). By contrast, fair and respectful treatment (3.70) and encouragement to participate actively (3.58) were the two highest-rated items, suggesting the instructional and technological gaps are not experienced as a lack of respect or engagement.

9.8 Summary of Findings

Three key patterns emerge from this dataset. Teachers indicate strong professionalism and competence, a finding corroborated by students specifically in interpersonal domains. Reflective practice is effective informally but deteriorates when reliant on institutional structures. Institutional support is recognised as the clear outlier in the study, the only dimension in the low band, containing the lowest-scoring item overall, and independently corroborated by students' lowest-rated item, technology use. The overall mean across all 24 teacher items is approximately 3.42, a figure that appears moderate to high in isolation but masks a fairly nuanced internal structure: professionalism and competence elevate the average, while institutional support significantly lowers it. The data provide strong support for the article's central argument: the primary constraint on pedagogical innovation is not teacher competence, which remains consistently strong, but institutional support, which is consistently and, in some cases, severely lacking.

The strong professionalism and competence scores are in line with theoretical expectation: experienced, well-qualified teachers (67.5% with more than ten years' experience; 55% holding a Master's or Doctorate) develop the integrated subject and pedagogical knowledge that Shulman's (1987) PCK and Darling-Hammond's (2006) work on teacher quality would predict. This answers the study's first research question, since teacher competence in this sample is strong and multidimensional even where surrounding institutional conditions are weak, suggesting professionalism is sustained largely by personal and collegial commitment rather than organisational investment.

The gap between informal reflection (discussing challenges with colleagues, 4.10) and institutionally structured reflection (journal-keeping, 2.88; institutional encouragement, 2.33) speaks directly to Schön's (1983) distinction between reflection as a habit of mind and reflection as formalised practice. Teachers are evidently reflecting, but without the scaffolding that Farrell (2015) and Richards and Farrell (2005) argue is necessary to convert reflection into sustained, evidence-based practice. The particularly low score for institutional encouragement suggests institutional indifference toward reflective practice specifically. This matters because reflective practice is one of the primary mechanisms through which teacher competence is sustained over a career (Farrell, 2015); left to individual initiative alone, gains in competence are less likely to be shared or built upon systematically.

The TPACK findings are the most pedagogically actionable in the study. Teachers strongly recognise technology's value but report considerably weaker practical capacity, particularly for online assessment. The near-universal agreement that more training is needed shows this is not a workforce resistant to technology but one acutely aware of its own skills gaps, precisely the pattern Koehler and Mishra's (2009) TPACK framework predicts when Technological Knowledge lags behind Pedagogical and Content Knowledge. That students independently identified technology use as the weakest aspect of their own classroom experience reinforces UNESCO's (2023) caution that positive attitudes toward technology do not automatically translate into meaningful pedagogical integration, narrowing the practical response required to a training and infrastructure problem rather than a persuasion problem.

The institutional support findings are the study's most consequential result. Anchored by the lowest single item score in the survey (professional development provision, mean = 1.85), the data support the argument, drawn from Hargreaves and Fullan (2012) and Fullan (2007), that sustainable pedagogical innovation depends on institutional professional capital rather than individual competence alone, a pattern consistent with OECD (2020) findings on persistent international disparities in teachers' access to sustained professional development. Read against the consistently strong competence scores reported elsewhere, this is the clearest evidence that the constraint on innovation here is institutional rather than individual, since capable, committed teachers are operating within institutions that do not yet provide the training, feedback structures, or permission to innovate.

The relationship between teacher and student data is more nuanced than simple agreement. Where teachers rate themselves highly on professional identity and instructional confidence, students are notably more reserved, particularly regarding modern teaching methods and technology use, precisely where the teacher data itself is weakest, suggesting students are experiencing the downstream consequences of the same institutional gaps teachers report from their own side. This triangulation, consistent with the study's aim of incorporating both teacher and student perspectives (Marsh & Roche, 1997), strengthens confidence in the overall pattern of findings and aligns with Vygotsky's (1978) Sociocultural Theory insofar as it confirms that classroom quality is co-constructed and observable from both sides of the interaction.

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Taken together, the discussion supports this article's central theoretical claim: teacher competence and pedagogical innovation are interdependent, but the relationship is not self-sustaining, and in this sample, it is institutional support, not teacher competence, that is failing to sustain it. The findings validate the integrated theoretical framework (PCK, TPACK, and Sociocultural Theory) while sharpening its practical implications: further developing individual teacher competence is likely to yield far less benefit than strengthening the institutional systems identified here as the most severe constraint in the data.

10. CONCLUSION

This article examined the relationship between teacher competence and pedagogical innovation in foreign language education across secondary schools, universities, teacher training institutions, and language centres. The findings show that teachers report strong professionalism and competence and readily engage in informal, collegial reflective practice. Set against this, two clear and interlocking gaps emerge: institutional support is markedly and consistently the weakest dimension measured, containing both the lowest single item score in the study (professional development provision, mean = 1.85) and the lowest section average (mean = 2.47); and teachers' technological pedagogical competence, while attitudinally very positive, is held back by a near-universal, strongly felt need for further training, particularly around assessment, a gap independently corroborated by students. These findings support the article's central argument that pedagogical innovation in this sample is constrained not by a shortage of competent, committed teachers, but by the institutional conditions required to let that competence become innovative classroom practice. The consistency of this pattern across six independent thematic dimensions, and its corroboration by an entirely separate group of respondents, students, gives the finding a degree of robustness that a single-source study could not have offered.

11. RECOMMENDATIONS

Institutions should establish regular, structured professional development programmes as an urgent priority, given that this was both the single weakest item and the area of clearest teacher dissatisfaction in the study. Targeted TPACK training should be prioritised around online assessment and digital tool integration specifically, since teachers identify this as their most pressing need and students independently corroborate weak technology use in the classroom. Institutions should create explicit structures for reflective practice, including protected time, guided journals, and peer-reflection sessions, to convert teachers' already strong informal reflective habits into sustained, documented practice, rather than leaving reflection entirely dependent on individual initiative. School and institutional leadership should take deliberate steps to signal support for pedagogical experimentation, since low agreement on institutional support for innovation suggests a genuine structural constraint rather than individual reluctance to change. Curriculum developers and teacher education programmes should build structured mentoring and technology-focused practicum experiences into initial teacher training, so that the institutional gap identified here does not simply repeat itself in the next generation of teachers. Finally, institutions and researchers should continue gathering student feedback alongside teacher self-report as a standard, low-cost way of validating where professional development resources are most needed, given how clearly student perceptions corroborated teachers' own reported weaknesses in this study.

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