

December 2018

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### Recommended Citation

Wang, Haixia; Liu, Gang; Li, Shunqin; and Luo, Lingjing (2018) "A Study of CFL Teacher Competency in the U.S.: An Overview of Professional Guidelines, Resources, and Standards," *Chinese Language Teaching Methodology and Technology*. Vol. 1: Iss. 4, Article 8.

Available at: <https://engagedscholarship.csuohio.edu/cltmt/vol1/iss4/8>

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# **A Study of CFL Teacher Competency in the U.S.: An Overview of Professional Guidelines, Resources, and Standards**

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## **ABSTRACT**

Chinese as a foreign language (CFL) is a critical language in the United States, and the importance to have competent CFL teachers has been more and more realized. However, the literature does not show sufficient research on CFL teacher competency. To fill the gap, a series of exploratory research studies are initiated. As a part of the initiation, this study overviews the professional guidelines, resources, standards and requirements for CFL education in the U.S. at the national and state levels. The findings will be useful for designing teacher education program and teacher training program. In addition, student teachers, pre-service teachers, and in-service teachers can also use them as great references for their academic and/or professional development.

**Keywords:** Chinese as a foreign language, teacher competency, standards, guidelines, professional development

## **1 Introduction**

In recognition of its importance in an increasing global economy and national security, U.S. State Department lists Chinese as one of the critical-need foreign languages and expands its education through kindergarten, elementary, secondary, postsecondary schools, as well as workplaces (U.S. Department of Education, 2008). With its expansion, the standards and requirements for CFL (Chinese as a Foreign Language) education also change significantly over the past few decades. According to The Standards for Foreign Language Learning in the 21st Century (ACTFL et al, 2006), foreign language education in the U.S. must change its focus from teaching grammatical knowledge to helping students develop communicative skills and cultural competence. This change of focus also takes place in CFL education.

Adair-Hauck & Donato's (1994) study points out, foreign language learners are more likely to develop communicative skills and cultural competence through learner-centered instructional practices. To ensure an adequate amount of learner-centered activities are incorporated into classroom education, Zhan (2008) suggests that we should first educate foreign language teachers (through professional development) on the similarities and differences between different pedagogical approaches used in different educational systems (e.g. teacher-centered or student-centered). Zhan (2008) argues that teachers' personal language learning experience often has lingering but significant impacts on their instructional practice, and

professional development can help change or minimize these impacts if teachers need to assume a different pedagogical approach in a new educational system. Similar arguments can also be found in Haley and Ferro's (2011) study on Arabic and Chinese teachers' perception of the diversity of language learners and the role played by language educators in the U.S. school system. Their study indicates that while language teachers' own learning experience may have great influence on their perception of the U.S. school culture, they can, with the help of professional development, notice the difference between their own learning experience and the educational models used in the U.S. schools, and therefore are more willing to modify their teaching methods to include more learner-centered activities.

The premise of these studies is that if foreign language teachers want their teaching career to succeed in a specific educational system, they must first clearly understand the educational and professional standards, requirements, procedures, and available resources of that system. In the light of this, we have conducted this study on CFL Teacher Competency Requirements in the U.S. The current part of this study focuses especially on the introduction of U.S. government educational resources, guidelines and professional standards for CFL education.

## **2 U.S. National CFL Education Guidelines, Resources, & Standards**

### **2.1 Guidelines: Chinese Advanced Placement by College Board**

At the national level, one of the most influential government guidelines regarding CFL education is the implementation of Advanced Placement (AP) Chinese curriculum. Advanced Placement is a program administrated by the College Board, which provides high school students an opportunity to take college-level courses and examinations. Students who obtain high scores on the examinations may be granted placement and/or course credit in some U.S. colleges and universities. AP Chinese Language and Culture Exam was first administrated in 2007. Since then, the number of students taking the exam has grown rapidly. Different from other language exams, AP Chinese exam is a 100% computer-based exam. It assesses students' interpersonal, interpretive, and presentational communication skills in Mandarin Chinese, as well as their knowledge and understanding of Chinese culture. The exam takes about 2 hours and 13 minutes and includes a multiple-choice part (listening and reading) and a free response part (writing and speaking). Specific information about each part of the exam can be found on the College Board website (<https://apcentral.collegeboard.org/courses/ap-chinese-language-and-culture/course>).

In order to have their students participate in the AP Chinese exam, schools that offer AP Chinese courses need to submit their curriculum to the College Board for auditing to ensure the courses are at the same rigor level as colleges or universities courses. According to the College Board standards, an AP Chinese Language and Culture course should be designed to be comparable to a fourth semester (or equivalent) college/university level course taught in Mandarin Chinese. This course should deepen students' immersion in the language and culture of the Chinese-speaking world, which typically represents the point where students have completed approximately 250 hours of college-level classroom instruction. Course work should reflect the proficiency exhibited throughout the Intermediate range, as described in the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL) Proficiency Guidelines. Moreover, AP Chinese Language and Culture courses should be conducted exclusively in Chinese to help students to develop their proficiency across the interpersonal, interpretive and presentational modes of communication. The aim of the course is to help students develop ability to use

Mandarin Chinese in linguistically, culturally and socially appropriate ways in a real-life context. Instructor of the course is given maximum flexibility in choosing either traditional or simplified characters for their instruction, and the AP exams also accommodate both versions.

For teachers who are interested in developing an AP Chinese Language and Culture course, it is important to know and understand the current resources and requirements for AP courses and professional development. Most information can be found through AP Central (<https://apcentral.collegeboard.org/>). The page on AP Chinese Language and Culture (<https://apcentral.collegeboard.org/courses/ap-chinese-language-and-culture?course=ap-chinese-language-and-culture>) contains an important overview of the AP Chinese course content, assessments, and classroom resources, as well as exam formats and sample questions.

## 2.2 Funding Resources: NRC, FLAS, STARTALK, Flagship

On the national level, there are two important funding resources to support Chinese education: the National Resource Centers (NRC) program on East Asia and the Foreign Language and Area Studies (FLAS) fellowships program funded by the U.S. Department of Education.

The NRC Program provides grants to establish, strengthen, and operate language and area/international studies centers that will become national resources for any modern foreign language education. The grants support instructions in those fields that provide full understanding of certain areas, regions or countries, research and training in international studies, work in the language aspect of certain professional and other fields of study, and instruction and research on world affairs (<https://www2.ed.gov/programs/iegpsnrc/index.html>).

The FLAS fellowship program allocates academic year and summer fellowships to institutions of higher education to assist meritorious undergraduate students and graduate students to undertake training in modern foreign languages and related area/international studies. Eligible students can apply for the fellowship directly from an institution that has received an allocation of the FLAS fellowship (<https://www2.ed.gov/programs/iegpsflasf/index.html>).

The Chinese STARTALK program is funded by National Security Agency and organized by National Foreign Language Center. Many of the program offers free intensive Chinese programs to high school students over the summer. Some programs also offer training and professional development opportunities for Chinese language teachers (<https://startalk.umd.edu/public/>).

The language Flagship program is a national initiative that aims to change the way Americans learn foreign languages through groundbreaking educational approaches. Chinese is one of the critical languages that is included in this program. Currently the Language Flagship sponsors 11 Chinese Flagship Programs across the U.S., which are hosted respectively in Arizona State University, Brigham Young University, Hunter College, Indiana University, San Francisco State University, University of Hawaii, Manoa, University of Minnesota, University of Mississippi, University of North Georgia\*, University of Oregon, University of Rhode Island, and Western Kentucky University. All Flagship programs in these universities have their unique strengths and provide undergraduate students with an opportunity to achieve professional-level proficiency in Chinese alongside the academic majors of their choice (<https://www.thelanguageflagship.org/>).

## 2.3 Professional Standards: ACTFL, CLASS, CLTA-USA



### 2.3.1 ACTFL (American Council of Teaching Foreign Languages) Professional Standards for Foreign Language Education

The American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL) is a professional organization dedicated to the improvement and expansion of the teaching and learning of all foreign languages at all levels of instruction. ACTFL members include language educators and administrators from elementary through graduate schools, as well as members from American government and industry. ACTFL was founded in 1967. Since then, it has focused on various issues that are critical to language learners and educators and assumed a leadership role in the development of Proficiency Guidelines and creation of national language learning and teaching standards.

One of the most important standards created by ACTFL (2006) is the World-Readiness Standards for Learning Languages. According to its own summary, these standards “define the central role of world languages in the learning career of every student...” and “create a roadmap to guide learners to develop competence to communicate effectively and interact with cultural competence to participate in multilingual communities at home and around the world.” (quoted from ACTFL website). In addition, ACTFL also hosts an Annual Convention and World Languages Expo, which has now become the world’s largest and most comprehensive conference on language education, with it focus on the discovery of innovative programs, emerging trends that impact the language profession, and research-informed foreign language teaching practices.

### 2.3.2 K-12 CLASS (Chinese Language Association of Secondary-Elementary Schools) Professional Standards for K-12 CFL teachers

U.S. K-12 schools saw a rapid increase in the number of students learning Chinese in recent years. As a result, the demand for well-trained and highly qualified CFL teachers also increases significantly. To support the professional development of CFL teachers, the Chinese Language Association of Secondary-Elementary Schools (CLASS) collaborated with the National East Asian Languages Resource Center at Ohio State University and published the CLASS Professional Standards for K-12 Chinese Teachers in 2007 (Lee, Su, & Lin, 2007). Twelve Professional Standards are included:

- STANDARD 1: Language Proficiency
- STANDARD 2: Linguistic Competency
- STANDARD 3: Cultural Knowledge
- STANDARD 4: Second Language Acquisition
- STANDARD 5: Child Growth and Development
- STANDARD 6: Diverse Learners
- STANDARD 7: Learning Environment
- STANDARD 8: Instructional Planning and Strategies
- STANDARD 9: Assessment
- STANDARD 10: Communication Skills
- STANDARD 11: Technology Knowledge and Skills
- STANDARD 12: Professional Development

These professional standards describe the knowledge, skills, and teacher dispositions that beginning K-12 Chinese teachers should possess in order to meet the expectations for quality

instruction in Chinese language and culture in the U.S. The knowledge consists of linguistic (Standard 2, 4), cultural (Standard 3), technology (Standard 11), education (Standard 6), and psychological (Standard 5) knowledge. The skills include language (Standard 1), teaching (Standards 7, 8, 9) and communication (Standard 9) skills. Teacher dispositions are a vital element of teacher preparation as they represent the educators' values, actions, attitudes, and beliefs when they interact with students, families, community, and professionals. The guidelines for K-12 Chinese teacher dispositions are incorporated in all the twelve standards. While Standards 1-11 are designed to be used by Chinese teachers to formulate professional goals to enrich their content knowledge and skills, improve their teaching practices, and create effective learning environments to guide and monitor students' learning progress, Standard 12 requires teachers to constantly enhance and improve themselves through engaging in reflective practices and professional development.

These twelve standards outlined by CLASS describes what beginning K–12 Chinese teachers should know to effectively guide students in learning Chinese language and culture. More information regarding the CLASS standards can be found at their webpage (<https://nealrc.osu.edu/sites/nealrc.osu.edu/files/teacher-k-12-class-teachers-standards.pdf>).

### 2.3.3 CLTA-USA (Chinese Language Teacher Association) Professional Standards for Chinese Language Education in the U.S.

Established in 1962, the Chinese Language Teachers Association, USA (CLTA) is a professional organization devoted exclusively to the study of Chinese language, culture and pedagogy. Approximately half of its membership are educators and specialists in Chinese language, literature, linguistics and culture at colleges and universities around the world. There are also Chinese teachers at primary and secondary, and community schools, as well as students of Chinese and other interested parties. CLTA is affiliated with ACTFL and follows the national foreign language education and learning standards set up by the latter. It does not publish its own professional standards for Chinese education. However, it constantly promotes the study of Chinese language and culture by establishing, supporting and sustaining quality Chinese programs, K-16 language teaching and learning articulation, pre-service and in-service teacher training programs, and classroom-based application of the results of empirical research on Chinese language acquisition and instruction. Since its establishment, it has become the largest Chinese teacher organization in the U.S. In addition to partnering with ACTFL to host the largest annual convention for foreign language education, it has also started to host its own annual symposiums and conferences since 2014, which have now become another important platform for Chinese educators to present their research, showcase their pedagogical development, and communicate with each other about new trends in the teaching and learning of Chinese language and culture. For more information, please visit CLTA's website (<http://clta-us.org/>).

## **3 U.S. State CFL Education Requirements and Teacher Certification**

We selected seven sample states, including Pennsylvania, North Dakota, Florida, California, New York, Texas, and Ohio, for our study on the requirements for CFL teachers. In this study, we collected and analyzed the sample requirements issued by each state's Education Department regarding the acquisition of CFL Teacher's License or Certification.

### 3.1 Sample States Selection

In selecting the sample states, we first randomly selected four states from the Northeast, Midwest, South, and West regions to begin our study. A preliminary survey in these four states revealed that the state of Alaska lagged behind in CFL education and could not be further investigated. We then replace it with the state of California, based on the 2014-2015 K-12 Foreign Language Enrollment Survey Report (2017) (<https://www.americancouncils.org/sites/default/files/FLE-report-June17.pdf>, hereinafter Report). The same report was also used as a reference to choose the remaining three states from the Top Ten states that have the highest CFL student enrollment rates. Here is the breakdown of our selection procedure:

Step One: The United States Census Bureau divides the U.S. into four regions ([https://www2.census.gov/geo/pdfs/maps-data/maps/reference/us\\_regdiv.pdf](https://www2.census.gov/geo/pdfs/maps-data/maps/reference/us_regdiv.pdf)): Northeast (9 states), Midwest (12 states), South (16 states and Washington D.C.), and West (13 states). We first randomly selected one state from each of the four regions: Pennsylvania from the Northeast, Dakota from the Northwest, Florida from the Southern, and Alaska from the West. We then conducted a preliminary survey in these four states, and discovered that while the K-12 CFL enrollment rates in the first three states were normal, the rate in Alaska was too low (353 students in 2014-2015, which ranked fourth to the last nationally) to merit a further investigation (<https://education.alaska.gov/teachercertification/pdf/ApprovedProgramDirectory.pdf>). Furthermore, Chinese was not one of the languages included in the World Languages Teaching Program run by the Alaska Department of Education, which made it impossible for us to carry out further research.

Step Two: After reviewing the Report, we found that California was the only state in the West region listed in the Top Ten U.S. states that have the highest K-12 CFL student enrollment rates (ranked No. 2). We then decided to use California to replace Alaska for our investigation.

Step Three: Since the number of Chinese teachers is usually in direct proportion to CFL student enrollment rate, we used the Report again as a reference to choose the remaining three states from the Top Ten states that have the highest K-12 CFL student enrollment rates. These three newly chosen states were New York State (ranked No. 1), Texas (ranked No. 4) and Ohio (ranked No. 6).

### 3.2 Analysis of the CFL teacher requirements in the seven states

In general, the requirements for new Teacher Licensure/Certification application in the selected seven states are: 1) Holding a (minimum) bachelor's degree, 2) to complete a state-approved teacher/educator program, 3) to pass the required tests, 4) to pass fingerprint and criminal background check, and 5) additional special requirements.

#### 3.2.1 Holding a (minimum) bachelor's degree

In addition to holding a bachelor's degree in related fields, five of the seven states require a new applicant for Teacher License/Certification to have a minimum GPA of 2.5, while Pennsylvania requires a minimum GPA of 3.0 and Ohio has no minimum GPA requirement. It is notable that the minimum GPA required by the state's Department of Education for new Teacher License/Certification application may be lower than that required the state-approved



teacher/educator programs. For example, California's Department of Education requires the applicant to have a minimum GPA of 2.5, whereas the state-approved teacher/educator program at the California State University-Long Beach has a higher GPA requirement of 2.67.

### 3.2.2 To complete a state-approved teacher/educator program

State-approved teacher/educator programs usually include two types: 1. A university program where the applicant can obtain both a bachelor's degree or above and Teacher License/Certification; 2. A teacher/educator preparation program run by state-approved educational institutes, which provides different types of education-related courses.

### 3.2.3 To passed the required tests

There are three types of required tests: English writing and reading tests, tests for comprehensive instruction at a certain age level, and tests in specific content areas (such as ETS Praxis Chinese Mandarin: World Language 5665, American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages 606, Oral Interview-Chinese (Mandarin), and 601 Writing Proficiency Test-Chinese (Mandarin)). Applicants are not always required to take all the three types of tests. For example, in Texas, the only required test is the content area test, namely, ACTFL Written and Oral Examination, whereas in Florida, the ACTFL examination is one of the few options that can be used to prove the applicant's language proficiency. In Ohio, pre-service Chinese teachers are required to pass Ohio Assessment for Teachers 004 (OAE004), a K-12 instruction test, as well as the ACTFL Written and Oral Examination. In New York and Pennsylvania, all the three types of tests are required for new Teacher License/Certification applicants.

### 3.2.4 Additional special requirements

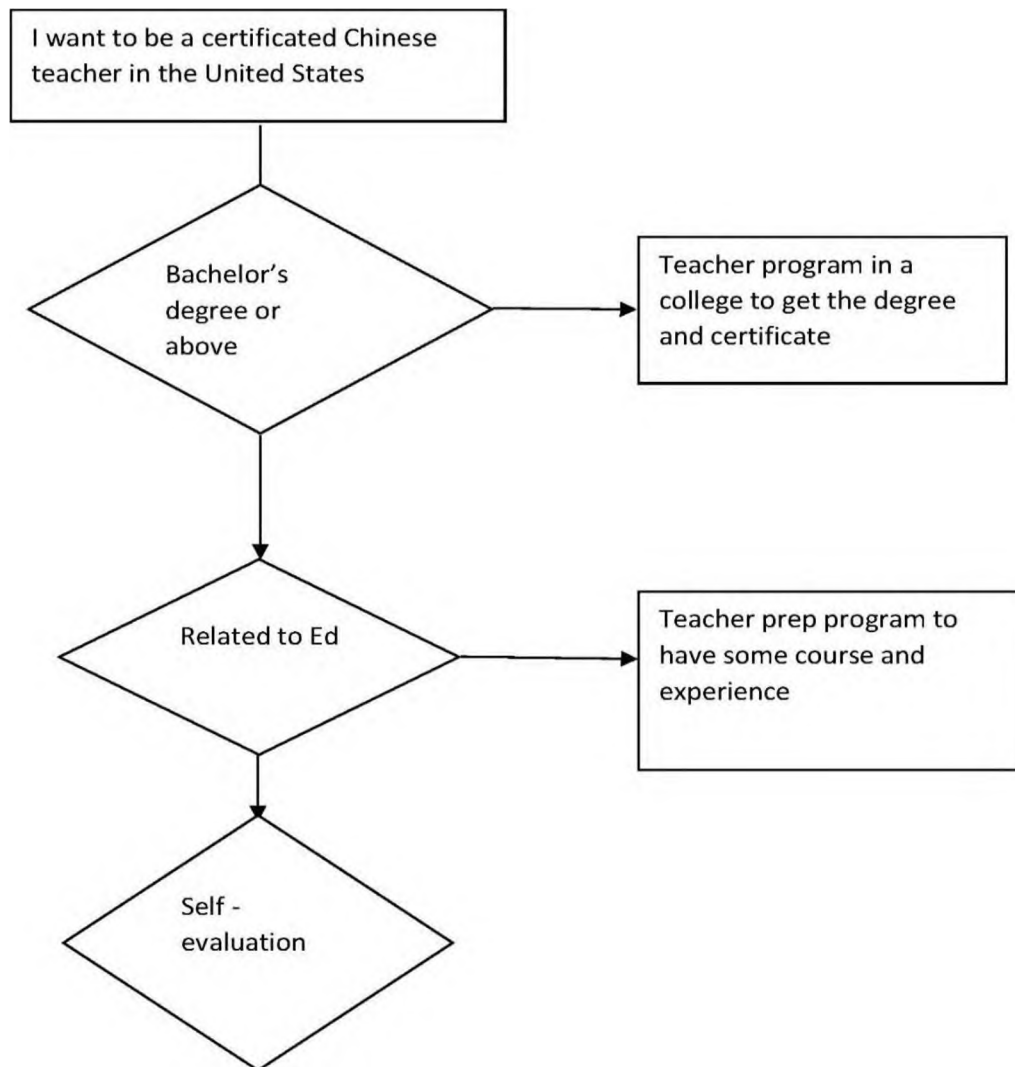
**Training:** Applicants for New York Teacher License/Certification also need to complete a six-hour training in accordance with Article 2 Sections 10-18 of the state education law.

**Citizenship:** In Pennsylvania, to obtain an initial teacher license, an applicant must hold a U. S. citizenship, except for world language teachers. (<http://www.education.pa.gov/Educators/Certification/OutOfState/Pages/Foreign-Educated-Teacher-Certification-Applicants.aspx>)

**Prerequisite:** California's Teacher License in elementary schools is a multi-subject teaching credential. It ensures teachers to be able to teach all daily subjects such as language arts, reading, math, science and social studies. For applicants who want to pursue their Chinese Teacher License there, this multi-subject teaching credential is a prerequisite.

**North Dakota Self-evaluation:** Since no Chinese teacher's program is approved in the state of North Dakota, the Chinese teacher licensure process there is a self-evaluation process, in which applicant needs to meet all the requirements for general studies, professional education, content area knowledge, and required examinations. See the flowchart below.





## 4 Discussion and Conclusion

This study is an overview of the professional guidelines, resources, standards and requirements for CFL education in the U.S. at the national and state level. As stated before, this study is a part of a series of research on CFL Teacher Competency in the U.S.

The purpose of the current study is to help pre-service teachers and student teachers better understand what they are expected to do as a CFL teacher in the U.S., what resources are available for their educational and professional development, and what the requirements and procedures they need to pay attention to. This study will also provide references for audience in China, especially for students who plan to apply for U.S. graduate schools in CFL education or related field and visiting scholars who will serve as guest teachers in American K-12 schools and universities.

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Lingjing Luo, a preservice teacher pursuing her Master's degree in Curriculum and Instruction at Cleveland State University. She also studies for obtaining teaching license in TESOL and TCFL.