



University of HUDDERSFIELD

University of Huddersfield Repository

Peng, Ying

The New Teaching Requirements and the Influence of Assessment: A Case Study of College English Reform in China

Original Citation

Peng, Ying (2011) The New Teaching Requirements and the Influence of Assessment: A Case Study of College English Reform in China. Doctoral thesis, University of Huddersfield.

This version is available at <http://eprints.hud.ac.uk/id/eprint/14052/>

The University Repository is a digital collection of the research output of the University, available on Open Access. Copyright and Moral Rights for the items on this site are retained by the individual author and/or other copyright owners. Users may access full items free of charge; copies of full text items generally can be reproduced, displayed or performed and given to third parties in any format or medium for personal research or study, educational or not-for-profit purposes without prior permission or charge, provided:

- The authors, title and full bibliographic details is credited in any copy;
- A hyperlink and/or URL is included for the original metadata page; and
- The content is not changed in any way.

For more information, including our policy and submission procedure, please contact the Repository Team at: E.mailbox@hud.ac.uk.

<http://eprints.hud.ac.uk/>

**The New Teaching Requirements and the Influence of Assessment:
A Case Study of College English Reform in China**

Ying Peng

**A thesis submitted to the University of Huddersfield
in partial fulfilment of the requirements for
the degree of Doctor of Philosophy**

**School of Education and Professional Development
University of Huddersfield
December 2011**

Copyright Statement

- I. The author of this thesis owns any copyright in it (the “Copyright”) and she has given The University of Huddersfield the right to use such Copyright for any administrative, promotional, educational and/or teaching purposes.
- II. Copies of this thesis, either in full or in extracts, may be made only in accordance with the regulations of the University Library. Details of these regulations may be obtained from the Librarian. This page must form part of any such copies made.
- III. The ownership of any patents, designs, trade marks and any and all other intellectual property rights except for the Copyright (the “Intellectual Property Rights”) and any reproductions of copyright works, for example graphs and tables (“Reproductions”), which may be described in this thesis, may not be owned by the author and may be owned by third parties. Such Intellectual Property Rights and Reproductions cannot and must not be made available for use without the prior written permission of the owner(s) of the relevant Intellectual Property Rights and/or Reproductions.

Acknowledgement

There are a number of people whom I would like to thank for their assistance in the research and writing of this thesis. First, I am grateful to my supervisor, Professor Mark Halstead for his unfailing patience and support. He took over the supervision when the research project was at a difficult stage, and his stimulation and insightful comments help my study to grow and develop, and take on new directions. Without his guidance and help, the thesis would have been impossible. Secondly, I would like to thank Dr Peter Sanderson, whose advice and feedback on the thesis were gratefully received. Special thanks are also due to Professor Michael Grenfell who helped me embark on this research journey and assisted me in developing my research ideas and in applying for scholarships.

I would also like to thank the staff at the School of Education and Professional Development, University of Huddersfield, for all the support they have provided during the writing-up period. I would like to express my gratitude to the School of Education, University of Southampton for giving me the financial support at the initial stage of my research. I am grateful to all those whom I surveyed, observed and interviewed, for their time and cooperation.

My friends in England, in particular Dr Chuanyan Zhu, Dr Jiamei Xiao and Mr Steve Bradbury, have been a constant refuge. I am grateful for their kindness and sincerity. I wish to express my appreciation and thanks to my life-long friends in China, who assisted me in my fieldwork.

Finally, I dedicate this thesis to my family, my parents and my husband. I owe my achievement to them, because they have always provided me with understanding, encouragement and support throughout all these years.

Abstract

College English reform is one of the main elements in the drive to improve the quality of higher education in China so that it meets the country's social and economic needs. This thesis focuses on three key aspects of the reforms: the new emphasis on speaking skills and communicative competence; the new learner-centred teaching model; and the influence (or washback effect) of the reformed College English Test. The research investigates the responses of teachers and students to the reforms and the factors influencing their attitudes. The aim is to contribute towards a fuller understanding of the impact of the reforms and generate recommendations for making them more effective.

The research consists of a case study of one of the 180 pilot centres for College English reform in China. A mixed methodology has been adopted, combining both quantitative and qualitative research. The data are drawn from 20 hours of observation of classroom teaching, 397 questionnaires (46 completed by teachers and 351 by students) and 15 in-depth interviews (13 with students and two with teachers). Since the university under investigation offers an International English course (ITE) to some students as an alternative to College English (CE), both courses have been studied. This comparative element has proved important, since in many ways ITE has been more successful than CE in responding to the New Teaching Requirements.

As a snapshot of the response to the College English reforms at a particular Chinese university at a particular moment in time, this research provides fresh insights into the obstacles facing attempts to develop students' speaking skills, the continuing influence of textbooks and exams on teachers' practice and students' attitudes, the reluctance of many students to become autonomous learners, and the continuing assumption that it is the teacher's task to control all key aspects of the learning process.

Contents

List of Figures and Diagrams	11
List of Tables.....	12
Abbreviations	13
Chapter 1 Introduction	14
Chapter 2 Historical Review of CE.....	18
2.1 CE education: achievements and issues	18
2.2 CE Reform and the New CE Teaching Requirements	21
2.2.1 Changes in teaching objectives	21
2.2.2 Flexibility in teaching requirements.....	23
2.2.3 Flexibility in course design	24
2.2.4 New teaching models	26
2.2.5 Changes in evaluation	27
Chapter 3 CET and IELTS	29
3.1 CET	29
3.1.1 What is CET?	29
3.1.2 The CET's strength and limitations	30
3.1.3 The CET reform	32
3.2 IELTS	35
Chapter 4 Literature Review	37
4.1 Key concepts in EFL: CC and communicative language teaching (CLT).....	37
4.2 Learner-centredness	39
4.2.1 Definitions of learner-centredness	40
4.2.2 Practical considerations.....	41
4.2.3 Theoretical bases for learner-centredness	43
4.2.4 General characteristics of the LC Approach	50
4.3 Washback Effects.....	58
4.3.1 Definitions of washback.....	58
4.3.2 Theoretical studies of washback	60
4.3.3 Empirical Studies of Washback	65
4.3.4 Empirical washback studies in mainland China.....	70
4.4 Summary	72
Chapter 5 Research Methodology	75

5.1 Research methodology	76
5.1.1 Research questions	76
5.1.2 A mixed research methodology.....	78
5.2 Research design and research context.....	80
5.2.1 Research design – A case study	80
5.2.2 Research context	82
5.3 Data collection instruments and pilot studies.....	84
5.3.1 Questionnaires	85
5.3.2 Observations.....	88
5.3.3 Interviews	91
5.3.4 Summary of the data collection instruments	93
5.4 Two important issues – triangulation and ethics.....	93
5.4.1 Objectivity? My own position as researcher	94
5.4.2 Triangulation	95
5.4.3 Ethical considerations	97
5.5 Data collection procedures and data analysis.....	99
5.5.1 Classroom observations.....	99
5.5.2 Questionnaires	101
5.5.3 Interviews	103
5.6 Summary	104
Chapter 6 Findings from the Teacher Questionnaire	106
6.1 Findings from Part 1 of the questionnaire:.....	106
6.2 Comparison between two courses and two exams	109
6.2.1 Curriculum arrangement and time allocation for speaking skills	110
6.2.2 The importance of speaking skills to students judged from their learning behaviours	111
6.2.3 Classroom activities used in these two courses.....	112
6.2.4 Language use in the two courses	116
6.2.5 Aspects of the washback effects of testing.....	116
6.2.6 Degree of the washback effects of testing.....	117
6.2.7 Nature of the washback effects of testing	117
6.2.8 Teachers’ evaluation of these two tests.....	118
6.2.9 Learner autonomy in these two courses	119
6.3 Questions only belonging to CE and CET: 9, 10, 13, 14 and 20	120

6.4 Summary	124
Chapter 7 Findings from the Student Questionnaire.....	126
7.1 Findings from Part 1: Participants' general perceptions of learning English at higher education level.....	126
7.1.1 Question 1 - Learning motivation	126
7.1.2 Question 2 - Students' perceptions of each language skill in general English learning.....	127
7.1.3 Question 3 – The necessity of having specialized speaking lessons.....	129
7.1.4 Question 4 - Students' perception of the influence of testing (in general) on teaching and learning	130
7.1.5 Question 5 - Aspects of learning influenced by English tests (in general)	130
7.2 Comparison between the two courses and the two exams	131
7.2.1 Frequency of practising language skills or knowledge in/after class on each course - Questions 6 and 19.....	131
7.2.2 Characteristics of the CE and ITE courses – Question 7 and Question 20.....	135
7.2.3 Time spent on practising speaking English each week - Questions 8 and 21	135
7.2.4 Learning outcomes for speaking skills – Questions 9 and 22.....	136
7.2.5 Familiarity with the tests - Questions 10, 12, and 23.....	137
7.2.6 Teachers' talk about each test during classroom time -Questions 11, 13, and 24	138
7.2.7 Students' perception of the importance of each test - Questions 14, 15, and 25 ..	138
7.2.8 The nature of the influence of the tests - Questions 16 and 26.....	139
7.3 Special questions on CET	139
7.3.1 Washback effects on other stakeholders apart from students and teachers – Question 17	139
7.3.2 Students' attitudes to the introduction of a compulsory speaking test in CET - Question 18	140
7.4 Summary	140
Chapter 8 Findings: The Characteristics of the Classroom Teaching-Learning Process.....	142
8.1 Teaching content	143
8.1.1 Sources of teaching materials.....	143
8.1.2 Types of teaching materials.....	147
8.1.3 Language skills emphasized.....	149
8.2. Teaching Methods	152
8.2.1 Classroom activities and organization patterns.....	152

8.2.2 Time allocation between ‘Teaching’ and ‘Practice’	161
8.2.3 Use of English by teachers and students:	162
8.3 Summary	164
Chapter 9 Findings: The Characteristics of a More LC and Speaking Skills-Oriented Class	165
9.1 Oral aspects of English.....	165
9.1.1 Vocabulary/phrase teaching and learning combined with training in oral aspects of English.....	165
9.1.2 Grammar teaching combined with training in the oral aspects of English	167
9.1.3 Other skills with oral aspects of learning	168
9.1.4 Speaking skills training in a certain topic	170
9.2 Teachers’ explicit practice of language features	173
9.3 Communicative learning opportunities	179
9.4 Laughter	182
9.5 Praise and encouragement.....	185
9.6 Relevance to students’ own lives	187
9.7 Summary	188
Chapter 10 Findings: Student Perceptions of the Learning Process	189
10.1 Language skills.....	189
10.1.1 What decides the students’ perceptions of language skills	189
10.1.2 More practice on receptive than on productive skills by the students after class	190
10.1.3 Training in speaking skills in class	192
10.1.4 Factors that influence the students’ willingness to speak English in and after class	192
10.2 Teaching model.....	199
10.2.1 Students’ attitudes to a computer-based teaching and learning model	199
10.2.2 The LC approach.....	200
10.2.3. Students’ perceptions of their own autonomy in learning.....	201
10.3 Testing and washback effects of testing.....	206
10.4 Summary	209
Chapter 11 Interpreting the Data: Identifying Key Factors in the Response to the New Teaching Requirements.....	210
11.1 Introduction	210
11.2 The social and cultural context.....	210
11.2.1 Underlying beliefs and values in teaching and learning	211

11.2.2 Collectivism and individuality	212
11.2.3 Power distance.....	213
11.2.4 Uncertainty avoidance.....	213
11.2.5 Exam-driven	214
11.2.6 The linguistic setting	215
11.2.7 Commentary	216
11.3 Influences on the teachers' response.....	217
11.3.1 Personal experience.....	217
11.3.2 Students	218
11.3.3 Personal attributes	219
11.3.4 Textbooks	220
11.3.5 Washback effects of summative testing.....	221
11.3.6 Availability of technological facilities	222
11.3.7 Size of class.....	223
11.3.8 The university/faculty context.....	224
11.3.9 Commentary	224
11.4 Influences on the students' response.....	226
11.4.1 Situational factors.....	226
11.4.2 Psychological/affective factors in EFL learning.....	229
11.4.3 Personal attributes/cultural traits.....	231
11.4.4 Commentary	232
11.5 Summary	233
Chapter 12 Conclusion and Study Implications.....	234
12.1 Summary of the research findings.....	234
12.1.1 Research topic one: development of speaking skills.....	234
12.1.2 Research topic two: adoption of LC teaching model	235
12.1.3 Research topic three: washback effects of CET and IELTS	238
12.1.4 Relationship between the three research topics.....	239
12.2 Recommendations for policy makers, teachers and students.....	241
12.2.1 Recommendations for policy makers	242
12.2.2 Recommendations for teachers	244
12.2.3 Recommendations for students	245
12.3 Suggestions for future research	246
Bibliography.....	248

Appendix I: Table of Influential Empirical Washback Studies	264
Appendix II: Teacher Questionnaire	266
Appendix III: Student Questionnaire	271
Appendix IV: Observation Scheme.....	275
Appendix V: Interview Schedules.....	276
Appendix VI: Sample Interview with a Student	278
Appendix VII: Sample of the Analysis of Content	284
Appendix VIII: CE Teaching Requirements 2007	289

List of Figures and Diagrams

Figure 1-1 Structure of the English education system in China.....	15
Figure 4-1: A basic model of washback.....	62
Figure 5-1 Research design.....	80
Figure 6-1: Gender proportion of teacher respondents.....	106
Figure 6-2: Factors influencing teaching.....	108
Figure 6-3: Aspects of teaching influenced by CET4 and IELTS.....	116
Figure 7-1: The necessity to include a specialized spoken English course.....	129
Figure 7-2: Frequencies of each skill or aspect of knowledge being practised in CE course.....	131
Diagram 11-1: Model of influences on the teachers' responses.....	226
Diagram 11-2: Model of influences on the students' responses.....	233
Diagram 12-1: Relationships between three research topics.....	241

List of Tables

Table 3-1: Comparison between the structures of the previous and reformed CETs.....	34
Table 3-2: Comparison of the score allocation between CET4/6 and IELTS.....	36
Table 5-1: Washback research sub-questions in relation to the Washback model proposed by Hughes (1993).....	77
Table 5-2: Research questions and data collection instruments used.....	85
Table 5-3: Comparative design in classroom observation.....	90
Table 6-1: The influence of testing in general.....	109
Table 6-2: Frequencies of classroom activities used in the two courses.....	113
Table 6-3: Frequency statistics about teachers' opinions on the relationship between these tests and CC.....	118
Table 7-1: Student's motivation in learning English.....	126
Table 7-2: Students' perception of the influence of testing on teaching and learning.....	130
Table 7-3: Independent Samples Test Results about the time spent on practising speaking skills.....	136
Table 8-1: Classroom activities by TA on the CE course.....	153
Table 8-2: Classroom activities by TB on the CE course.....	154
Table 8-3: Classroom activities by TA on the ITE course.....	156
Table 8-4: Classroom activities by TB on the ITE course.....	156
Table 8-5: Frequencies of teaching activities used by TA on both courses.....	158
Table 8-6: Frequencies of teaching activities used by TB on both courses.....	158
Table 8-7: Differences of time allocation for practising speaking skills by the two teachers when teaching on the two courses.....	162
Table 9-1: Language features covered in the ITE lessons.....	174
Table 9-2: Communicative learning opportunities.....	180

Abbreviations

CC: Communicative Competence

CE: College English

CET: College English Test

CLT: Communicative Language Teaching

COLT: Communicative Orientation of Language Teaching

EFL: English as a Foreign Language

ESL: English as a Second language

ESP: English for Specific Purposes

G/P: Group/Paired work

IELTS: International English Language Testing System

ITE: International English

IW: Individual Work

L2: Second Language

LC: learner-centred

MoE: Ministry of Education

RA: Reading Aloud

SET: Spoken English Test

SFL: Systemic-Functional Linguistics

SP: Student Presentation

TA: Teacher A

TB: Teacher B

TOEFL: Test of English as a Foreign Language

TP: Teacher Presentation

T&S: Teacher & Student Interaction

WTO: World Trade Organization

Chapter 1 Introduction

No one can deny the role that English, as the lingua franca, has played in globalization: it has been used as the main instrument to access science and technology, computers and electronic media; to conduct trade and tourism, commerce and industry; and to exchange information and communication.

English is the official language for 45 countries in the world. One third of the world population speak English and 75% of the television programmes are produced in English. 95% of the United Nations conferences and meetings are conducted in English and 80% of information on internet is presented in English (Wang, 2006: 3).

In China too, English has become much more important in recent decades. Since China's economic reforms and policies of opening-up to the outside world in the late 1970s, dramatic economic and social changes have taken place and these have involved rapid developments in English teaching, as Cheng (2008:16) points out:

..... there has also been a great boom in foreign language education in China. Foreign language education, especially English education, has become more and more important for Chinese learners at all levels of education.

After China's entry into the World Trade Organization (WTO), successfully holding the 2008 Olympic Games and the 2010 World Expo, English has been gaining more popularity among people in all walks of life. It is China's number one foreign language. According to Zhang (2003) the English competence of Chinese graduates plays a significant role in improving the country's overall national strength and competitiveness. English skills are tested and required for people in all professions seeking promotion in governmental, educational, scientific, research, medical, financial, business and other government-supported institutions (He, 2001 and Cheng, 2008). It is perceived by the nation as a valuable means to achieve modernization and by individuals as a useful tool to realize their academic or career dreams. Therefore, Cheng comments that 'it is no exaggeration to say that China has the largest English-learner population in the world' (2008:17).

In China English is taught from primary schools through to college or university level, as well as in specific training programmes. However, in this dissertation, the focus is on English education at tertiary level. In China, English as a Foreign Language (EFL) teaching at tertiary level is divided into two types: one for the relatively small number of English majors, the other for the majority of students who do not major in English.

The English education received by non-English majors is called College English (CE), which is the focus of my research. The following chart is a summary of the structure of the education system for EFL in China.

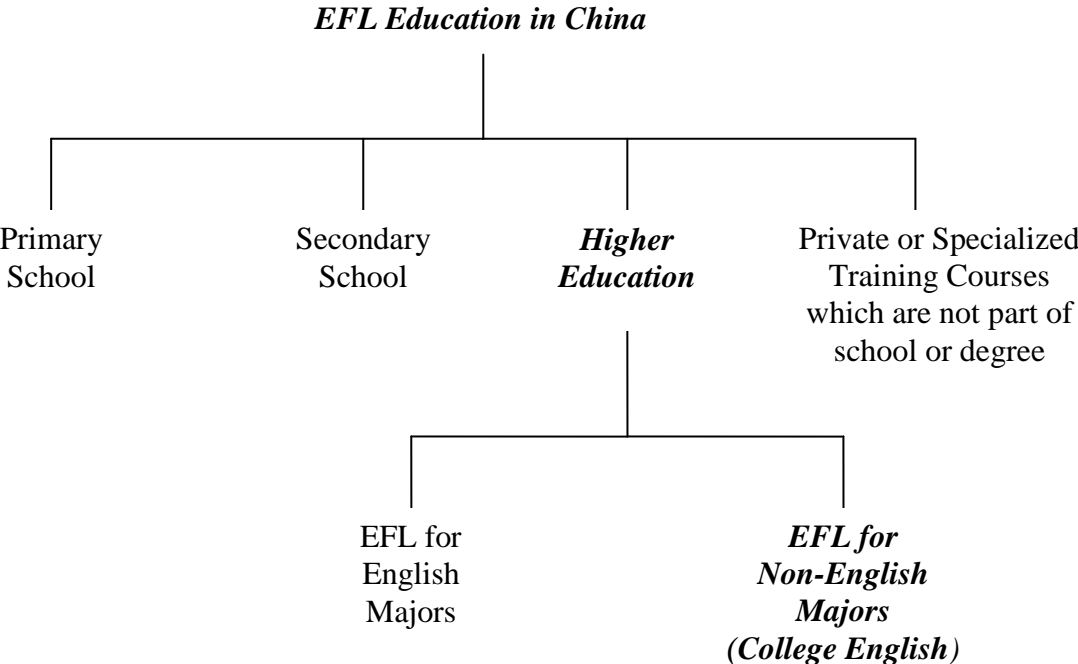


Figure 1-1 Structure of the English education system in China

In order to achieve its modernization and sustainable development, China has a higher demand for education, in terms of both quantity and quality. With the expansion of enrolment at Chinese universities and colleges, higher education is becoming more popular and common, and the quality of higher education is becoming more crucial. At the beginning of the 21st century, the Chinese Ministry of Education (MoE) initiated a ‘Higher Education Teaching Quality and Reform’ project, mainly covering four aspects: the construction of elite courses, CE reform, awards for excellent teaching and the evaluation of tertiary education teaching

(Wang, 2006). It is worth noticing that CE reform is regarded as one of the major drivers to improve the quality of higher education in the country. The important role of CE is obvious. CE reform is intended to expand the use of high-level technology in promoting computer-assisted teaching and learning, to set minimum requirements in CE education, and to reform the College English Test (CET). During recent years, CE reform has made noticeable achievements: new CE Teaching Requirements were published; new comprehensive textbooks with courseware were designed; 180 pilot centres across the country have started testing the new courseware and the new teaching model as specified in the new Teaching Requirements; and the CET reform has been undertaken (Wang, 2006).

The current research aims to investigate how the reform of CE has been carried out in one of the above-mentioned 180 pilot centres, especially with regard to the New Teaching Requirements and new CET. There are five major changes in the New Requirements as compared to the previous syllabi: changes in teaching objectives; more flexibility in the Teaching Requirements; flexibility in course design; new teaching models; and changes in evaluation. The details of the changes will be discussed in the next chapter. According to the New Teaching Requirements, particular attention should be given to the speaking skills and a more student-centred teaching model should be adopted. As a result, my research interests lie in speaking skills development, the teaching model in English classrooms and the influence of the reformed CET.

When I approached the research context (the specific university located in the northeast of China), however, it was found that CE is not the only English course available to its undergraduates. The university also offers an International English (ITE) course to some undergraduates as part of their degree courses, with the International English Language Testing System (IELTS) being its designated exam. This English course, as an alternative to CE, attracted my interest. Both English courses have been selected as the research subjects in the current study.

In accordance with the issues mentioned above, three main research questions were identified as central to my research project:

1. How do teachers and students on these two courses respond to the new emphasis on speaking skills in the teaching objectives and what factors influence their responses? How are

speaking skills developed in these two courses? Which course is able to achieve a better result in developing learners' speaking skills? How does it manage to do so?

2. Has the learner-centred (LC) teaching model recommended in the New Requirements been adopted in the CE course? What are the teaching models adopted in these two courses?

3. What influence do the reformed CET and IELTS impose on English teaching and learning?

The three questions are discussed more fully at the start of Chapter 5. Together they are intended to get to the heart of the importance of the New CE Teaching Requirements and the CET reforms and their impact on teachers and students. The new emphasis on speaking skills reflects both changes in the conceptualisation of language learning (with a greater emphasis on communicative competence (CC) and less on the intricacies of grammar) and the changing economic and social needs of China following the opening-up policy of recent years. The historical and theoretical context for this shift in the teaching objectives of CE is discussed in more detail in Chapter 2. The new LC teaching model is part of the modernisation process and represents a move away from traditional approaches that have their roots in Confucian values towards a model that is intended to meet the needs both of individual learners and of society more closely. Aspects of learner-centredness in recent educational writing are reviewed in the first half of Chapter 4. The historical background of the reforms to the CET and IELTS is explored in Chapter 3, and since the washback effect of testing (i.e. the direct and indirect influence that testing has on both teaching and learning) is particularly relevant to the present study, a detailed review of the literature relating to the concept and effects of washback is presented in the second half of Chapter 4. The next three chapters therefore provide the structural and academic context within which the current study has been carried out.

Chapter 2 Historical Review of CE

Chapters 2 and 3 will provide an introduction to the CE teaching and testing system and the comparison of CET and IELTS. This background information is essential in that it not only presents a picture of the research context, but also explains how the research questions were formed. CE, formerly called Service English, refers to the mandatory English courses offered to all non-English major university or college students all over China. Currently, there are about 5 million students taking this course in more than 1000 Chinese universities or colleges. CE courses may include intensive reading, extensive reading, listening, speaking and specialized English. Individual universities or colleges may vary in their curriculum arrangements and teachers' duties. CE has now become a core course in China's higher educational curricula. However, it is the hard work of generations of teachers, researchers and educators that has brought about CE's current success.

2.1 CE education: achievements and issues

Researchers, educators and teachers have different opinions regarding the evaluation of CE teaching and learning. Some suggest that remarkable achievement has been made in CE education. Professor Yang Huizhong, director of the CET Committee, is a representative of this view. He argues that CE education is a great success, because the English proficiency of the university/college students nowadays is much higher than it was in the early 1980s. One example is that by 2000, 3.19 million students had passed CET 4 and got their certificates, which means that they had reached a level of English proficiency where they could read at a speed of 70-100 words per minute, comprehend the listening contents at a rate of 130-150 words per minute, and write a composition at a speed of 120-150 words within half an hour. This is really a great contrast with the students at universities in the early 1980s, when only one third of them could read 17 words per minute (Yang, 2000).

Professor Hu Zhuanglin (2002) also agrees with this opinion. He argues that English is taught and learnt in China as a foreign language, which differs from English as a second language (ESL), and thus it is unfair to set ESL requirements as the standard for Chinese EFL learners. He quotes a report in *People's Daily Online* saying that Chinese students are ranked fourth among all Asian countries based on their average Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL) scores. According to Hu (ibid), however, China is effectively ranked first among

countries where English is used as a foreign language, because the first three countries (the Philippines, India and Sri Lanka) all regard English as their second language. He concludes that it is unjustified to consider Chinese CE education inefficient.

Besides the improvement in the students' English proficiency, several new textbooks have been designed and published. They are communication-oriented and student-centred. Original teaching materials published and used in countries where English is the native language are included. These changes have enriched the CE teaching resources (Luo & Zhang, 2003).

Another achievement of the CE education is the improvement of the teaching staff (*ibid*). This is not to say teachers nowadays are better than teachers in the past, but just that more and more teachers now can have formal training in teaching before they start to teach. Teachers have a better opportunity to learn the target language either by studying or having training in countries where English is the native language or by learning through high technology, such as researching and reading on the Internet or joining an on-line discussion forum where they can meet and learn from language teachers with different backgrounds all over the world. And with the increasingly significant status English has as an international language, more research has been done. The results of this academic research and their implications for practical teaching and learning are published in more and more specialized journals. All of these may improve the teachers' qualifications and experience in academic issues, teaching methods, cultural awareness, etc. Furthermore, both educators and students themselves have realized that English is the medium for them to communicate with the outside world; just to learn knowledge of the language is not the final goal.

Despite the great success CE has achieved, however, both Professor Yang Huizhong and Professor Hu Zhuanglin as well as many other researchers and scholars have commented on the unfavorable outcomes it has had, which should be addressed as well. Among them, the most significant and obvious one is the learners' relatively low English proficiency considering the time and effort spent (Premier Li Lanqing 1999 cited in Liu & Zhou 2003). By the time they enter universities or colleges, they have already studied English for about six years. And later on in their higher education, they learn general or specialized English for another 2-4 years. It is assumed that their proficiency should not be too low. However, the fact is a totally different story. Years of English education have produced a group of learners

who can read, but cannot write in English; who can comprehend listening materials but cannot speak English.

Many employers are disappointed with the graduates' English performance at work. Employers need their employees to be able to read and translate English, and more importantly to be able to write and conduct conversations in English (Jiang & Tian, 2003). However, when confronted with authentic communication situations, for example in answering a phone call, they cannot understand what the other party is saying, still less respond in an appropriate way. Some of them may find it hard to comprehend and translate materials written in English. The results of a survey of employers about their opinions of their employees' CE show that:

Only 5% of the employers think that the spoken English of non-English major university graduates is good or very good, ... As to their written English, only 11% of the employers think that the university graduates' written English is good or very good, ... (Huang & Shao, 1998:21).

In spite of the dissatisfaction expressed by employers, the fact is that those graduates have passed CET 4 or even CET 6 with a relatively high score. Thus it seems that there is a gap between what they have learnt at universities or colleges and what is needed in their future career. This opinion was echoed by the Chinese Deputy Minister of Education Wu Qidi (cited in Chinese MoE, 2005). While acknowledging the rapid development of English teaching since the introduction of the reform and opening-up policies, she also pointed out that it still could not meet the needs of the society. Instead of reading skills, she argued that Chinese CE teachers should focus on listening and speaking when evaluating a learner's language skills.

To summarize, there is a series of significant problems facing CE education such as 'time consuming but low efficiency', 'mute English' and 'high grades but low communicative competence' (Li & Li, 2009). According to the findings from a study of more than 900 teachers from 48 Chinese universities conducted by the Foreign Language Education and Research Centre of China in 2002, there are several underlying reasons leading to the above phenomena: shortage of teachers (31.5%), lack of teacher training (30.8%), pressure from national standard exams (26.2%), relatively poor teaching materials (17.1%) and the uncertain level of teachers' own commitment to work (16.1%) (cited in Shi, 2007).

The achievements and problems of CE education have been recognized and discussed by many researchers. As a response, the Chinese government initiated a major reform to tackle the above problems. The next part of this chapter gives a brief introduction to the CE reform project.

2.2 CE Reform and the New CE Teaching Requirements

To better prepare graduates to meet the needs of China's technological and economic development, the Chinese government has initiated several large-scale educational reforms since the start of the 21st century. In particular, the CE reform was started in 2002 as one of the important parts of the Higher Education Teaching Quality and Reform.

Great improvements have been seen since then. According to Jia (2006:42) 'College English teaching reform has gained the following achievements: issuing Curriculum Requirements, publishing web-based multimedia teaching systems, pilot-testing reformed teaching modes and launching the reform of the CET summative examination'. The new curriculum requirements contain a comprehensive description of the CE teaching objectives, contents, procedures and evaluation system. Moreover, they serve as the guidelines for teaching practices, because they are the embodiment of the theories of teaching. When compared with the previous teaching syllabi (1985, 1986 and 1999), the New Teaching Requirements (2004, 2007) show several significant differences.

2.2.1 Changes in teaching objectives

In the previous syllabi, reading skill was the priority, while in the New Requirements the focus is on learners' comprehensive language ability, particularly their listening and speaking skills. The changes are clear from the following abstracts:

The course aims to develop different language skills to different degrees of competence. Most emphasis is laid on reading ability; listening and translating abilities are developed to a relatively lesser extent; and only basic training is given in writing and speaking. The learning of English should be regarded ... as a means of enabling the students to acquire information in their fields of specialization ... (CE Teaching Syllabus 1985)

This course aims to develop in students strong reading abilities, and a certain degree of listening, speaking, writing and translating abilities so that they can communicate in English. (CE Teaching Syllabus 1999)

To develop students' comprehensive English application abilities, especially listening and speaking abilities to enable them to communicate in English both orally and in written form in their future work and in social life. (CE Teaching Requirements Trial 2004)

The objective of College English is to develop students' ability to use English in a well-rounded way, especially in listening and speaking, so that in their future studies and careers as well as social interactions they will be able to communicate effectively..... (CE Teaching Requirements 2007)

In the 1999 Syllabus, listening/speaking skills were placed at the second level with the priority given to reading skills, while in the new Requirements these two skills are emphasized more. To evaluate the appropriateness in the design of teaching objectives, it is essential to consider the need of the country's social and economic development at the time (Cai, 2005). In the past when China's opening-up policies were not implemented in full and direct communication and cooperation with other countries was limited either by government policies or by technology, the chief way to know the outside world was by reading the available text materials. However, with China's entry into the WTO and the rapid development of high technology, this country needs to be able enhance cooperation with other countries to achieve its sustainable development. As a result, English listening and speaking skills are becoming more significant.

However, more emphasis on listening/speaking does not mean any abatement in other language skills. According to Wang (2006), as language activities, reading and listening are the channels to obtain information, but speaking and writing are the channels to disseminate information, to express views and communicate feelings. They are interrelated and indispensable to each other. The objective of CE teaching as stated in the New Requirements (2007) is to develop learners' ability to use English in a well-rounded way, which means the skills of listening, speaking, reading, writing and translating should be developed in balance. Wang (2006) thinks the reason why listening/speaking has gained more attention is that it was widely accepted in the previous CE education that learners would have a lower level of listening/speaking abilities. As a result, according to the New Requirements, while training

learners' reading skills, the CE teacher is also required to develop their abilities in expressing and communicating so that learners are able to comprehend and speak this lingua franca in most basic situations.

From the above document analysis, it has been shown that integrated skills development has replaced single skill training (reading) as more emphasis is given to the skills of listening and speaking. Correspondingly, the goal of English teaching and learning has been changed from utilizing English as a tool of acquiring information to a means of communication. The importance of the role that speaking skills are taking is becoming clearer and CC is gaining more attention.

With the increase in cross-border and cross-cultural communication, Chinese society has a higher and more urgent demand for graduates' ability to use English comprehensively, especially to be competent in speaking and listening. Yang & Weir (1998) conducted a survey of employers' views on the importance of each language skill: listening, reading, speaking and writing. The results are listed as follows: speaking 48.6%, reading 47.6%, listening 40.8% and writing 26.2%. Similar findings were obtained by Fu et al (2001) in a survey targeting over 126 employers in five cities of Zhengjiang Province, China.

In addition to the above opinions from employers, teachers and students also expressed their concerns about English speaking skills. Wang Shouyi, Dean of Foreign Languages Department, Nanjing University, commented that speaking and listening skills are becoming more important in 21st century China (Wang, 2006). Further evidence was provided by the CET Reform Committee (2004, cited in Cai 2005), in the form of a survey of over ten thousand university teachers and students. About 70% of them agree that spoken English is the skill that they want to improve, much higher than any of the other skills. Du (2002) conducted a study on CE teaching and learning in four Chinese universities. There were interviews with the students regarding their comments and suggestions for the improvement of CE teaching. Surprisingly, all their suggestions are about oral English. From this, it can be seen that those students are really eager to improve spoken English proficiency.

2.2.2 Flexibility in teaching requirements

In the 1999 Syllabus, CE was composed of two stages: the foundation stage (English for general purposes) and the advanced stage (English for specific purposes (ESP)). The

foundation stage usually covered the first 2 years in higher education, which consisted of 6 bands. It was required that all university students should reach the level of CE band 4. However, due to the discrepancies existing among different regions or even among schools in the same region, students would enter higher education with different levels of English proficiency. Some may have started English learning from Grade 3 even Grade 1 of primary school, while others may have started only in secondary school. According to Cai (2004), some students have mastered a vocabulary of 4000 words on entry into higher education, while others may have less than 1500. Even though they have enjoyed the same teaching resources or quality, the difference may still be greater than the difference between CE Band 6 and Band 4.

Instead of setting out obligatory policies, the New Requirements serve as the guideline for CE teaching. They also pay attention to individual differences. Each individual university or college has the authority to design their own teaching syllabus according to their own circumstances. The minimum requirement of CE band 4 is terminated in the New Requirements.

As China is a large country with conditions that vary from region to region and from college to college, the teaching of College English should follow the principle of providing different guidance for different groups of students and instructing them in accordance with their aptitude so as to meet the specific needs of individualized teaching.The Requirements serve as reference standards for colleges and universities in preparing their own College English teaching documents. They can, in the light of their respective circumstances, make due adjustments to the specific requirements for listening, speaking, reading, writing and translation at the three levels. In doing so they should place more emphasis on the cultivation and training of listening and speaking abilities. (CE Teaching Requirements 2007)

2.2.3 Flexibility in course design

The previous syllabi gave clear instructions on how the CE course should be structured:

The number of classroom teaching hours at the foundation stage should be at least 240-280 hours, distributed over the first two years of study. It is recommended that there should be 4 teaching hours per week, and that teaching hours and homework assigned to be done after class should be in a ratio of 1:2. (CE Teaching Syllabus 1985)

Teaching hours at the basic stage should be no less than 208 hours, which are arranged from the first to the fourth semester, with one band every semester, 70 hours every band, and no fewer than 4 hours every week. The proportion of curricular and extracurricular study hour should be no less than 1:2.English courses in the four semesters of the basic stage are compulsory. (CE Teaching Syllabus 1999)

One problem with this clear and uniform instruction is that learners would only progress onto the stage of ESP or advanced level where they could have access to elective English subjects (such as writing, translation/interpretation) after 4 terms of compulsory study of general English. This arrangement was impractical and a waste of teaching resources. According to Cai (2004), when some students' English proficiency is higher than the learning content, their motivation to learn will be unavoidably lessened. Dai (2001) has found out that the reason why in many universities learners have low interest or motivation to learn and have a passive response to the CE course is this repetitiveness of learning content. Learners have no access to new knowledge or skills, and as a result no space for progress.

Furthermore, due to the restriction of teaching facilities, the shortage of teaching staff and the enlargement of the enrolment, most universities could only manage to finish the first 4 terms of basic English for general purposes (Cai, 2004). Only a few could afford to offer elective or ESP courses. As a result, some students may have never had the chance to learn other English subjects.

Due to the flexibility in implementing the new guidelines, different regions or different institutes can now design their courses differently based on their own practical situations. Students in the same university can be placed at different levels of learning according to their English proficiency at entry. Each individual university has the right to adjust the Requirements to their own circumstances. They have more freedom in designing their course systems which may combine required and elective subjects in comprehensive English, language skills, ESP (English for Specific Purposes), cross-culture, English for practical purposes at any stage as long as the system can meet the learners' needs. The focus is on further development so that students at different levels can receive adequate training and make further improvement. The New Requirements are more flexible. The following quotation from the *Teaching Requirements 2007* clearly demonstrates this feature of flexibility:

Because institutions of higher learning differ from each other in terms of teaching resources, students' level of English upon entering college, and the social demands they face, colleges and universities should formulate, in accordance with the Requirements and in the light of their specific circumstances, a scientific, systematic and individualized College English syllabus to guide their own College English teaching..... A course system should ensure that students at different levels receive adequate training and make improvement in their ability to use English. In designing College English courses, requirements for cultivating competence in listening and speaking should be fully considered, and corresponding teaching hours and credits should be adequately allocated.All the courses, whether computer-based or classroom based, should be fully individual-oriented, taking into account students with different starting points, so that students from lower levels will be well taken care of, while students whose English is better will find room for further development. (CE Teaching Requirements 2007)

2.2.4 New teaching models

The 2007 Requirements advocate that ' the new model should combine the principles of practicality, knowledge and interest, mobilize the initiative of both teachers and students, and attach particular importance to the central role of students in the teaching and learning process.'

The previous teacher-centred pattern should be changed to student-centred autonomous learning. In the traditional teacher-centred model, teachers take a dominant role with their main responsibility being knowledge dissemination. Most of the time, students take a passive role as audience or note takers. There is not enough participation or interaction for learners. On the other hand, the student-centred approach is more learner-oriented. When teachers are no longer engaged in the imparting of knowledge, there will be more interaction between teachers and students, and more opportunities for students to practise. Learners' intrinsic learning motivation will be inspired. Learners, who are motivated from within, find it easier to achieve a better result in learning.

Changes in the teaching model by no means only call for changes in teaching methods and approaches, but, more importantly, consist of changes in teaching philosophy and practice, and in a shift from a teacher-centred pattern, in which knowledge of the languages skills is imparted only by the teacher in class, to a student-centred pattern, in which the ability to use the language and the ability to learn independently are cultivated in addition to language knowledge and skill,

and also to lifelong education, geared towards cultivating students' lifelong learning ability. (CE Teaching Requirements 2007)

The above-mentioned ability to learn independently is considered as a reference to autonomy in learning. Autonomous learners are self-reliant and capable of studying independently and continuously (Stern, 1999). However, this autonomous learning does not exclude classroom teaching. In fact, it is a combination of classroom teaching, computer-assisted and web-based learning, and face-to-face coaching. In the New Requirements, web-based learning assisted by modern information technology is a dramatic change.

In view of the marked increase in student enrolments and the relatively limited resources, colleges and universities should remould the existing unitary teacher-centred pattern of language teaching by introducing computer- and classroom-based teaching models. The new model should be built on modern information technology, particularly network technology, so that English language teaching and learning will be, to a certain extent, free from the constraints of time or place and geared towards students' individualized and autonomous learning. (CE Teaching Requirements 2007)

2.2.5 Changes in evaluation

The facilitative role of formative assessment is acknowledged in the New Requirements, which has never been mentioned in the previous syllabi. The evaluation of teachers is also included for the first time in CE history. Moreover, students' ability to use English in communication, particularly their ability to listen to and speak in English should be the focus of assessment. The quotation below not only introduces the evaluation system advocated in the New Requirements (2007) and the primary focuses of assessment, but also sets out clearly the flexibility that individual colleges or universities have in choosing which test to administer:

The evaluation of students' learning consists of formative assessment and summative assessment.... To make a summative assessment of teaching, colleges and universities may administer tests of their own, run tests at the intercollegiate or regional level, or let students take the national test after meeting the different standards set by the Requirements. Whatever form the tests may take, the focus should be on the assessment of students' ability to use English in communication, particularly their ability to listen to and speak in English. (CE Teaching Requirements 2007)

The New Requirements once again stipulate that individual universities have the right to administer tests of their own, instead of the national examinations, i.e. CET. A similar clause appeared in the 1999 Syllabus, but had not been implemented in full due to the high social influence CET enjoyed and 15 years' practice (1985-1999). The 1985 syllabus had required every student to take the national examinations (CET 4 or CET6).

When teaching at the basic stage comes to a close, testing should be organized according to the basic requirements and relatively high requirement of this Syllabus. It can be a test made by the university itself, or a test from a testing database or alternatively a national test. (CE Teaching Syllabus 1999)

When the teaching of Band 4 and Band 6 come to an end, students should attend a national examination according to the requirements of this syllabus. The English band and score students have reached should be noted on the registers. (CE Teaching Syllabus 1985)

To facilitate the reform of the CE testing system, one project to reform CET was initiated in 2005, which will be further discussed in the next chapter.

There are studies which have shown the achievement made by this reform such as Ying (2005) and Jia (2006). However, as in any reforms there are problems and concerns as well, such as the unreliability of web-based courseware, and the difficulty in developing students' autonomous learning (Jia, 2006). Studies have also found that some universities have not been able to implement the Requirements in full. Some may just ignore the need for changes and continue as they used to. Some may pretend compliance in public, but resist or not make enough commitment to the reform in the practical teaching/learning process (Shi, 2007). The current study is designed to investigate the situation in a specific case – one university in northeast China. This university was chosen as one of the 180 pilot centres to implement the CE reform. My aim is to find out how they respond to the reform. Obviously there would be a huge amount of work required to investigate every aspect of the reform happening in this case, which is beyond my current ability (such as time, funding and human resources). Based on the above documentary analysis of New Teaching Requirements and previous Syllabi, three key aspects have been chosen as the focuses of attention in this research - speaking, the teaching model and exams, as indicated in the three research questions outlined in the first chapter.

Chapter 3 CET and IELTS

As discussed above, one major element in the reform of CE is the reform of CET, and thus it is necessary to consider the nature of CET and its history. And because its counterpart in the other English course available in this specific university is IELTS, there will be a brief introduction to IELTS as well.

3.1 CET

Currently, CET comprises CET4, CET6 and Spoken English Test (CET-SET). CET4/6 is a large-scale national standardized test administered twice a year to those undergraduates who do not major in English. CET4 was first introduced in September 1987 and CET6 in January 1989. The bands in CET corresponded to the CE Syllabi (1985, 1999). The purpose of CET was to ‘facilitate the implementation of the College English Syllabus, to provide an objective and accurate measurement of the test-takers’ English proficiency, and to improve the quality of our College English instruction’ (Yang & Weir, 1998:1). Thus, it is clear that CET was designed with an intention to impose a positive influence on CE teaching and learning.

3.1.1 What is CET?

CET4/6 is a written test. CET-SET was included in the CET cohort in 1999 to meet the needs of China’s economic and opening-up policy (Cheng, 2008). Only students who have scored over a certain relatively high level in the CET paper test are allowed to take CET-SET. Thus, CET-SET is not available to every learner.

CET4/6 is a high stake test (Cheng, 2008). Although it is in the charge of the National CE Testing Committee, it is administered by the Committee on behalf of the Higher Education Department of the MoE. Most of the universities and colleges in China used to require their students to pass CET4 in order to graduate. Many employers would use it as one of the essential criteria in recruiting their employees (Jin, 2006). Even some universities in Hong Kong, such as City University of Hong Kong, have taken mainland students’ scores of CET4/6 into their English proficiency requirements for entrance onto masters or doctor degrees. That is how the CET 4 certificate became a prerequisite for both degree and employment.

CET4/6 was designed to have an impact on teaching and learning, as can be seen in the above discussion—one of the purposes of the test was to improve the teaching quality. The way this positive washback influence functions is that through testing and feedback, the limitations and deficits in the previous teaching and learning can be diagnosed so that the parties involved can take corresponding action to remedy it. The influence of testing on teaching and learning is called the washback effect (Alderson & Wall, 1993; Hughes, 1988).

3.1.2 The CET's strength and limitations

A Sino-British project was carried out from 1992 to 1995 as a validation study of CET. The following conclusions were drawn: the CET is highly reliable and valid; the design is rational; a rigorous and comprehensive test system has been developed for the CET; the CET has developed a suite of computer programmes as a tool for the organization, administration, and management of the test, and for the rapid production of statistical data that provide a wealth of information for decision-makers in education at all levels; a group of highly trained professional language testers at both senior and junior levels has been formed and a strong research base has been established (Yang & Weir, 1998).

Based on the above evidence, it can be seen that as a standardized test, the CET's validity and reliability were proved by many researchers and its test scores was widely used in many aspects of society.

However, CET also had its limitations and concerns. The majority of the test items were multiple-choice questions. According to Han et al (2004), the multiple-choice test cannot reflect students' CC objectively, because the focus is on testing students' receptive ability but not on their productive skills. It is possible that students can increase their scores 'artificially' when they take multiple-choice tests (Alderson et al, 2000). It used to be a norm-referenced test, which was criticized by language researchers and educators (Liu & Dai, 2003) because in their opinions CET4/6 should be designed to measure learners' English proficiency, to judge if they have achieved the requirements set out in the Syllabus.

Furthermore, the washback effect of CET4/6 initiated a heated debate. There was a group of people who argued that CET should be cancelled. In their opinions, due to its high stakes, CET exerted a substantial negative influence on CE teaching and learning (Han et al, 2004). It incurred a phenomenon called teaching to the test. Many universities link students' CET

scores with graduation or the award of a degree and with the quality assessment of teaching and learning. As a result this put a large amount of pressure on teachers and students. The focus of teaching shifted from training language skills and developing CC to the instruction in test-taking strategies and preparation for the test (Jin, 2006). Some teachers would even discard the textbook and devote all the class time to preparing for CET4 in the fourth term in order to help their students pass the test. Because of the convenience of marking, most of the test items were designed as discrete-point multiple-choice questions. According to a nationwide survey done by Liu and Dai (2003), more than 90% of the college teachers think that CET cannot reflect students' CC objectively. This kind of testing will not only interfere with the normal classroom teaching, but also negatively influence students' systematic mastery of language knowledge and development of integrated language skills (Han et al, 2004). However, others suggest that given the population of test takers, the test has to be designed in this way to save the time and manpower required in grading the test papers (Cheng, 2008), because it is necessary for the whole nation to have a uniform standard assessment system so that evaluation and comparison can be made. Multiple-choice questions make the test more objective. And it can cover a wider range of language knowledge, which may give plenty of feedback information to teaching and learning so that remedies can be made. Also the content of teaching and learning is enriched to meet the needs of testing. Just because of the test's high-stakes, both the teachers and students are more motivated, so that more time and effort are spent on it. And thanks to that, more research and funding will be devoted to English education improvement.

As summarized by Gu & Liu (2006:81-82):

CET scores have now been generally accepted throughout the nation as the standard evaluation of students' English level. Meanwhile, CET's washback—the effects of testing on teaching and learning—has become one of the most controversial issues in China's college English teaching. On the one hand, CET gives colleges nationwide a uniform standard of comparison on the quality of their English teaching, and thus strongly attracts the attention of college leaders to lay emphasis on English teaching, which in turn has greatly promoted China's College English teaching. On the other hand, the test causes both teachers and students to value test results rather than language practice, and the overflow of multiple-choice questions in this large-scale test encourages both teachers and students to work more at the skills of test and guesswork than at the skills of practical communication. Thus it is common to find some students with high CET scores are quite poor in English speaking and writing. Therefore, in China's present reform of college English teaching,

the controversial focus is on whether the washback effect of CET has hindered students' development in practical English and how to improve students' communicative competence in English.

3.1.3 The CET reform

There had been increasing complaints among employers, researchers, even learners themselves that learners could not cope with the normal demands of English use at work, especially in writing and oral communication, although they had attained the CET pass mark (Du, 2002). As a result, the validity of CET was challenged because the minimum score for passing the test did not correspond to the requirements stipulated in the Syllabus.

As summarized by Wu Qidi (cited in Chinese MoE, 2005), there are three main concerns about CET: 1) excessive attention from society – some universities or colleges consider CET4 or CET6 certificates as prerequisites for graduation or degree awarding, and some employers use the CET certificate as a requirement for employment, which may lead to 'teaching for the test' practices; 2) cheating or criminal behaviour caused by the over-valuing of CET results, which damaged not only the reputation of this test but also its justice and fairness; 3) the underdeveloped test content - the current testing syllabus followed the old teaching syllabus in which language knowledge and reading ability were emphasized. The social need for learners to use the language practically and communicatively were not met, which can be shown in learners' inability when attending international conferences even to understand what is being talked about. This called for an urgent reform to CET to assess learners' practical English competence with a focus on listening and speaking.

As a response to the above concerns, many reforms have been made to improve the CET testing system, the most recent one being in 2005. It is believed that the reform of the testing system plays an important role in the outcome of CE education reform generally (Jia, 2006). The CET Reform Team was set up in 2004 and in March 2005, the MoE published its CET reform plan. The plan was designed according to the teaching and learning objectives stipulated in the CE Teaching Requirement (2004) – 'to develop students' comprehensive English application abilities, especially listening and speaking abilities to enable them to communicate in English both orally and in written form in their future work and in social life' (CE Teaching Requirement 2004). While aiming to keep its original scientific and objective nature, the reformed CET tries to produce a more positive influence on CE education, such as

enabling the relationship between teaching/learning and testing to be handled more sensibly; test scores to be used more reasonably; testing to serve teaching more effectively, and so on (Jia, 2006).

According to the Chinese MoE (2005) there are three main changes proposed to CET:

1) The underlying principles of the CET system should correspond to the CE Teaching Requirements so that new test content and formats are designed in order to assess learners' comprehensive abilities in language use with an emphasis on the listening and speaking skills. The percentage allocated to listening would be increased from 20% to 35%. Reading will be reduced to 35%, but with new a skimming and scanning reading section and more non-multiple-choice questions.

2) The total score should be changed from 100 to 710 and no pass mark set. As a result there will not be any certificate awarded. Test takers will receive a score sheet instead detailing their overall scores and scores for each individual section. The CE Testing Committee will send out documents explaining the levels of English proficiency shown by the scores.

3) New test centres should be chosen and new test administrative regulations implemented. Gradually only students registered in universities and colleges should be allowed to take the test so that its high stake will be reduced in society. As a result, it will become clearer that testing should primarily serve the purposes of teaching.

Furthermore, it is reiterated that the MoE has never required universities to link graduation or degree awarding with a CET certificate. Students should take the test voluntarily and each individual university has the authority to decide what they want to do with CET.

Table 3-1 shows a comparison between the structures of the previous and new CETs.

CET 4/6 (before 2006)	Listening	Reading	Vocabulary and grammar	Cloze	Writing	Spoken	Total score
Score point allocation	20%	40%	15%	10%	15%	0	100
CET 4/6 (reformed)	listening	reading	Comprehensive Language use		Writing	Spoken	Total score
Score point allocation	35%	35%	15%		15%	0	710

Table 3-1 Comparison between the structures of the previous and reformed CETs

In the new test, there will be no explicit testing of vocabulary and grammar and fewer multiple-choice questions, which means that the weighting of discrete-point items testing linguistic knowledge decreases; instead there will be more integrated and synthetic testing items and more assessment of comprehensive language use. These changes are made to answer the frequent criticism of the CET's low validity and cheating in the test.

However, there is one thing that has not changed—there is no spoken English test in CET4/6. Although the Designing Committee of the National College English Test started to implement CET-SET in 1999, it remains an optional test even after the reform in 2005. Currently, only students whose CET 4 score is higher than 550 or CET 6 score is higher than 520 are eligible to take the spoken English test.

The CET reform was started in order to facilitate the CE reform. So the question arises what the current influence of the revised CET is on teaching and learning. Has it managed to achieve what it aims at – a more positive impact? This has led me to the third research question: what is the influence that CET imposes on teaching and learning? However, in this case there is a different exam that some undergraduates need to take: IELTS. Thus a closer look at IELTS is necessary for the purpose of comparison.

3.2 IELTS

IELTS is jointly administered by the University of Cambridge Local Examination Syndicate, the British Council, and the International Development Program Education, Australia (Saville & Hawley, 2004). It is an internationally recognized test for admission purposes. People who want to study or work in a country where English is the language of communication (e.g. Britain and Australia) need to get a certain score set by individual universities/colleges, employers, or immigration authorities. It is intended to measure if the candidates are ready to study, work and live in an English-speaking context. Thus it is widely accepted as a communicative test by testers, test takers, and potential test score users. According to the IELTS official website (www.ielts.org), ‘over 3800 educational institutions, government agencies and professional organizations across 120 countries around the world recognize IELTS scores as a trusted and valid indicator of ability to communicate in English.’ It is also a high-stake language test for those test-takers, because it is regarded as a necessary qualification.

It consists of two forms: the Academic Module--the one for academic purposes (to test if the candidates are ready for academic study or training); and the General Training Module--the one for general training purposes (to test if the candidates are capable of taking a job or job-related training or communicating in English for daily life). Each kind of IELTS is composed of 4 sections, corresponding to the 4 traditional language skills: reading, writing, listening, and speaking. It tries to assess the four skills through various tasks that are designed to simulate genuine study, work or life tasks. Therefore, IELTS is designed to achieve an intentional positive washback effect, in the sense of encouraging test takers to develop language proficiency in ways that will assist their study, work or life through the medium of English (Hayes and Read, 2004). And a spoken English test is an obligatory and integral part of the overall testing system. The present research focuses on the Academic uses test only. As to the scoring system, there is no pass mark, but instead there is a score report with the separate band scores for these 4 different skills and also an average of the four separate scores as an overall band score. The way in which individual performances in IELTS speaking and writing are rated is worth noting: there is a detailed description of an acceptable performance at each level, and then performances are rated according to the descriptions (ibid).

Table 3-2 is a comparison of the score allocation between CET4/6 and IELTS:

CET 4/6 (since 2006)	listening	reading	Comprehensive Language use	Writing	Speaking
Score point allocation	35%	35%	15%	15%	0
IELTS	listening	reading	writing	speaking	
Score point allocation	25%	25%	25%	25%	

Table3-2 Comparison of the score allocation between CET4/6 and IELTS

From the above comparison, we can see that IELTS attaches more importance to the assessment of candidates' productive skills: writing and speaking, with each of them making up 25% of the total score (speaking is an integral part of the whole test), while in CET4/6 only 15% of the score is allocated to writing and 0% to speaking.

As discussed above, there are discrepancies between these two exams. The third research topic in the current study is intended to explore the influence of these two exams (the revised CET and IELTS) on the two English courses.

The exploration of the practical concerns about CE and CET in Chapters 2 and 3 not only provides the background to the current study, but also shows how the three main research topics – speaking skills, teaching/learning model and the influence of testing – have evolved. There has been a particular emphasis on speaking skill. The next chapter will critically review the relevant theoretical and practical studies that have been done on the two remaining research topics.

Chapter 4 Literature Review

Chapters 2 and 3 have provided a detailed account of the CE course and a thorough introduction to CET. They also present and discuss some of the literature on the first research topic of the present study – learners’ relatively poor speaking skills. The present chapter starts with a brief review of some general concepts and current thinking in EFL teaching before focusing on the second research topic (the LC teaching model) and the third (the washback effect of language testing).

Learner-centredness is a term frequently used in educational and research contexts. According to O’Banion (1997), this approach can be traced back to Carl Rogers’ client-centred therapy in the 1960s. It represents a move from traditional teaching approaches by focusing on how students learn rather than on how teachers teach (Weimer, 2002; Wohlfarth et al, 2008). It is a way of thinking and learning that emphasizes student responsibility and activity in learning (Cannon & Newble, 2000) and the attention or responsiveness given to learners’ individual needs and differences. Washback is a term mainly used in language education to refer to the effects that a test may have on teaching and learning. Some people consider it as one of the four essential requirements of any test, together with validity, reliability and practicality (Boyle and Falvey, 1994). It is only since the 1990s that washback has become the subject of serious theoretical and empirical investigation.

4.1 Key concepts in EFL: CC and communicative language teaching (CLT)

Before the 1960s, language was considered as ‘a system of structurally related elements for the coding of meaning’ (Richards and Rodgers 2000:17). As a result, the objective of language learning was the mastery of the forms of language such as phonology, grammar and vocabulary. However, this view changed dramatically after the emergence of the concept of CC and the development of CLT in the early 1970s.

Since its very beginning, language has been a primary method of human communication. And conversely, ‘communication is the most fundamental social function of language’ (Liu, et al, 1984:16 cited in Liu 2003). Therefore, the purpose of language teaching and learning is to enable learners to communicate in that language and this ability is referred to as CC.

In the early seventies, Dell Hymes first put forward the concept of CC. According to him (1972) a speaker's competence to use the language for communication far exceeds his/her linguistic competence as in Chomsky's term. Chomsky makes a distinction between competence and performance (1965) - competence is an ideal speaker's knowledge of the rules of his language, while performance is the actual production of utterances with the use of this knowledge in communication. His concept of competence is mainly concerned with the linguistic knowledge; however, according to Hymes competence should also include the knowledge that enables users to achieve effective communication in different situations in a proper manner. He believes that social-cultural factors will influence language use; he focuses on language in actual performance and argues that rules about language use or performance should be an integral part of a theory on competence in communication, namely CC. He proposes a set of four criteria for measuring CC:

- 1). Whether (and to what extent) something is formally possible;
- 2). Whether (and to what extent) something is feasible;
- 3). Whether (and to what extent) something is appropriate (adequate, happy, successful) in relation to a context in which it is used and evaluated;
- 4). Whether (and to what extent) something is in fact done, actually performed, and what its doing entails. (1971:12)

Since the introduction of the term CC, it has enjoyed increasing popularity, and there have been numerous interpretations of its meaning, among which the work done by Canale and Swain (1980) and Canale (1983) from a pedagogic perspective is of great significance. They propose a fourfold framework: grammatical competence, sociolinguistic competence, discourse competence, and strategic competence. Probably their most valuable contribution to CC theory is integrating strategic competence into the CC model. Strategic competence is the ability to correctly and effectively interpret and convey information. Building on their research, Bachman (1990) provides a framework of communicative language abilities, which is more systematic and clearer in guiding language teaching and testing. Communicative language ability consists of language competence (including linguistic knowledge - grammatical, textual, pragmatic, social-linguistic; and strategic competence) and psycho-physiological mechanisms. His description on the three functions of strategic competence (planning, assessing and execution) can, to a certain degree, explain how all the components of language competence interact with each other and work as a whole, which is missing from Hymes' and Canale & Swain's studies. According to Alderson and Banerjee (2002),

Bachman's model of communicative language ability is the state-of-the-art in the area of second language teaching.

Studies on CC have shed new light on foreign language teaching/learning and given rise to a corresponding teaching approach - CLT - which can be regarded as a product originating from dissatisfaction with Structuralism and the situational methods of the 1960s (Nunan, 1988). Starting in the late 1970s and spreading widely across the whole world, this approach is based on the close relationship between languages and communication. It 'has drawn extensively on developments in sociolinguistics, discourse theory, psycholinguistics, applied linguistics, and second-language acquisition research that have occurred largely in the West' (Hu, G.W. 2002:94). According to Larsen-Freeman (1986), CLT has the following characteristics: communication as the only intent; activities in small groups; use of authentic materials and an LC and experience-based view of second language teaching. There will be further discussion of CLT later in this chapter as a theoretical foundation for LC teaching and learning.

CLT is also regarded as a development from the Notional/Functional approach, and sometimes the two terms are used interchangeably. The Notional/Functional approach is based on Halliday's systemic-functional linguistics (SFL), which views language as a tool to perform various social functions. SFL base language and human communication on functions and semantics, and relates language structures with communicative functions. Thus, in order to communicate, one has to master a set of language functions with direct relation to certain linguistic forms. Like CC and CLT, Halliday's work also stresses meaning and social context. For him, 'meaning' is function in context. SFL has a close relationship with applied linguistics as some of its principles have been used in second language (L2) teaching. Since it emphasizes communicative functions in contrast to a structural approach, it has introduced new ways to language teaching and learning, especially in syllabus design and training in speaking skills.

4.2 Learner-centredness

After a discussion of the definitions of learner-centredness, this section continues by exploring the rationale underlying this approach – practical considerations in the Chinese context and theoretical issues. This LC approach to language teaching is under the influence of a number of sometimes overlapping, sometimes differing perspectives on language teaching; it is not just the product of a single, coherently structured school of thought (Tudor

1996). Constructivism, Humanism, CLT and Adult Learning Theory have all contributed to the development of the LC approach. There will be a discussion of the first three of these theoretical bases for the LC approach because they are particularly relevant to the field of language education. Furthermore, some of the general features of the LC approach will be presented, which can be used as guidelines to the research methods adopted in the current study.

4.2.1 Definitions of learner-centredness

In language education, learner-centredness has been in existence as a pedagogical principle or approach for CLT since the 1970s (Holec 1979, Nunan 1988). However, defining it is no easy task as the concept incorporates many different ideas. To make it more complicated, it has been used interchangeably with several synonyms such as student-centred, learner-directed, and student-oriented, though LC is used throughout this dissertation for the purpose of consistency.

McCombs and Whisler (1997:9) present a working definition from the standpoint of general education. It is defined as

the perspective that couples a focus on individual learners (their heredity, experiences, perspectives, backgrounds, talents, interests, capacities and needs) with a focus on learning (the best available knowledge about learning and how it occurs and about teaching practices that are most effective in promoting the highest levels of motivation, learning, and achievements for all learners).

More relevant to the current research, Breen (1987) defines this concept from a language instruction point of view: the LC approach, which develops from moves towards CLT, emphasizes the value of collaborative learning, autonomy and shared decision-making and is based on the belief that students' voices regarding the management of their learning should be heard.

Although the above definitions may be different in their wording, they share some common ideas. Students are put at the centre of the teaching/learning process, which means that instructional programmes should focus more on students than on teachers and more on learning than on teaching. Learners' needs should be considered. Students are encouraged to

take on a greater degree of responsibility for the success of their own learning so that they will have the opportunities to choose learning objectives, contents, methods, and sometimes even means of assessment. The benefit is that they will master the necessary skills in managing learning. This responsibility may extend outside classrooms when students continue their learning in their spare time or beyond formal education when they become life-long learners. According to McLeod (1994), learning is not a one-way undertaking and instead of waiting passively to be filled with information by the teachers, learners can become active participants in their own learning. When learners do possess this ability, teaching and learning will become more effective. In the field of EFL, this approach allows learners to play a more active, responsible and engaged role in their own language study. Hart (2003) maintains that language learners should develop their understanding of the conventions of the language used by *engaging* in the kinds of language activity found in real life rather than by learning lists of rules.

4.2.2 Practical considerations

There are practical concerns leading to the promotion of an LC approach in the Chinese context. As discussed in the earlier chapters, there exists a gap between the social demands and the actual competence of graduates of higher education. Some teachers and students themselves are not quite satisfied with the ways that EFL is taught or with the learning outcomes. Even after years of learning, some students still face great difficulties in using this language for communication purposes. The traditional model of teaching is partially blamed for these concerns.

For many years in China, English has been taught in a traditional way which can be characterized as teacher-centred (Tang, 2008). This teacher-centred approach is closely related to Behaviourism which regards learners as passive and assumes that they can only become active after receiving some form of outside stimulus (Liu, Qiao and Liu, 2006). Teachers have absolute control over everything in the teaching and learning process. In such a classroom, teachers give lectures following textbooks and pass their knowledge on to students, acting as an authority or a knowledge giver (Cortazzi and Jin, 1996). Students are passive recipients of knowledge and are assessed at the end of the process to demonstrate that they have mastered the knowledge. Little attention is paid to learners' needs or reactions. As a result knowledge has been perceived by students as something solely to be transmitted through teachers rather than to be discovered by themselves. The emphasis in this process is

laid on teaching instead of learning, as most of the classroom time is taken by teachers to impart knowledge while students have few opportunities to apply what they have learnt into practice. To these learners, it is the teachers' responsibility to explain or explore everything so that all they need to do is to listen, take notes and memorize. They are not accustomed to thinking or creating, let alone to expressing their own opinions or challenging the authority of teachers. As a result, they may become less autonomous or creative (Tang, 2008), but more dependent or obedient.

To summarize, a teacher-centred way of teaching is very likely to damage learners' initiative and motivation, to restrain the development of students' potential and to have an adverse impact on the learning outcome. It is clear that to master a foreign language, efforts may well be expanded outside the classroom or even beyond graduation, where much more practice is necessary. However, when students become used to a teacher-centred approach at schools or colleges, where teachers arrange everything and fail to teach students how to learn, students may feel unmotivated or frustrated without the presence of a teacher. As McGarry (1995) comments, the ways in which most students are taught actually promote dependence and leave them ill-equipped to apply knowledge and skills learnt at school to practical use beyond the classroom. The benefits from autonomous or life-long learning may be jeopardized, so it is necessary to turn the focus from teaching to learning in order to achieve the goals set out in the CE Teaching Requirements.

Furthermore, as pointed out by Richards and Rodgers (2000:4), under such a teaching method 'foreign language learning meant a tedious experience of memorizing endless lists of unusable grammar rules and vocabulary and attempting to produce perfect translation of stilted or literary prose.' In such a way, reading or translation skills may be enhanced and the accuracy of grammar or vocabulary may be increased. However, listening and speaking skills (which are essential to CC) may be neglected (Liao and Su, 2006). As these two skills are badly required with the rapid development of the Chinese economy and society, this traditional approach to teaching may no longer serve a satisfactory role. This is how an LC approach comes into being. However, the above argument does not mean the conventional model of teaching is not effective in any circumstances (Terenzini & Pascarella, 1994). It may be beneficial to the development of some skills but not others.

Not only do these practical considerations and changing social needs require a switch from teacher-centredness to learner-centredness, but also the changes and developments in theories about the nature of learning and more specifically language learning can help to justify the shift of focus. The next part contains a discussion of some theoretical bases for an LC approach in EFL teaching and learning.

4.2.3 Theoretical bases for learner-centredness

Three major theories that have exerted a great influence on the development of an LC approach will be discussed here – CLT, Constructivism and Humanism. Of course, these are not the only influences on learner-centredness. Adult Learning Theory stresses the relevance of past experience to present learning (Brundage and MacKeracher 1980) and links this to the need for self-direction (Knowles et al, 1998) and critical reflection (Cranton, 2000). However, CLT, Constructivism and Humanism are arguably the most important influences.

4.2.3.1 CLT

Some elements of CLT have already been discussed. However, the focus in this section is on the link between CLT and LC education. There are two versions of CLT according to Howatt (1984): a weak version of CLT incorporates communicative activities into a pre-existing programme, while the strong version claims that learners actually acquire language through communication. Nevertheless, the core of both versions is that communication is not just the final goal of language learning, it is also used as a means of learning (Xia, 2003) – learners use the language in the process of learning it rather than just learn about this language. Pedagogically speaking, class time is not spent solely on knowledge transmission or language drills, but also on more communicative activities which are meaningful, functional and in the same forms as those they are required to have in authentic communicative situations. Thus the focus of a communicative classroom is on learners as they are actively involved in the teaching/learning process (Wang, 2000). As noted by Tudor (1996), the contribution of CLT to the development of an LC approach can be evidenced on two levels: firstly and most importantly, the communicative movement puts the communicative goals of the learners at the central place in course design, i.e. to the messages they need to receive or convey in real-world interactive situations; secondly on the methodological level, CLT fosters an experiential form of language study in which learners' real world experience and concerns are given a central role in learning activities.

CC can hardly be developed in a traditional EFL teaching and learning environment where language forms are exclusively concentrated on and learners have few opportunities to practise. That is why an LC approach is called for where learners are the centre of education. Nunan (1988) called this change in approaches to language teaching an offspring of CLT.

Although CLT has been considered a dominant teaching paradigm in foreign or second language instruction, it has its own limitations and critiques, which in turn may present some problems to the application of an LC approach. First, one of the guiding principles of CLT is that communication is both an end and a means to language learning, which may lead to the problem that in CLT priority is given to fluency over accuracy (Alcón, 2004). In other words, meanings are more important than forms in CLT. However, I think both of them are essential in learning a foreign language and a balance should be achieved between the two. One negative consequence if too much concentration is placed on meanings is that important forms or rules of language may be ignored. I do agree with the CLT idea that students learn the language through communication or social interaction. However, in a foreign context where both the quantity and quality of the necessary communication is limited, learners will not be able to have enough access to the target language. The result is that they will not be able to learn the language. Thus some explicit teaching and drills on the correct forms of the target language are critical. Secondly, in most cases, learners have to imagine or pretend that they are communicating for genuine purposes although they understand clearly that they are in an artificial learning situation. Thus the replica of the real outside world where this foreign language is used seems to be an ideal. Thirdly, CLT places a relatively high demand on students' language proficiency, which may cause some problems in China where students' entrance levels of English proficiency are not even. The large population of university students with different backgrounds and experiences may make the application of CLT and the LC approach very difficult.

Fourthly, there is a concern about whether CLT (based on western education theories) can suit the Chinese context. Research has found that 'CLT and the Chinese culture of learning are in conflict in several important respects, including philosophical assumptions about the nature of teaching and learning, perceptions of the respective roles and responsibilities of teachers and students, learning strategies encouraged, and qualities valued in teachers and students' (Hu, G. W. 2002:93). Those conflicts may present problems in teaching and

learning, and special adaptations are necessary to meet the needs and demands of EFL teaching in China.

4.2.3.2 Constructivism

Another theoretical foundation for the LC approach is Constructivism, which has developed from philosophy and cognitive psychology. It has been gradually accepted as an influential educational theory since the 1960s. It is a theory about learning and the nature of knowledge, i.e. it describes what knowledge is and how one gets to know (Fosnot, 1996). Its main contribution to the LC approach is that it has brought learners to the centre of the teaching and learning process. In recent years it has become a theoretical foundation for CE reform in China (Liu, 2009).

John Dewey and Jean Piaget are two prominent figures in Constructivism through their theories of childhood development and education. Dewey (1938) emphasizes real experience and the freedom of the learner. Students' own experiences are the most valuable resources for learners. Piaget is mainly concerned with the way human beings come to know things as they develop from infancy to adulthood. They learn by experiencing and making their own judgments about the outside world (Piaget, 1973). Many other psychologists or theorists have also made a great contribution to the development and elaboration of this theory. Although they approached this theory from different perspectives due to their different interests, there are some fundamental similarities in their discussion of Constructivism.

Constructivists think that knowledge is acquired by human beings through social interactions (Zhuang and Huang, 2003). Learners are not passive receivers; instead they are active constructors who will actively build personal meaning and understanding about the world through their own experience and reflection from birth. This meaning-making process is called learning. According to Constructivism, knowledge is not an objective entity, out there, independent of learners, ready to be studied or memorized. Instead it is personal, cultural and social. Individuals have to build their own personal models of the world through contacts with other human beings such as teachers, family members, friends, and casual acquaintances (Rein, 1991 cited in Mo, 2002). Willis, Stephens & Matthew (1996:7) show its relevance to education:

Constructivism ... rather than seeing information as a thing that can be transmitted, sees students as independent learners building and creating knowledge for themselves in a learning environment designed to encourage and facilitate just that ... knowledge is always constructed by each student's efforts to make sense of the world ... instruction means providing exploratory and problem-solving situations that allow the student to experiment, to make mistakes, and to work collaboratively with peers to find answers to problems.

In the process of learning, learners evaluate and understand the present situation by reflecting on previous experience, that is to say, new information is assimilated or accommodated in the brain based on the old knowledge. New knowledge has to be filtered through or interact with prior knowledge in order to be formulated.

When applied to foreign language learning, this theory means that knowledge about the language imparted by teachers is far from being enough in the process of knowledge construction. Learners need to use this foreign language in authentic communicative and social contexts in order to get access to new information or to reflect on what is already known. When teachers focus on passing on language points, all students have to do is to listen and to take notes. Students themselves do not need to think or to reflect. According to Constructivism, in such a case students may fail to build their knowledge because knowledge is not just new information input into their brains; instead human beings need to grow their own knowledge, based on previous experiences (Ormrod, 2009), as a response to outside stimuli (Xue and Wang, 2003). Opportunities to correlate new information with the old are essential to master any language point. It may be difficult in the case of foreign language learning as chances to communicate in the target language for genuine purposes are scarce in real-life situations. As a result, students are encouraged to grasp any opportunity in or outside classrooms and more practice time is required in classrooms. Language teachers should try to set up an appropriate learning context in the classroom where students can easily communicate with their peers or teachers in the target language. Teachers may help students to foster the belief that their fellow classmates can be considered as sources of knowledge. Thus an LC approach is crucial. However, the aforementioned ideas are not suggesting any undermining of the roles of teachers or textbooks, especially in such a Chinese context where English is a foreign language and the knowledge that peers can share with each other may be limited.

Another feature of Constructivism is that learning requires learners to be self-motivated and self-directed (Lee & Lee, 2008). There will be a negative outcome when a student is forced to learn what somebody else wants him/her to learn, because they will easily lose their motivation and interest. Effective learning only happens when one is willing to learn and also importantly to learn continuously. Students are more likely to learn if they can take responsibility for and ownership of their learning. When applied to second language acquisition, this means that students will have the ultimate control over what they learn (Zhang & Du, 1999).

Constructivism also stresses the significance of learners' potentiality in learning. People learn to learn as they learn, i.e. learning consists of both constructing meaning and constructing systems of meaning (Rein, 1991 cited in Mo, 2002). Learning is a life-long endeavour. Formal education in an educational institution is only part of the learning process. Language teachers are supposed to help their students in forming the ability to learn and good habits of learning so that learners are able to continue their learning outside or beyond formal education.

As this theory highlights the central role of learners while teachers take a less dominant role as facilitators or supporters rather than knowledge transferers or feeders, it supports an LC approach in teaching and learning.

A constructive approach to education requires learners to become active processors of information and constructors of knowledge instead of being passive receivers of external stimuli. It has changed the roles of teachers and students, and redistributed the power in classrooms. Undoubtedly it will facilitate the reform of CE in China. However, this theory also has its challenges and criticisms. One major challenge is the implementation of this theory in practice. Constructivism is a theory of learning, but not a theory of teaching (Wolffe and McMullen, 1996), and as a result it can be difficult and imprecise to translate this theory to practice (MacKinnon and Scarff-Seatter, 1997). It may present a formidable task to educators, teacher trainers and teachers themselves. There may be a higher demand on the theoretical knowledge and practical experience of the Chinese educators and teachers when they try to apply this western-created theory to an 'alien' culture. There have been some criticisms about the social aspect of theory that the collaborative principle it promotes may lead to group thinking. Students may have to accept what the majority agree. There is also a danger that a few dominant figures may control the whole collaborative activity. Furthermore

I find this collaborative principle is somewhat contradictory to another constructive principle, i.e. constructivism encourages diversity and originality of thoughts. Collaboration requires group work and conformity, while diverse thoughts demands individuality and divergence. It is hard to find a balance between the group and individuals. Another potential danger of encouraging diversity and originality is that students' own understanding and interpretation of a phenomenon or a concept may be over-emphasized or over-valued in the context of objective knowledge where many people might think it inappropriate. As mistakes are allowed in a constructive approach, some teachers may tend not to correct the mistakes occurring in the language learning or acquisition process. Students may have too much freedom to construct their own knowledge system, which can be right or wrong. If unfortunately it is wrong, it will take the learners more time to correct it, which makes the learning time-consuming and less efficient. Furthermore, as mentioned above, Constructivism presents a formidable task to teachers; it may also bring a great challenge to Chinese learners. It makes a higher level of demand on students' self-management ability which is something missing from many Chinese learners.

4.2.3.3 Humanism

As discussed above, Constructivism mainly focuses on how knowledge is constructed – the cognitive side of psychology; while Humanism (in the sense I am using it here) concentrates on the non-cognitive humanistic side of psychology that takes into account a person's feelings and motives. Briefly speaking about their relevance to education, Constructivism studies the information processing system, while Humanism pays particular attention to the role of affective aspects in learning such as needs, motivations, feelings, self-esteem and values.

The history of Humanism goes back to the Western Renaissance, with its revival of classical Greek and Roman thinking, its emphasis on human values, interests and welfare, and its commitment to human reason rather than religious authority. It has remained a dominant philosophical stand in Western thinking to the present day. It became a particularly influential force in psychological and then in educational thinking in the 1960s. When it is applied to education, this theory emphasizes the importance of the learners' inner world and places individual's thoughts, feelings and emotions at the centre-stage in all human development (William & Burden, 2000). It is assumed that effective learning outcomes can only be achieved when learners understand why they need to learn, when they are motivated to learn, when the learning materials are personally meaningful to them and when they are situated in a

supportive and comfortable environment. There are two pivotal figures that have made great a contribution to the development of Humanism: Abraham Maslow and Carl Rogers.

Maslow believes that each individual person ‘has within him a pressure toward unity of personality, toward full individuality and identity, toward spontaneous expressiveness, toward seeing the truth rather than being blind, toward being good, and a lot else’ (Maslow, 1968:155). He names this predisposition to achieve one’s potential as self-actualization. In the process of self-actualizing oneself, the individual’s social experience and unconscious thoughts or feelings may have some influence on his/her inner nature, but cannot dominate it. Individuals have great control over their own behaviours. When applied to education, his ideas mean that students should be allowed to make choices about their own learning – taking ownership of their own development. They have the right to choose what and how they want to study. They are allowed to be different or even make mistakes. Teachers, while in a supportive role, are advisors or helpers who should not try to control every aspect of the learning process.

Rogers pioneered a new approach to therapy – client-centredness, based on his own experience working as a psychotherapist. He then introduced this approach to education. He suggests that significant learning can only take place when the learning content is perceived to be personally relevant to the learner and when the learner is engaged in active participation, i.e. experiential learning (Rogers, 1969). This idea shares some similarities with Maslow’s argument in that learners need to have more to say in planning and executing the learning process. If learners are not on the receiving end of external criticism, they are much more likely to develop qualities of independence, creativity and self-reliance (Rogers, 1969). To teachers, it means that they need to pay attention to students’ affective well-being. In classrooms students are treated as clients in therapy while teachers endeavour to build a positive and friendly atmosphere where students may feel welcomed and cared for. A teacher’s genuineness and caring is crucial to the success of learning outcomes as Rogers believes that ‘the facilitation of significant learning rests upon certain attitudinal qualities that exist in the personal relationship between the facilitator and the learner’ (Rogers, 1990:305).

Based on their humanistic beliefs, Humanists call for an LC approach in education. Students should take a leading role in their own learning with the right to make choices, while teachers should be sensitive and supportive to the cognitive and emotional development needs of

students. This humanistic perspective has had a considerable impact on language teaching and learning. According to it, language learners are not passive code receivers, instead they should be proactively immersed in the process of learning. Learners' affective and intellectual resources should be exploited as fully as possible, and language teaching should be in line with learners' continuing experience of life (Tudor, 1993).

Humanism has been used in many disciplines and produced many benefits in different professions; however, like every theory, it may have its inherent flaws. One possible criticism is its subjectivity. It may become too subjective to be researched or measured objectively. A humanistic approach may not be scientific enough. What I want to discuss here is one of its potential flaws that may cause problems to the LC approach. Humanism emphasizes the role of the individual and each individual's free will or other affective variables. This principle when applied into education, especially EFL instruction of Chinese higher education, may encounter several barriers. First of all, due to the relatively large number of students present in each classroom, the implementation of this humanistic idea may be implausible because teachers may struggle to take into account the needs or other affective considerations of each student. Secondly, too much emphasis on individuals may sacrifice the needs of the whole class, which in turn may have a negative impact on learning outcomes. Thirdly, when individuals become extremely obsessed with their own free wills or self-fulfillment, signs of isolation may gradually appear. Some learners may become isolated or less concerned with other classmates. As a result the interaction between teachers and students or between peers cannot be achieved.

4.2.4 General characteristics of the LC Approach

Based on the previous discussion of the concept of the LC approach, the features of a traditional teaching approach and the theoretical bases for the LC approach, it is not difficult to summarize the general characteristics of the LC approach, especially its implications when applied to EFL teaching and learning in China. There are three main aspects to be included here: changes in the teachers' role, promotion of learner autonomy and an LC curriculum.

4.2.4.1 The shift in the teachers' role

Generally speaking roles are the parts that people play in the performance of social life (Widdowson, 1987:83). In education, a teacher's role may refer to the functions teachers perform and the expectations that people have on them. The roles that teachers play are

sometimes so significant that they may determine the success of an educational programme. When talking about the LC approach, many researchers agree that teachers' understanding of their new roles and how they adapt to new approaches are key issues in the effectiveness of LC learning (Coles et al, 2004, Dickman, 2008).

In a traditional classroom, teachers are expected to be the experts on the subject matter. They present the information in textbooks, and occasionally use supplementary materials. All they intend to do is to transfer their knowledge, sometimes even their thoughts to their students. Teachers are in strict control of everything happening in classrooms. They determine what and how students learn, paying little attention to the needs, feelings or reactions of the students. As passive listeners or note-takers, students have few opportunities to initiate questions, to think critically and to interact with each other. As a result, students' potential for development and creativity may be restrained (Tang, 2008).

Conversely in an LC classroom, teachers give guidance but not orders. They are the 'guide on the side' rather than the 'sage on the stage', helping students create their own meaning instead of dominating all classroom activities (Woolfolk, 2003). Learners assume responsibility for their own educational development. Teachers are no longer knowledge transferers or suppliers; instead they become facilitators and supporters. They provide students with a ladder to higher levels of understanding and knowledge but students are required to take the initiative in climbing the ladder.

Campbell and Kryszewska indicate the roles of a teacher in an LC model in their book *Learner-based Teaching* (1992).

- 1) The teacher can be *an active participant* in the group, genuinely taking part in the activities, contributing ideas and opinions, or relating personal experiences;
- 2) The teacher is also a *helper* and *resource*, responding to learners' requests for help with vocabulary and grammar.
- 3) At other times, the teacher is a *monitor*, checking what learners have produced before they pass it on to other learners. (ibid, 6-7)

Although more commitment is expected of learners, the active roles that teachers take are by no means diminished in an LC classroom. On the contrary, teachers' roles are becoming more challenging. Teachers need to familiarize themselves with a wide range of teaching materials,

methodologies, study options and to be flexible and adaptable in the meantime (Tudor, 1996). The success of students becoming more actively involved in the design and completion of their language study depends to a large extent on the teacher (Hill, 1994). Under the control of an effective teacher, the classroom can support those students in developing more efficient learning strategies (Ehronan & Dornyei, 1998). The functions mentioned above are focused on how to teach, and thus it is crucial for teachers to know how to teach. At the same time, the value of expert knowledge is equally important. Teachers are still required to possess the necessary expertise about the subject matter. They should be able to impart information or to give advice if they are required to do so. Researchers at China's Foreign Language Education and Research Centre summarize the roles of foreign language teachers in a report (2002:225), 'although foreign language instruction should be learner-centred, the roles that teachers occupy should not be underestimated. They are needs analyzers, curriculum designers, material compilers, courseware makers, consultants, mentors and activity organizers. They have to be good at adjusting the roles in different situations.' (cited in Shi, 2007)

4.2.4.2 Promoting learner autonomy

Autonomy is a word widely used in many aspects of social life, especially in politics, but here in this thesis it is confined to educational contexts, especially language education. The LC approach has brought the notion of learner autonomy or autonomous learning to foreign language education and research. This concept of learner autonomy may have originated in debates about the development of life-long learning and independent thinking skills in the 1960s (Gardner & Miller, 2002) and it has remained a catch word in the field of language education since the 1980s.

Holec is regarded as a leading figure in the study of autonomy in foreign language learning and his definition of it has been considered as a starting point for much of the later work in this area. According to him, learner autonomy is a conceptual tool – 'the ability to take charge of one's own learning' (1981:3). Dickinson describes learner autonomy as a 'situation in which the learner is totally responsible for all of the decisions concerned with his or her learning and the implementations of those decisions' (1987:11). Dam et al. (1990) defines learner autonomy in terms of the learners' willingness and readiness to control or monitor their own learning. Little argues that learner autonomy is 'essentially a matter of the learner's psychological relation to the process and content of learning – a capacity for detachment, critical reflection, decision-making, and independent action' (1991:4). Cotterall (2000)

believes that learner autonomy is a central aim of all forms of learning; it involves many things such as setting goals, choosing learning strategies, and evaluating progress. The concept of learner autonomy has been used interchangeably with several other terms such as self-directed learning or self-regulated learning.

Cotterall (1995:219) summarizes three categories of reasons to justify the advocacy of autonomy in language learning:

1. Philosophical reasons: the belief that learners have the right to make choices with regard to their learning; the need to prepare learners for a rapidly changing future, in which independence in learning will be vital for effective functioning in society (Knowles 1975); the expectation of an increase in enthusiasm for learning (Littlejohn 1985).
2. Pedagogical reasons: adults demonstrably learn more, and more effectively when they are consulted about dimensions such as the pace, sequence, mode of instruction and even the content of what they are studying (Candy 1988:75); learners who are involved in making choices and decisions about aspects of the programme are also likely to feel more secure in their learning.
3. Practical reasons: a teacher may not always be available to assist; learners need to learn on their own simply because they do not always have access to the kind or amount of individual instruction they need; learners become more efficient if they do not have to wait for the teacher to provide them with resources or solve their problems.

Autonomous learners hold a positive attitude towards learning by taking ownership and responsibility for their learning and taking initiative in the process. They are able to independently set their own learning goals, to choose learning materials and make good use of them; to organize their time wisely, to choose learning methods, to plan and implement their own learning tasks; to select appropriate learning strategies and sometimes even to choose the criteria or ways of assessment. In summary, autonomous learners are capable of making reasonable choices as to why, what and how to learn, implementing the plan and evaluating the results. Once they have learnt how to learn, they become lifelong learners who will be able to achieve success in the real outside world by using these skills developed in schools and universities such as self-management and critical thinking. Once again, the concept of learner autonomy has placed learners at the centre. They are enthusiastically and proactively involved in decision-making and implementation. They have clear purposes of learning and

set specific agendas. As a result, learning becomes more effective and efficient because it is more personal and focused, and students are more motivated and committed.

However, researchers are not in complete agreement as to the degree of responsibility on the part of learners. Some of them argue that an autonomous learner will assume total responsibility for all the decisions concerning his/her learning. Others may disagree.

Littlewood (1999) points out that taking responsibility means that learners take partial or total ownership of many processes which have traditionally belonged to the teacher. It may not be the case that learners are autonomous in all circumstances; instead they may have to work towards autonomy. According to Nunan (1997), it may be the fact that the fully autonomous learner is an ideal, not a reality.

Although Nunan illustrates that language classrooms are the best place for inspiring learners as they move towards autonomy, he also admits that this is a slow process: 'I have found that it is usually well into a course before learners are in a position to make informed choices about what they want to learn and how they want to learn, and it is not uncommon that learners are in such a position only at the end of the course' (Nunan, 1996:15).

4.2.4.3 LC curriculum

According to Yeary (1998), there are two complementary components in LC education: placing more responsibility in the hands of the students and requiring the instructor to serve as the 'presenter or facilitator of knowledge' rather than the traditional 'source of all knowledge'. These correspond to promoting learner autonomy and shifting the teachers' role. They focus on changes of roles and the distribution of power (He, 2003). How in practice are these two ideas applied in real teaching and learning? The answer is an LC curriculum – a curriculum with learner-centredness as a main principle. According to Nunan (1988), it is an attempt from the course design point of view to realize learner-centredness. The main idea is that learners should be taken as the reference point for decision-making with regard to both the content and the form of teaching (Tudor, 1996). The whole process can be seen as a piece of collaborative work between teachers and learners. According to Nunan (2001) an LC curriculum contains the same elements as a traditional curriculum– planning, implementation and evaluation. The difference lies in the degree of students' involvement at each of the stages.

The starting point of any curriculum is planning. For an LC curriculum, typical planning procedures are needs analysis and goal setting. A learning needs analysis may help teachers and students to identify where the students are in their knowledge, skills, and competencies as well as where they would like to be. Only after this can they have a clear idea of how to fill in the gap by selecting the appropriate course contents and teaching methods. In this way, students' needs are placed first. In order to conduct a needs analysis for a language course, teachers need to collect such information about their students as age, educational background, current proficiency levels, learning experience, interests, preferred teaching methods or learning styles and the general purpose of learning the language. This can be done through a process of consultation and negotiation. The main underlying reason is that learning is most meaningful when the content of learning relates to the students' experiences, knowledge, needs, and interests and when the learners themselves are actively involved in creating, understanding and applying knowledge (McCombs and Whistler, 1997). In a traditional curriculum, teaching or learning goals are decided by educational authorities or institutions. However, in an LC curriculum teachers should listen to students' opinions and seek their advice when setting the goals of teaching. However, the goals may need to be modified during the course of programme delivery as students' skills and self-understanding develop, and their needs change (Nunan, 1988). Thus this process can be seen as one calling for continuous shaping and refinement, not pre-determined and unchangeable. The benefits are that, on the one hand, goals are more responsive, reasonable and meaningful when they are based on the results of learners' needs analysis; on the other hand, learners are more motivated in the following learning process if they already know that the teaching/learning plan will meet their personal needs. A clear and realistic goal is crucial to determine the success of a course and it serves as guidelines in selecting the appropriate teaching materials, methods and means of evaluation, which will be discussed next.

There are two major issues at the implementation stage – teaching materials and teaching methods. Teaching materials are often regarded as the tangible manifestation of the curriculum in action – they provide detailed specification of what to learn; they create a concrete model of classroom practices; they also influence the roles that teachers and learners may occupy. Two principles are adopted in my own research based on the previous discussion of the theoretical foundations for the LC approach. First, they need to be communicative-oriented, as the ultimate goal of studying a language is to use the language to communicate. Traditional English textbooks in China were full of structural and lexical items

due to the focus on linguistic forms at that time. With the development of the concepts of CC and its implications for language teaching, other language competencies have been drawn into attention – sociolinguistic, discourse and strategic. As noted by Tarone and Yule (2000:17) ‘there has been a change of emphasis from presenting language as a set of forms (grammatical, phonological, lexical) which have to be learned, to presenting language as a functional system which is used to fulfill a range of communicative purposes’. Accordingly teaching materials adopted in an LC classroom should be focused on CC. Secondly, they need to be authentic as language courses are to assist learners to do in class what they will need to be able to do outside (Nunan, 2001). In other words, good materials should have a high level of authenticity, reflecting the outside world. Authentic materials usually are interesting and stimulating with the ability to bring learners closer to the culture of the language they are studying. Once learners’ interest or curiosity is aroused, they will find the learning process more enjoyable. Little et al (1989) summarize three reasons in support of the use of authentic texts – motivating learners, promoting acquisition and if used in sufficient quantities, contributing to language immersion. According to Nunan, authentic materials are those produced for purposes other than language teaching, and they can be derived from ‘video clips, recording of authentic interactions, extracts from television, radio and newspapers, signs, maps and charts, photographs and pictures, timetables and schedules’ (1985:38). There are other characteristics of authentic teaching and learning materials proposed by Nunan (2001) – fostering independent learning, considering learner difference, flexibility, and reflecting the sociocultural context of the target language.

As to teaching methods, they should be flexible enough to meet the different needs of learners at different stages of their learning. One particular method is unlikely to suit every learner present in the classroom due to the differences in individual personalities, educational backgrounds, experiences and expectations of the course (Tudor, 1993). Furthermore, different methods may become necessary as the course develops into different stages (Wang, 2007). Teachers may work with various approaches as long as their methods or techniques work well with their students. The adoption of a particular method depends on learners’ needs (Nunan, 2001), not on the strict adherence to a specific language theory. Another benefit of adopting various methods is that it may work better in catering for learners’ differences. One method that is stimulating or effective to one individual may not be able to achieve the same result from others. In other words, various methods will address the differences among learners. Bonk and Cunningham (1998) give a list of examples of LC educational practices:

collaborative group learning, both inside and outside the classroom; individual student research and discovery; research and discovery by students and faculty together; problem-based inquiry learning; student-faculty studio and performance activities; asynchronous distance learning; hands-on, experiential activities, etc. It can be inferred from this list that interaction is a key feature of the methods or practices used in an LC classroom, as can be shown from collaborative group learning and joint work by teachers and students. According to King (2006, cited in Zhong, 2010), interactive teaching and learning is a two-way process in which teachers modify their approach in response to learners' needs, whilst at the same time learners interact with peer students, teachers and the environment. Another key feature is experiential learning, which can be seen in problem-based learning and hands-on, experiential activities. As pointed out by Gibbons & Gray (2002), teachers should design tasks that trigger learning experiences. Experiential learning helps learners to grasp knowledge and skills more extensively and permanently (Kilic, 2010).

Classroom activities are the real manifestation of teaching methods in practice. Students should have their say in organizing classroom activities because it is assumed that the more involved they are, the more motivated they are. LC activities that are commonly used in the language classroom include group work, pair work, role play, discussion, debates and language games.

Evaluation is the third component of any curriculum. Evaluation and assessment are used interchangeably in many cases, but Nunan tries to distinguish them from each other in LC language instruction. According to him (2001) assessment refers to the set of processes by which student learning is judged, while evaluation means that not only is the extent to which students have achieved the objectives of the course measured, but also considerations and decisions are taken as to whether or which part of the course needs to be modified. As a result, evaluation here means assessment and feedback. One feature of evaluation in LC education is that it may happen at any stage during a course due to its function of providing feedback, which is different from traditional evaluation usually occurring at the end of the course. These feedbacks are helpful in providing information to shape teaching/learning and closing the gap between current and expected performance. Self-assessment is another feature of LC evaluation (ibid). Evaluation is no longer merely a teacher's job because students can be involved in this process as well. Teachers can train their students in the skill of evaluating

teaching materials, learning activities and the achievement of learning objectives. Learners' self-awareness as active participants will be increased.

The previous part of this chapter has reviewed the relevant theories and studies about the LC approach. The next part of the literature review will be devoted to washback effects, which is the third focus of the current study and one of the main reasons behind the CET reform as discussed in the previous chapter.

4.3 Washback Effects

First there will be a review of the definitions of washback, and then some theoretical and empirical research on the washback effects of language testing will be discussed in detail. Much evidence suggests that testing does influence teaching and learning. Although it is a comparatively new topic in language education, it has been discussed at length in general education (Wall, 2000). As far back as 1877 Latham (in Cheng, 1999) described the examination system as an 'encroaching power' that was influencing education. This ability of testing is referred to as 'effects' in general education literature and 'washback' or 'backwash' in language testing and applied linguistics (Rea-Dickins and Scott, 2007). In the research on the impact of tests on language teaching and learning, the term 'washback' is widely used. However, as Alderson & Wall (1993:115-129) explained, 'we see no reason, semantic or pragmatic, for preferring either label'. In this study, the term 'washback' is used for consistency in line with the British convention.

There was little discussion of washback in language education before the 1990s (Wall, 2000). 'The few empirical studies which existed relied on survey data or on test results rather than on direct contact with the classroom' (ibid: 501). Since the 1990s a larger number of studies have been undertaken on the washback effect of language testing. Washback is no longer treated as an assumed truth (Andrews, 2004); instead it has become a subject calling for serious theoretical and empirical investigation.

4.3.1 Definitions of washback

Many linguists have discussed it in their work and offered rational definitions, ranging from simple or straightforward ones to very complicated ones.

Hughes defines washback simply as ‘the effect of testing on teaching and learning’ (1989:1) which could be either harmful or beneficial. He thinks if a test is considered significant, then preparation for it can dominate all teaching and learning activities (ibid). There would be a harmful impact if the content and techniques of assessment are in conflict with the objectives of the course. From his statements, two inferences can be drawn: 1) testing plays a significant role in teaching and learning, and 2) teaching and testing should be in harmony with each other in order to achieve a better learning outcome.

Shohamy (1992:514) describes washback as ‘the utilization of external language tests to affect and drive foreign language learning (in) the school context.’ She thinks that ‘this phenomenon is the result of the strong authority of external testing and the major impact it has on the lives of test takers’ (ibid). The problem with Shohamy’s definition is that not all language tests are designed to affect or drive foreign language learning. Some are only set up to evaluate and to provide information, but they may in some cases unavoidably have some influence on teaching and learning. According to Shohamy’s definition the influence of those tests designed to evaluate and give feedback cannot be regarded as washback.

Messick (1996) describes washback as the extent to which the test influences language teachers and learners to do what they would not otherwise necessarily do to facilitate language learning. According to this definition, only *what* teachers and learners do can be influenced by a certain test. However, in fact *how* they do, and the degree, the frequency or the extent of, a certain practice can also be counted as the impact of testing. To give an example, there may be an activity to promote language learning which teachers and learners will carry out even without a test. However, the introduction of a test with this activity may increase the frequency of its use, which can also be considered as the washback of the test.

Brown (2004) adopts a similar point of view in claiming that washback is the effects that a test may have on instruction in terms of how students prepare for the test. Brown’s definition excludes teachers and others who might be influenced by assessment, which may seem less holistic.

The discussions above focus on teachers and students in classroom settings, which seem to result in narrower definitions when compared to others who think that it is a more complicated phenomenon than simply the impact of a test on teaching and learning. They

hold that a test will influence educational systems or even society in general. Pierce is one of them, saying that ‘the washback effect ... refers to the impact of a test on classroom pedagogy, curriculum development and educational policy’ (Pierce, 1992: 687). Bachman and Palmer also discuss washback broadly, referring to it as an impact on individuals (such as test takers and teachers), on the society and on the educational system (1997). Andrews (1994) adds parents to the list of people who may be influenced by a test. However, he also sees washback as ‘a complex and ill-defined phenomenon’ and calls for more research to be undertaken in this area for better understanding of the presumed, intended or unintended influence of test, and for curricular innovation.

Some researchers make a distinction between these ‘wider’ and ‘narrower’ effects: the wider effects of testing, e.g. on teaching materials, the educational system or even society in general are called ‘impacts’; whereas the specific effects on teaching and learning are referred to as ‘washback’ (Wall, 1997, Taylor 2006, Fox & Cheng, 2007). ‘Indeed, washback can be considered to be one aspect of impact, the former being micro-level and the latter macro-level effects’ (Rea-Dickens & Scott, 2007:3). Due to the limitations (time, resources and funding) of the current research, however, the study on the influence of testing is confined to teaching and learning. As a result, Turner’s definition may work more practically here that generally speaking washback in second language (L2) education refers to the influence of a test or other education procedures on teaching and learning (Turner, 2001).

Although it has been discussed by a diverse group of researchers using different wording and from different angles, there is a general agreement on one point: it is the influence of the test rather than the test itself that should be the focus of this type of research. Another point that should be noted is that the concept of washback is always associated with high-stakes tests, whose results ‘are seen - rightly or wrongly - by students, teachers, administrators, parents or the general public, as being used to make important decisions that immediately and directly affect them’ (Madaus, 1988:87). The two tests that the current research is going to investigate are CET and IELTS, both of which are viewed by their test-takers as high-stakes tests.

4.3.2 Theoretical studies of washback

4.3.2.1 Washback Mechanisms

In the last two decades, washback has become a focus for theoretical investigation, and different hypotheses and models have been put forward trying to illustrate the working

mechanism of washback. Among those contributions, two are highly influential in providing frameworks for research into washback (Rea-Dickens & Scott, 2007): Alderson and Wall's Washback Hypotheses which laid the foundation for washback research; and Hughes and Bailey's Washback Model which clarifies the process of how washback works.

Within the context of EFL, Alderson and Wall (1993:120-121) and Alderson & Hamp-Lyons (1996) propose a series of impact hypotheses concentrating on the influence of tests on various aspects of teaching and learning. The intention of the hypotheses is not to seek absolute conclusions of confirmation or rejection, but to clarify the issues that washback studies must address. In the context of language education, Alderson and Wall (1993) point out that more research on washback is needed and researchers need to use more restricted definitions and more varied instruments, e.g. classroom observations.

Hughes (1993) constructed a basic tripartite washback model, which is described by Bailey (1996) and represented in the following figure:

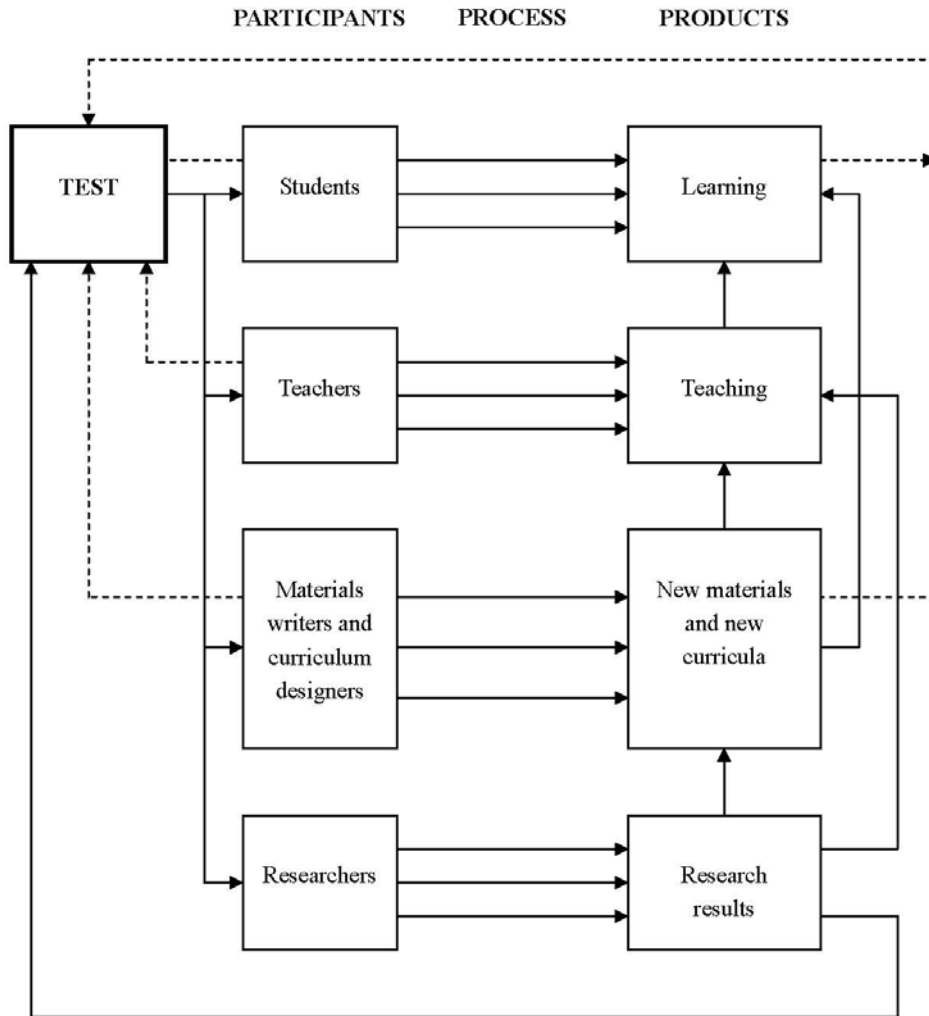


Figure 4-1: A basic model of washback

A distinction is made between washback on the participants, the process and the products of an educational system. All the three parties may be affected by the nature of a test. ‘Participants’ may refer to students, classroom teachers, administrators, material developers and publishers, i.e. ‘all of those whose perceptions and attitudes towards their work may be affected by a test’ (Hughes 1993:2, quoted in Bailey, 1996:262). ‘Process’ may include materials development, syllabus design, changes in teaching methodology, the use of learning and test-taking strategies, i.e. ‘any action taken by the participants which may contribute to the process of learning’ (ibid). Finally ‘product’ refers to ‘what is learned (facts, skills, etc) and the quality of the learning (fluency, etc)’ (ibid). The inter-relationship among these three factors is represented in the above figure. A test may first influence the participants’ understanding and attitudes to their teaching and learning tasks, which will then have an impact on the process of completing the tasks, and which may in the end affect the

learning results. In this model we can also see very clearly that a test directly influences the participants who are engaged in various processes, leading to products specific to each category of participants. Furthermore, the model also clearly points out how in turn products can provide feedbacks which may bring about changes to tests.

One problem with the above model is that according to Bailey teaching has no direct impact on the test while all the other three aspects of products do (learning, new materials and new curricula, research results). To my personal knowledge this type of impact does exist in some cases. Researchers working on the washback effect must first identify the type of washback they intend to study. In the current research the focus is on teachers/learners and teaching/learning practices, and if the results prove to be useful and enlightening hopefully they may draw more attention from administrators, curriculum developers or policy makers. Another problem with this model is that it does not 'include test design based on the needs of the learners in individual contexts as part of the washback investigation process' (Saif, 2006:3). As a result, this model may only be appropriate to studies exploring possible washback effects of the tests that are already in existence, but may not be comprehensive enough to be used to investigate the intended washback effect of a specially designed exam with the purpose of inducing specific outcomes. However, this limitation does not apply in the current study because the research objects (CET & IELTS) have been in existence for a long time and it would be beyond the current researcher's capability to make any changes in search of any intended outcomes.

Both Alderson & Wall and Hughes & Bailey attempt to outline the areas of washback research. Alderson & Wall's Hypotheses using a dichotomous way assume that the washback effect may involve two parties (teachers and students) and two processes (teaching and learning). Hughes's basic model makes a trichotomous distinction between washback on the participants, the process and the products. Besides teachers and students, his model also includes materials writers, curriculum designers and researchers, which improves and extends Alderson and Wall's Hypotheses.

The above theoretical discussions have laid a solid foundation for empirical studies (which will be discussed in more detail in the later part of this chapter). In turn they need more empirical evidence to make them more in-depth and accurate.

4.3.2.2 Classifications of washback effect - Positive and negative washback

Although the washback effect has been generally defined as the effect of testing on teaching and learning, this effect in fact can be either positive or negative (Bailey, 1996). If a test can promote teaching/learning and encourage the attainment of educational goals, it brings positive or beneficial washback; on the contrary, if it hinders teaching and learning, it will produce negative or harmful washback. Negative washback has been the main cause for criticism in specific testing contexts, such as CET in the Chinese context. Especially in the past, it is the assumed harmful influence that was the focus of the discussion on the effect of testing. As summarized by Alderson and Wall (1993), some tests with negative washback effects have been suspected of narrowing or distorting curricula (Vernon, 1956; Madaus 1988; Cooley 1991), the loss of instructional time (Smith et al, 1989), and the reduced emphasis on skills that require complex thinking or problem-solving (Fredericksen, 1984; Darling-Hammond and Wise, 1985). This kind of washback effect should be avoided. In contrast, tests with potential positive washback effects will have enlightening effects on language curricula. This kind of washback is the priority in test design. The existence of both positive and negative washback is acknowledged. Any test, whether it is good or bad, may produce beneficial or harmful impacts. The priority of researchers is to identify the positive and negative influence that a test does have, and the reasons behind those negative impacts so as to propose changes in order to maximize the positive influence.

Positive washback has already been recognized as an important criterion in developing and evaluating language tests, together with validity, reliability and practicality. According to many discussions of language testing, validity and reliability are always in opposing positions to practicality, because in order to make a test more valid or reliable, longer time and more resources may be spent on the training, developing and administration. This means that the value of one element has to be achieved at the expense of losing the other. As the fourth essential element in developing or evaluating tests, washback, especially potentially positive washback should 'join validity and reliability in the balance against practicality' (Hughes, 1988:146, cited in Bailey, 1999).

Instead of being posited as a criterion in developing language tests, in this current study, the washback of CET and IELTS is investigated to evaluate language tests and shed light on their possible influence. Here washback is judged to be positive or negative according to the degree it encourages or hinders the appropriate forms of teaching and learning. The negative

influence of CET had been much debated in the Chinese educational context. That is why CET reform was initiated to amend the problems. This research intends to investigate the nature of CET washback after the reform has been in place for several years. Comparison will be made with the nature of IELTS washback, because IELTS is another test that some students in this specific case need to take.

From the above review of the literature, it can be seen that the washback effect of language testing has been widely discussed from different perspectives. Next, there will be a detailed review of the empirical research done in this field.

4.3.3 Empirical Studies of Washback

Much of the research on washback before the 1990s was limited due to the lack of direct empirical evidence. To amend this shortage, in recent years a number of empirical washback studies have been conducted to investigate different types of test impact in a variety of settings by using different research methods. Some of the most influential or relevant ones are reviewed in the following sections of this chapter.

Wall and Alderson (1993) carried out a longitudinal study to investigate the impact of a new O-level English examination in Sri Lanka's secondary schools on language teaching by using questionnaires, interviews, document analysis and detailed classroom observation before and after the implementation of this new examination to compare these two sets of data. In contrast to the previous studies which may only use questionnaire and interview data, the incorporation of classroom observational data is original and valuable (it constituted a major component with over 300 classroom observations conducted). It has become a model for many subsequent studies in this field. Their conclusion is that the impact of the new examination did exist, but was less influential and widespread than had been assumed. The results provided evidence for the presence of the washback effect (both positive and negative) on what the teachers taught and the way teachers designed classroom assessment, but not on how they taught, which means that it had little impact on their teaching methodology. Although they concluded that there were no indications that the exam was affecting the teaching methodologies, in my opinion, we should examine the test formats in more detail before we could make such a claim. The exam they studied only included items to assess reading and writing skills, but not listening and speaking skills. However, the tasks for developing listening and speaking skills may provide learners with more opportunities to

interact and require them to take a more active role in learning (Zhao, 2005). Reading and writing can be done individually, but the tasks of listening and especially speaking may need more paired or group work. So in their study, the reason that the methodology was not influenced by the test might be due to the inappropriate testing formats. Assessment may have the potential to influence teaching methodology if the testing formats and contents are chosen carefully and scientifically.

In the US, Alderson and Hamp-Lyons (1996) did a study to explore the existence and extent of washback of TOEFL using classroom observation and interviews with teachers and students in a five-week preparation programme of TOEFL. Both non-TOEFL preparation classes and TOEFL preparation classes taught by the same teacher were observed. This is similar to the current research design, which will be presented in the next chapter. The results show that TOEFL did influence both the content and the way teachers taught, but the effect varied in degree and types among teachers. The research shows that it may be comparatively easy to use tests to bring about changes in the teaching content, but much more difficult to do so in teaching methods. More importantly, it shows that it is not just the test that causes washback, but rather the way it is approached by administrators, materials writers and teachers themselves which actually creates the specific washback of a given language test. The findings are similar to the conclusions drawn by Wall and Alderson (1993).

Shohamy (1993) and Shohamy et al (1996) made a comparative study of the washback effect of 3 national language tests to see if there were any changes over time by using questionnaires, interviews and document analysis. They conclude that the washback effects of tests may change as time goes on and the difference is caused by several factors: the stake of the test (high or low), the status of that language, the use of the test results and the format of the tests, etc. Contrary to Wall & Alderson (1993) or Alderson & Hamp-Lyons (1996), the influence of testing is confirmed on both teaching content and methods. The conclusion is that washback is likely to be complex (Shohamy et al, 1996).

Watanabe (1996) conducted a preliminary study of the washback effect that an additional test component (translation) in college entrance exams has on teaching by comparing two different kinds of classrooms – with only one kind of classroom having translation in the new exam. The study concludes that the additional translation component will affect the teaching of some teachers but not others, and it will affect teachers in different ways. Similar to

Alderson and Hamp-Lyons (1996), he suggested that the personal characteristics of the teachers such as their beliefs about teaching, educational background and previous learning experience will affect the teaching more than the test itself.

Cheng (1997, 1998, 1999, 2003 and 2004) carried out a series of studies on the washback effect of the Hong Kong Certificate of Education Examination (HKCEE) in English in Hong Kong secondary schools. She studied different aspects of washback. The 1997 and 2003 studies concentrated on the washback on teaching; the 1998 one examined the impact on students' perceptions and attitudes; while the 1999 and 2004 ones were devoted to studying the washback on teachers. All these studies were about the same test and based in the same context. The methodologies applied are questionnaires to both teachers and students, interviews and classroom observations. The findings show that the teaching content (especially when compared with the teaching methods), among different aspects of teaching and learning, received the most distinctive washback effect. There is one thing I would like to address regarding the conclusion drawn by Cheng. In her words, the impact on teaching methods was very limited. However, it seems that she did not provide a clear definition of teaching methods (Zhao, 2005). Thus the discussions tend to get a bit confusing sometimes. For example, in her 1999 study, she noticed that there were an increasing number of opportunities for students' activities, and even new types activities were organized. In my opinion, some of these changes could be regarded as an indication of a more active LC classroom, and an indication of positive washback on teaching methods.

Andrews et al (2002) did empirical research in a similar context to Cheng (1999-2004): Hong Kong. To fill the gap noted by Wall (2000) that less research attention was paid to the impact of tests on the 'products of learning' than on classroom processes, their study focuses on examining how an additional oral component to this high-stakes test affects the speaking performance of those test-takers. The findings provide some tentative support to their hypotheses: that tests influence what students learn and their spoken English performance, and also that it takes some time before the impact of test innovation can take place. However, this washback is unpredictable because of the individual differences among teachers and students, and some of the washback effects are present at a very superficial level, such as becoming familiar with exam format and the learning of test taking strategies. One thing needs to be addressed regarding the findings of this study. The researchers comment that 'the impact of the test on student performance is delayed' (Andrews et al, 2002:207). If so, then

given more time, the above mentioned conclusion – that the washback occurs at a very superficial level —may have a chance to develop into a deeper level of positive washback, such as the mastery of the language skill gradually (Zhao, 2005). However, the research methods adopted in this study, especially the way the researchers analyzed the learning products (performance score and language output), are crucial in complementing the previous studies which mainly focused on the other two ‘P’s in Hughes’ model: participants and process.

Ferman (2004) did some research on the intended washback effects of a newly-introduced oral matriculation test in Israeli high schools. The research methods used are structured questionnaire, structured and open interviews and document analysis. Findings confirmed the existence of a strong washback effect on the participants, the educational process, and the products. However, there were both positive and negative washback effects. Positive influence was reflected in the findings that more focus and attention were given to speaking and students’ oral skills improved. Negative washback included that the scope and content of teaching and learning were narrowed and that learners tended to memorize some materials rather than to develop skills. The findings also confirmed the significant role test formats and task contents play in deciding the nature of the washback effect, through the discussion of one component of the test: extended reading. This study also proves clearly for the first time that washback affects both the ‘what’ and ‘how’ of teaching: teaching content and teaching methodology. One factor to be noted here is that Ferman (2004) and Shohamy et al (1996) drew similar conclusions when investigating the same research object in the same research context (Israeli high schools) although at different times and using different research methods. The finding they shared is that washback was observed on teaching content as well as on teaching methodology.

Just like TOEFL in Alderson and Hamp-Lyons’ 1996 study, IELTS is another popular international exam to assess non-native speakers’ English skills. In New Zealand, Hayes and Read (2004) conducted a study to investigate the washback effect of IELTS (academic module). They adopted a comparison model – comparing two different courses: one was exam-focused and the other was skills-focused (skills of English for Academic Purposes), both of which lasted for 4 weeks. Four types of data were collected: classroom observation, interviews, questionnaires and pre-/post-tests. Washback was clearly demonstrated in the exam-focused preparation course, although with a negative nature. The comparative element

in their research is similar to the current research and IELTS is one of the two research objects in the current study as well. However, the courses in their study were short-term intensive preparation courses, which are different to the current study in that the two courses of the current study are systematic programmes lasting 1.5 to 2 years. Washback effects observed from short-term intensive courses may be different from those from long-term extensive courses, although the same exam is required, because some washback does take time to occur (Cheng, 2003).

Another similar study about IELTS washback was done by Green in the UK (Green, 2007). Comparison of score gains was made among learners of three types of courses, all designed to prepare international students to study in British universities: one with a focus on test preparation, one to introduce students to academic writing in university settings and one combining the above two features. Pre-/post-tests were used together with questionnaires. No clear advantage was found in the test-focused course on improving writing scores. These three types of course in question ranged from 4-14 weeks in length and were intensive in that 15-28 teaching hours per week were involved. Other washback studies of IELTS include Deakin (1996), Brown (1998), and Hawkey (2006). However, as Green (2007:78) comments 'because they focus only on IELTS preparation classes, most of the studies have been unable to establish how teachers might change their behaviours if they were not preparing students to take a test'; or if they are preparing students for the test as well as focusing on the development of language skills (like the ITE course in my own study).

Other recent empirical washback studies include Saif (2006), Fox & Cheng (2007) and Muñoz & Álvarez (2010). As can be seen from the above discussion, in the last two decades an increasing number of empirical studies have been undertaken on the washback effects of language (especially English) assessment. They have been carried out in different contexts with the use of various research methodologies, even at different times after a certain test was first introduced. Mixed findings were presented from different perspectives of the washback effect. However, from the above review, one conclusion can be drawn, that washback does exist as a phenomenon, although it is complex and unpredictable. Many interacting factors will influence the washback – the educational context, participant factors (e.g. teachers or students), the test context, etc. 'It not only varies according to the test, but also in terms of contextual factors and participants' responses' (Rea-Dickens & Scott, 2007:2). Given the current situation of research in this field, assumptions should not apply. Further empirical

studies are desirable to investigate a certain test in a certain context during different periods of its implementation.

4.3.4 Empirical washback studies in mainland China

The washback research in mainland China mainly concentrates on nationwide CET and NMET (National Matriculation English Test) except for a few articles introducing overseas theories of washback effect in language testing and a few others studying the washback of TEM (Test for English Majors). Some of them are general theoretical discussions and lack in-depth and in-detail exploration. These publications provide an insight into the theories and models of language testing, but are short of support from empirical data. Some others are mainly based on one source of data rather than triangulated data. Since it has been proved that washback is a complex topic (Alderson & Wall, 1993; Shohamy et al, 1996, Bachman and Palmer, 1997), it seems not so valid and reliable to discuss the washback effect of a specific test when there are no multi-sourced data to complement this. Therefore, more comprehensive empirical studies with triangulation of research methods and data should be done to enrich the washback research in China.

To compensate for this, Qi (2003, 2004, and 2005) conducted a comprehensive study on the washback of the NMET. The methods she adopted were questionnaires and interviews (semi-structured individual and group interviews). The research is based on a large amount of data collected from 8 NMET constructors, 6 English inspectors, 388 teachers and 986 students. The study provides new empirical evidence to understand the washback effects in the Chinese educational context, especially using tests to engineer pedagogical innovations in China. The conclusion is that the intended washback is limited and as a result in this context NMET is not an efficient tool to produce pedagogical changes in schools due to the conflict between its two major functions – the selection function and the function of promoting changes (cf. Cheng, 2008). One problem with this study is with its data collection methods. Classroom observation was not used, which may make the results less reliable, because it is dangerous to believe what the teachers and learners say without observing what is really happening in classrooms (Wall & Alderson, 1993).

As mentioned above, most of the washback studies in the Chinese context are concerned with CET, such as Jin (2000), Huang (2002), Zhou (2002) and Han, Dai & Yang (2004).

Questionnaire survey is the only research method used in Jin (2000) and Han, Dai & Yang

(2004), while Huang (2002) and Zhou (2002) are more versatile on this respect, using questionnaire, interview and classroom observation. As to the findings, they are mixed: 1) Jin (2000) confirms the absolute positiveness of washback of CET-SET on learners' spoken English skill and its test design; 2) Huang (2002) points out the differences in washback that different types of institutions may experience and the many aspects of teaching and learning that may be influenced, including teaching methods. The conclusion contradicts many criticisms of the test in that CET exerts more positive influence than negative influence; 3) Zhou (2002) shares a similar view to Huang (2002), that CET as a whole has promoted CE teaching and learning in China; 4) Han, Dai & Yang (2004) hold different opinions – their study shows that over 70% of the teachers from 40 institutes did not believe that the test could improve overall English teaching and learning at the level of higher education in China and 77.9% did not think a CET certificate would necessarily mean the holder has acquired English competency as required by the CE Teaching Syllabus.

Gu (2007) conducted a comprehensive study on the relationship of washback to CET and CE teaching/learning from 2002-2005, in both case study settings and nationwide contexts. A range of different research methods were used. A total of approximately 4500 stakeholders were involved. Both positive and negative effects were found with the positive influence being greater. Most of the stakeholders agree it is an effective means of measurement. They attribute its negative influence to the misuse of it by stakeholders. However, they also expressed their concerns such as the overuse of multiple-choice format, the lack of direct score reports to the teachers and the absence of a compulsory spoken English test, etc. Some of the above concerns (such as the misuse of the test by stakeholders) correspond with the reasons why the MoE initiated the CET reform as discussed in the previous chapter. The conclusion is that CET washback is more complicated than has been assumed in the profession and other factors may also play a role in determining the outcome of CE teaching and learning, such as students' educational background and administrators' considerations about the CE course and the CET. Although all the three 'P's in Hughes and Bailey's model were explored, the approach adopted to investigate the outcomes of learning is questionable. She compared the output of 3 candidates recorded in a 1999 sample CD to 72 randomly sampled test-takers' output of 2002, and then drew a conclusion that CET-SET had exerted a positive washback on speaking skill. However, I think the reliability of the conclusion may be jeopardized because there is no reference to the representativeness of the 3 candidates among all the examinees in 1999 and the sample size is not large enough.

A summary of all the empirical washback studies discussed in this chapter is included in the table in Appendix I adapted from Gu (2007). The studies were done in different contexts and to examine different aspects of testing. They adopted various methodologies and yielded mixed findings. As to the results of these studies, almost all of them confirm the washback effect of testing on language teaching and learning, more or less, in varied aspects such as teaching content, teachers' and learners' perception and practices, and student performance, etc, most of which have been put forward in Alderson and Wall's Washback Hypotheses.

4.4 Summary

The following findings from the above review indicate the significance of conducting the current research in this specific context:-

1) The LC approach, based on practical concerns in China and drawing theoretical support from several theories including CLT, Constructivism, Humanism and Adult Learning Theory, may have fundamentally changed the beliefs and pedagogies in language instruction. It has shifted the focus of language education from teaching to learning and from teachers to learners. Many studies have proved its usefulness as an effective teaching approach (Fazey & Parker, 2000; Reece & Walkers, 2000; Gao & Zhang, 2005).

As illustrated by Wohlfarth et al (2008:67), 'the broad learner-centred paradigm encapsulates our current understanding of the "best practices" in teaching, including an emphasis on active learning (McKeachie & Svinicki, 2006; Thompson, Licklider & Jungsbt 2003), problem-based learning (Blumberg, 2007) and, more generally, a thoughtful understanding of what the best teachers actually do in their classrooms (Bain, 2004).' It has the potential to make a valuable contribution to the EFL teaching in China.

However, not all innovations can be easily applied in every context or every culture. As this approach was developed in the West, there may be some barriers or hurdles in its implementation in China where cultures and traditions are distinct from the West. The promotion of learner-centredness necessitates a change in the way a person thinks about language learning and even about education itself. Hence, this study is going to explore how teachers and students in this particular case react to this pedagogical approach.

Wohlfarth et al (2008:68) comment that 'although the learner-centered paradigm has become the new buzzword in the field, empirical support is needed to move the paradigm from a

passing trend to a conceptual pillar of scholarship of teaching and learning ...Despite promising early findings, empirical support for learning-centered models is in its infancy'. This has indicated another reason to carry out the current study - not enough empirical work has been undertaken to prove the usefulness of the LC approach.

2) Most of the researchers agree that washback is far more complicated than it looks (Cheng, 2003; Andrews, Fullilove and Wong, 2002; Spratt, 2005). Many factors, such as teachers' competence and experience, administrators, and material writers, all work interactively to affect the teaching and learning. Different people experience the same event differently, depending on such things as their previous life experiences, educational or professional background, culture or political viewpoints (Burrows, 2004). The complexity of washback can be found from different perspectives. A test may have a positive or negative influence or even no influence at all on teaching and learning, and the degrees of effect may differ in a variety of aspects of education. Being such a complex issue, 'washback needs to be studied and understood, not asserted' (Wall & Alderson, 1993:68). As a result more empirical studies are necessary.

According to Turner (2001: 141), 'in second language education, empirical studies concerning washback are slowly increasing, but they are still scarce and even less prevalent than in general education'. Spratt (2005:8) also claims that 'it is still the case that more research is needed on washback, if only to confirm how generalizable the results of these studies are to other populations and situations, and to follow up on issues they raise.'

3) The washback effect of IELTS has rarely been discussed in the Chinese context, despite the fact that it is becoming more and more popular and involves a large number of stakeholders. Furthermore, although it has been researched in some countries such as New Zealand and the UK, the focus has always been on short-term intensive preparation programmes, which is different from the current study where the washback effect of IELTS is studied on a prolonged English course of about 2 years. Since this area (washback of IELTS on teaching and learning in a long-term systematic course) is rarely touched on, the current study is critical to shed some light on research in this area. Furthermore, it is obvious to see from the summary table in Appendix I that most of the empirical CET washback studies were carried out before the CET reform. There is little literature so far to empirically explore the washback of the reformed CET, which will make the current research important.

4) Context plays a significant role in determining the nature of the washback. As summarized from the table in the appendix, most of the washback studies outside China were conducted in secondary school contexts and most of the washback studies in China are not case studies. Since there is not a comprehensive and in-depth investigation of washback in this specific Chinese university, it is necessary to carry out one combining the different research methodologies and various data collection methods as discussed in the above review.

To summarize, a comprehensive study is necessary in exploring and documenting, in each context, the application of the LC approach and the impact a certain test has.

Chapter 5 Research Methodology

The analysis of the relevant documents and review of previous research on EFL teaching in Chinese higher education in the previous chapters have provided a theoretical and practical foundation for the present study.

As explained in Chapter 1, this study seeks to identify how the new national CE Teaching Requirements (2004 & 2007) are being implemented at one of the 180 pilot centres for CE Reform in China. To be more specific, the focuses of investigation cover three aspects: speaking skills, the LC teaching/learning model and the washback effects of testing. The topics were chosen on the basis of the analysis of relevant documents such as previous national CE Teaching Syllabi (1985, 1986, 1999) and the New Teaching Requirements (2004, 2007), and also on the basis of the review of some previous studies on the practical situation of CE teaching and learning. These three aspects were paramount when compared with other changes, initiatives or practical concerns.

The results of the current study present a recent and detailed picture of this university in terms of spoken English teaching, English teaching and learning models, and the impact of assessment. It is hoped that the results of this study may help this university or other similar Chinese higher educational institutions better understand how to develop learners' speaking skills, how to adopt the LC teaching model, and how to cope with the influence of English tests. The deeper understanding in turn may encourage teachers to reflect on their teaching practices and encourage the administration of the institution to reflect on university policies. According to Mezirow (2000), meaningful reflection can lead to transformative learning that changes teaching practice.

In its six sections, the present chapter offers the rationale for my choices of research methodologies, research design, and data collection instruments and presents the research context and research procedures. It begins with a detailed account of the general research methodologies used in this study. The review of research questions in the first section may help to justify the choice of research methodologies. The second section introduces the research design and the research context. Section three outlines the data collection instruments adopted in this study with specific reference to the individual research questions,

including a justification of the choices and the trial of the instruments. Section four covers how triangulation was adopted and how ethical issues were considered. Section five reviews how the data were collected and processed. Section six summarizes the above five sections.

5.1 Research methodology

Whether a choice of methodology is appropriate depends on the focus of study – the specific research questions to be addressed. Therefore, it is crucial here to review and illuminate the research questions of the current study.

5.1.1 Research questions

As mentioned above, the three major research focuses were formulated on the basis of a preliminary analysis of relevant documents and previous studies. The research subject was chosen as a response to the newly-initiated CE Reform during which 180 higher education institutes across China were chosen to pilot the reform. This particular university where the current study was undertaken was one of the 180 pilot centres. However, CE was not the only English course available in the curriculum – another English course (ITE) was offered to non-English major undergraduate students in one particular college. In addition to the CE course, the ITE course was also included in the investigation for the purpose of comparison, evaluation and exploration. Another reason is that including a comparative element is a common feature of studies on washback effects (Hayes and Read, 2004). Since the study on the influence of testing is the third major focus of my current research, I chose to include two types of courses (CE and ITE) and two English tests (CET and IELTS).

An emphasis on speaking skills is an important part of the changes in the teaching objectives of the New Teaching Requirements (2004 & 2007). Thus, the first research focus is on speaking skills. There are three sub-questions included here:

- 1) How do teachers and students on the CE course respond to the change in the teaching objectives and what factors influence their responses?
- 2) How are speaking skills developed in these two courses?
- 3) Which course is able to achieve a better result in developing learners' speaking skills? How does it manage to do so?

An LC model is recommended in the New CE Teaching Requirements (2004 & 2007). Thus the second research focus aims to investigate the teaching models adopted in these two

courses. Based on the review of literature in Chapter 4, this topic is explored with particular reference to three characteristics of the LC approach: shifting teachers' roles, promoting learner autonomy and an LC curriculum. Accordingly, three sub-questions are listed as follows:

- 1) What are the roles that teachers take on these two courses?
- 2) How autonomous are the learners on these two courses and what factors influence their responses ?
- 3) What are the curricula like on these two courses (with an emphasis on the implementation stage – selection of teaching materials and classroom teaching methods)?

The CET reform constitutes a critical part of the CE reform. It is an English assessment taken by students on the CE course. Its counterpart in the ITE course is IELTS. As reviewed in Chapter 2, the negative influence of CET on CE teaching and learning is considered a main motive for the CET reform. As a result, the third major research focus is to investigate the influence of testing - what influence do the reformed CET and IELTS impose on English teaching and learning in the two courses? As reviewed in Chapter 4, according to the Washback Hypotheses proposed by Alderson and Wall (1993), and the Washback Model put forward by Hughes (1993), this research question can be divided into several more explicit sub-questions:

- 1) Will these tests influence what and how teachers teach? In what way?
- 2) Will these tests influence teachers' attitudes to and perceptions of teaching? In what way?
- 3) Will these tests influence what and how learners learn? In what way?
- 4) Will these tests influence learners' attitudes to and perceptions of learning? In what way?
- 5) What are the impacts on learning outcomes in terms of speaking skills that these two tests exert?

A table may show clearly the focus of each sub-question:

Sub-question	Focus of washback investigation
1, 3	process
2,4	participants
5	products

Table 5-1: Washback research sub-questions in relation to the Washback model proposed by Hughes (1993)

5.1.2 A mixed research methodology

This study adopts a combination of qualitative and quantitative approaches – a mixed-methodology, which is defined as ‘the class of research where the researcher mixes or combines quantitative and qualitative research techniques, methods, concepts or language into a single study’ (Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004:17). On the one hand, a naturalistic, phenomenological and qualitative inquiry was undertaken as this study sought to describe and explore how speaking skills were perceived and developed, what kind of teaching models were adopted and what the washback effects of testing were. On the other hand, a statistical and quantitative approach was used for the purpose of comparison – comparison between two courses and comparison between two tests.

Quantitative and qualitative approaches are regarded as two different research paradigms. For more than one century, their respective advocates have been engaged in constant debates about the superior value of one or other of these two research methodologies, because they thought the two were not compatible (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). However, in fact they can be compatible with each other (Patton, 1990). It is possible to use these two approaches together, and quite often it is necessary to do so, because each has its own distinctive strengths which cannot be replaced by the other and its own limitations which *can* be compensated by the other.

Qualitative research methodology refers to any kind of research that generates findings based on descriptive data and does not make regular use of statistical procedures or other means of quantification (Mackey & Gass, 2005). It has several characteristics that make it a valuable tool in conducting research: 1) natural settings as the source of data; 2) rich description and holistic presentation; 3) the researcher as the research instrument; 4) open-ended process. Strauss and Corbin (1990 cited in Hoepfl, 1997:48-49) summarize the advantages by pointing out that qualitative methods can be used to ‘better understand any phenomenon about which little is yet known; they can also be used to gain new perspectives on things about which much is already known, or to gain more in-depth information that may be difficult to convey quantitatively’. In recent years this approach has come to occupy a dominant role in the field of educational research and it serves as a powerful tool for enhancing the understanding of EFL teaching and learning. In spite of the strengths mentioned above, however, the qualitative approach does have problems and limitations as well. They are briefly summarized into 3 categories: a) internal validity: two issues are involved here: sample size and the researcher as

instrument; b) external validity: this means whether the conclusions have any greater significance beyond the immediate context, and whether they can be transferred across different settings; c) objectivity: it is argued that since qualitative findings largely depend on the researcher's interpretation, and they are value-bounded, not value-free, thus they cannot be objective (Hoepfl, 1997).

The quantitative approach is defined as a formal and systematic study in which numerical data are collected and analyzed to obtain information and understanding of the world (Burns & Grove, 1993). It can be used either to test those theories that are already constructed or to test hypotheses formed at the beginning of the research. Standing apart from the research subjects, a researcher's role in a quantitative study is detached and impartial in order to prevent their biases or personal beliefs/values from influencing the research process and findings. It allows for generalization and prediction. Data collection and analysis are relatively less time consuming when compared to the qualitative approach, especially when statistical software is used. Data are collected in a numerical form which is scientific and precise, and thus quantitative studies are more objective and credible. Quantitative research possesses limitations as well. Since its focus is on numbers and results, some of the potentially valuable information will be missed, especially information about the process. Sometimes research findings can be superficial and abstract due to the lack of details. Just as in qualitative research there is a risk of researcher bias, in quantitative studies there is a danger of 'confirmation bias' (Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004:19), because in quantitative inquiries researchers (usually with a presumption before the actual conducting of the research) intend to test theories or hypotheses. Despite these limitations, the quantitative approach was still adopted for the strengths it has, and also because of the comparative nature of my present study and for the purpose of triangulation.

To summarize, both approaches with their distinct strengths and limitations can be useful. The selection is dependent on the research questions to be answered. No single approach (qualitative or quantitative) is absolutely correct or superior to the other one; rather they are complementary and compatible in that they can be used in combination to triangulate the research. What matters is how the research questions can be better addressed. Based on the above discussion of my research questions and the features of the two approaches, it is clear that the current research can only be answered by a combination of the two approaches. This

mixed-methodology design can provide a more complete and accurate picture of the studied situation than either type of research could provide by itself.

5.2 Research design and research context

As mentioned above, this research adopts a combination of quantitative and qualitative approaches. However, even within each paradigm there are different methods, and for each method there are various data collection instruments that can be used. To be more specific, the research method used in my research is a case study which is defined by Bassey as a study of a singularity conducted in depth in natural settings (Bassey, 1999).

The following figure clearly presents the research design (research procedures and data collection instruments) for my present study:

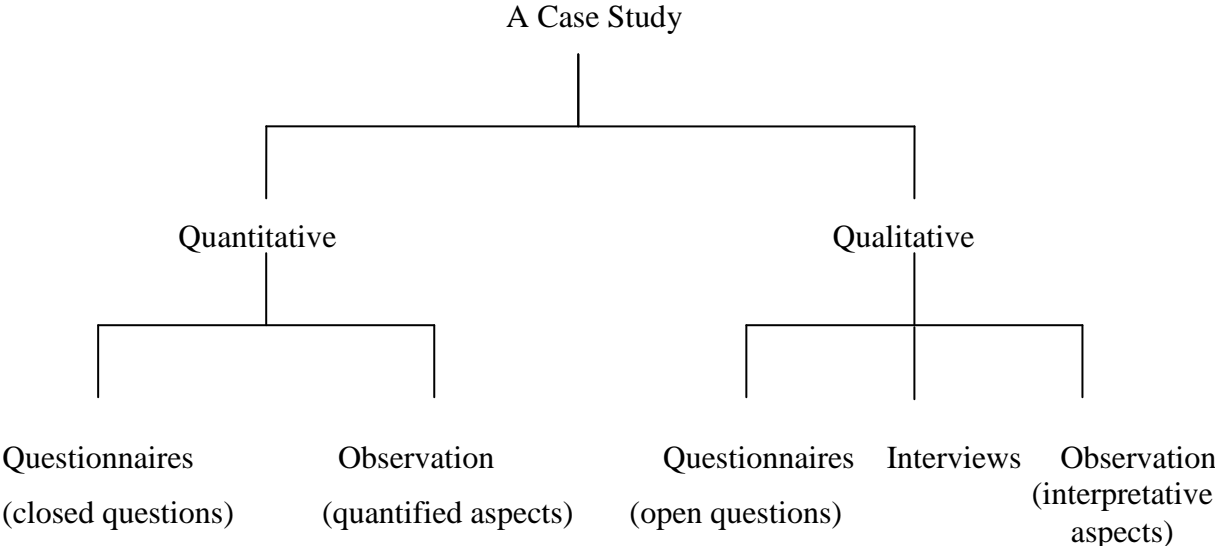


Figure 5-1 Research design

5.2.1 Research design – A case study

Case studies have been used in various investigations, particularly and increasingly in educational studies. They are usually considered as a qualitative research method. Therefore, they are supposed to share the strengths and limitations that were mentioned above about the qualitative research approach.

The case study is often regarded as a prime strategy both to develop educational theories, and to evaluate and enhance educational practices. It is preferred when ‘how’, ‘what’ and ‘why’ questions are being asked. My current research is an educational project with the underlying purpose of improving teaching and learning practices in Chinese EFL classrooms.

Furthermore, most of my research questions to be addressed belong to the category of ‘what’ and ‘how’ questions. A case study is particularly appropriate when a holistic and in-depth investigation is required (Feagin, Orum, & Sjoberg, 1991). As mentioned previously, I aim to present a relatively detailed and complete picture of the situation in one of the pilot centres for the CE reform. These are some of the main reasons that a case study was chosen.

A case study is not a data-gathering technique but a research method that incorporates a number of data collection measures such as documentation, archival records, interviews, direct observation, participant observation and physical artefacts (Yin, 2003).

In case studies, researchers can be totally immersed in the case, which may allow them to attend to every detail or piece of evidence during the process. In this way, rich, in-depth and integral information can be gathered in a single case study. Then comprehensive description and analysis can follow. The choice of a research method will depend, of course, on the research questions. My research focuses were on how speaking skills were developed, what the teaching/learning models were and what the influence of testing was, for which the exploration of one educational context in great depth and complexity was a plausible and desirable approach. This is a further reason why a case study was used.

Another characteristic of case studies is that they are conducted mainly in natural contexts. They are concerned with real people in real situations. Since the purpose of my research was to describe and evaluate an educational phenomenon, it was best to conduct it in a natural setting. Context is a strong determinant of both causes and results, and those causes and results are crucial in understanding the educational phenomenon I intended to study. Thus, the naturalness of the context is another reason why a case study was used in my research. By providing a detailed analysis of the context of my research, I can enable readers to make a meaningful comparison with other institutions, to judge if they are similar or not. The existence of similar contexts could be regarded as a counterargument to the claim that qualitative studies lack the basis for generalization.

The above is the justification for the use of a case study in my research. As already noted, this particular university was chosen because it is one of the 180 pilot centres nationwide in China for the CE reform. Since the research focuses on the three prominent aspects in the CE reform, the case to be chosen had to be a higher educational institute that was carrying out the CE reform. In addition, this university is well-known for its students' high scores in CETs at the provincial level and I had some connections there which might make the negotiation of access easier. There now follows a more detailed description of this specific setting where my research was undertaken.

5.2.2 Research context

There were good reasons for choosing this university to carry out my case study. It is one of the Chinese national key universities and among the first batch of '211 Project' universities. The '211 project' is a project of 106 (as of 2007) National Key Universities and colleges in the 21st century initiated in 1995 by the MoE of the People's Republic of China (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Project_211). There are over 1700 standard higher educational institutes in China, but only 6% of them belong to the elite '211 project'.

The Foreign Language Department of this university also has considerable prestige. It has a leading position in teaching foreign languages (especially the teaching of EFL) among universities or colleges of a similar type in China. In 2004, the MoE of China nominated it as one of the 180 Higher Education institutions for the CE teaching reform. As to my research subjects CE and CET, this university has a remarkable level of achievement and fine traditions: its CE course has been accredited as an excellent course at provincial level; the pass rate in CET has remained among the top of the institutions in the same province and even in the whole country.

It has a large number of EFL teaching faculty members with good educational experience and a high academic reputation. They are actively engaged in academic and pedagogical research programmes with support from the Department and the University, and have made considerable achievements. The university has invested a lot to improve the teaching, learning and research conditions of foreign languages.

As mentioned above, there are two English courses available to non-English majors in this university – the CE course and the ITE course. CE has been taught there for a long time and

has achieved much success so far. It is offered to the majority of students as a compulsory subject. At the foundation stage (the first two years consisting of four terms), it involves a total of 240 teaching hours accounting for 16 credits. Students may choose other optional English subjects (ranging from 1.5 to 3.5 academic credits); however, these 16 credits are the minimum requirements. Two subjects are included in CE at the foundation stage: Integrated English – reading, listening, speaking and writing (5 teaching hours every two weeks); and listening/speaking (3 teaching hours every two weeks). The specific teaching curriculum follows the new CE Teaching Requirements (2004 & 2007): it adopts the same three levels requirements as specified in the 2004 and 2007 Requirements – basic, intermediate and advanced; it encourages an LC classroom and an interactive teaching method; it advocates the use of advanced facilities and multimedia or web technology; it emphasizes the training of listening and speaking skills; it promotes extra-curricular learning activities to increase learner autonomy; and it uses formative (30%) and summative (70%) assessment.

As to the ITE course, it has only been in existence for a few years and is only available to a small number of students. The ITE course lasts two years of 4 semesters as well. In the first two terms, learners enroll on the subject of Integrated English and in the last two terms, the four skills of English (listening, speaking, reading and writing) are separated in the teaching curriculum. Integrated English requires a total of 144 teaching hours which equals 9 academic credits. In the first year, it is offered twice a week (a total of 4 teaching hours). The ITE curriculum aims to increase students' abilities in the four skills closely combining conversations, communicative functions and grammar. In the meantime, phonetics is taught and vocabulary is expanded. Similar to the CE course, the focus is on listening and speaking skills. The ultimate teaching and learning objective is to develop learners' CC in English, i.e. the ability to use English flexibly to achieve meaningful and effective communication in various contexts, with different interlocutors, and for diverse purposes. The teaching model is a combination of instruction, discussion, training and practice, with the use of multimedia teaching facilities and web resources. Formative and summative assessments each occupy half of the final scores.

As the subject of Integrated English is shared between two courses, it was chosen as the focus of my research, especially at the classroom observation phase. After discussion and negotiation with the persons in charge of these two courses, agreement was reached as how

and when my study should be carried out. In the next section, there will be an introduction to the data collection instruments used in my research.

5.3 Data collection instruments and pilot studies

From the previous introduction to my research questions, it is clear that the focus of my study is on how the CE reform was implemented in this case, not the Reform itself. Thus it is necessary to document what was happening in the teaching and learning process. But how? The only way to document is by asking and watching. To ask, I used questionnaires and interviews; to watch, I used observations. Questionnaires and interviews are of great help to investigate participants' internal factors, such as beliefs and motivations, while observations are crucial to examine how these internal factors are embodied in the actual teaching and learning behaviours. Before moving on to discuss these data collection instruments in more detail, the above discussion is summarized into a table.

Research Focus	Research Questions	Data Collection Instruments
Speaking skills	1) How do teachers and students on the CE course respond to the change in the teaching objectives and what factors influence their responses? 2) How are speaking skills developed in these two courses? 3) Which course is able to achieve a better result in developing learners' speaking skills? How does it manage to do so?	1) Q and I 2) O (main) I and Q (supplementary) 3) O (main) I and Q (supplementary)
Teaching and learning model	1) What are the roles that teachers take on these two courses? 2) How autonomous are the learners on these two courses and what factors influence their responses? 3) What are the curricula like on these two courses?	1) O (main) Q and I (supplementary) 2) O and I (main) Q (supplementary) 3) O and I
Washback effects of testing	All five sub-questions (see Section 5.1.1)	Q, I and O

Table 5-2 Research questions and data collection instruments used

Q=questionnaires; I=interviews, O=observations

5.3.1 Questionnaires

A questionnaire is defined by Richards et al (1992) as a set of questions on a topic or group of topics designed to be answered by a respondent. It is widely used as a common research tool in social sciences (Tuckman, 1999). It may be the only feasible way to gather data from a potentially large number of subjects (which is the case in the current study) or when the population is widely distributed.

5.3.1.1 Questionnaire construction

Two questionnaires were designed and distributed: one to the teacher participants and one to the student participants. In the process of developing these questionnaires, qualitative input

and piloting were employed to ensure their validity, reliability and clarity (Cheng, 2004). Qualitative input may involve referring to theoretical sources from related research (ibid). In my study, qualitative input was obtained via the review of the relevant literature and informal telephone interviews with several EFL teachers prior to the design of the questionnaires. The contents of teachers' answers were extremely helpful in designing the choices of answers to the multiple-choice questions in the questionnaires. My personal experience as an EFL teacher was also utilized.

The teacher questionnaire consists of three parts with 29 items (see Appendix II). Part 1 is designed to collect some demographic information about the teacher participants and their general opinions about English teaching. Part 2 specifically targets CE teachers and Part 3 is for teachers with experience in teaching the ITE course. 6 items or sub-items are open-ended questions (asking for comments, opinions or reasons). The rest are multiple-choice or Likert-scale questions. In this way, both quantitative and qualitative data were obtained to facilitate triangulation. The questionnaire was designed to investigate both facts and opinions by addressing the following issues: background information; opinions about language skills; factors that influence teaching and the extent/degree of the influence of the tests (CET4, CET-SET, IELTS); the nature of the influence; training in speaking skills; classroom activities; classroom language use; university policies; and comments about exams.

Like the teacher questionnaire, the student questionnaire is composed of three parts, with 26 items in total (see Appendix III): Part 1 is designed to investigate students' general opinions about learning English at higher education level; Part 2 targets students on the CE course; Part 3 is for students on the ITE course. Only two sub-items are open-ended questions, as one lesson learnt from the trial of data collection instruments is that usually student participants do not like open-ended questions. To compensate for the lack of flexibility in the closed-ended questions, student interviews were conducted later.

Items are designed around the following aspects or themes:

Part 1: participants' general perceptions of learning English: their motivation in learning; their language skills; the importance of spoken English lessons; the influence of testing on teaching and learning (intensity and aspects);

Part 2: students' perceptions of and practices in CE and CET: frequency of the practice of language skills in / after class; characteristics of the course; time spent on practising speaking

skills; learning outcomes in speaking skills; the washback of CET4 (paper and speaking) on teaching/learning and on stakeholders; the necessity of a compulsory speaking test in CET; Part 3: students' perceptions of and practices in ITE and IELTS: frequency of the practice of language skills in / after class; characteristics of the course; time spent on practising speaking skills; learning outcomes in speaking skills; the washback of IELTS.

Most of the questions in these two questionnaires were multiple-choice or Likert scale questions. For most of the multiple-choice questions, only one answer could be chosen, but when particularly specified, for some of them more than one answer could be chosen. For Likert scale questions, participants were asked to indicate one degree on the five point scales by ticking one of the responses ranging from 'never' to 'always' or 'not at all' to 'a great deal'. The questionnaires were designed and distributed in Chinese and translated into English later for research purposes.

5.3.1.2 Pilot of the questionnaires

Both questionnaires were trialed from November 2006 to January 2007 to obtain information regarding the construct validity, reliability and clarity of the items and the amount of time required to complete. It helped me to note many unexpected problems and I checked these by interviewing a few participants regarding the design of my questionnaires.

Improvement was made accordingly through exclusion, modification, merging, moving and supplementing (Saville and Hawley, 2004). One example of 'exclusion' is that the original design asked if the participants had taken the tests and if so, what the scores were. It was discovered from the pilot study that these questions were not so relevant to any of the research questions, and thus they were excluded from the final version. As to 'modification', one example is that in the original questionnaires there were more open questions; however, many of the open questions were left unanswered in the returned questionnaires. Thus several open questions were changed into multiple-choice questions based on the relevant literature and the answers that were provided by those participants. One example of 'merging' is that questions about the frequencies of practising each language skill in and after class were merged for the purpose of comparison. One example of 'moving' is that the question for teachers to comment on general factors that may influence their teaching was moved to the first part of the teacher questionnaire while the question on the washback effects of CET was kept in the second part as the mention of it earlier may interfere with the teachers' judgment about the general factors

affecting their teaching. As to ‘supplementing’, one example is that in the original design the teacher questionnaires were mainly concentrated on speaking skills and washback effects; however, teachers’ comments on learner autonomy were added later to balance the research questions explored in the questionnaires.

The actual collection of the questionnaires and procedures for analysis will be discussed in section 5 of this chapter. Next, there will be an introduction to the other data collection instruments used in my research.

5.3.2 Observations

Observation is defined by Marshall and Rossman as ‘the systematic description of events, behaviors, and artifacts in the social setting chosen for study’ (1989:79.) It is not only used in teacher education and assessment or supervision, but also is more and more frequently used in classroom research (Allright and Bailey, 1991). In educational research, classrooms are quite often chosen to be observed so that information can be obtained on the teaching and learning activities, the physical settings, and the interactions occurring in classrooms.

According to the degree of the observer’s involvement / participation in the classroom and the informed consent or deception of the informants, observation can be categorized into 4 types, which range on ‘a continuum from complete participant to complete observer’ (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2006:450).

- 1) complete participant: the observer will interact with the members of the studied social situation as naturally as possible, but his/her role as a researcher is concealed.
- 2) participant-as-observer: the researcher will be fully involved in the activities of the group being observed, and his/her role is either overt or covert.
- 3) observe-as-participant: the researcher will make clear to the observed that he/she is undertaking a study right from the beginning and will participate in the class, but not join in the activities of the group being studied. However, most times, the researcher may also interact with the members through interviews.
- 4) complete observer: the researcher will observe from some distance without any involvement at all and their role as a researcher is either known by or concealed from the informants.

The first two kinds of observation are called participation observation, while the last two are known as nonparticipation observation (ibid). Each role has its strengths and limitations. If I took the role of a complete participant, I might be able to get a truer picture of the observed and their behaviour. However, being completely covert was not feasible for ethical reasons in my study. On the other hand, if I took the role of a complete observer, the distance between the observed and me would prevent me from getting the best data available. As a result, I decided not to take either of these two roles. Between the participant-as-observer and the observer-as-participant, I chose to be the observer-as-participant, because if I took the role of a participant-as-observer I would actually become a member of the class being observed and would have been fully involved in the related teaching and learning activities, which may affect what the teachers and students would do. The role I wanted to take in the classroom observation was a researcher who was interested in observing the participants in their natural context without any interference from myself. In addition, such a role would not deny me opportunities to interact with the observed because I could conduct interviews with them if applicable.

5.3.2.1 The comparative design in classroom observations

The classroom observations in my study were conducted to investigate and compare what the teachers and students on these two different courses were actually doing during their classroom time. The comparative design in my study consists of the comparison between the observational data collected by observing 2 teachers' lessons, and for each teacher there were two sets of data: data collected from the CE classes and data obtained from the ITE classes.

Observations were conducted in the classrooms of two teachers who were teaching on both the CE and the ITE courses. The rationale is that according the previous literature review, it is apparent that teachers' personality, experience and background may all play a significant role in determining the way he/she teaches. Thus it was not possible to observe different classrooms by different instructors in order to claim similarity or difference between the characteristics of two courses. This is also true in studying the washback effect of two different tests.

The comparative design can be clearly shown in the following table (adapted from Watanabe, 2004):

	Teacher A		Teacher B
The CE course/ Test I (CET)		← compared to →	
	↑ compared to ↓		↑ compared to ↓
The ITE course/ Test II (IELTS)	▲	← compared to →	

Table 5-3 Comparative design in classroom observation

The hypotheses that emerge from this design relating to the existence of washback are that:

1) Teaching, learning and teaching materials may be different in two courses or classes preparing for two different exams, although they are taught by the same teacher. To be more specific, the same teacher when teaching different courses may exhibit differences in the ways he/she organizes the teaching and learning activities.

2) Teaching, learning and teaching materials may be similar among classes for the same course or classes preparing for the same exam, although they are taught by different teachers. To be more specific, different teachers when teaching the same course (either in CE or ITE) may share similarities in the ways they organize the teaching and learning activities.

In summary, comparisons are made between two different courses taught by the same teacher, and between the two different teachers teaching the same course.

5.3.2.2 Instruments used in the observations

I used two data collection facilities to carry out the observations: audio taping and a coding scheme (with space for field notes). The scheme I adopted is the Communicative Orientation of Language Teaching (COLT) observation scheme (Spada and Fröhlich, 1995). It was designed to investigate features of CLT in different language classrooms. It is composed of two parts: Part A requires the observer to make detailed real-time notes on activities and

episodes occurring during the observed lessons and the time taken for each of them; Part B emphasizes the linguistic features of classroom talk, based on the video or audio recorded tape. As the linguistic features of classroom talk either by teachers or learners were not the focus of my study, only Part A was used.

Part A was further adapted to make it suitable for my research purpose. I did not include all the 7 categories given by Spada and Fröhlich (1995) (time, activities & episodes, participant organization, content, content control, student modality and materials), because they note that ‘in some situations, a decision to code for all the seven features will be made. It may be appropriate in other circumstances, however, to select only one or two features’ (Spada and Fröhlich, 1995:120). I did not include content control, because the trial of the scheme (conducted in December 2006) unveiled a single mode – control by teachers, which may be true in the specific Chinese educational context where usually only the teachers have the authority to decide what topic to teach or discuss. One section was also included to note down any unexpected significant incidents for further analysis. According to the research purposes and the nature of my specific research setting, some other modifications were made. As a result, 7 categories were covered in Part A: time, activities, organization patterns, skills (student modality), materials, language use and memo (see Appendix IV). The coding of Part A was done in real time when the observations were undertaken.

One limitation is that due to the limited time and human resources, it was impossible to undertake classroom observation on a larger scale. To compensate, each teacher was visited twice or more to record their classroom teaching.

5.3.3 Interviews

An interview is defined by Kvale as an interchange of views between two or more people on a topic of mutual interest (Kvale, 1996). It is a special type of communication, conducted for a specific reason and in a structured way. It may serve a number of different purposes and has been used so extensively that it has been said that we live in an ‘interview society’ (Atkinson & Silverman, 1997; Silverman, 1993). It has been widely recognized in educational research and language studies. As a data collection instrument, it has much strength which made it an indispensable part of my study.

I employed interviews in my study to complement the limitations of the questionnaires and classroom observations that I used. As to the use of questionnaires, it is said that 'even in a well-designed, professional survey, follow-up research found that only about half the respondents understand questions exactly as intended by researchers. Respondents reinterpreted questions to make them applicable to their idiosyncratics, personal situations or to make them easy to answer' (Neuman, 2005: 305). The interviews provided me with ample opportunities to have face-to-face communication with my interviewees to explore more in-depth details and eliminate misunderstandings. As to observation, I, as the researcher, had to interpret the teachers' or the students' behaviour from my own point of view, which might increase researcher bias. Follow-up interviews offered me a chance for clarification and confirmation before I could make any credible conclusions.

A semi-structured scheme was designed to achieve a balance between the freedom that my participants required to voice their opinions and my own research pursuits (answers to my research questions). On the one hand, this mode enabled me to gain insight into the participants' understanding of their own experience and the teaching/learning process. On the other hand, it provided me more control of the interview process as to its content and duration. A semi-structured design is able to probe in depth and in detail the underlying factors which lead to the interviewees' teaching and learning practices (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005).

The questions in the semi-structured interviews with the two teachers and 13 student participants are presented in Appendix V. One potential problem with the teacher interview schedule is that its content was not piloted as most of the questions were based on a preliminary analysis of the classroom observational data. There was not enough time for me to trial it. However, I did have the opportunity to practise the skills in conducting interviews in the pilot of the interview schedule with students. This kind of pilot was essential because sometimes interviews can be difficult to implement. During the pilot, I learnt how to operate the recording equipment; the importance of using two recording machines in one interview as on one occasion when I used only one in the pilot study, the battery ran out resulting in the loss of data without my knowledge; how to establish trust and rapport between the participants and myself; and how to control the pace of the interview. The student interview schedule was piloted in April 2007, and modifications were made accordingly. There were more questions in the original design and it took about one hour or more to finish one interview. Some questions were excluded as they were not so relevant or important so that the

time duration for each interview could be controlled to between 30 and 45 minutes. As mentioned above, my skills in conducting interviews were practised and improved.

To relieve the stress on memory or taking notes during the interviews, I decided to record all the interviews. Informed consent was obtained from the participants prior to the actual interviewing. The recording allowed me to better focus on the asking and answering of questions during the interview instead of struggling with note-taking. Another advantage is that I could review the tape as often as I needed to transcribe and code data after the interviews. Also, I chose to use audio-recording to minimize the nervousness that might be experienced by the interviewees.

5.3.4 Summary of the data collection instruments

In conclusion, questionnaires, observations and interviews were all needed and used in my study. In fact they complement each other in educational research, especially in the research of washback effects. Wall and Alderson assert in their research (1993:63):

It was important for us to complement the classroom observations with teacher interviews, questionnaires to teachers and teacher advisers and analyses of materials teachers had prepared for classes.

All three techniques were utilized in my research as an attempt to give a fuller account and a better interpretation of what was actually happening to EFL teaching and learning in this case. Teachers' materials will be discussed in Chapter 8. Before I move on to present the details of data collection and analysis procedures, however, there are two important issues that need to be discussed – triangulation and ethics.

5.4 Two important issues – triangulation and ethics

According to Lincoln and Guba (1985), various measures have been proposed, such as member checking, thick description, inquiry auditing, and triangulation, to ensure the quality of qualitative research in terms of credibility, transferability, dependability and conformability. Qi (2004) in her study on the washback effects of NMET in China adopted some of these measures. I myself in the present study have used three of them:

1) member checking, which involves participants confirming or disconfirming data, analysis and conclusion (ibid); in my present study, it was done through follow-up interviews with the observed subjects to check my interpretation and analysis of the data.

2) thick description, which requires a detailed description of the study context so that readers can determine for themselves whether or not the results are applicable to another similar setting (ibid); the whole of chapter 2 in my study is devoted to a description of current English teaching and testing in the Chinese setting to present a complete picture of the research context and there is a detailed description of the case earlier in this chapter. All of these may help potential readers to decide if the findings in my study are applicable to their individual situations.

3) triangulation, which I would like to discuss in more detail here. Before this, however, it is necessary to examine my own position as researcher in order to clarify how far the research may be considered objective and how far it is open to direct or indirect influence from my own beliefs and values.

5.4.1 Objectivity? My own position as researcher

It is often claimed that it is impossible to achieve objectivity in qualitative research, especially in case studies and ethnographic research. Different researchers see things differently and make their decisions and judgments on the basis of different beliefs and values (Hoepfl, 1997), and this makes it difficult to avoid conscious or unconscious bias. Postmodernism goes further and denies the possibility of objectivity and neutrality altogether, even in quantitative research and statistical analysis. However, Silverman (2011:28) challenges this claim and counter-argues that it is nonsense to suggest that qualitative research is necessarily subjective.

My own position is that subjectivity cannot be avoided completely in such research, especially in the interpretation of findings, but that it is worthwhile pursuing objectivity as a goal in order to reduce the possibility of bias, maximise the validity and reliability of the research, and justify some generalization of the findings (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). I did this in three ways.

1) I engaged in a process of critical personal reflection in order to raise my own deeply held (and perhaps hidden) beliefs and values to consciousness. This process confirmed that my personal values and educational priorities are mainstream and have much in common with other Chinese young people born after the Cultural Revolution who have seen China growing into an ever more economically successful player on the world stage. This makes it more

likely that my interpretation of the findings of my research will be acceptable to most Chinese readers. I received my primary, secondary and tertiary education in China, and taught English in Higher Education there for a number of years. Like many others sharing this background, I am generally supportive of the aims of the reforms of Higher Education introduced in China in the early 21st century, but having lived in the UK for the last seven years, I have an outsider's perspective on the reforms as well and am able to view them more objectively.

2) I avoided coming to the research topic with a set of preconceptions or a hidden agenda that might influence my judgment. My motivation for doing the research was a genuine interest in knowing whether the reforms were working in the sense of creating a more helpful learning experience for students and contributing positively to teachers' practice. My openness can be seen in the fact that although I started the research generally supportive of the notion of learner-centredness, after doing the research I changed my opinion and came to the view that 'learning-centredness' might be a more appropriate term to use.

3) I took conscious steps to avoid bias by choosing my methods of data collection with care. For example, I adopted a mixed research methodology, supplementing the relatively small-scale interviews and observations with two relatively large-scale surveys. Also, when conducting classroom observations, as already noted, I chose to be an 'observer as participant' rather than a full participant in the class, in order to minimise any influence I might have on the participants. I used follow-up interviews with the participants after the observations, because interviews have the potential to reveal the true opinions or feelings of the subjects, which could help to clarify or modify my own interpretations.

5.4.2 Triangulation

Triangulation is a concept borrowed from navigation and land surveying by anthropologists and applied linguists (Bailey, 1999). Hammersley and Atkinson (1983:198) use an analogy to explain what triangulation is:

For someone wanting to locate their position on a map, a single landmark can only provide the information that they are situated somewhere along a line in a particular direction from the landmark. With two landmarks, however, their exact position can be pinpointed by taking bearings on both landmarks; they are at the point where the two lines cross.

When applied in social science, it means that findings are more accurate or convincing if data, although different in nature can lead to the same conclusions. Triangulation helps to enhance

the confidence in findings and reinforce the reliability and validity of the research, because ‘triangulated measurement tries to pinpoint the values of a phenomenon more accurately by sighting in on it from different methodological viewpoints’ (Brewer and Hunter, 1989:17). Basically, there are four types of triangulation (Denzin, 1970): data triangulation (data from more than one source are used to answer one research question), investigator triangulation (there are two or more persons to collect or analyze the data), theory triangulation (more than one theory is used to generate research questions or interpret findings) and methodological triangulation (two or more instruments are used to collect data). Three types were adopted in my research: methodological, theoretical and data triangulation. To be more specific, in my research, questionnaires, observations and interviews were all used in collecting data (methodological triangulation); there were various types of participants including teachers and students (data triangulation) talking about the same phenomenon; the teachers might have different backgrounds and the students were at various ability levels (data triangulation); teachers whose lessons were observed were interviewed afterwards (methodological triangulation); Anderson’s Washback Hypothesis, Hughes’ Washback Model and Watanabe’s model were all used in the construction of data collection instruments (theory triangulation). Due to the constraint of time and funding, investigator triangulation was not applied as I was the only person in charge of the data collection and analysis.

The combination of multiple methods or data from different sources could help me to overcome the intrinsic weakness or biases that a single method or a single type of data had and to gain a richer and truer insight into the studied participants and context. Furthermore, the use of different theories could provide a stronger theoretical foundation to my research. One potential problem of using triangulation is that findings from different types of data or sources of data may be inconsistent; for example, findings from questionnaires or interviews may either corroborate or contradict findings from classroom observations; or teachers and students may tell different stories. Although this is described as a problem, it may actually be a helpful way of acknowledging the complexity of the situation and thus may pinpoint the weakness of relying on just one method or one source. More importantly, when two findings are not convergent, a new prospect or line of inquiry will emerge, which can always lead to more in-depth investigation or discussion. What I had to bear in mind was that in my research I had to be constantly faithful to the facts and to the subjects’ own understandings. Being truthful was an ethical requirement on myself as a researcher, and there were further ethical

issues for consideration when involving others (i.e. participants) in my research, which will be discussed next.

5.4.3 Ethical considerations

From the outset of this research, I have been committed to making my study an ethically sound one. According to the ethical guidelines of the Social Research Association (2003), there are four basic principles: obligations to society (researchers must conduct their research responsibly, scientifically and impartially); obligations to funders and employers (a clear and balanced relationship or commitment to the funders or employers); obligations to colleagues (researchers must have appropriate professional behaviour and when appropriate keep methods, procedures and findings open to collegial review); and obligations to subjects (researchers should strive to keep the subjects away from risks or harm as a consequence of participating in the research).

Issues involving obligations to society have been discussed constantly in this thesis especially when focusing on topics involving validity and reliability of the research. There were not any particular issues involving obligations to funders or employers. As to obligations to colleagues, the completed final draft of my thesis will be submitted for examination and review. Ethical issues concerning research subjects were carefully considered and acted upon during my whole research process.

I made sure that all participants were voluntarily taking part in my research. Information about the purpose, nature and means of presentation of the research was made clear to the participants. They were informed of their rights to abstain from participation or to withdraw at anytime during the process. They were assured that confidential information about themselves would not be revealed to others and their identities would remain anonymous throughout the study.

In the opening paragraph to each questionnaire, there was an introduction to the aims and methods of my research and a guarantee that respondents' identities would be kept confidential. All the questionnaires for teachers and students were completed and returned anonymously. Their identities were even anonymous to me as the researcher. Although student questionnaires were distributed to the students by their teachers as a means to increase the return rate, students were not coerced into participation because I asked the teachers to let

their students freely make their own decisions. How did it help to increase the return rate then? First, the teachers were able to explain the purpose of the questionnaire in more detail if required, and by leaving the job of collecting completed questionnaires to the teachers, the whole procedure became more flexible to the student participants as they did not have to return the questionnaires at a specified time; instead they were given a deadline if they were happy to return the completed questionnaires. This procedure might be more ethical to the students as ample time was given to consider whether to participate and to complete the questionnaires, bearing in mind their heavy study load.

As to the classroom observations, anonymity of participants' identities to the researcher (myself in this case) was not possible. However, informed consent was sought from all involved – teachers, students and the administration level. First, I obtained the consent of the two teacher subjects after explaining the aim and methods of observation. They were asked to seek the consent on my behalf from their students that might be involved in the observations. At the same time, I negotiated the agreement of the persons in charge in the English Department. I promised to keep the identities of the teachers, students and the specific university where my case study was carried out confidential and anonymous to others. The actual observations took place only after the informed consent was obtained from all three parties. Furthermore, two more ethical issues were considered here. First, in choosing the type of observation, I decided to be honest in disclosing the purpose of my presence and I was determined not to participate, to minimize the potential harm to their normal teaching and learning. Secondly, the use of audio-taping equipment would of course decrease the nervousness experienced by the participants compared to facing a camera; it also helped to maintain the anonymity of the participants' identities.

Similar to the classroom observations, it was not possible to keep the participants in interviews anonymous to the researcher (myself in this case). First, emails were exchanged between myself and those potential student participants to introduce my purpose and methods of interviewing and to seek informed consent. Later, before the actual conducting of the interviews, voluntary participation was reaffirmed. However, the use of audio-tapes instead of video-tapes again helped to keep their identities anonymous.

The above discussion mainly focuses on the information gathering phase of my research, but ethical issues were also considered for the phases of data analysis and presentation of findings.

To keep the promise of confidentiality and anonymity, participants' identities were concealed in the data analysis and presentation; for example, the terms Teacher A (TA) and Teacher B (TB) were used to refer to the two teachers who participated in the classroom observations and follow-up interviews, and the names of the student interviewees were changed.

Another ethical issue is that individual subjects have the right to see what has been written about them. As my field work was done in China and I would finish analyzing the data and writing-up the whole thesis in the UK, my contact email address was provided to ensure that participants would be able to contact me if any of them was interested in the findings. The two teachers expressed their interest in reading my final interpretation of the data during the follow-up interviews.

Now that the above detailed account has been completed of my research methodologies, research design and context, data collection instruments and important issues that were considered during the planning and implementation stages, it is necessary to introduce how the data were collected and analyzed in the current study.

5.5 Data collection procedures and data analysis

The actual process of data collection took place between October 2007 to June 2008 in the following order: observations, questionnaires and interviews. Classroom observations were conducted first to avoid 'observer effect'.

5.5.1 Classroom observations

Classroom observations are usually taken to seek empirical evidence of what is actually happening in the classrooms rather than what is said to be happening or to have happened. The relevant field work in my study was carried out in October and November 2007. Two teachers teaching on both the CE and the ITE courses during the same period were observed. TA was in her early 30s and TB was in her late 20s at the time when their lessons were observed. Both have Masters degrees in English, and both had the experience of living in an English speaking country – Britain. TA was a visiting scholar to a British university for one year under the sponsorship of the university that she worked for. TB achieved her master's degree from a British university, which took her roughly 1.5 years studying and living in the UK. Therefore these two teachers shared some similarities in their educational, personal and work experiences.

A total of 20 teaching hours were observed and audio recorded – 6 hours for each teacher on the ITE course and 4 hours for each teacher on the CE course. During each observation, real time field notes were taken and comments were made on the pre-designed coding sheets.

The data generated from the classroom observations were meant mainly to answer research focuses 1 and 2: speaking skills and the teaching/learning model, although they might also shed light on research focus 3 – washback effects. I started the analysis through reading through the coding and notes taken on the coding sheets. There were seven sections covered in the coding sheets: time, activities, organization patterns, skills, materials, language use and memo.

At the first stage of analyzing the observational data, I started from the classroom activities. All the classroom activities used by these two teachers were listed on a separate document so that distinction and categorization could be made. Six broad categories were drawn up based on the relevant literature review and a preliminary analysis of the observational data. These categories and their relationship to specific classroom organization patterns are presented as follows:

- a. Teacher Presentation (TP); organization pattern: Teacher-Student(s) /Class
- b. Teacher & Student Interaction (T&S); organization pattern: Teacher-Student(s)/Class
- c. Student (individual) presentation (SP); organization pattern: Student-Student(s)/Class
- d. Group/Paired work (G/P); organization pattern: Group
- e. Reading Aloud (RA); organization pattern: choral or individual
- f. Individual Work (IW); organization pattern: individual

Each activity used by these two teachers was labeled with one of the above six broad categories and the time spent on each individual category (not just on a specific activity) by each teacher was calculated. Information obtained could provide an answer to the second research focus – the teaching and learning model. Notes taken on the coding sheets regarding skills and language use (English or Chinese) were linked to the six categories of classroom activities to answer the first research focus – speaking skills. Findings so far could clearly answer the research question – which course is better at improving learners’ speaking skills? The sources and types of teaching materials used were also analyzed, because they could not only provide supporting information to research focuses 1 and 2 (speaking skills and the teaching model) but also shed light on research focus 3 (influence of testing) as the use of

previous test papers and test coaching materials in class was considered. So far data generated from six of the seven sections on the coding sheets were analyzed.

At the second stage of analyzing the observational data, following the findings from the above data processing, the audio-recording of the specific course (the one that was found to be better at improving learners' speaking skills) was transcribed. Thus 12 hours of audio recording were transcribed into written form. An interpretative phenomenological analysis was adopted (Smith & Osborn, 2008; Rapley, 2011). It started from reading one transcript several times and comments about the teaching and learning were noted. Then the comments were transformed into themes and a list of themes was created. This list of themes on features of teaching and learning was clustered and reorganized into another list with superordinate themes and sub-themes (ibid). This procedure was repeated with each transcript and the list was modified and refined into a final version for further discussion (ibid). The seventh section on the coding sheets – memo for any unusual or significant incidents – was used here with all the superordinate and sub-themes in analyzing the transcribed data.

5.5.2 Questionnaires

After conducting the classroom observations as mentioned above, I started the procedures of collecting questionnaire data. The two trialed and modified questionnaires were distributed in Chinese to teachers of English and Year 1 and Year 2 undergraduate students.

5.5.2.1 Teacher questionnaire

60 teacher questionnaires were issued to teachers of English in the university where the case study was carried out during November and December 2007. 46 were returned with a return rate of 76.67%. The questionnaires were administered to the teachers after their routine staff meetings. Some were returned on the same day, while others were returned within one or two weeks after the meetings. Among the 46 teachers, 32 (69.56%) had experience only in teaching CE courses, and 14 were teaching on ITE courses. However, 12 out of these 14 teachers had previous experience of teaching CE. As a result, they were able to comment on CE teaching and learning as well.

Since the teachers were asked to complete the questionnaires anonymously, the returned questionnaires were numbered. Answers to the multiple-choices and Likert scale questions

were input into SPSS. A few invalid answers were omitted. Replies to open-ended questions were put together, transcribed and translated.

With the help of SPSS, a frequency analysis was conducted to generate data about frequency and percentage, and descriptive statistics were run to produce figures about mean, standard deviation, and range if the items concerned were scaled. The descriptive statistical data would show clearly the range (the dispersion of the answers), the minimum and maximum values for each question and the mean, which would indicate the common areas of agreement among the participants. That is to say if the mean is high, it may suggest that most of the teachers respond to that question positively – a higher degree on the Likert-scale of frequency or importance.

Furthermore, paired samples T-test and independent samples T-test were run to check the significant difference between the means of two groups of data. In statistics there are two designs to examine if two means differ significantly: the within-subjects design (paired samples T-test) and the between-subjects design (independent samples T-test). Paired samples T-tests are conducted to compare means when the groups of data are correlated. In this study, the ‘within-subjects’ refers to the group of 12 teachers who have experience of teaching on both CE and ITE courses. A paired samples T-test was used to examine their opinions on CET/the CE teaching/learning and IELTS/ the ITE course. To be more specific, the means of items about CE/CET and the means of items about IELTS/ITE course were compared to investigate if the same group of 12 teachers held different opinions or had different practices when teaching on the two different courses. A between-subjects design involves two independent groups with each participant being assigned to only one group. This is called an independent samples T-test in SPSS. In the current research, the two independent groups are the 32 CE teachers and the 14 teachers on the ITE course. Means were compared to further examine if the opinions of and practices in CE and CET of those 32 teachers who had never taught ITE course before would differ from those of the 14 teachers on the ITE course.

Throughout the analysis, questions with a similar topic were grouped together for analysis. The contents and numbers of each question on the questionnaires were listed. Tables or graphs were presented as well for a clear visual effect.

5.5.2.2 Student questionnaire

450 student questionnaires were issued to the learners with the help of course teachers and tutors during the period from November 2007 to January 2008. Questionnaires were completed anonymously. The return rate was 78% (351 out of the total 450 questionnaires issued were returned). 313 questionnaires were chosen here for analysis because the remaining 38 questionnaires were not valid, because of the large number of missing answers in a single questionnaire. These 38 participants either did not take it seriously or did not complete it carefully. Among the 313 students, 205 of them were on the CE course and 108 were on the ITE course.

The questionnaire was designed and issued to the participants in Chinese in order to minimize the problems caused by language misunderstanding, and to ensure its validity and reliability. It was later translated into English by the researcher for research purposes.

It is worth mentioning here that Part 2 of the student questionnaire was composed of questions about the CET paper and speaking tests, because the influence exerted by these two tests – the paper test (compulsory) and the speaking test (optional) - might be different. As a result in the data analysis, comparison was made between the CE course and the ITE course, between the CET paper and CET-SET, and between CET and IELTS.

As in the analysis of the teacher survey, questions with the same theme were grouped together for analysis. SPSS was used as well to conduct statistical analysis, such as frequency, descriptive and means comparison. In comparing the means between the CE course and the ITE course, or between CET and IELTS, only an independent samples T-test was run. The basic theories of paired and independent samples T-tests were explained previously in the data analysis of the teacher survey. As none of the learners was enrolled on both courses, it meant that not a single participant would appear in both samples. This is why only independent samples T-tests were necessary in the comparison between the two groups of learners. The findings here are discussed in relation to the findings from the teacher survey for the purpose of triangulation.

5.5.3 Interviews

Like the questionnaire surveys, interviews were conducted with both teacher and student participants; however, the nature of these two series of interviews were different: the interviews with the two teachers (who were the subjects of classroom observations) were

follow-up interviews with the purpose of confirming, clarifying or further exploring the findings from the classroom observations; while the interviews with the student participants were conducted to generate some raw data in order to answer the research questions more clearly and holistically. As the analysis of classroom observations focused on the teachers, the inclusion of some interview data from students may balance and complement the whole analysis. Two teacher interviews and 13 student interviews (each of them lasting from 30 to 45 minutes) were conducted in May and June 2008. They were all conducted in Chinese, audio-recorded and transcribed later. A sample interview with a student interviewee is contained in Appendix VI.

The analytic method of the interview data was different from that of the observational data, although both sets of data were categorized as qualitative. The method used here is called thematic analysis (Braun & Clark, 2006; Rapley 2011). Taking the analysis of the student interviews for example, I started the analysis by reading through the 13 transcripts to familiarize myself with the information contained so that I could get a better understanding of the meanings they communicated. In the meantime, initial comments or ideas were noted on the transcripts (Rapley, 2011). Then I read each transcript in entirety several times so that I could immerse myself in the details, during which time a systematic coding was carried out. Attention was not only paid to those recurring issues or key items linked to the research questions, but also to those that were odd or interesting. ‘Recurring issues’ refers to those repetitive or similar ideas that frequently appear from the evidence. ‘Key items’ are those that are closely and obviously related to the research questions. Any other unusual or interesting ideas were also marked. Similar codes were later collated into broad themes based on the research objectives and interview questions. The specifics of each theme were refined (ibid) by forming sub-themes or sub-categories within each theme. Thus a hierarchical coding was built. Further linkage and comparison could be done with the hierarchical system. A worked example to illustrate the process of thematic analysis is contained in Appendix VII. It is based on a number of paragraphs taken from the translated transcript of a student interview in Appendix VI.

5.6 Summary

This chapter has introduced the theoretical justifications for the choices of the general research methodologies and the specific research method (case study). There is also a detailed account of the background of the institution where my research was undertaken. Three types

of data collection instruments were used and the design and piloting of them were also presented in this chapter. The whole data collection procedure was described, together with approaches adopted in analyzing these three sets of data. The findings from the collected data will be presented in the following chapters.

Chapter 6 Findings from the Teacher Questionnaire

Chapter 5 has provided a thorough introduction to the research methodology, the research methods, the data collection instruments and the procedures in collecting and analyzing those data. The next few chapters will present and discuss the findings from the collected data. The present chapter starts with the analysis of the teacher survey which is intended mainly to provide answers to the first and third research topics (speaking skills and the washback effects) although it may also shed some light on research topic 2 – the teaching/learning model.

6.1 Findings from Part 1 of the questionnaire:

Question 1-3:

The first three questions are designed to offer insights into the background information of the participating teachers. The mean of the teachers' age (Question 1) is 32 with the youngest being 24 and the oldest being 50 years old. Among the 46 teachers, 23 (or 50%) are under the age of 30; 17 (or 36.96%) are between 30 and 39 years old; 6 (or 13.04%) are between 40 and 50 years old. The result may indicate that the majority of the English teaching staff at this university are relatively young. This is perhaps due to the fact in China now the senior teachers are usually allocated either administration or research duties. 8 respondents are male, accounting for 17.4%, and 38 are female accounting for 82.6% (Question 2). This finding suggests that most of the teachers engaged in front line teaching of English are female.

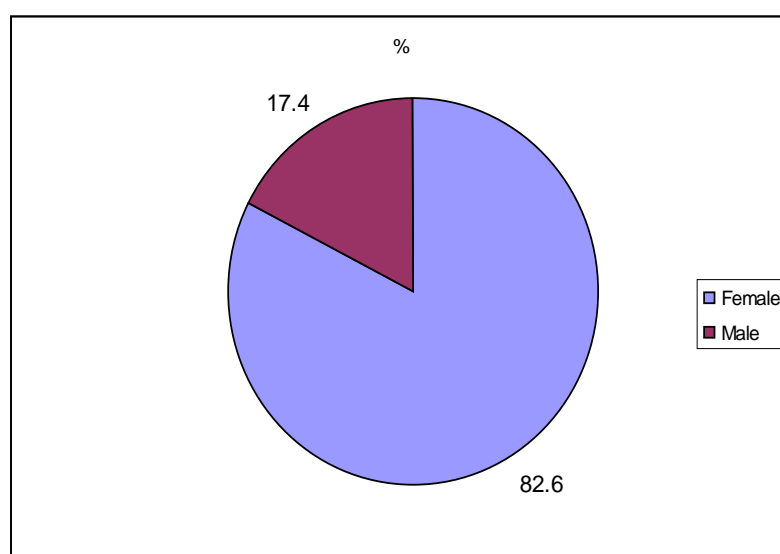


Figure 6-1: Gender proportion of teacher respondents

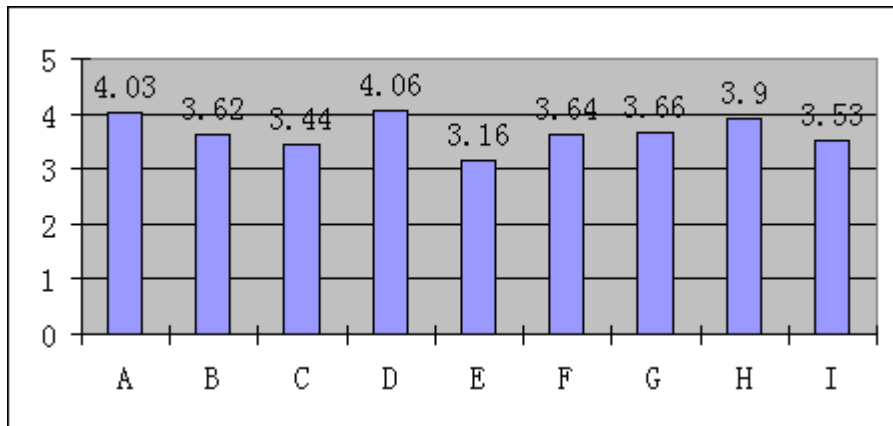
Question 3 investigates their length of service as a teacher of EFL. The answers vary from 1 year to 22 years with a mean of 6.7 years of teaching experience. This finding corresponds to the findings in Question 1 that young teachers with relatively less experience make up the majority of teaching staff while those senior teachers with more experience often undertake other duties rather than teaching.

Question 4-6

These three questions are included in the questionnaire to elicit teachers' general opinions about CE teaching/learning. Question 4 is about their opinions on language skills; Question 5 is to investigate factors that may influence their teaching practice; Question 6 targets the effects that testing may exert on them.

Question 4: Teachers are asked about their opinions of each specific language skill - listening, reading, grammar, translation, writing, speaking, vocabulary and pronunciation/intonation. As to sub-question 1 'which is the most important skill that should be developed in higher education?' Two skills stand out with the highest importance: 55.7% of the respondents agree on speaking and 32.9% agree on reading. The most difficult skills for learners (sub-question 2) are speaking (54.4%) and listening (21.5%). Teachers also think that speaking (77.2%) and reading (13.9%) are the most useful skills in students' future jobs (sub-question 3). The above data prove the significance of speaking skills: speaking is the most important and the most useful one while at the same time it is also the most difficult one to develop, and thus it calls for special attention and extra efforts. The results have also shown that most teachers in this specific case agree with the change in the New Teaching Requirements that speaking skills should become one of the priorities in CE education. This finding is crucial in that there will be a risk of non-compliance in teaching practice if teachers do not agree with the principles set out in the Teaching Requirements. This question investigates teachers' perceptions of each language skill. In the student questionnaire, students are asked the same questions. In the next chapter results from students' questionnaires are combined with the findings here for discussion to see if there is any consistency between teachers' and students' opinions.

Question 5 is a Likert scale question with 9 sub-items. Teachers are asked to indicate on the five point scale the degree that these 9 factors influence their teaching (5 = great influence, 1= no influence at all).



A = previous experience as a language learner;

B = personality;

C = in-service training;

D = previous teaching experience;

E = teaching syllabus;

F = textbooks;

G = tests;

H = students' expectations and needs;

I = institutions' expectations.

Figure 6-2: Factors influencing teaching

Among all the 9 influencing factors, teachers' previous teaching experience (mean=4.06) and past language learning experience (mean=4.03) are regarded as the most influential aspects underlying their current teaching practices. Testing with a mean of 3.66 is listed as the fourth in the list just after students' expectations. Further paired samples T-tests were conducted in SPSS to examine if there is any significant difference between the mean of testing and the means of their previous experience of teaching and learning. A within-subjects design is used, because this is to compare the same groups of samples' attitudes to different questions.

Results show that these means are statistically different, which indicates that previous experiences as language learners or teachers have a much stronger impact on how they teach now than testing has. This finding seems to be contradictory to the assertions by some scholars (mentioned in Chapter 3) about the great negative effects that CET has on teaching and learning. However, it is CET in particular that is the focus of the debates in Chapter 3, while here the question asks about testing in general. There are questions in the next part of the questionnaire specifically targeting the washback effects of CET.

Surprisingly, teachers' in-service training and the teaching syllabus are the two least influential factors affecting teaching. This finding needs further investigation: it seems that those theoretical or policy issues (training and syllabus) are not considered so important by teachers, while personal experience (both teaching and learning experience) or practical considerations (students' expectations and helping students pass tests) are more influential. Thus, in order to improve teaching practices, people in charge of administration or policy making should think of other ways than just to provide in-service training or make a new syllabus. Consideration might be given to pre-service training (before teachers form certain kinds of habits or beliefs in teaching); to language teaching practices in primary schools or middle schools (previous learning experience); and to improving the tests.

In Question 6, teachers are asked about the degree of impact of assessment in general (not just CET4 or IELTS) on the four aspects of teaching: teaching approaches (A); choices of teaching materials (B); curriculum arrangement (C) and teaching hours allocated to each language course (D).

Descriptive Statistics

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Q6A	46	2.00	5.00	3.7237	.91795
Q6B	46	1.00	5.00	3.3026	.90950
Q6C	46	2.00	5.00	3.4868	.82451
Q6D	46	1.00	5.00	3.3289	.82281

Table 6-1: The influence of testing in general

The above table shows clearly that on average, teachers think that testing has a certain degree of influence on all the four aspects in teaching, with all the four means being greater than 3, the middle point on the five-point Likert scale. However, none of these figures is greater than 4, which confirms the finding from Question 5 that testing may not have such a strong impact on teaching as many people assume, at least in this case.

6.2 Comparison between two courses and two exams

In this part, questions appearing in both Part 2 regarding CE & CET and Part 3 concerning the ITE courses & IELTS are grouped together to be analyzed for the purpose of comparison.

6.2.1 Curriculum arrangement and time allocation for speaking skills

Questions 7 and 21 try to investigate how speaking skills are developed currently in these two different courses by exploring the curriculum arrangements and time allocation. The frequency analysis of data collected from Question 7 shows that 78.5% of the CE teachers think that their students have a specialized spoken English course; however as to the nature of the course it is a combination of speaking and listening skills. This finding shows that at least at the university policy level, the principles in the New Teaching Requirements have been implemented; according to the informal interview with a teacher respondent after the collection of questionnaire data there was no such course in the past. The administration in this university has made specific efforts to follow the guidelines in the New Teaching Requirements. When it comes to the analysis of teaching hours for speaking skills per week, the mean value is very low, because as acknowledged by teacher respondents, listening tasks are the priority in this course. The question here asks the average teaching hours spent on speaking skills per week. The answer is about 0.5 hour accounting for 12.5% of the overall CE teaching hours per week (based on 4 hours per week). This finding seems contradictory to findings from Question 4 that teachers consider speaking to be the most important and useful skill. One possible explanation is that it is overlooked in the classroom because it is also the most difficult one to develop as admitted by these teachers.

Question 21 targets the same aspects in the ITE course. Findings suggest that 100% of the teachers on this course will provide students with specialized oral English training and on average 25.5% of the classroom time will be spent on this, which is much higher than the percentage of time spent on oral English in CE teaching. One possible explanation for these differences in teaching arrangements and time allocation between the CE courses and the ITE courses is that in these two kinds of courses, testing requirements are different. In CE, CET4 is a very important national standard test, but speaking is only an optional assessment item. Not all the students are required or even allowed to take it. The CET-SET score is usually not required in academic progression or employment. In IELTS, speaking is as important as the other 3 skills, accounting for 25% of the total score. Since it is not tested in CET, it may not get enough attention from teaching in CE.

6.2.2 The importance of speaking skills to students judged from their learning behaviours

Questions 8 and 22 are to investigate the attitudes of students on these two courses towards speaking skills as judged from their learning behaviours by the teachers. Teachers are asked to choose one of the five points on the Likert scale showing, according to their knowledge, how their students think about the importance of spoken English. The findings will be used to crosscheck students' own answers in the next chapter.

Generally speaking, in teachers' opinions, students on the ITE course take speaking skills more seriously than students on the CE course, which can be seen from the difference between the two means (3.93 is much higher than 2.78). To draw a more affirmative conclusion, more sophisticated statistical analysis is essential to compare the means to examine if they are significantly different. Two designs are needed to carry out the comparison:

1. Within-groups design

The answers of those 12 teachers with experience of teaching on both courses were taken out for analysis. This is to compare, in their eyes, if there is any significant difference between their students on the CE course and those on the ITE course in relation to the importance of speaking skills. A paired-samples T-test was conducted.

Of course, researchers can arbitrarily choose the significance level. Here 0.05 is chosen because it is often used by social scientists as a cut-off. If the significance value is 0.05 or smaller than 0.05, there is only a 5% or less chance statistically that the difference is due to chance. Then we can conclude that the two means are significantly different statistically. Here, in the current research, the significant value of 0.015 is significantly lower than the cut-off point of 0.05, which suggests that the means are significantly different. As a result, a tentative conclusion can be drawn here that according to these teachers, their students on the ITE course take speaking skills much more seriously than their students on the CE course.

2. Between-groups design

There are two groups involved: those 32 teachers who only have experience of CE teaching and the group of 14 teachers teaching on the ITE course. In SPSS, an independent samples T-

test was run to compare the two means of students' attitudes to speaking skills as judged by their teachers.

Again, the significance value of 0.003 is smaller than 0.05. These two means are statistically different. Thus a similar conclusion is drawn that students on different courses hold different views about speaking skills in the view of their teachers. For students on the ITE course, spoken English is more important.

The results from these two T-tests suggest similar findings that students' attitudes towards speaking skills are different on the two courses. These two courses have different requirements in assessing their learning results. Thus, it is possible that testing is one of the reasons leading to the difference in attitudes.

6.2.3 Classroom activities used in these two courses

Questions 11 and 23 are grouped together for analysis because both of them are designed to investigate classroom activities, one about the CE course (Question 11) and one about the ITE course (Question 23). The 21 categories are the same for both questions. Teachers are required to indicate on the five point scale the frequency of using each of the 21 activities:

- 1) Explanation about grammar in textbook_____
- 2) Explanation about vocabulary and phrases in textbook_____
- 3) Reading aloud (teacher)_____
- 4) Reading aloud (students)_____
- 5) Students read after the teacher_____
- 6) Read silently (students)_____
- 7) Dictation_____
- 8) Role play/dialogue/simulation_____
- 9) Discussion/debate_____
- 10) Presentation (students)_____
- 11) Translation between Chinese and English_____
- 12) Writing_____
- 13) Explanation and /or exercises of discourse_____
- 14) Explanation and /or exercises of different cultures or socio-cultural rules for language use_____
- 15) Explanation and/or exercises of communication strategies_____

- 16) Multiple-choice grammar/vocabulary exercises_____
- 17) Multiple-choice reading comprehension exercises_____
- 18) Multiple-choice listening comprehension exercises_____
- 19) Gap-filling exercises/short answer questions in reading_____
- 20) Gap-filling exercises/short answer questions in listening_____
- 21) Teacher interacts with student and gives feedback on their language output:_____

The mean frequencies for the 21 activities in each course are listed in the following table according to the values of means:

Rank order	CE	IELTS
1	2) =4.22	3) =4.13
2	19)=3.72	8) =4.00
3	3) =3.61	21)=3.85
4	11)=3.56	15)=3.75
5	1) =3.51	4) =3.58
6	4) =3.50	14)=3.58
7	17)=3.48	10)=3.48
8	21)=3.46	2) =3.31
9	14)=3.43	5) =3.31
10	13)=3.30	11)=3.24
11	18)=3.27	20)=3.24
12	7) =3.26	12)=3.24
13	10)=3.18	9) =3.27
14	20)=3.11	13)=3.17
15	5) =3.09	1) =3.13
16	15)=3.06	16)=2.89
17	8) =3.06	18)=2.82
18	12)=2.97	17)=2.79
19	16)=2.97	7) =2.75
20	9) =2.81	6) =2.65
21	6) =2.69	19)=2.62

Table 6-2: Frequencies of classroom activities used in the two courses

Results from these descriptive statistics have clearly shown that teachers prefer to use different classroom activities when teaching on these two different courses. The 21 categories are divided into 3 groups for analysis: Group 1 – the most frequently used, Group 3 – the least frequently used ones and the Group 2 – the middle 7 on each list.

On both courses teachers tend to use activities 3) and 4) frequently. All the other 5 most used methods are different for the two courses. On the CE course, teachers spend a lot of time on the teaching of 2) and 1), which may suggest that they perceive vocabulary/phrases and grammar more important. It also implies that CE classrooms are very teacher-centred as teachers prefer to lecture on the knowledge of language. Students do lots of exercises about reading, no matter whether it takes the form of 17) multiple choices or 19) gap-filling. This result shows that teachers perceive reading skills as very important. Another often used method in CE is translation. The seven most frequently used teaching methods in CE involve only a small amount of speaking training: it may be done in translation or students' reading aloud. However, these two activities still emphasize the accuracy of language use and pronunciation. There is little spontaneous language output by the students involved. Students have few opportunities to practise spoken English during class time.

The mean values for the ITE course tell a totally different story. Apart from 3) and 4), the other 5 most frequently used methods are all different from the CE course. On the ITE course, students have more opportunities for role play, dialogue or simulation. This method ranks the second in the list only after 3) teachers reading aloud. Another speaking-related activity is also often used here – presentation. Furthermore, in ITE classrooms, students also have more opportunities to interact with teachers and receive feedback on their language output. All of these findings may indicate that this course is paying attention to the development of speaking skills and is more LC as students have to participate more in order to conduct these activities. Students on this course receive more instructions and exercises on communication strategies and different cultures when compared with the CE course. Findings so far seem to suggest that on average the ITE course pays more attention to communication and cultural differences, and this course is more interactive, communicative and LC.

By further examining the least frequently used methods in these two courses, more significant findings appear. 6) students reading silently and 16) exercise of grammar and vocabulary in the form of multiple choice questions are not so frequently used on either course. 8) and 15)

are among the 7 least frequently used in the CE course, while they appear in the list of the most frequently used ones in the ITE course. 1) explanation of grammar is much more often used on the CE course than on the ITE course, which once again confirms that the former is more teacher-centred than the latter. 12) writing (another productive skill) appear among the 7 least frequently used methods in CE while it is in the middle group in the ITE course.

In order to further decide if the means of each method or activity in two different courses are significantly different statistically, SPSS T-tests have to be conducted. Due to the complicated nature of statistical analysis, two designs are used.

1. paired samples T-test

This sample includes the 12 teachers with both CE and ITE teaching experience. A T-test was run to compare their use of each method on the two courses. Again the significance level is fixed at 0.05. Statistically significant differences are found among the following items: 2), 7), 8), 9), 10), 15), 17), 18) and 19). Results show that the same group of teachers with experience in teaching both courses tend to use 2), 7), 17), 18) and 19) more often on the CE course and to use 8), 9), 10) and 15) more frequently while teaching the ITE course.

2. independent samples T-test

Two groups of different samples are included: the 32 CE teachers and the 14 teachers of ITE. For the 14 teachers, only their opinions towards ITE are considered and used to compare with the 32 CE teachers. After SPSS is run, significant differences are found in the following items: 2), 3), 8), 9), 15), 17) and 21). The results are slightly different from the results of the paired samples T-test: besides the differences discussed above, ITE teachers tend to read aloud and interact with students more often than CE teachers.

To summarize the similarities between the two groups of statistical data, conclusions could be drawn that on the CE course, more emphasis is put on vocabulary, phrases and reading skills because 2) and 17) are more frequently adopted; while on the contrary, on the ITE course, students may have more opportunities to practise speaking skills as can be seen from the usage of 8) and 9). Furthermore, the ITE course is more LC than the CE course. More details about the learning activities or teaching methods will be discussed in Chapters 8 & 9 when the observation data are analyzed.

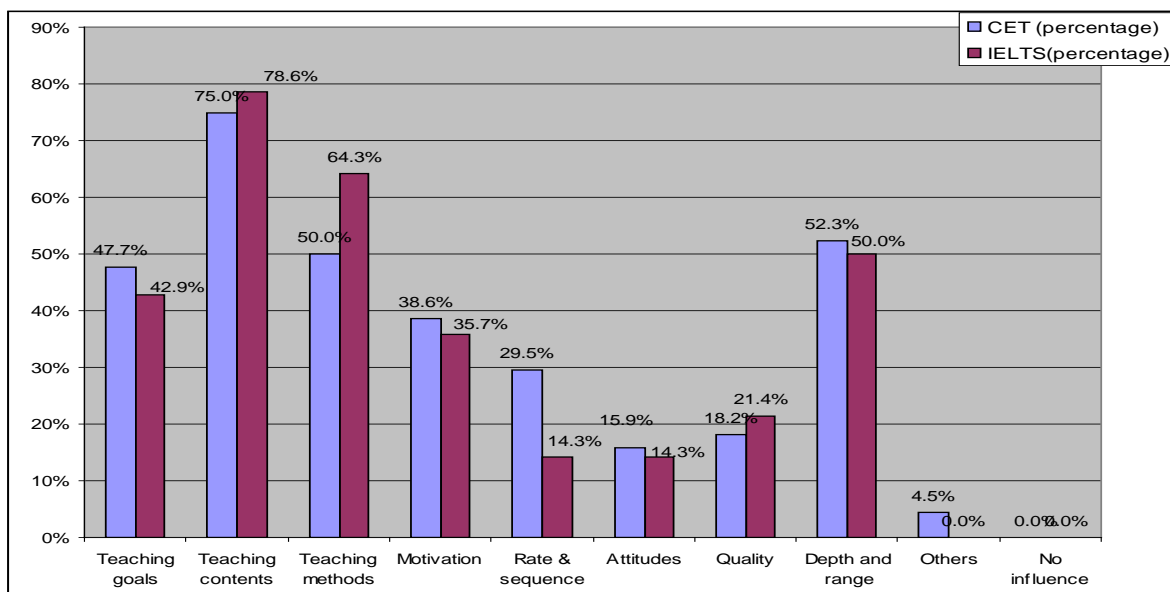
6.2.4 Language use in the two courses

Questions 12 and 24 are designed to find out teachers' language use in classroom teaching. The results show that teachers on the two different courses give similar answers. No teacher would completely use English in instruction and no teacher would speak Chinese all the time in class. Only two teachers admit that they will use Chinese more than English, and they are both from the group of CE teachers. About 34% (15 out of 44) of the CE teachers would speak the two languages for about half of the class time each, while for ITE teachers, the figure is 35.7% (5 out of 14). About 61.4% of the CE teachers and 64.3% of the ITE teachers would use English more often in teaching. The results so far seem to suggest that language use by these teachers is about the same no matter which course they are teaching. It may also suggest that language tests do not have strong washback effects on teachers' language use. However, when I was collecting the completed questionnaires, one teacher did mention to me that teachers' language use does not merely depend on the teachers' English level; it is also decided by the students' English level. She is willing to use more English in instruction if the students' English level is high enough to understand what she is talking about.

6.2.5 Aspects of the washback effects of testing

Questions 15 and 25 aim to explore the aspects of teaching influenced by CET and IELTS. More than one answer can be chosen.

Figure 6-3: Aspects of teaching influenced by CET4 and IELTS



As the above figure indicates, CET4 has the strongest influence on teaching content (75% of the 44 teachers chose this answer), and the range and depth of teaching ranks the second, followed by teaching methods, teaching objectives etc. CET4 has relatively less influence on teaching quality and attitudes. On the ITE course, teaching content and methods are the two aspects of teaching that will receive stronger impacts from IELTS. The depth and range of knowledge taught in classrooms ranks as the third here, compared to the second place on the CE course. It looks as if the teaching methods are more likely to be influenced by the assessment on the ITE course. All the teachers on both courses agree that these two exams have some influence on certain aspects of their teaching behaviours. The findings from both questions are not significantly different, which means the aspects of teaching being influenced by CET4 and IELTS are similar. In general, teachers of both courses admit that these two exams have a relatively strong impact on their teaching methods (3rd place for CET and 2nd for IELTS), which seems to contradict some of the findings from similar studies discussed in the literature review chapter (e.g. Cheng's studies).

6.2.6 Degree of the washback effects of testing

The results from Questions 16 and 26 may show clearly the intensity of the washback effects of CET4 and IELTS. Teachers are supposed to choose from the five points on the Likert scale (ranging from 1=no influence to 5=great influence) to indicate the degree of the influence these two exams exert on them. For the CE course, the mean is 3.86, while for the ITE course the mean is slightly higher – 3.93. Both of these figures are greater than 3 (the middle point on the scale), which indicates that teachers perceive that these two exams have a relatively strong influence on them. This finding is further supported by the frequency analysis: none of the respondents on either course choose '1=no influence'. 68.2% of the CE teachers and 71.5% of the ITE teachers opt for 4 or 5.

6.2.7 Nature of the washback effects of testing

Questions 17 and 27

The findings so far have proven the great significance of washback effects on teaching on both courses, but is this influence positive or negative? The answer depends on the nature of the washback effects: Questions 17 and 27 are designed to elicit teachers' opinions.

4.6% of the CE teachers comment that the influence of CET4 on their teaching is totally positive; 56.8% believe that CET4 has more positive effects than negative effects; while

13.6% and 25% of them think that the negative effects are either equal to or exceed the positive influence. All participants confirm that CET4 does have some kind of positive impact on CE teaching. It is a similar case for the ITE course in that the majority of the teachers respond positively to IELTS. None of them will say IELTS has no positive influence on them at all. However, the percentage of ITE teachers who think positively about IELTS is higher than its counterpart on the CE course.

6.2.8 Teachers' evaluation of these two tests

Questions 18 and 28 ask teachers to indicate on the five-point Likert scale the extent to which they think these two tests can truly assess students' CC in English, with the scale ranging from '5=completely can' to '1=completely cannot'. The mean score for CET4 is 3.11 which is slightly higher than the middle point 3, while the mean for IELTS is 3.79, even higher than that of CET. This indicates that on average, teachers think that both exams can, to a certain extent, reflect students' basic CC, while IELTS is better than CET on this aspect. It may seem that the mean of IELTS (3.79) is not much higher than the mean of CET (3.11), which is confirmed by the results from paired sample T-test and independent samples T-test. However, frequency analysis shows that these two groups of teachers hold distinctive views, which can be seen by examining the value of range. For CET, respondents are scattered along all the five points on the scale, while for IELTS all the respondents are concentrated from 3 to 5 with none of them choosing 1 or 2. This finding tells us that teachers' perceptions of CET can be quite varied, even extremely different sometimes, while teachers of ITE tend to hold similar views towards IELTS.

		CET		IELTS	
		Frequency	Valid percent	Frequency	Valid percent
Valid	1.00	2	4.5	0	0
	2.00	3	6.8	0	0
	3.00	28	63.6	5	35.7
	4.00	10	22.7	7	50.0
	5.00	1	2.3	2	14.3
	Total	44	100.0	14	100.0

Table 6-3: Frequency statistics about teachers' opinions on the relationship between these tests and CC

Some CE teachers offer explanations for their choices. Those who confirm the positive role of CET4 in evaluating CC argue that:

- 1) CET4 provides a relatively objective and comprehensive evaluation; it covers almost all the basic skills in using the language except that a spoken English test is not available to all the learners;
- 2) CET4 evaluates the practical use of language.

However, there are more teachers commenting on the weaknesses of CET4:

1. Some point out that there are certain test-taking strategies that may help students to get a higher mark; the ability to take the test is not equal to the ability to use the language for a practical purpose;
2. There are too many objective testing items; some students, who get high scores in CET4, are still not able to communicate in daily life; there are some faults in the test design; it deviates from practical communication;
3. There might be chanciness in test taking;
4. This test does not cover all the skills; it may be able to evaluate students' level in vocabulary, grammar, reading, even listening, but it neglects the more practical skills in communication such as writing and speaking;
5. Some teachers point out that the students' speaking abilities are not tested in CET4; it requires improvement; some students with high scores in CET4 have a relatively low oral English capability, which directly influences their competence in communication.

As to the open question affiliated to IELTS, only 3 out of the 14 teachers give their reasons. They regard IELTS as a scientifically designed communicative language test and believe that IELTS is able to reflect learners' real CC.

6.2.9 Learner autonomy in these two courses

Questions 19 and 29 intend to investigate how autonomous these two groups of learners are in these two courses in the teachers' views. Again teachers are supposed to indicate on the five point Likert scale the degree of their students' autonomy in learning, ranging from 1=not autonomous at all to 5=very autonomous. The means of the degree of learners' autonomy in both courses are quite low – 2.59 for the CE course and 2.92 for the IELTS course, both lower than the middle value of 3. This may imply that in the teachers' views, their students are not so autonomous in learning English no matter which course they are on and students on the CE

course are even less autonomous than students on the ITE course. The non-significance in the difference between the two means is further confirmed by running two SPSS T-tests (paired samples T-test and independent samples T-test).

6.3 Questions only belonging to CE and CET: 9, 10, 13, 14 and 20

Question 9 aims to find out teachers' attitudes towards a compulsory speaking test in CET. There is a Likert scale of five points ranging from '1=not necessary at all' to '5=completely necessary'. Results from SPSS show that the mean value of degree of necessity is 4.04, which is much higher than the middle point 3. By further examining the statistical frequency analysis, I have noticed that none of the 44 respondents chose 1 or 2, which suggests that they all think it is necessary, to some extent, to make CET-SET into a compulsory assessment.

The findings in this question not only confirm that teachers tend to welcome a compulsory CET-SET, but also show that teachers have noticed the potential positive washback effect of CET-SET. The term 'washback effect' does not appear in the questionnaire design to avoid 'polluting' the survey results. However, teachers implicitly and even explicitly mention it. One teacher just answers directly that tests may have a washback effect. Others explain this washback effect more implicitly but in more detail:

1. This influence can be evident in teaching: CET-SET may facilitate the teaching and training of oral English in CE;
2. This influence can also be seen in learning: students may attach more importance to it; students may feel some pressure so that they will be more motivated; it may help to improve students' oral English skills and improve their CC.

Some others confirm the necessity of implementing a compulsory CET-SET from the point of language theory and test design. They believe that speaking is an essential language skill just like listening, reading and writing. It should be trained and tested as well. A test is not a holistic one without testing speaking skills. Based on the above discussions, it can be inferred that all teachers tend to accept the idea of implementing a compulsory CET-SET. However, of course the test has to be scientifically designed and trialed in order to achieve the intended positive washback effect and to avoid or minimize the potential negative influence.

Question 10 asks what changes will happen with a compulsory communicative speaking test in CET. 37 teachers gave their comments.

Most of them agree a compulsory communicative speaking test would, to a certain extent, have some positive influence on teaching and learning. They also point out explicitly the potential benefits this idea will bring about:

- 1) It will make teachers, students, and even the university administration level attach more importance to speaking skills (T10, T26, etc). The focus of language teaching and learning will change: more attention will be given to speaking and less to reading and grammar (T6, T43, etc).
- 2) Time allocation in the classroom might be rearranged. More teaching hours might be set for speaking skills (T7, T22, etc). Spoken English teaching will be separated from the teaching of reading and teachers will be appointed specifically for the spoken English course; maybe more native speakers of English will be employed as teachers (T17, T35 etc).
- 3) Students will be stimulated and motivated (T8 and T24) to participate in activities with practical language use in or after class.
- 4) Textbooks with interesting and practical contents will be adopted (T5 and T31). Teachers may use more multimedia facilities or various meaningful classroom speaking activities to encourage students' participation (T15).
- 5) Students may have more opportunities to practise spoken English, and as a result, speaking skills will be improved (T16 and T38, etc). A few teachers notice the close relationship between speaking skills and CC, and think students' CC will get better as well (T28, etc).
- 6) There will be more interaction between teachers and students (T33).

(Note: Here, T stands for teacher, while the number refers to the number given to a specific teacher participant.)

However, there are two teachers who disagree:

T13: It is difficult to predict the possible influence. English language learning is a continuous process starting from junior middle school, lasting through senior middle school and higher education. It is not reasonable to put all the emphasis on the end product rather than on the process.

T20: The speaking test will fail a lot of students.

Besides these potential benefits, there are several other comments worth mentioning:

- 1) Two teachers point out some supplementary measures that would assist in achieving the positive results: to give teachers special training in teaching spoken English and to help students formulate positive and active attitudes to this test; otherwise students may hate this additional test and have a hostile attitude to it, and then it may be impossible to produce the positive effects (T38); teachers should make a scientific and effective teaching plan, otherwise students may feel it is like playing rather than learning (T17);
- 2) Students will benefit most from this idea (T8);
- 3) Two teachers think students are not the only party that will benefit from this test, since teachers' organizational abilities and spoken English will be improved as well (T15, T27);
- 4) Although T25 agrees that more time should be allocated to oral English, it will at the same time increase teachers' workload;
- 5) T42 points out that this phenomenon is also seen as studying for tests.

The above discussions suggest that most teachers have foreseen the potential washback effects of a compulsory spoken English test, both positive and negative. No test can be claimed as perfect in respect of washback effects due to its sophisticated nature. All parties involved (teachers, students, university administration level, textbook writers, etc) should make efforts to maximize the positive effect and minimize the negative impact.

Questions 13 and 14 are specially designed to investigate the influence of CET on university policies, as some universities' attitudes were the centre of criticism against CET prior to its reform. It is also the government's intention to reduce the high stakes of CET in order to minimize its negative washback effects. Data from the questionnaires show that 93.1% of the teachers think that administrators in this specific university attach great or some importance to CET4. The mean is 4.06, much higher than the middle point 3. However, 52.3% of the teacher participants comment that there is little or no relation between their students' scores and their premium or teaching posts. On average, the mean value for relationship between students' CET4 performance and teachers' premium or promotion is only 2.32. Results from Questions 13 and 14 seem to be contradictory to each other, as on the one hand teachers do think that the university they work for attaches great importance to CET4 while on the other hand the university does not relate students' performance in exams with teachers' own welfare. There may be one explanation for this phenomenon that although the university does value CET4, it

does not want to force teachers to accept the exam. It is preferred that teachers can realize and accept the importance of CET voluntarily, so that they will have a more positive attitude to it.

Question 20 asks teachers' attitudes to test preparation (preparation for the CET paper test and CET-SET), either in or after class. There is a higher percentage of teachers who are willing to prepare their students for the CET paper test than the CET-SET (37 vs 16), which shows that the CET4 paper test is a comparatively high stakes test and it has stronger washback effects on teaching than the CET-SET. As a result, teaching practices may differ. As to reasons why or why not teachers organize test preparation in or after class, teachers are able to state their own opinions rather than to select one from the given answers.

84.1% of the teachers support the CET4 (paper test) preparation in or after class. They believe that:

- 1) The preparation can improve students' performance in the test so that they may get a higher score;
- 2) Students may become familiar with the test (its format, time requirement, etc); they will not feel nervous in the test and they will know how to manage time so that they perform to their best; the scores are a better reflection of their real language proficiency;
- 3) In the process of preparation, students' vocabulary and the amount of reading can be enlarged through the intensive training, and as a result their general English level is improved;
- 4) Teachers may have an opportunity to help test takers systematically review what they have learnt;
- 5) It might not be necessary for those students whose English level is high, but it is especially beneficial to students of low English proficiency not only in achieving a higher score but also in improving their English level.

However, 15.9% of the teachers are not in favour of test preparation. Their opinions are summarized as follows:

- 1) This kind of preparation may reinforce the notion of 'teaching to the test' and give students a wrong impression about 'learning to the test';

- 2) The preparation may be ineffective in improving students' English proficiency from a long term perspective; it may be helpful to test scores but improvement in proficiency relies on long term hard work instead of short term intensive training;
- 3) It may increase teachers' workload and students' study load.

Compared to the CET 4 paper test, fewer teachers responded positively to CET-SET preparation. Those who do support CET-SET preparation give similar reasons to the arguments for the CET4 paper test: to help students get familiar with the test formats so that they will not feel so nervous or at a loss in the real test; to improve students' performance in tests to get a higher score; to improve speaking abilities during intensive training, etc. 28 teachers who will not give special preparation to the CET-SET either in or after class time state their reasons as well, which are totally different from the reasons given for not offering the CET paper test preparation. The most frequently mentioned reason for not giving CET-SET preparation is that it is unnecessary because most of the students will not take CET-SET. This is either because CET-SET is not compulsory so students are not bothered with taking it, or because most of the students cannot reach the criteria set as the requirement for taking the test.

Results from Questions 13, 14 and 20 show that on the one hand the CET4 paper test is taken seriously by most teachers, who are willing to offer special preparation courses to students in or after class despite the fact that they have already got a heavy workload. They are not forced by the administration level to help students in CET preparation; on the contrary, they do this mainly for the sake of students' and institutions' expectations. The CET4 paper test has strong washback effects on teaching.

6.4 Summary

Most of the teachers of English at this university are young with relatively little teaching experience. Females make up the majority (over 80%). Various factors can influence the way they teach and the most influential one is their previous experience as learners and teachers. Teachers have realized the importance of speaking skills, which is in agreement with the changes made to the CE Teaching Requirements. However, they do admit that this skill is the hardest to develop. In spite of the importance of this skill, it fails to receive proper training in practical CE teaching. The situation is better in the ITE course, as can be seen from the findings from the investigation of curriculum arrangements, time allocation and students'

learning behaviour. It is clear that the washback effects of the two exams are complicated, covering a wide range of aspects of teaching. The degree of the influence (the intensity of the washback effects) on teachers differs dramatically. On average, the intensity is strong. The vast majority of teachers acknowledge the existence of washback effects on their teaching; however, when it comes to the nature of the influence, teachers hold different views with more than half of them confirming the positive influence. In general, teachers on the ITE course think more favourably about IELTS than teachers of CE do about CET4. However, the fact that teachers have also realized the negative influence cannot be neglected, because it shows the need for improvement (improvement of test design, of university policies, of teacher training, and of other aspects involved in teaching and learning, etc.).

Some teachers have also realized the limitations of CET as a language test to assess learners' CC: the tendency to encourage test-taking strategies; too many objective testing items; omission of speaking skills, etc. Generally speaking teachers agree that IELTS is a better communicative language test. Learners' autonomy in both courses is low. However, it should be noticed that the development of learner autonomy is one of the priorities in the new Teaching Requirements (2004 & 2007). Thus results have shown that the CE course in this case has so far failed to achieve the goal set out in the new Teaching Requirements. However, this situation is not unique as students on the ITE course are not so autonomous either. It is possible that this phenomenon is common in the Chinese context, at least in the context of foreign language learning. Most CE teachers support the idea of a compulsory speaking test in CET and have foreseen the benefits from it. However, some teachers also admit that extra efforts and supplementary measures are necessary in order to achieve the above. This specific university where the case study was undertaken attaches great importance to CET, but it does not relate students' performance in tests to teachers' welfare. It is hoped that teachers will accept the test willingly so as to form a positive attitude to it. This is exactly what most CE teachers have done – they are willing to spend time on helping students to prepare for CET (paper test).

This chapter has analyzed the teacher questionnaires. The other survey that was carried out in the current research is a survey to student participants, since both parties (teachers and students) are crucial in the teaching and learning process. The next chapter will analyze the students' views as expressed in the student survey and discuss the research topics from their perspective.

Chapter 7 Findings from the Student Questionnaire

The previous chapter analyzed the data collected from the teacher survey. The present chapter follows the same process with regard to the student survey, and the discussions of the findings here will be closely linked to the previous chapter.

7.1 Findings from Part 1: Participants' general perceptions of learning English at higher education level

7.1.1 Question 1 - Learning motivation

This item is intended to explore the motivations of students in learning English while they are at university. Seven choices are given, and participants can choose more than one answer as long as the situation described applies to them. They can give their own reasons as well.

Students' motivations in learning English	%
to pass exams	49.5
for interest	28.1
for future career	60.4
to get enough academic credit in order to graduate	34.8
to meet the needs of English in society:	34.8
to prepare for the study or travel abroad in the future	13.7
Others	6.39

Table 7-1: Student's motivation in learning English

(Note: the total amount is greater than 100%, because participants are allowed to choose more than one answer.)

The data in this table show that testing (49.5%) ranks second among all the motivations, whose significance is only listed after students' concern for a future job (60.4%). These are the top two motivations for students to learn English and both of them are practical reasons. However, interest in English is only considered as the fifth most important reason. Although interest is a good internal motivation to learn, it cannot be found in every learner. The same theory may apply to other subjects. In the Chinese context, the need for a future job is quite often the most critical reason to learn anything. This may include the fact that future jobs require the acquisition of a certain skill, or a specific subject may enable the students to get a decent job in their future employment.

Another critical reason to learn in the Chinese context is testing, as one characteristic of Chinese culture is that it is exam-driven. Especially here in this case study, it is listed as the second most important motivation by student participants. Testing may be an external motivation to learn, but it is not necessarily a negative one.

There are several students who do not agree with any of the first 6 options, so they have chosen 'others'. However, none of them have offered further comments on what the other alternatives might be.

7.1.2 Question 2 - Students' perceptions of each language skill in general English learning

This question is designed to investigate learners' perceptions of each language skill: listening, reading, grammar, translation, writing, speaking, vocabulary and pronunciation/intonation. Speaking is considered the most useful skill in their future job by the majority of students (220 out of 313), which is in line with the findings from the teacher survey. 136 students feel a great necessity to improve it. The need for improvement is also expressed by teachers in the teacher survey. So far the findings from this question are consistent with the findings from the teacher survey.

What is different from the findings of the teacher survey is that speaking is not perceived as the most difficult skill by students. On the contrary, it is grammar that is the hardest for them - the one that requires a lot of memorization and is totally different from Chinese language rules. Only 23 out of the 313 participants chose speaking as the most difficult one. This figure is lower than the numbers who chose grammar, listening, writing, vocabulary and translation. This finding differs from the one of the teacher survey in that more than half of the teachers (54.5%) think speaking is the most difficult skill to develop. There may be a potential danger resulting from this discrepancy between teachers' and students' perceptions as teaching may fail to meet the needs of learners. One possible reason to explain the discrepancy is that teachers may feel it difficult to organize learning activities to help students to improve speaking skills. Thus the difficulty has an effect on them, while it is not perceived in the same way by the students. This hypothesis may be supported by the findings from the previous chapter that there are fewer activities adopted by the teachers on the CE course to develop the learners' spoken English. Another possible explanation is testing. The small challenge that speaking presents to learners (on their view) seems to contradict the complaints about the

rather low level of speaking and communication skills both from employers and from students themselves (see Chapter 2). If it is easy to improve, then why in reality are there so many complaints? Speaking is not compulsory in CET. As a result, teachers and learners may not be willing to spend much time on it, although they know it is the most useful element of learning English at this stage.

Among all these skills, it is reading that most students are good at, although not so many of them regard it as the most useful skill. Reading is followed by listening (16.6%) and grammar (7%) as the skill which learners are good at. From the analysis in the previous chapter, it is known that teachers tend to organize reading activities or give exercises in reading more frequently in the CE course. There are two possible explanations. Firstly the traditional way of English teaching is that all the language knowledge or skills are organized around an article (a piece of reading material). Unavoidably, reading skills or reading comprehension are emphasized in the teaching and learning process. As most student respondents are on the CE course, it makes testing the second potential reason. Reading used to take up the highest proportion in the old CET scoring system and currently shares the same high proportion of the score with listening as the top two skills (in terms of allocated marks) in the new CET scoring system. It may be natural for teachers and students to put more effort into it, and as a result it is the skill most students are good at.

Listening is listed as the second skill that students are good at after reading, and both of them are receptive skills. Since the reform of CET4, the marks allocated to listening have increased a lot. This is probably why it is listed as the second skill that learners want to improve most (after speaking). Speaking is the skill that most students want to improve, because it is the one that is most useful in future jobs (220 out of 313 chose it) and the one that only 2 out of the 313 students consider the skill they are best at.

It is also revealed here that only a very small number of participants choose translation, writing or speaking as the skills they are good at. However, all of these three can be categorized as productive skills (the skills enabling learners to produce language output). It is clear that learners in this specific case study are more proficient in the receptive skills (such as reading and listening) than in productive skills. It is acknowledged that the ultimate goal in learning a language is to communicate in it, and communication involves a two-way exchange of information, and so more efforts should be made to improve the productive skills of these

learners.

7.1.3 Question 3 – The necessity of having specialized speaking lessons

86.6% of the students agree that it is necessary to include a speaking course in the English curriculum, which suggests that most students regard speaking as an integral and essential skill in English learning. In the open-ended question asking for an explanation, some students explain why they are against such a course and the following two are typical:

Student 33: ' It is not so useful, because I may not use it a lot in the future. It is a waste of time spending too much time on it now.'

Student 205: ' There are too many students in one class. On average, each student can only speak for a little while.'

The opinions like the one held by Student 33 may be caused by the special Chinese context, where in most cases English may be used to obtain information, mostly through reading. There are specialists in oral interpretation, so there are few opportunities for graduates to speak English in their future jobs. However, things may change as time passes. With the development of the Chinese economy, English is more and more often used as a means to exchange information and for that purpose more speaking will be involved because there will be more contacts with foreigners. Learners who share the opinion of Student 205 may not be totally against such a course. What they are worried about is whether or not the current teaching/learning situation will suit the course. Careful account of such considerations is crucial in the planning and conducting of spoken English courses when they are included in the curriculum.

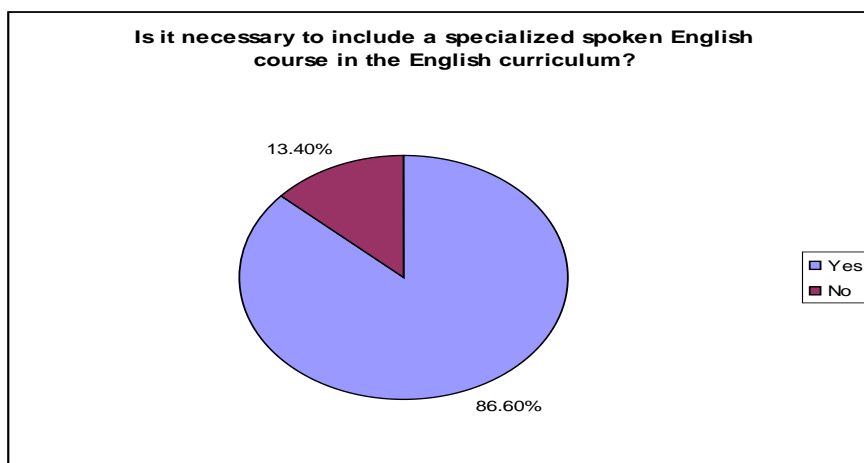


Figure 7-1: The necessity to include a specialized spoken English course

7.1.4 Question 4 - Students' perception of the influence of testing (in general) on teaching and learning

This 'testing' is a general term which refers to any assessment in the subject of English that students may encounter while studying in this university.

testing influence on	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
teaching	309	1.00	5.00	3.2071	.99796
learning	309	1.00	5.00	3.3786	1.03932

Table 7-2: Students' perception of the influence of testing on teaching and learning

This is based on a five point scale from 1 (no influence) to 5 (great influence). Generally speaking, according to the students' point of view, assessment may have some impact on both teaching and learning. The means for teaching and learning are 3.2071 and 3.3786, both of which are higher than 3 – the middle point. A further paired-samples T-test shows that there is no significant difference between these two means (because the significant value 0.653 is greater than the critical level 0.05). Thus learners perceive that the intensity of the tests' influence on learning is similar to that on teaching. The finding here shows that generally speaking testing can have a relatively strong impact on both teaching and learning.

7.1.5 Question 5 - Aspects of learning influenced by English tests (in general)

Once again, testing is used to refer to assessment in general. Only 5.1% of the participants (16 out of 313) state that their learning has not been influenced by testing at all. All the other 297 participants agree that assessment does have some impact on different aspects of their learning. The findings indicate that learning content, attitudes and motivation are the top three aspects that receive the greatest impact from testing: of all the participants, learning content is chosen by 43.5%; learning attitudes by 42.5%; and learning motivation by 40.6%. These three figures are much higher than any other categories. They are followed by learning focus, learning methods, choice of learning materials, learning range and depth, and learning strategies. This is to say that what the learners learn (learning content and learning focus) tends to receive a stronger impact from testing than how learners learn (for example, learning methods (31%) or strategies (30%)). A similar finding is also revealed by Cheng (1997): changes to the 'what' of the teaching and learning occurred more quickly than the 'how'. The washback effect of testing does exist among students in this university, although the impacts on different students are varied. However, those exceptional cases where students deny the

influence of testing cannot be overlooked, as they show that the exam-driven culture cannot be applied to all learners.

7.2 Comparison between the two courses and the two exams

7.2.1 Frequency of practising language skills or knowledge in/after class on each course - Questions 6 and 19

There are 8 skills or aspects of knowledge included here for investigation. The participants are asked to choose a degree on the five point Likert scale to indicate the frequency of a certain skill or aspect of knowledge being trained or practised in and after class in these two courses. In this way, information can be gathered about the focus of teaching and learning in each course. Furthermore, the data can be related to the findings about teachers' teaching methods/ classroom activities in the teacher questionnaires for further discussion and data triangulation.

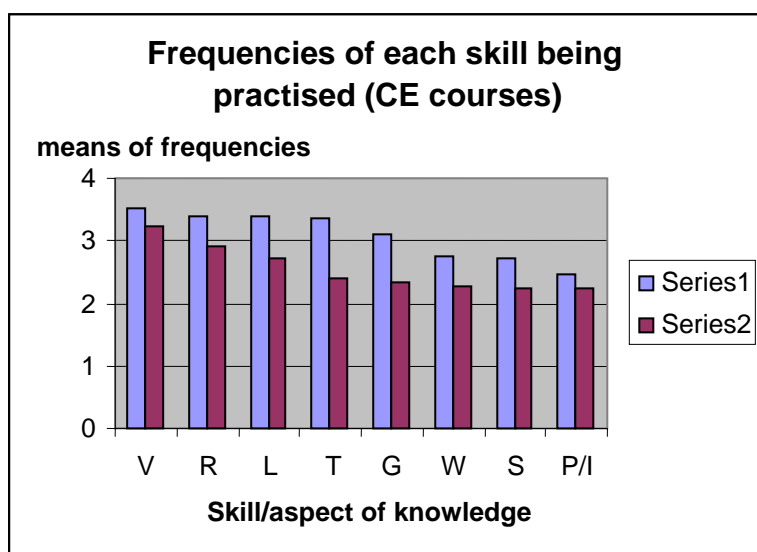


Figure 7-2: Frequencies of each skill or aspect of knowledge being practised on the CE course V=vocabulary; R=reading; L=listening; T=translation; G=grammar; W=writing; S=speaking, P/I=pronunciation/intonation.

Series 1= during class time; Series 2 = after class time.

As shown in the above chart, according to the views of students on the CE course the top two skills that are emphasized by teachers in class are vocabulary (frequency mean = 3.5108) and reading (frequency mean = 3.4050), while the last two are speaking (frequency mean = 2.7204) and pronunciation/intonation (frequency mean = 2.4516). Those in between are listed

in the following order: listening (3.3786), translation (3.3441), grammar (3.1075) and writing (2.7634). The orders of these 8 skills being practised in class and after class are exactly the same, which implies that there is a consistency in how teachers teach and how learners learn.

The above finding shows that students on the CE course think that their teachers usually spend more time on vocabulary teaching and training in reading skills, while teachers spend the least time on speaking skills and the relevant training in pronunciation/intonation. Students behave similarly to their teachers: after class they attach more importance to vocabulary and reading practice, but less to speaking. To relate this part of the data to the findings from the teacher questionnaires, the top two teaching activities teachers use in the CE course are explanation about vocabulary and phrases in textbooks, and gap-filling exercises/short answer questions in reading. These two kinds of activities are just for the training of vocabulary and reading skills, which shows that what teachers say they will do in class is just the same as what they are actually doing in class according to the students' perceptions.

Furthermore, the conclusion drawn from the teacher survey, that in the CE course there are fewer classroom activities conducted to train students' speaking skills, corresponds to the findings here in the student survey. As has been discussed about teachers' and learners' perceptions of each language skill, speaking is the most useful skill and the one calling for the most urgent attention. However, the fact discovered here is that so far it has failed to receive the appropriate attention in actual teaching and learning. One possible reason is that teachers find it difficult to organize speaking activities due to the large class size or teachers' own lack of expertise. Another possible explanation is that speaking is not tested: it is only an optional test in CET4 and CET is a high stakes exam. In CET 4 or many other CE examinations, reading is the skill which accounts for the highest proportion of the score. And in recent years, especially after the reform of CET in which the proportion of the score allocated to listening has been increased, listening is becoming more and more important. Vocabulary is also very important, because it is tested in the assessment of every other skill, e.g. reading, listening, writing, speaking etc. That is possibly why vocabulary, reading and listening are valued by both teachers and students on the CE course. The two productive language skills – writing and speaking - are much less frequently trained in/after class. From the above analysis, we know that both teachers and students think that speaking is the most important skill that should be developed in higher education, because it is the most useful one in future work. It seems that

teachers and learners have realized the importance of speaking skills, which is in agreement with the focus of the CE New Teaching Requirements. Thus in theory they have acknowledged the role of speaking skills, while in practice they fail to make enough commitment.

Answers to Question 19 present a different story about the ITE course. The skills trained during classroom time are listed as follows (from the most frequently trained in class to the least): listening (4.1383), reading (3.8526), speaking (3.6622), vocabulary (3.4526), writing (3.4526), translation (3.1053), grammar (3.0632) and pronunciation/intonation (3.0105). Reading still ranks as the second most frequently trained skill on the ITE course, while listening, speaking, even writing have all obtained higher rankings here when compared to the CE course. In contrast, vocabulary and grammar have received less attention. However, pronunciation/intonation is still the least frequently trained skill. Similar findings are seen in the analysis of classroom activities used in the ITE course in the teacher survey as well. Teachers on the ITE courses tend to use more classroom activities involving speaking (role play, interaction between teachers and learners, explanation/exercises about communicative strategies, presentation, etc.) and writing. However, there is one inconsistency, that although students say they receive a lot of training in listening, classroom activities like multiple choice listening comprehension exercises or gap-filling/short answer questions in listening are not always employed by teachers on the ITE course according to the findings from the teacher survey. One possible reason is that other activities involving training in listening skills, rather than those two answers provided for teachers to choose in the teacher questionnaires, might be conducted in classroom teaching. Another possible reason is that students may perceive the activity of interacting with other fellow students or teachers and getting feedback from teachers as a kind of listening training as well, which is confirmed as used often by teachers. Despite this discrepancy, the two productive skills (speaking and writing) are definitely more valued in the ITE course. Similarly, among the skills practised after class in the ITE course, listening and reading are again the top two skills which receive the greatest attention and pronunciation/intonation is the least. The ranking of the other skills is slightly different: vocabulary, writing, speaking, grammar and translation.

From the above discussion, differences in the focus of teaching and learning can be found between the two courses both in and after class, especially differences in speaking skills: these are much more frequently trained or practised by teachers and students on the ITE

courses. However, are these differences statistically significant? To test this, SPSS has to be run to examine if there is any significant difference: 1) between the means of frequencies of skills trained by the two groups of teachers in class; 2) between the means of frequencies of skills practised by the two groups of learners after class. However, unlike in the statistical analysis of the teacher questionnaires, each participant is only assigned to one group, and thus only a between-subjects design is necessary. Here, 'between-subjects' refers to the two groups of learners: the 205 students who have only taken the CE course and the 108 students who have taken the ITE course. An independent-samples T-test is usually used in such a design.

1) Statistical test between the means of frequencies of skills trained by the teachers in the two types of classrooms:

After the running of independent-samples T-tests, significant differences are found in the following five skills – reading, listening, writing, speaking and pronunciation/intonation. For students on the ITE course, they have received significantly more training on these five skills during their in-class time than students on the CE course. These five skills are treated more importantly by teachers on the ITE courses. Although teachers of the ITE course may spend more time on listening and reading than teachers on the CE course, both skills are among the top four skills being trained in both courses, while writing and speaking are among the bottom four skills being trained in the CE courses but are among the top four skills being trained in the ITE course. It is known that writing and speaking both account for higher proportions in the scoring system of IELTS when compared to the CET scoring system. As a result, testing might be one of the reasons that these two skills are treated differently in the two courses.

2) Statistical tests between the means of frequencies of skills practised by the learners themselves after class:

This time, significant differences are found not only in the five skills that were discussed in the previous T-test, but also in grammar. Statistically speaking, students on the ITE course do significantly more grammar practice after class than learners on the CE course. In fact, when compared with students on the CE courses, learners on the ITE course do more exercises on all the language aspects except on vocabulary. It is not plausible to draw a conclusion that learners on the ITE course are more autonomous in learning simply because they do more practice after class. It may be the teachers on the ITE course who have assigned that practice to their students. Further investigation is necessary to shed more light on learners' autonomy in these two courses, which is done through interviews with students.

Listening, reading and vocabulary are among the top four language aspects practised by these learners on both courses. Obviously it is easier to do exercises on the receptive skills (e.g. listening and reading) on their own because there are always fixed answers available. However, it is much more difficult to practise the productive skills such as writing or speaking. No fixed answers are available to check their language output. However, writing and speaking receive more attention in the ITE course than in the CE course. Learners on the ITE course practise them more frequently even than grammar and translation. Assessment may play a role in this: in IELTS there is no direct assessment of grammar or translation, and both writing and speaking are compulsory items for testing with each accounting for 25% of the total score, the same as reading and listening. These reasons may explain why writing and speaking are not practised as frequently as reading and listening by the learners on both courses, but are practised more frequently by students on the ITE course than those on the CE course.

7.2.2 Characteristics of the CE and ITE courses – Question 7 and Question 20

Five categories are designed to explore the characteristics of these two courses:

- A: being interesting;
- B: generating knowledge;
- C: being close to real life or work needs;
- D: providing opportunities to discuss with others or communicate information;
- E: enabling communication with teachers and getting feedback.

There is a five point scale from 1 (very poor) to 5 (very good) for them to choose from.

The descriptive statistics show that all the five means of the ITE course are greater than their respective counterparts for the CE course, which means that the ITE course is better than the CE course for all these five characteristics in the students' views. The ITE course is more interesting, and closer to real life and work. In this course, learners may have more opportunities to discuss or communicate with peers or teachers in English, and to receive feedback from teachers. They may gain more knowledge as well. A further independent samples T-test proves that these five pairs of means are significantly different statistically, because all the five significant values are smaller than the critical point 0.05.

7.2.3 Time spent on practising speaking English each week - Questions 8 and 21

The questionnaire asks learners how much time on average they spend on practising their

speaking skills every week. The descriptive statistics from SPSS show that there are clear differences between the means of the time spent on oral English by these two groups of students: the mean for CE learners is 1.1829 (hours per week), while the mean for IELTS learners is 3.9379 (hours per week). To further test if these two means are statistically different, an independent-samples T-test has to be run.

Table 7-3: Independent Samples Test Results about the time spent on practising speaking skills

		t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference
TIME	Equal variances assumed	8.090	224	.000	2.73177
	Equal variances not assumed	6.497	86.730	.000	2.73177

The significant value is smaller than 0.05, the critical level, which proves that the two means are significantly different from each other. To be more specific, the finding here is that these two groups of learners spend different amounts of time on practising their spoken English and learners on the ITE course spend significantly more time on it than CE learners. This finding confirms the earlier finding and discussion in the analysis of Questions 6 and 19.

7.2.4 Learning outcomes for speaking skills – Questions 9 and 22

In these two questions, students are required to comment on the level of improvement in spoken English they have achieved by attending these two courses, based on the 6-point scale from 0 (no opportunities to develop speaking skills), 1 (no improvement at all) to 5 (very great improvement).

There is some difference between the learning outcomes perceived by learners after attending each course. Students on the ITE course speak highly of the course's role in improving their speaking abilities. The mean is 3.4953, higher than the middle point 3, and also higher than the mean of 3.0614 given by the participants to the learning outcome from the CE course. Many factors may have caused this, such as the previous findings from both the teacher and

the student surveys: 1) from the teacher survey - teachers on the ITE course tend to organize more speaking activities; they emphasize communicative strategies; students have more interaction with peers and teachers; 2) from this student survey – students receive more training and undertake more practice of speaking in/ after class in the ITE course; they spend more time after class on practising speaking skills. Once again the finding from this question is consistent with the previous findings in both surveys.

Although the ITE mean of 3.4953 is higher than the CE mean of 3.0614, are these two figures significantly different statistically? Further T-tests have to be conducted to confirm this. Again only an independent-samples T-test is necessary here. The significance level is set at 0.05. The value of significance is smaller than 0.05. The ITE mean of 3.4953 is significantly higher than the CE mean of 3.0614, which means that learners on the ITE course evaluate their learning outcome (in respect of speaking) higher than the evaluation given by learners on the CE courses. However, it seems unreasonable to totally deny the role of the CE course in developing learners' speaking abilities. The mean of 3.0614 is higher than the middle point, which shows some levels of improvement after attending the course, and it means that the CE course is able to develop students' speaking abilities to a certain degree although the improvement is limited and not as great as the learners receive on the ITE course.

7.2.5 Familiarity with the tests - Questions 10, 12, and 23

The students are allowed to choose more than one answer as long as they are familiar with any of the aspects of the tests: date, format, procedures, and scoring criterion. Among these three tests, CET-SET is the one with which learners have the least familiarity. 60.5% of the participants on the CE course (124 out of 205) acknowledge that they have no knowledge at all about any aspect of CET-SET, either because they have never paid any attention to it, or because their teachers have never introduced it to their students in class. However, only 2.4% of them are not familiar with the CE paper test in any way. The percentages of students who are familiar with the date and format are the highest in the CET paper test (86.3% and 88.8%). Most students on the ITE course are familiar with all aspects of the IELTS test: the date (70.7%); the format (82.1%); the procedures (77.4%); the scoring criterion (47.2%). None of them say they have no knowledge of any aspect of this test. There is one similarity among these three tests – students are less familiar with the scoring criterion of any of the tests when compared with the other three aspects: date, format and procedures.

Both the CET paper and CET-SET belong to the CET system. Why has only the CET paper attracted the proper attention? Why is CET-SET treated differently? It seems that neither learners nor teachers have attached enough importance to CET-SET. According to the previous review of the literature, tests with different significance to stake holders will affect them in different ways and to different degrees. One possible explanation for the differences in the degree of familiarity is that the washback effects of the CET paper, CET-SET and IELTS on their test takers are varied.

7.2.6 Teachers' talk about each test during classroom time -Questions 11, 13, and 24

The previous theme aims to investigate the washback effects on students and this theme intends to explore the washback effects both on teachers according to students' perceptions and indirectly on the students themselves (insofar as the washback effect on them is mediated or encouraged by their teachers). In terms of the frequency with which teachers mention each test to their students, great differences can be found. IELTS enjoys the highest frequency of being mentioned to test takers, with a mean of 4.13. This is based on the 5-point scale from 1 (never) to 5 (always). It is followed by the written CET with a mean of 3.05 and the CET-SET with a mean of 2.15. This indicates that IELTS is exerting intense washback effects on teachers on the ITE course, because it has been mentioned much more frequently than the written CET and speaking tests. However, for all these three tests, the range covers the whole scale from '1' (never) to '5' (always), which seems to be a wide coverage. This indicates that the washback effects of the three tests differ in degree on different stake holders. They may have strong effects on some teachers, but not on others. On average, the written CET may have a stronger influence than CET-SET with its mean above 3, the middle point, while the mean for CET-SET, being 2.15, is below the middle point of 3.

7.2.7 Students' perception of the importance of each test - Questions 14, 15, and 25

Learners on the CE course regard the score of their CET paper test as more important than the score of CET-SET (3.53 vs 2.70, based on the five point scale from 1 - no importance at all, to 5 - great importance). There might be two reasons for the neglect of CET-SET: a) it is not required as much as the CET paper by other stake holders, e.g. universities or future employers; b) it is not designed as a compulsory test. Test-takers of IELTS (mean = 3.92) are more conscious of their performance in the exam than the other two groups of test-takers.

In summary, teachers on the CE course do not talk about the CET-SET very frequently and students are not so familiar with it, and thus they do not consider it so important. However, teachers mention the CET paper test and IELTS more often and students are familiar with them, and thus these two tests are of more significance to them. The CET paper and IELTS exert stronger washback effects than CET-SET.

7.2.8 The nature of the influence of the tests - Questions 16 and 26

The previous three themes have discussed the intensity of the washback effects of the tests, while this section is intended to explore the nature of the impact. On average learners still think the positive influence of CET outweighs its negative influence, in spite of the severe criticism of it in recent years. Here, the mean score is 3.71 which is higher than the middle point of 3, based on the five-point scale from 1 (completely negative) to 5 (completely positive). It indicates that learners still think CET has more positive washback effect on their learning. Similarly, students on the ITE course hold a favourable view about IELTS with its mean (3.75) slightly higher than the one for CET. The findings here are consistent with the findings from the teacher survey. From the previous analysis, we know that the washback effects of these two tests are found in many aspects of learning, and from this question we know that the overall nature of the influence of both tests is positive.

7.3 Special questions on CET

7.3.1 Washback effects on other stakeholders apart from students and teachers – Question 17

As one of the intentions of the CET reform is to reduce its high stakes, this question is designed specifically for CET to investigate whether this aim has been achieved or not. In contrast to the teacher questionnaires in which ‘other stakeholders’ refer to the administration level in this university where the research was undertaken, here the ‘other stakeholders’ refer to students’ future employers. As a result, so far there are 4 parties of stakeholders that have been covered: teachers, students, the administration level and employers. 75.1% of the CE students know their future employers will definitely require a certain score in the CET 4 paper test, while only 19.0% think their future employers will take the CET-SET score into consideration in recruitment. Thus it is obvious that the written CET still has intense washback effects on students’ future employers, which goes against the expectations of the government officials and test designers.

7.3.2 Students' attitudes to the introduction of a compulsory speaking test in CET -

Question 18

In spite of the concerns about the negative washback effects of testing on learning both in language and general education, 80% of the student participants agree that a speaking test should be included into the overall testing system as a compulsory item. Some of them offer explanations in their replies to the open question regarding the reason for their choices. It is found that to have CET-SET as a compulsory test may have a positive effect on learning at least according to students' perceptions - it can not only help learners to find out the level of their speaking skills, and what problems exist, but can also motivate them to work harder for it. Furthermore, this finding coincides with the finding from the teacher survey that in general teachers are in support of such an idea.

Of course, not all the students agree with this idea. Some consider testing as just going through the motions, without any practical use at all (e.g. Student 47). Others prefer to learn in a more relaxing way rather than to be forced to learn by exams (e.g. Student 89). About 20% of the participants do not like this idea, while the majority is still in favour of such a test. They have anticipated the positive washback effects of such a speaking test based on their own learning experience.

7.4 Summary:

The students in this case study are more motivated by practical concerns when learning English at university level. Only a small number of them are motivated by a genuine interest in EFL or by the plan to study or travel abroad. When students' opinions on language skills are compared with those of the teachers, mixed findings appear – both parties believe that speaking skills are the most useful in future work, and thus most teachers and students feel speaking is the skill that they want to improve; however, they hold different views on the degree of difficulty in improving it. More students are better at receptive skills such as reading and listening than at productive skills such as speaking and writing.

The majority of the students in this case study welcome the idea of including a specialized speaking course in the English curriculum. Findings from the investigation of language skills focused on both in and after class reveal that 1) in the CE course teachers spend more time on teaching vocabulary and training reading skills, while speaking skills and training in pronunciation/intonation are somehow neglected; 2) in the ITE course, although reading skills

are still valued, listening and speaking skills receive more attention from the teachers. Productive skills such as speaking and writing have become more important both to teachers and students when compared with those in the CE course.

When comparison is made between the characteristics of these two courses, it is discovered that the ITE course is perceived to be more interesting, closer to real life and future work, offering more opportunities for students to communicate with each other and with the teachers, and involving more knowledge.

Investigations into speaking skills show that learners on the ITE course spend significantly more time practising spoken English than learners on the CE course. They also speak more highly of the course's role in improving their speaking skills. Investigations into the washback effects of the three exams (CET, CET-SET, IELTS) reveal that the washback effects of all these tests do exist widely; only the degree and nature of the effect differ among them. IELTS has the strongest washback effects on its test takers, while the influence of CET-SET is the weakest among the three, which is perhaps because it is not such a high-stakes test as the other two. As to the nature of the impact, both CET and IELTS are considered to have more positive than negative effects.

In spite of the intention of government officials and test designers, CET is still taken very seriously by its stakeholders – teachers, students, university administration and future employers. As to the inclusion of a compulsory speaking test, the majority of CE learners welcome this, because their speaking abilities could be evaluated by it and they would be more motivated to develop their speaking skills. In fact, as discussed previously, test results and job prospects are the two main reasons for them to learn English.

Chapter 6 and Chapter 7 have presented an analysis respectively of the teacher and student surveys. The focus of these two surveys is on research topic 1 (speaking skills) and 3 (the washback effects of language tests). Mainly quantitative data were used. The next two chapters will utilize the data collected from classroom observations and interviews with the intention of answering research topic 2 about the LC teaching/learning model and shed more light on Research Topic 1 from a different angle - a qualitative approach.

Chapter 8 Findings: The Characteristics of the Classroom Teaching-Learning Process

The previous two chapters have explored the participants' (teachers and students) perceptions of the two courses and the two tests, based on the questionnaire surveys which mainly targeted research topics 1 and 3 (speaking skills and washback effects). By using the observational data, this chapter focuses on classroom teaching and learning, which will shed light on all three research topics with particular reference to research topic 2 – learner-centredness. As discussed in the research methodology chapter, data collected from classroom observation may provide empirical evidence about what is actually happening rather than what is said to be happening or to have happened in the classrooms. The observational data gathered over 20 hours of observation is supplemented with follow-up interviews with the two observed teachers, who were invited to comment on some issues in English teaching and learning. In addition to that, the two teachers were asked to clarify, explain, confirm or disconfirm some preliminary findings from the observation data. Another benefit of doing this is that according to Watanabe (2004:31) 'post observation interviews are becoming increasingly important, as a number of research results indicate that the teachers are prominent factors mediating the process of washback being produced.' The discussion is also supplemented by the analysis of the textbooks used in these two courses. To sum up, two sets of data are analyzed in this chapter:

- Field notes (using the COLT observation scheme) taken during classroom observations
- Follow-up interviews with the two teachers.

An initial analysis reveals the following main topics or themes, and these are arranged as the main headings for this chapter:

- Teaching content
 - The sources of teaching materials
 - The types of teaching materials
 - The skills emphasized in classroom teaching and learning
- Teaching Methods
 - Classroom activities & organization patterns

- Time allocation
- The use of the target language by the teachers and students

8.1 Teaching content

8.1.1 Sources of teaching materials

The findings show that textbooks are the predominant teaching materials used by these two teachers in both courses. Textbooks are chosen by the administration level of the Department, and the same textbooks are used by all the teachers working on the same course. The teachers usually just take this for granted and the students have no say in which textbook to use. In fact textbooks are the only materials used during all the classroom observations, although both teachers claim in the follow-up interviews that they occasionally use materials from other sources as well, such as supplementary teaching materials and test papers or test-coaching materials. According to Gu (2007:107), ‘the supplementary teaching materials mainly refer to those authentic materials from mass media, such as Internet, TV programs, radio broadcasting, newspapers and magazines.’ Test papers are the real test papers that have been used in the previous tests, whereas test-coaching materials refer to those materials used in the test-oriented practice or test taking strategy training (Gu, 2007).

8.1.1.1 The use of supplementary materials

Both teachers acknowledge in the interviews that the use of supplementary materials is very limited due to the fact that they are struggling to finish the teaching target (the textbooks) set out in the teaching plan.

In the ITE course, the students are required to take IELTS at the end of the first term in Year 2. The teachers on this course have 6 textbooks to complete. On average, 2 textbooks are to be covered in every term. The teachers cannot afford to spend much time on supplementary materials; however, they try to use some to make lessons more interesting. A typical type of supplementary material used by TA on the ITE course is from the Internet. According to the interview with her, she would do some research herself (e.g. to collect some English stories or newspaper extracts), or ask her students to do research on the Internet before a certain lesson and bring the results (either the original text or a report based on it) to the class. This type of material may have a high degree of authenticity in relation to the outside world, because its language is the language used by native speakers of English.

Both teachers say they show English films to their students on the CE courses. In fact TB mentions specifically that 3 or 4 English movies are shown each academic year. Both teachers mention the advantages of showing English films: students like watching movies; it helps to enhance their motivation to learn English; it relieves the classroom atmosphere; and it can bring the students closer to the culture of the target language.

However, there are 10 units in each book and each unit consists of several different tasks. As a result, teachers cannot spend much time on supplementary teaching materials. Both teachers give more detailed reasons why the use of supplementary materials is limited in the follow-up interviews:-

(1) TA explains that there is no specific requirement from the English Department to use supplementary materials. She mainly just uses the textbook, because that is required in the teaching plan by the Department. The teaching plan applies to all English teachers, and they have to complete it accordingly. She worries that she will not have enough time to cover all the required units in the textbook if she spends too much time on other things, such as supplementary teaching materials.

(2) TB has the same problem with time management, but she has another reason why she will not use supplementary materials frequently – a financial reason. There is no funding for this kind of material. She thinks that it should not be the teachers who have to pay each time, and she tries to avoid asking the students to pay for other expenses on top of their tuition fees.

8.1.1.2 The use of test paper and test-coaching materials

No test papers or test-coaching materials were used during the observation period. However, this does not mean that they are not used at all. In fact, in the follow-up interviews, both teachers mention the ways they adopt these materials in class:-

(1) When teaching second year students on the ITE course, TA tends to use test papers or coaching materials every week. However, due to the limitation of time, she assigns most of them to be finished after class and checks whether or not they have been completed, but only selects a few to discuss in class. She does not use them much during class time on the CE course either, because in this specific university there is a special course available to prepare students for CET4. She points out that the CET preparation course is available to every

student, in which test papers and coaching materials are the essential teaching materials. As a result, in her own normal CE class, she does not spend much time on test paper or coaching materials.

(2) The case is somewhat different for TB. In the first two terms of ITE, she concentrates on the textbook and on improving students' language skills. However, she introduces a test preparation plan to them, i.e. focusing on memorizing IELTS vocabulary in the first term; then starting to do some test coaching materials and mock tests; finally using the test papers from the previous years to evaluate their levels and to see if they are ready to sit the test. She also recommends which specific materials to use. Right from the beginning of Year 2, she spends more time on test preparation in class: introducing test-taking techniques and doing mock tests. As to the CE course, like TA, TB uses the writing topics from previous CET papers in teaching writing skills. In addition to that, she also uses the listening materials from previous CET papers in listening-speaking lessons. She also mentions the use of coaching materials in the CE integrated English course:

TB: I will also use certain loose-leaf materials in class. They are very important test coaching materials.

Interviewer: Do they come with the textbook?

TB: No. They are designed by our department. They are about CET4.

Interviewer: Do you start using them from the first term in Year 1?

TB: Yes. We have this kind of material every term.

Interviewer: Do you use them in every CE integrated English lesson?

TB: No. There are 20 papers every term. Sometimes I will ask students to do one in class and then we will discuss the answers; however, students are required to do all the others after class.

There are only two types of exercises: reading comprehension and cloze, just like CET.

8.1.1.3 The use of textbooks

A detailed discussion of the two textbooks is necessary because they are the primary teaching materials used by these two teachers on both courses. Teaching quality largely depends on textbooks, because a textbook is usually the basis for implementing the syllabus, the main foundation for teachers to organize classroom activities and the primary source for students to learn their knowledge and skills.

The textbook used on the CE course is *New Horizon College English*, which is a teaching series recommended by the Chinese MoE and a popular one used by many Chinese universities. The contents of these books are designed around different topics covering culture and communication, morality and emotion, information technology, science and education, social issues, etc. The choice of topics is intended to be informative, interesting and cross-cultural, because the textbook aims to develop learners' comprehensive and practical language competency in all the aspects of reading, listening, writing, speaking and translation. When asked about why in their opinions *New Horizon College English* is designated as the textbook, both teachers mention that it might be because it is a textbook recommended by the MoE and it is popular in many universities, which still does not explain the reason clearly. As a result I ask them to think deeply to give a better explanation.

TA: I think it helps to expand knowledge and vocabulary, and maybe it is more relevant to CET. For example, the exercises contained in the textbook are quite similar to those in CET and the key words in the textbook are also the key vocabulary in CET. Students who have studied all the textbooks at 4 levels, will not have any problem in passing CET.

TB: In my opinion, there are many texts included in this book and there are various reading materials on different topics. There are also CDs or DVDs affiliated with the book.

It seems that these two teachers do not have a very clear idea why *New Horizon College English* is the required textbook, but they do believe it is a true manifestation of the CE New Teaching Requirements (2004 & 2007). TA thinks that testing might have some impact on the choice, but TB think that the contents of a certain textbook will have more influence on whether it can be chosen. They think this textbook is interesting in its choice of various themes, but can be difficult for some students as far as the language is concerned. The main difficulties lie in the large amount of vocabulary and the relatively lengthy reading materials.

The textbook used on the ITE course is called *Interchange*, which was chosen by the English Department in this specific university for the single purpose of this course. The book offers 'new, fresh content in every unit, additional grammar practice, and more opportunities to develop speaking and listening skills. The series focuses on both accuracy and fluency, and features contemporary topics. The successful multiskills syllabus integrates themes, grammar, functions, vocabulary, and pronunciation' (ESL.net.) The underlying philosophy is that

'language is best learned when it is used for meaningful communication' (ibid). This series of books is organized around the communication functions. According to the interview with the two teachers, the focus on practical and meaningful communication is the reason why this series of books was chosen. They think that their students' reading and writing skills are not bad, but they are poor at listening and speaking. They feel that the use of this textbook will improve their students' listening and speaking skills and they can learn the language in a natural way. Furthermore, it is only when their four language skills develop in balance that they can sit IELTS. Their opinions on this textbook correspond with other book-users' testimonials (ibid)

The immediate benefits of using *Interchange* show themselves very quickly: while the students learn the language in a way that is natural and interesting to them, the teacher learns more about his or her own teaching style (as well as new and effective ways to instruct an ESL class)... a highly recommendable set of books to use.

(TESOL Journal)

One of the best things about *Interchange* is that the lessons always encourage the students to participate using information from their own lives. This makes class more fun and keeps students' interest high.

(International Language Training Consultants)

8.1.2 Types of teaching materials

The type of teaching material refers to whether they are audio, video or text. One key element which contributes to the use of audio or visual teaching materials is the availability of multimedia facilities.

The ITE classrooms are equipped with blackboards, computers (for teachers' use only) which can play CDs and DVDs, and projectors. The CE classrooms are equipped with whiteboards, computers (for teachers and students), projectors, microphones and headphones, which seem to be more advanced and versatile than those available in the ITE classrooms and are a great improvement compared to the situation a few years ago when most of the CE classrooms only had blackboards. According to the interview with TA, most changes to these teaching facilities occurred after the implementation of the New Teaching Requirements, and the new CET in 2004 in which the listening section makes up a higher proportion of the test score.

Therefore, testing may have had some influence on those at the administration level of this university in inputting more investment to improve teaching and learning facilities.

In spite of the above improvements made to the multimedia teaching facilities, the findings from the observational data show that materials in the form of text are the predominant type of teaching material used in both courses, which corresponds to the findings in the previous section that the textbooks are the primary sources of teaching materials.

During the observation sessions, TB does once use an audio resource in the ITE class – playing a CD to the students when she is combining listening activity with speaking activity. As for TA, she uses the computer and the projector once in the CE course to play a PowerPoint presentation that she has prepared in advance to explain vocabulary. During the rest of the observational hours, both teachers on both courses just use textbooks and blackboards or whiteboards, although both teachers claim to play movies (video materials) occasionally in the CE integrated English course.

According to TA, some teachers may only use the teaching disks attached to the textbooks or other software purchased by the university. As to the teaching disks she worries that some students may have a copy as well, and thus they may fail to achieve the expected result; as to the software purchased by the university she considers them good quality work but she just cannot afford the time to use them frequently in class. TB gives another reason for the relatively infrequent use of multimedia technology in the CE integrated English course - students on the CE course have more access to audio materials in their listening/speaking class compared to the situation a few years ago.

Another problem noticed from the observation is that the layout of the classrooms may hinder the adoption of an LC approach in both courses. The classrooms used for the ITE course are somewhat better in this sense in that although the desks and chairs are fixed to the floor, at least each student does not have to sit in a separated unit as the students on the CE course do. Unmovable teaching facilities such as desks and chairs will limit the use of some interactive teaching activities, such as circles or fishbowls; isolated cubicles and big computer screens are even worse as they will prohibit the interaction between teacher and students, and group or paired work among students.

8.1.3 Language skills emphasized

The teaching content has been examined from two perspectives: the source and type of teaching materials. It will now be investigated from another angle – language skills.

8.1.3.1 The influence of course planning and testing

Course planning is a vital factor that can influence the skills emphasized in classrooms. It is usually determined by the administration levels in universities. This is the case in this particular university.

The CE course is taught in two components in both Year 1 and Year 2: Integrated English which includes intensive and extensive reading, listening, speaking and writing (6 teaching hours every two weeks); and additional listening/speaking (2 hours every two weeks). Integrated English lessons are the subjects of my observation, recording and study, because three-quarters of all the English lessons are categorized as Integrated English lessons. Findings from the observational data show that reading is the skill predominantly emphasized by both teachers, while the other three skills are much less practised. This is further confirmed by TA in her follow-up interview that although it is called Integrated English, the focuses are on reading skills. During the observation, there are occasions when students answer questions, make presentations or work in groups, in which there are some elements of listening & speaking skills. Reading skills receive most attention. However, this does not mean that the other 3 skills are never trained at all. In fact listening/speaking is allegedly practised in another subject – listening and speaking (which occupies one-quarter of the overall time), but the proportion of time assigned to each skill is quite different.

In the follow-up interview TA says that in the listening/speaking lessons on average 50% to 60% of the time is spent on listening, and 30% to 40% of the time on doing exercises and discussing the answers. Only about 10% of the time is given to developing speaking skills. When asked to clarify what she means by speaking activities, she says that in most cases it is only the students answering questions, but sometimes she gives a presentation task for students to carry out in class. There is not much group/paired work, again due to limitation of time. She may adopt a few group/paired activities in the Integrated English lessons, but rarely in the listening/speaking class, because the students have access to the listening facilities only once every two weeks. She prefers her students to make the best use of these facilities, and think the use of speaking activities in the listening/speaking class is somehow a waste of time.

It is a similar story for TB: 80%-90% of the listening/speaking class is spent on listening. The few opportunities for students to speak are when they answer questions. She says she leaves speaking activities to the CE Integrated English class. From the above analysis, it can be seen that although the course is called Listening/Speaking, it is listening that takes up the majority of the time. However, as mentioned earlier the observation of the CE Integrated English lessons offered by these two teachers does not provide much evidence of training in speaking skills or group work.

Although writing is missed out from the observation lessons, according to the follow-up interviews with the two teachers, it is practised after class. Due to the limited time, the teachers usually assign writing tasks to be completed after class and discussed in class. In the follow-up interviews, TA confirms that as to writing skills, she only talks about it in class. The actual writing process has to happen after class. What she does in class is to give comments, lectures and summaries due to time limitation. TB gives a more detailed description on how she trains her students in writing skills:-

TB: I will assign a writing topic every other week, which means one writing task after each unit in the textbook. This is because usually it takes two weeks to finish one unit.

Interviewer: Will you read and mark their writing?

TB: Yes, of course. Usually before it comes to the next writing task, I will comment on their previous assignments. However, when I'm struggling to finish the units in the textbook or there is no interesting topic to write about this unit, I will not assign any writing task. I will wait for another two weeks.

Interviewer: Do students write in class or after class?

TB: After class, because we have teaching plans for the textbook. We can only carry out extra activities if we feel certain that we can complete the target set in the teaching plan.

In summary of the above analysis, reading and listening are the two skills most emphasized in the CE course, followed by writing and speaking skills. This order of priority basically conforms to the proportion of the total score allocated to each skill in the CET: Reading 35%, Listening 35%, Writing 15%, Translation 5% and Cloze 10%, while Speaking is not compulsory. This finding is further confirmed by both teachers in their interviews when they are asked about their opinion of language skills.

For the ITE course, on the other hand only one subject is available in Year 1 – Integrated English. In Year 2, the 4 skills are trained separately in 4 different subjects. As a result, it seems that the four skills are equally focused in Year 2 course planning. However, Year 1 Integrated English is the subject of my observation. Again writing is not practised at all during the recording time; instead it is assigned for the students to complete after class. Both teachers give similar explanations in the follow-up interviews: time limitation. According to the observational data, the other 3 skills are more or less equally practised. In addition to the use of listening materials, both teachers try to use the target language as much as they can in all circumstances. As to reading skills, as in the CE Integrated English course, they are mainly developed in the form of reading comprehension. As a result, the chief difference between the CE Integrated English lessons and the ITE Integrated English lessons lies in speaking skills. Unlike in the CE course, speaking is no longer at the end of the list. It enjoys the same amount of significance in teaching as reading and listening skills. However, these two teachers hold different understandings: TA is more prone to be influenced by testing, while TB is more concerned with the way language skills should be developed.

TA: They (the students) are supposed to take IELTS at the end of the first term of Year 2. As you know, IELTS evaluate and score the 4 skills separately. That's why these 4 skills are equally important.

TB: I will probably place more emphasis on speaking skills in Year 1. There is a problem of continuity in education. When students graduate from middle schools, they are good at reading and writing skills, but poor at speaking. In order to improve their oral English proficiency, I will give them more opportunities to speak in the class.

8.1.3.2 The influence of textbooks and teaching methods

The textbook is another factor that may have some influence on the skills. The textbook used in the CE Integrated English class is organized around reading topics, with one intensive reading article and one extensive reading article in each lesson. The focus is on reading comprehension. The textbook used in the ITE Integrated English class is designed around communicative functions. There are listening, reading, speaking and writing tasks in each lesson. This may help to explain why reading is the top priority in the CE course while in the ITE course the 4 skills are relatively in balance.

Compared to the textbooks, the teaching methods may have a greater impact on the skills emphasized. 'Teaching method' mainly refers to the way teachers organize the classroom activities. The frequent use of a certain type of activity (e.g. group/paired discussion, role play or presentation) will lead to the frequent practice of a certain skill (e.g. speaking). For example, according to the observation data, while teaching on the CE course, a typical way for TA to carry out a reading task is to ask the students to read the article and to finish the questions (multiple choices or open ended questions), and then to go through the answers with them. On the other hand, on the ITE course she asks her students to summarize the meaning of a reading article in the format of a speaking task before the students move on to the exercises on the textbook (those exercises are designed to check whether or not students have comprehended it correctly). Therefore, even for two similar tasks (reading), TA uses different activities in completing them in the two different courses. The important influence of teaching methods on the language skills emphasized is evident. There will be more detailed discussion on teaching methods in the next section of this chapter, which may provide more insights into this topic.

8.2. Teaching Methods

The next aspect to be discussed about the teaching-learning process is teaching methods, which are divided into 3 subcategories:-

- 1) classroom activities and organization patterns
- 2) time allocation
- 3) target language input and output

8.2.1 Classroom activities and organization patterns

Classroom observation show that there are various classroom activities organized by these two teachers:

- a. Teacher Presentation (TP) (organization pattern: T-S/C): this may consist of lectures, explanations, paraphrases, analyses, summaries and translations (Gu, 2007:114).
- b. Teacher & Student Interaction (T&S) (organization pattern: T-S/C): this may include interactions between teacher and students, questions & answers, pattern drills, etc.
- c. Student (individual) presentation (SP) (organization pattern: S-S/C): this refers to students making short presentations on a certain topic to the whole class.

- d. Group/Paired work (G/P) (organization pattern: Group): this refers to any work carried out by students in pairs or groups, e.g. group discussion, conversation, role play, simulation, etc.
- e. Reading Aloud (RA) (organization pattern: choral or individual): this is about students reading either vocabulary or text aloud.
- f. Individual Work (IW) (organization pattern: individual): this refers to the time spent by students on doing exercises on their own in class.

(Note: T refers to Teacher; S refers to Student(s), C refers to the whole class)

8.2.1.1 The CE course

Tables 8-1 & 8-2 summarize the classroom activities and the time taken up by each type of activity organized by these two teachers on the CE course. Theoretically speaking, each lesson is supposed to last for 50 minutes, but very often when the time of all the activities in one lesson is added up, the total amount is either over or less than 50 minutes, which may be due to the fact that the lessons do not end on time (either earlier or later) or there are certain periods when no teaching & learning activities are happening such as when teachers are trying to find out who is absent from that class.

Table 8-1 Classroom activities by TA on the CE course (' = minutes, '' = seconds, N/A = not applicable, OB = observation)

Activities	OB1	OB2	OB3	OB4	Total
TP	27'50''	19'41''	25'22''	23'18''	96'11''
G/P	3'37''	N/A	N/A	N/A	3'37''
SP	7'08''	9'48''	N/A	6'28''	23'24''
IW	7'30''	N/A	20'34''	N/A	28'04''
RA	5'17''	9'22''	N/A	9'47''	24'26''
T&S	N/A	11'08''	5'47''	8'35''	25'30''
Total	51'22''	49'59''	51'43''	48'08''	201'12''

Table 8-2 Classroom activities by TB on the CE course (' = minutes, '' = seconds, N/A = not applicable, OB = observation)

Activities	OB1	OB2	OB3	OB4	Total
TP	22'30''	21'48''	20'06''	26'27''	90'51''
G/P	5'29''	N/A	N/A	4'53''	10'22''
SP	N/A	8'29''	N/A	6'12''	14'41''
IW	6'25''	8'18''	14'03''	N/A	28'46''
RA	6'45''	N/A	10'26''	8'09''	25'20''
T&S	10'37''	10'21''	7'32''	4'41''	33'11''
Total	51'46''	48'56''	52'07''	50'23''	203'12''

The above two tables demonstrate that the activities organized by the teachers vary across the 4 observation occasions: a certain activity may be carried out in one lesson, but not in another, even for the same teacher. The time spent on each activity across all the 4 observations is added up to make the comparison between TA and TB.

The time spent on different activities by each teacher in the CE Integrated English lessons is compared below:

- | TA | TB |
|------------------|------------------|
| 1. TP (96'11'') | 1. TP (90'51'') |
| 2. IW (28'04'') | 2. T&S (33'11'') |
| 3. T&S (25'30'') | 3. IW (28'46'') |
| 4. RA (24'26'') | 4. RA (25'20'') |
| 5. SP (23'24'') | 5. SP (14'41'') |
| 6. G/P (3'37'') | 6. G/P (10'22'') |

There are a lot of similarities between the ways TA and TB organize their classroom teaching when teaching the CE course. TP is the most frequently used activity by both teachers. The observational data show that both teachers spend quite a lot of time on explaining background knowledge, new vocabulary, grammatical points, analyzing the text, etc. The only difference

between TA and TB in the use of various types of activities is the frequency at which they employ IW and T&S. For TA, IW is the second most often used activity, and T&S is the third. It is the other way round for TB. With regard to organization patterns, TP and T&S belong to T-S/C, and as a result the CE lessons by both teachers are teacher-controlled for more than half of the classroom time. Moreover, the time spent on TP by both teachers is the equivalent of about half of the classroom time, which suggests that these observed lessons are teacher-dominated to a certain extent. The more communicative types of activities (SP or G/P) are even less used than RA.

TA gives her reason in the follow-up interview why G/P is less used in her class than all the other activities. She thinks students' self-discipline and the relatively large class size are issues in designing and organizing G/P work. There are too many students in one class, and as a result, there will be too many groups or pairs if she intends to divide them up in this way. It will be quite hard for her to monitor their work and if they are not self-disciplined, they may talk about the topic in Chinese or even take this opportunity to talk about something else rather than the study subject. She believes that teachers will not be able to know what is going on in students' groups or pairs.

TB shares TA's concern about the large class size by relating it to the problem that has already been mentioned – limited class time. That means that even when the students have done the G/P work very well, there is still not enough time for them to show it to the whole class or the teacher. For example, if the class is divided into 10 groups, she can probably only afford the time to check one or two of them. Then some students may feel slightly or significantly disappointed because they are deprived of the opportunity to demonstrate their work and to receive feedback for future improvement from fellow students and their teacher. Therefore, they will lose their motivation for and interest in G/P work. Next time they are given another G/P task, some students may not take it seriously, because they are going to take the chance that their teacher may not check on them. She reiterates that her choice of classroom activities is influenced by the number of students in one class and the time available. If she tries organizing a certain kind of activity several times but fails to achieve a satisfactory result, she will gradually stop using it.

8.2.1.2 the ITE course

The classroom activities organized by these two teachers when teaching the ITE course are shown in the next two tables.

Table 8-3 Classroom activities by TA on the ITE course (' = minutes, '' = seconds, N/A = not applicable, OB = observation)

Activities	OB1	OB2	OB3	OB4	OB5	OB6	Total
TP	12'01''	10'25''	29'15''	N/A	N/A	13'10''	64'51''
G/P	N/A	8'30''	N/A	N/A	N/A	19'22''	27'52''
SP	N/A	1'15''	13'32''	9'15''	10'54''	3'55''	38'51''
IW	2'45''	7'35''	4'53''	2'16''	6'00''	2'11''	25'40''
RA	2'35''	3'17''	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	5'52''
T&S	31'57''	18'52''	3'28''	35'45''	33'26''	12'04''	135'32''
Total	49'18''	49'54''	51'08''	47'16''	50'20''	50'42''	298'38''

Table 8-4 Classroom activities by TB on the ITE course (' = minutes, '' = seconds, N/A = not applicable, OB = observation)

Activities	OB1	OB2	OB3	OB4	OB5	OB6	Total
TP	36'35''	18'22	5'30''	N/A	16'28''	15'18''	92'13''
G/P	2'12''	18'57''	12'33''	26'00	4'09''	4'47''	68'38''
SP	N/A	7'47''	5'31''	N/A	N/A	N/A	13'18''
IW	N/A	2'25''	3'31''	N/A	3'11''	N/A	9'07''
RA	N/A	1'49''	3'15''	N/A	N/A	N/A	5'04''
T&S	13'22''	N/A	28'34''	19'18''	23'49''	29'05''	114'08''
Total	52'09''	49'20''	58'54''	45'18''	47'37''	49'10''	302'28''

The time spent on different activities by each teacher on this course is compared below:

TA	TB
1. T&S (135'32'')	1. T&S (114'08'')
2. TP (64'51'')	2. TP (92'13'')
3. SP (38'51'')	3. G/P (68'38'')
4. G/P (27'52'')	4. SP (13'18'')
5. IW (25'40'')	5. IW (9'07'')
6. RA (5'52'')	6. RA (5'04'')

A close look at the above data may again show a lot of similarities between the ways these two teachers carry out their teaching. They are only different in the use of SP and G/P. The lessons are still controlled by the teachers, as seen from the use of T&S and TP. However, they are no longer teacher-dominated: TP is not the predominant activity in the classrooms anymore; the more communicative activities (SP & G/P) are more often used than the less communicative ones (IW & RA); T&S is the most frequently adopted activity, the use of which may encourage the students to use the target language. Both teachers try to organize more activities which may enhance students' engagement and the students are offered more opportunities to speak. The students are taking a more active role in the learning process. Therefore, the lessons are more interactive, communicative and LC.

8.2.1.3 Discussion:

Despite the above similarities in teaching methods between TA and TB when they teach the same course, significant differences are found between the different courses taught by the same teacher, which partly confirms the two assumptions outlined in the Research Methodology Chapter:

- 1).The same teacher when teaching different courses may exhibit differences in the ways he/she organizes the teaching and learning activities.
- 2).Different teachers when teaching the same course (either in CE or ITE) may share similarities in the ways they organize the teaching and learning activities.

To draw a more confirmative conclusion, a more detailed study of the classroom activities employed by these two teachers is necessary. Table 8-5 and Table 8-6 compare the teaching activities employed by the same teacher on different courses:

Table 8-5: Frequencies of teaching activities used by TA on both courses

TA:	The CE course	The ITE course
	1. TP	1. T&S
	2. IW	2. TP
	3. T&S	3. SP
	4. RA	4. G/P
	5. SP	5. IW
	6. G/P	6. RA

Table 8-6: Frequencies of teaching activities used by TB on both courses

TB:	The CE course	The ITE course
	1. TP	1. T&S
	2. T&S	2. TP
	3. IW	3. G/P
	4. RA	4. SP
	5. SP	5. IW
	6. G/P	6. RA

The teaching-learning process in the CE classrooms is mainly controlled by the teachers – the teachers have the absolute right to decide on the use of activities, while the students have little say in the choice of activities. As mentioned in the review of the relevant literature, a low level of involvement in this respect may discourage learners’ motivation in learning. TP is the primary means of teaching and the students spend quite a proportion of time doing the exercises on the textbook on their own, which may indicate that the CE lessons are not so LC and interactive.

A close look at the observation notes shows that on the CE course both teachers spend quite a lot of time lecturing about vocabulary and phrases, or explaining and analyzing the texts. Then the students are given time to complete the comprehension exercises or other exercises (e.g. cloze and translations) on the textbooks. The teachers finally check the answers with the students. The focus of teaching is on comprehension of the reading materials, and on the forms of language (vocabulary or grammar). These methods provide hardly any opportunities for learners to produce target language output, especially in the speaking form. The other two types of activities which may give the learners the opportunities to speak English (SP and G/P)

are the least frequently used activities in classroom. Thus the students do not have many opportunities to practise spoken English and speaking skills receive much less training when compared to reading skills. This finding is consistent with the finding from the study on language skills in the analysis of the teaching content. Furthermore, as discussed in the Literature Review Chapter, group work, paired work, role play, discussion, debates and language games are commonly used LC activities in the language classroom. The comparatively infrequent use of these activities suggested that these CE lessons fail to meet the requirement of an LC curriculum.

The top four teaching activities employed in the ITE course are T&S, TP, SP and G/P, which means that the teaching-learning process here is still teacher-controlled but not so teacher-dominated, because the teachers take the roles of activity organizers and the learners have more opportunities to participate in this process, to interact with the teachers, to answer questions, to do drills on pattern use, to make presentations or to work with partners in groups/pairs in the target language. Reading no longer dominates the classroom, while speaking receives more practice. Forms of language (vocabulary and grammar) are still emphasized, but they are taught with enough practice in the use of them by the learners, especially in the form of speaking. There will be more detailed discussion about how these two teachers combine the teaching of forms of language with practice of speaking skills in the next chapter. The less communicative activities IW and RA are seldom used, which means that the teaching-learning process is more interactive.

With regard to the characteristics of the teaching activities in the ITE course carried out by TA, the findings show that T&S is the most commonly used activity in her class: about 45.39% of the classroom time is spent on this type of activity which may include all types of T&S interaction, such as Questions& Answers, Pattern Drills, Teacher's feedback on the answers or the language output provided by students (confirming, correcting or responding), and more interestingly and importantly the exchange of authentic information between TA and individual students. The exchange of authentic information between TA and individual students takes up 20.14% of the whole class time and SP accounts for 13.01%. These two types of activities take up about 1/3 of the general teaching-learning time, while G/P work (the other activity which may involve learners' practice on speaking skills) takes up only 9.33% of the whole class time. These findings not only show the important status of speaking skills in TA's class, but may also indicate the washback effect of IELTS on TA's use of

teaching activities, as interaction between the examiner and the test-takers and a short speech on a certain topic are the two kinds of assessment tasks in the IELTS speaking test. In the follow-up interview, TA confirms that the frequent use of these two activities is to a large extent for the sake of preparing her students for the IELTS speaking test, and even the choice of topics involved in these activities is influenced by the test. As a result, a conclusion can be drawn here that there is a relatively strong washback effect of the IELTS speaking test on TA's use of teaching activities (washback on teaching method).

Although speaking skills are also emphasized in TB's ITE lessons, the specific speaking activities adopted by her differ from those of TA in some ways. The exchange of authentic information between the teacher and students is no longer the No. 1 speaking activity carried out in class (it occupies only 5.6% of the classroom time). Furthermore, SP is less frequently used as well – only 4.4% of the classroom time. G/P is more frequently adopted (22.70%), and these activities are witnessed during all 6 observations. According to the observation notes, the speaking activities carried out in groups or pairs include paired conversation (making up conversations according to a given topic or situation), group discussion (on the same or different topics) and role play. Even for most of the exercises on the textbook which are presented in the forms of multiple choice or sentence completion, TB asks the students to finish them in groups or pairs. There will be more explicit examples in the next chapter. This may also explain why IW is much less used in TB's ITE lessons. So far the above discussion cannot prove the existence of the washback effect of the IELTS speaking test on TB's teaching methods, because the most commonly used speaking activity (G/P) does not conform to the types of tasks assessed in the IELTS speaking test. The only conclusion that can be drawn here is that speaking skills do receive more attention and practice in TB's ITE lessons. However, it may work as an indicator of washback effect only on teaching content, not on teaching methods. As a result, a further study on the follow-up interview with TB is necessary. When asked about the reason why she tends to use G/P work widely across all her lessons, TB says:

This type of activity can provide my students with the opportunity to not only practise their speaking skills, but also to work in teams. Teamwork and peer learning are effective ways of learning. Furthermore, this kind of activity can motivate students' participation and make the lessons more interesting.

To summarize, the speaking activities these two teachers employ in the ITE course not only cover the types of tasks required on the IELTS speaking test in order to prepare their students for the test, but also are not just restricted to the test, in that other types of speaking activities which are not included in the test (paired conversation, group discussion or role play) are often carried out to encourage the use of English by the learners and to make the teaching-learning process more interesting. The above discussion demonstrates that speaking skills are emphasized by both teachers when teaching the ITE course and the washback effect of IELTS on these two teachers' teaching methods (to be more specific on the use of classroom activities and participant organization) does exist. However, the degrees differ between the two teachers: the influence is stronger on TA but slightly weaker on TB. The existence of this influence cannot be ignored because it is positive in that more and varied speaking activities are carried out in class and as a result the learners' speaking skills may be improved.

8.2.2 Time allocation between 'Teaching' and 'Practice'

Practice refers to all the teaching-learning activities carried out by learners. As discussed above, the observational data show that for these two teachers, the CE Integrated English course is highly teacher-dominated (with 47.80% for TA and 44.71% for TB of the classroom time spent on TP). This confirms Gu's finding when she says, 'this indicates that many teachers like spoon feeding the students rather than interacting with them or offering them time and opportunity to practice' (Gu, 2007:117). The students do not practise enough on the use of the target language. When they are teaching the ITE course, the time allocated on TP is much less with 21.72% for TA and 30.48% for TB. This difference may be able to ensure that the students have relatively more time to practise the use of English in class.

Findings from the field notes also show that in the classrooms where there is less talk by the teacher, the atmosphere is more active and relaxing. Learning is the focus in the teaching and learning process, and the students are more engaged and motivated. On the contrary, in the classes where there is more teaching time and less practice time, it is easy for the students to lose their concentration or become bored. There is little interaction between the teacher and the students; as a result, the atmosphere seems relatively dull and uninteresting. In short, a lesson is more LC when there is less teaching and more practice. In this sense, the ITE lessons are more LC than the CE lessons.

Since one of the research focuses of this study is on speaking skills, a detailed investigation of time allocation for speaking skills is vital, especially when teaching activities such as IW and RA are counted as practice as well. These are not communicative activities, but they do make up a significant proportion of classroom time, especially in the CE course: 26.09% for TA and 26.62% for TB. The teaching activities that may involve practice on speaking skills include G/P, SP and T&S. RA is regarded as practice on phonetic symbols rather than practice on speaking skills.

Teacher	Course	Time allocation on practising speaking skill
TA	The CE Integrated English course	26.11%
TB	The CE Integrated English course	28.67%
TA	The ITE Integrated English course	67.73%
TB	The ITE Integrated English course	64.83%

Table 8-7: Differences of time allocation for practising speaking skills by the two teachers when teaching on the two courses

The above table reveals that much more time on the ITE course is allocated to the activities involving spoken English practice when compared to the CE course. While both of the observed course subjects are called Integrated English, there is a great difference in time allocation when the same teacher is teaching on different courses. This suggests there may be some washback effect on the time allocation between teaching and practice, and in the ITE course the influence of testing is positive in improving learners' spoken English proficiency. Once again, testing is not the only influencing factor. According to the follow-up interviews with the two teachers, factors which may influence their choices of teaching and learning activities may also contribute to the difference in time allocation between the two courses.

8.2.3 Use of English by teachers and students:

Findings from the observation field notes and the audio recorded materials demonstrate that both teachers tend to use English (the target language) for the majority of classroom time in both courses. They use English in offering their own presentations, in giving instructions and

feedbacks; for example, they try to use paraphrase instead of translation when dealing with a difficult sentence or phrase and they describe the procedures or details of a particular learning task in English rather than in Chinese. At the beginning of some lessons, they also use English to greet the students and ask about things relevant to the student's personal experience, such as if they have had a lovely weekend, etc. At the end of the lessons, they also give out assignments in English.

This is intended to ensure their students can receive adequate target language input, not just from the textbooks, but also from themselves. They also require their students to answer the questions or discuss in groups/pairs in the target language. According to the follow-up interviews, they believe that in this way they can not only encourage more target language output from the students, but also develop their habit of using the target language. The observational field notes show that the students on both courses seem to have very few difficulties in understanding their teachers' English; however, some students on the CE course do have problems in providing satisfactory answers in English. They are reluctant to voluntarily answer questions in English and the teachers spend quite a lot of time encouraging them and waiting for an answer. The response from the students is not very good. Even when nominated by the teachers to answer a specific question, some of them have difficulties in giving a complete sentence in English. According to the follow-up interviews with the teachers, some students are just too shy to express themselves in class, but their spoken English is not bad. This relates to two affective factors in learning – self-esteem and anxiety. They may feel anxious or not confident about talking in front of the whole class or about their performance in classroom activities. Others are just not able to answer questions in English due to their low proficiency in spoken English or English in general. However, if their speaking ability is low, and as discussed above, they have fewer opportunities to work on it to make improvements, then how indeed can their speaking skills be improved? TB also mentions the low motivation and lack of interest in learning English for some students.

Usually there are four ways to answer questions put forward by a teacher: students' volunteering to answer, teachers' nominating students to answer, students answering in chorus, and teachers answering their own questions. Findings from the field notes and recordings show that these two teachers tend to use nomination quite frequently in both courses, which may help to ensure the equal and sufficient language output and participation from each student. Also, fewer students volunteer to answer the questions on the CE course

than on the ITE course. In the CE course, there are many cases when the teachers offer the questions to the whole class, but nobody volunteer or it is the same group of students who always come forward to answer the questions every time. TA tells me that those students have a higher level of English proficiency compared with the average students. As there are fewer volunteering students in the CE course, there are more cases when the teachers ask a question and ends up answering the question themselves. They think this is a way to save class time in order to keep up with the course progress. However, it also damages the essence of questioning. Questions become less meaningful because when asking a question and providing the answer themselves, the teachers are actually repeating TP in a different way. There is less comprehensible output by the students and no interaction between the teacher and the students. In a class where there is less target language output by the students, the class is less LC and it becomes less possible for the students to improve speaking skills. Thus the CE lessons are less LC than the ITE course.

Research findings in this part reveal that tests do not have much influence on the use of English by the teachers, because they tend to use English whenever they can in both courses. The situation becomes more complicated when it comes to the students. The students on the ITE are provided with more opportunities to produce output in English. Generally speaking, there are fewer students in each class when compared with the CE course but more volunteers in answering questions. Therefore, on average they produce more language output. More importantly they show more enthusiasm in the use of English, especially spoken English. The less frequent use of English by the students on the CE course may be caused by the fact that there are fewer opportunities offered to them to produce output in the target language, by their relatively lower proficiency or by less interest in spoken English due to its exclusion from CET.

8.3 Summary

The above discussions of teaching content and teaching methods show that both courses are controlled by the teachers. By comparing the two courses, it is clear that speaking skills attract more attention from the teachers and the students on the ITE course than from those on the CE course. In addition, the ITE course is more LC and communication-focused. It is now critical to take a closer look at the characteristics of the ITE lessons, especially those characteristics that will be regarded as good qualities which can facilitate the implementation of an LC approach and can assist in developing learners' spoken English.

Chapter 9 Findings: The Characteristics of a More LC and Speaking Skills-Oriented Class

Since the previous chapter has preliminarily shown that the ITE course is more LC and communicative, and doing better in developing learners' speaking skills, than the CE Integrated English course, a detailed analysis of the recorded ITE Integrated English lessons becomes essential. So 12 hours of audio recording have been transcribed. As mentioned in the Research Methodology Chapter, an interpretative phenomenological analysis is adopted, which involves thorough reading and careful study. What emerges is a list of themes and subthemes, which can illustrate clearly the characteristics of a more LC and speaking skills-oriented class.

9.1 Oral aspects of English

This refers to the time spent on the spoken aspects of English in classroom, which may include 'frequency of oral practice at word, phrase, clause, and sentence levels; frequency of utterances made in English to exchange genuine information (e.g. giving instructions, etc) rather than mechanical oral practice (e.g. reading aloud from the text, etc)' (Watanabe, 2004:135).

From the observational data recorded, it appears that both teachers spend the majority of the classroom time training their students in the oral aspects of English, some of which may be just at word, phrase or clause level, but some of which can be at sentence or even discourse level. These two teachers give lectures and instructions in English to ensure that there is enough language input; furthermore they combine the training of the oral aspects of English with many other language aspects to provide their students with plenty of opportunities to produce as much language output as possible.

9.1.1 Vocabulary/phrase teaching and learning combined with training in oral aspects of English

When teaching vocabulary and phrases, both teachers tend to combine them with the practice of speaking skills.

Extract one: TA is reading through the text to explain the new words and phrases.

TA: Mrs Field said to Lisa, 'Lisa, please pick up your things. They are all over the floor'.

What's the meaning of 'all over'? ... S1?

S1: Throughout.

TA: Throughout. Yes, good. What other words we can use?

(Silence. The students are thinking. TA goes on to ask another student.)

TA: S2, what else can we say?

S2: Er,...Covering.

TA: Yeah, covering. Good. It is all over the floor. It is covering everything. It is throughout everything. Now I want you to make sentences with 'all over'. What else can we have 'all over'?

(TA turns to another 3 students for examples of using 'all over'.)

TA: S3?

S3: The books are all over the table.

TA: Good. Your books are all over the table. S4?

S4: The rubbish is all over the street.

TA: The rubbish is all over the street. Good. S5?

S5: Er, ...er...*(He was hesitating.)* The water is all over the floor.

TA: The water is all over the floor. Very good.

Note: S1, S2, S3, S4are students present in each class. SS means a few or all students in the class. S1 (or any S with a number) may not necessarily refer to the same student in different extracts.

From the above extract, we can see that instead of solely lecturing on meaning or giving examples about the language usage herself, TA engages students in the process of learning this language point 'all over' by asking individual students to answer her questions. All together five students have the opportunity to speak English here, either at the word level (two occasions when the teacher asks students to explain the phrase) or at the sentence level (three occasions when TA asks students to give their own examples using this particular phrase). The teaching and learning process moves from understanding the meaning of a specific language point with the contribution from the students themselves to students' producing language output by using what they have just learnt.

TB carries out the teaching and learning of vocabulary/phrases in a similar way. In one of TB's lessons, the students are involved in active learning and given the chance to speak

English. TB gives them two minutes to do an exercise in the textbook: to match the ten nouns with ten two-part verbs, and then goes on to check the answers. When checking and explaining answers, she intentionally expands on the teaching of language use. She makes it clear that more than one noun can be put after a specific two-part verb. Some students volunteer to answer. The teacher makes sure that every student is involved in this part of the learning by asking each of them to give their own examples in English, although the oral output here is only at clause level. Each student has an opportunity to speak, and to actively participate in learning. Furthermore, the students have to listen to the other students' examples very carefully as they cannot repeat what has been used. They are not just learning from their teacher and the textbook, they are learning from each other as well. This is called 'peer teaching' which makes the lessons 'more communicative' (Hayes & Read, 2004:107).

9.1.2 Grammar teaching combined with training in the oral aspects of English

One typical example to show that TA combines grammar teaching with oral English practice is when she is teaching infinitives & gerunds for uses and purposes – 'be used for doing' and 'be used to do'. After explaining the meaning/usages, and going through the exercises in the textbook, she asks her students, each of them, to give their own examples. She does not choose the forms of filling in blanks or multiple choice questions. Instead, she makes the students speak out their examples to ensure that they can not only learn grammar but also practise speaking skills at the same time. All the 20 students have the opportunity to give their examples. The oral aspect of English here is at sentence level. In fact, there are a few incidents of laughter in this part of the learning, which makes the grammar learning very interesting. There will be more discussion on the classroom atmosphere later.

Extract 2 is one example when TB combines practice of oral aspects of English with one grammar point:

TB: Now, in Part B, we have six sentences: Mother's Day, July and August, Wedding anniversary, winter, birthdays and spring. In your group of 2 or 3, I want, I don't want you to write it, I want you to speak it. Speak these sentences. For example, winter is the season when we play snow balls. Winter is the season when we light firecrackers to celebrate New Year. OK. 'Winter is the season' is followed by 'when' to link two clauses. In your group, I want you to speak, to speak English in completing these sentences. Think of as many sentences as possible. (*Preparation time: 34'45''-37'58''*)

TB: All right. Let's see how we go. S1, what is winter?
 S1: Winter is the season when people go out skating.
 TB: Very good. S2, what is winter again? What's winter?
 S2: Winter is the season ...er... the weather...
 TB: Winter is the season when...
 S2: Winter is the season when the weather is so cold.
 TB: When the weather is so cold. Good, very good. S3, what's winter?
 S3: Winter is the season when we don't want to go out.
 TB: When we don't want to go out. Very good. S4, again, what's winter?
 S4: Winter is the season when frog hi...hiber...
 TB: Hibernate. Hibernate is when animals sleep in the winter. The bears hibernate. S5, what's birthday?
 S5: Birthday is the day when I have a family get-together.
 TB: Very good. S6, what's birthday?
 S6: Birthday is the day I get a lot of gifts.
 TB: Is the day when I get a lot of gifts. 'When' is very important, ok? S7, what's birthday?

.....

According to the observational notes, there are only 16 students in that lesson, but there are 18 student utterances recorded, which means that some students have the opportunity to speak more than once. The oral aspects of English here are all at sentence-level. Another three points need to be stressed: 1) in the textbook, for this exercise learners are asked to complete the sentences by writing down the answers, but TB requires her students to speak out their answers; 2) TB allocates the class into groups in completing this task, so that the students have a chance to work in groups; 3) TB encourages her students to think of as many ways as possible to complete each sentence so that learning is not restricted by the textbook.

9.1.3 Other skills with oral aspects of learning

TA gives students about 2 minutes to read an article in the textbook to themselves before she asks 6 students to read it aloud to the whole class. Then she gives her students a speaking task – to summarize the main idea of this article.

Extract 3:

TA: Good. Now I want you to tell me in your own words what is the main idea of this article. In your own words what is it about? What is it trying to say?

Two students are asked to use their own words to give a brief speech on this article. TA then goes on to ask some comprehension questions. Five more students answer her questions. So far, 7 students have the opportunity to speak about this reading material. The oral aspects of English here are at sentence or discourse level. After this part of training in speaking skills, TA gives students some time to complete the exercises in the textbook and goes through the answers with them.

Extract 4 is an example of TB combining reading skills with oral aspects of English:

Extract 4:

TB(at 31'33'') : Let's go on to the reading. The reading on Page 41. What I want you to do when you read this, I'll give you 5 minutes to read it. When you read it, I want you to take notes and then I'll ask you to close your book, and I'll ask you to summarize what the article is about. Let's go!

.....

TB(at 35'58'') : Ok, now close your books. Close books. Very good. What I want you to do now is to summarize. I want you to tell me what this article is about using your own words and your notes. Ok, let's start with S1. S1, could you tell me what this article is about?

S1: 36'34''-37'01''

S2: 37'08''-37'56''

S3: 38'01''-38'51''

S4: 39'00''-39'32''

S5: 39'43''-40'32''

Five students are nominated to summarize the main ideas of the text using their own words by only referring to their notes. The oral aspects of English here are at discourse level.

TB also combines listening skills with the practice of oral aspects of English.

Extract 5:

TB: Let's do something different. I would like all of you to close your books. Close your books. (*She waits a few seconds here to make sure all students have done so.*) I am going to play a CD. In the CD they are talking about making a phone call. What I want you to do is to show how they make phone call. First, then, next, after that. I will play it 3 times, so I want you to listen to it first and tell me how they make the phone call.

Again here the oral aspects of English are at discourse level. With the help from TB, 3 students have the chance to summarize what they have listened to in the form of speaking. This practice is useful in training integrated language skills (reading and listening) and in training the learners to speak at a sustained discourse level – they have to plan and organize the whole speech.

9.1.4 Speaking skills training in a certain topic

The above three sections demonstrate clearly how these two teachers combine the training of spoken English with other aspects of English. This section is to introduce how they explicitly conduct speaking activities.

9.1.4.1 Teacher & student interaction

There is an exercise in the textbook – rating your computer usage. The students are asked to rate how frequently they use computers to perform a certain task. TA first explains the frequency words ‘often, sometimes, hardly ever and never’, and gives students one minute to do the exercise on their own. She then starts going through the answers with the whole class. She goes through the 10 functions of the computer one by one, and students are asked to put up their hands if they use the PC to do a certain job at a certain frequency. Here, instead of just finding out how often her students use the computer to do a certain job, she makes this part into a very interesting teacher and student interaction by asking many further open questions which are relevant to their personal experience – questions like ‘why’, ‘what’, ‘when’ or ‘where’.

Extract 6: TA is going through the first function that computers can do – ‘to send & receive emails’. The students put their hands up accordingly. There is a lot of laughter when two students raise their hands when TA asks who never uses the computer to send/receive emails.

TA: (*smiling*) Really? Why don't you use emails?

S1: I can call.

TA: Excellent, so you prefer to call somebody rather than send an email. Ok. (*turning to another student who never sends/receives emails*) What about you? Is it inconvenient or do you just prefer something else?

S2: I just call somebody.

TA: What about ‘use emails often’? Who use emails often?

S3: (*volunteering to answer*) I think it's cheaper. You can say things and send pictures at the same time.

TA: Good. What about you? S4?

S4: Er...

TA: (*repeating her question*) How frequently do you send emails?

S4: Hardly ever. Only one time.

(*Laughter from SS*)

TA: (*smiling*) Only once. You only use it once. Why is that then?

S4: Er...Er...When I wanted to send (an) email to my friend, he did not get it.

TA: Fair enough. (*Turning to another student*) S5, where do you go if you want to send emails?

S5: Er...There are a few internet cafés near (the) campus. I will go there.

TA: When do you usually go?

S5: Only at weekends.

.....

This part of the exercise lasts for about half an hour. On average, each student has more than one chance to interact with the teacher. It is noted that TA spends a lot of time training her students to talk about this subject – computers. According to her follow-up interview, she intentionally focuses on topics which are relevant to students' personal experience or topics which are likely to appear in the IELTS speaking test. She believes that the students would find the learning process more interesting if it relates directly to their own lives or to something they are enthusiastic about. Activities like this usually involve the exchange of genuine information, and are thus quite communicative. Regarding preparing for assessment, she thinks that the preparation is useful and necessary because the students will feel more confident and less nervous when coming across a familiar topic in the exam.

9.1.4.2 Students' short speech on a certain topic

TA not only intentionally adopts learning activities on those speaking topics, she also gives instructions on techniques used in organizing speech. The next episode happens when the class is discussing the topic 'Invention'. After explaining the 8 examples of invention in the textbook, TA expands the range of discussion and gives opportunities for her students to practise oral English.

Extract 7:

TA: What's the invention that you think is the most important? Can you tell us which is the most important invention for every person or what's the most important for the community? And remember to use P.R.E. P. Ok. What's your *point*? What do you think? What's the *reason* for you to say that? Can you give any *example*? And restate your *points*. What do you think is the most important invention? I want you to use this 'P.R.E.P' to organize your speech. Tell me what is the most important invention in your opinion. You don't have to use the examples in the textbook.

S1: I think ...er... the most important invention is (the) elevator.

TA: Elevator. Yes.

S1: Er... As the society is developing, there are more and more building(s), and there are more and more people. But if you have an elevator, you can save a lot of space. You can build high building(s); people go to work or home by (the) elevator. It is convenient. So I think (the) elevator is the most important invention.

TA: Definitely. I have not even thought about that. Yeah. I completely agree with you. The elevator is an invention that we use every day. They make our life simple. Ok, good. S2, what about you?

...

The elevator is not an example in the textbook. S1 expresses her own opinion on the most important invention. The oral aspect of English here is at discourse level. Furthermore she uses 'P.R.E.P' to organize her ideas to make the short speech clear-structured and more logical. TA is impressed by her student's idea and gives positive feedback on the meaning of S1's speech.

After S1, another 7 students take turns to give a brief speech on this topic:

S2: 37'10'' – 38'08''

S3: 38'45'' – 39'05''

S4: 39'12'' – 39'47''

S5: 39'58'' – 40'09''

S6: 40'17'' – 40'34''

S7: 40'43'' – 41'03'' 41'15'' – 41'37''

S8: 41'56'' – 42'21''

In this part of the lesson, the oral output of English by the students is all (more or less) on an extended discourse level. Similarly, TB also trains her students to use 'P R E P' in organizing their ideas both in speaking and writing.

Extract 8:

TB: What I want you to do now is just to talk about any invention. What you think is the best invention. But when you talk about the best invention, I want you to use 'P.R.E.P'. You can talk about pen, laser, anything. In small groups everybody talks about what you think is the best invention by using 'P.R.E.P'. Remember? I think, because, for example, so. Ok, now you work in groups and then I will ask some people to speak.

Altogether 4 students give short speeches here. The oral aspects of English are at discourse level, and she also adopts group work in preparing her students for the task. The students are talking about topics which they may encounter in real life situations and the exchange of authentic information can not only deepen their understanding about a specific topic but also make the lesson more communicative.

The technique of using 'P, R, E, P' is valuable in organizing written texts or oral speeches, not just for the purpose of performing well in assessment but also in real-life situations. There is 'little, if any, difference between activities involved in learning the language and activities involved in preparing for the test' (Messick, 1996:241-242).

9.2 Teachers' explicit practice of language features

According to Saville and Hawkey (2004), language features that may be covered in classroom teaching include recognition of sounds, grammar, sentence pattern, etc. These features (the first twelve in the following table) are listed together with other language components which appear to have received explicit practice from TA and TB in the following table.

Language Features	TA	TB
Recognition of sounds		
Pronunciation of sounds	√	√
Stress and intonation	√	√
Grammar	√	√
Sentence pattern	√	√
Notions and functions	√	√
Word formation		√
Connotation		
Collocation		
Idioms		
Linking words expression		
punctuation		
Sociolinguistic and cultural knowledge	√	√
Meaningful language use	√	√
Vocabulary and phrases	√	√

Table 9-1: Language features covered in the ITE lessons

The above comparison reveals that the language features covered in TA's and TB's ITE lessons are almost the same.

1) Both of them give explicit practice on pronunciation and stress. TA usually asks her students to read after her whenever they come across a word which is difficult to pronounce or where special attention is required to the stress. One example is the word 'encyclopedia'. First she explains where the stress should be, reads it aloud twice, and then asks the whole class to read after her for three times. The situation is slightly different for TB: she asks the students to read the vocabulary in turn to the whole class, and she gives corrections when there is a mistake. Even during their speech, sometimes she stops them to correct their pronunciation, for example the pronunciation of 'microwave'.

2) Examples when the teachers give explicit practice on grammar and sentence patterns can be found in the above discussion about oral aspects of English, because the practice of grammar or sentence patterns is usually combined with the training in speaking skills.

3) Both teachers emphasize communicative language functions.

The next extract shows how TB makes her students practise the language functions – ‘request and refusal’.

Extract 9:

TB: What I want you to do now; I want you to prepare five requests. I want you to ask your classmates some requests. When somebody asks you a request, you have to say ‘I’m sorry’, and you give an excuse. OK? So now stand up. Stand up. Get your requests and I want you to ask people a request. If someone asks you, I want you to say NO and give a reason. Say I’m sorry but... I’m sorry, I can’t because...ok? Let’s go. I want you to ask lots of people, OK?

(The students do exactly as they are told. About five minutes later...)

TB: All right, now let’s go back to your seats. Go back to your seats. Some people did very well. Now, let’s listen to what your requests are. S1, what was your request? Ask S2.

S1: S2, would you mind borrowing me your book?

TB: Would you mind lending me your book?

S1: *(repeating after the teacher)* Would you mind lending me your book?

S2: Sorry, I can’t lend my book, because I have promised to lend it to Robert.

TB: Lend you my book.

S2: *(repeating after the teacher)* Lend you my book.

TB: Very good. S2, what was your request?

S2: *(turning to S3 who was sitting next to her)* Would you mind waiting for me?

S3: Oh, I’m sorry. I need to go home now.

TB: I need to go home now. Very good.

.....

This process lasts for about 12 minutes. It is clear that it is composed of 2 parts: a) The students are asked to move around in the classroom asking 5 requests to 5 classmates. Thus on average each student may have 5 opportunities to practise making requests and another 5 opportunities to refuse and to give excuses. The students stand up from their seats, walk around the classroom to find a fellow student whom they want to impress with their somewhat odd requests. This LC activity arouses their interest and excitement: some students rush to another classmate saying ‘你还没回答我的问题’ (in English you have not answered my question). b) Since it is difficult for TB to check if every student has grasped the usage of this language function correctly, she then starts another activity by asking the students to make requests, to give refusal and to offer excuses one by one in turn - S1 makes a request to S2, S2 refuses and gives an excuse, then S2 goes on to make another different request to S3,

S3 refuses it and offers a reason as well. In this way TB can check and correct each student's usage of making requests and refusal/giving an excuse. During these 12 minutes, on average each student has six chances to practise this language function and it is obvious that they enjoy the whole learning process. There will be more examples of explicit practice of notions and functions later in the discussion about communicative opportunities, because both teachers tend to give their students plenty of communicative opportunities to practise language functions.

4) Sociolinguistic and cultural knowledge is focused on as well. Sociolinguistics refers to 'forms or styles (spoken or written) appropriate to different contexts or genres' (Spada & Fröhlich, 1995:48). Cultural knowledge is knowledge of a specific culture where the target language is used, especially knowledge of cross-cultural difference. Both teachers give frequent and explicit lectures on this type of knowledge.

Extract 10:

TA: First, let's go through these words to see what they are. Garbage, what's garbage?

S1: Rubbish.

TA: Good, rubbish. (*TA writes down this word on the blackboard.*) What other words have the same meaning? Garbage, rubbish... (*Silence for a few seconds*) What else?

S2: Trash.

TA: Good, trash. (*She writes it down on the blackboard.*) What's the difference between these words?

S3: 不知道. (In English, it means I don't know or I have no idea.)

TA: What's the difference? What's the difference between trash and garbage? Or between trash and rubbish? (*Silence for several seconds*) Do you know the difference?

(*None of the students answers this question.*)

TA: In America, they probably say trash. Throw away the trash. If you are in Australia, you would say rubbish or garbage. What about England? Rubbish. It's important to learn the difference, so when you are trying to use it in a specific country, follow their way. You listen to what others would say, and you use the exact word. So if you are in Australia or England, you would say rubbish. If you are in America, you use trash.

Extract 11: one example when TB lectures on a sociolinguistic point.

TB: Cell Phone. In England or Australia, they don't say cell phone. They say mobile. OK. They say mobile phone or mobile. Have you got a mobile? But in America, cell phone is more often used.

This is a sociolinguistic example. Although different words may have the same meaning, people in different contexts may have their own preference. To be more specific, the UK, Australia and America are all English speaking countries; however, English is used differently in these countries. These two teachers are trying to teach their students more native and appropriate usages of English in these different countries. This kind of knowledge is essential in both written and spoken English. When Chinese students go abroad to study, work or live in a specific English speaking country, this kind of knowledge can help them immerse themselves into the local context or community. On the other hand, when Chinese students are communicating with a visitor from a foreign country, attention to the sociolinguistic differences in usages will be welcoming and avoid misunderstandings.

The next two examples show how the teachers teach knowledge about cultures.

Extract 12:

TA: In China, New Year's Day is more often a day for families, but in western countries, New Year's Day is a day for your friends. It's a day you spend with friends. It is a very important day, but probably New Year's Eve is more important.

Extract 13:

TB: If you go to a western country, you will find lots of hardware shops. These shops sell tools, wood, etc. Things you can use to build. Why? In western countries, people like to do things themselves.

When talking about cultural knowledge, TB also, if possible, combines it with knowledge of geography and history.

Extract 14:

TB: A long time ago, all Europe used to celebrate Carnival. Now, they don't. Carnival used to be when the poor people pretended they were rich and the rich people pretended to be poor. Now it is a day when people have fun.

The teachers may have obtained this kind of cultural knowledge from sources like reading, contacts who are native speakers of English, or quite possibly from their own experience of living abroad. They want to impart this knowledge to the students, because they believe that this kind of knowledge was crucial to foreign language learning.

5) Both teachers focus on vocabulary/phrases and meaningful language use. The formats that both teachers adopt in teaching these two language features are more or less the same: lecturing to the whole class. However, they do give students plenty of opportunities to participate in the learning, such as answering the questions raised by the teachers or giving their own examples using the vocabulary/phrase. There are more concrete examples in the earlier discussion about oral aspects of English.

Both teachers emphasize the meaningful use of language in a real-life communication context, rather than merely focusing on knowledge of language.

Extract 15:

TA: We are talking about going camping. The question is ‘what are you going to take when going camping?’ A lot of you say ‘I’m going to take a credit card when going camping’. You should not take a lot of cash. That’s obvious. Why can’t you take a credit card as well when going camping? What stops you from taking a credit card when going camping?

S1: You can’t use it.

TA: You can’t use it. Exactly. Although it is grammatically correct, it’s not a very good answer. I don’t take a credit card when going camping, because I can’t use it anywhere. OK, good.

Another common mistake is on Page 32.

Undoubtedly, TA is sure her students already know the meaning of ‘credit card’. The point here is why the word ‘credit card’ is not appropriate to be used in that specific context – camping. TA expects her students can not only understand the meaning of a word/phrase, but also use it appropriately and correctly in meaningful communication.

Extract 16: When students practise the use of ‘a special occasion when ...’

S1: (A) Wedding is a special occasion when lovers get married.

TB: Very good, but it’s not very good to use ‘lovers’ here because lovers may have a very specific meaning. OK. So you can be girlfriends and boyfriends, but not lovers. You can be

lovers but not boyfriend and girlfriend. So we should say a wedding is a special occasion when a couple get married. A couple get married.

Grammatically speaking, it is not wrong for this student to use 'lovers' here. However, according to TB's explanation it is not appropriate to use this word in this context – a wedding. It is the meaningful use of language in specific contexts that matters.

6) There is one difference in the language features covered by these two teachers – word formation. TA does not have any reference to it at all during all her recorded lessons, while TB does on one occasion when she is teaching customs and holidays.

Extract 17:

TB: What's a wedding anniversary? A wedding anniversary is a celebration a married couple have once a year on the day of their marriage. OK, so if you got married on the 8th November, every year on the 8th November you'll have wedding anniversary. In English, 'ann' usually means year. OK, year. Anniversary, annual. Annually means every year.

9.3 Communicative learning opportunities

Both teachers intend to provide as many communicative opportunities as possible. The following categories of communicative learning opportunities are adapted from Saville & Hawkey's work (2004:94). According to the analysis of the observational data collected for the current study, one category has been added - speech/presentation.

Communicative Opportunities	TA	TB
Paired/group discussion	√	√
Teacher & student(s) interaction	√	√
Debate	√	
Speech/presentation	√	√
Games/Puzzles/Role Play	√	√
Surveys and other project work		
Report writing		
Review writing		
Essay writing		√
IT e.g. telephone, fax, letters, emails		
Listening, reading, viewing for personal interest		

Table 9-2: Communicative learning opportunities

It is obvious that the communicative learning activities that both teachers use are the same with the exception of 'Debate' which is only used by TA and 'Essay Writing' only used by TB.

For TA, as can be seen from the earlier discussion, the interaction between her and her student(s) is one dominating feature of classroom patterns. However, she does provide other kinds of communicative opportunities as well, such as role play, paired/group discussion, debate etc. One example is when the class is learning two part verbs. TA combines the practice of this language point with the communicative function – making a request. The students are supposed to make a request to another student by using a two part verb, and the student to whom the request is addressed has to act accordingly. Then the student who acts upon the request has the chance to make another request to another student.

Extract 18:

TA: S1, could you please turn off the light?

S1: (*Hesitating, not sure if she should do it or not, so she repeats*) Turn off the light?

TA: Yeah.

(*S1 walks to the front of the classroom and turns off the light.*)

TA: Now you can ask S2 to do something.

S1: Please stand up and turn around.

TA: Good. Please stand up and turn around.

(S2 does exactly as she is told to do, then turns to S3.)

S2: Could you clean up the blackboard, please?

(Laughter from SS, and S3 does as he is told to do.)

TA: *(laughing)* Thank you, S3.

S3: S4, could you stand up and jump for three times?

(S4 stands up and jumps three times. There is a lot of laughter here.)

S4: *(turning to S5)* Could you please lend me some money?

(Again there is a lot of laughter, and S5 does not know what to do.)

TA: *(laughing)* If you really don't want to do it, just say 'I'm sorry, I can't do it.'

S5: Oh...I'm sorry. I can't do it. *(He turns to S6)* Can you clean up my dormitory after class, please?

(There is a lot of laughter.)

S6: I'm sorry. I can't do this.

TA: *(smiling)* Good. I'm sorry. I can't do this.

...

There is a lot of laughter in this part of the teaching and learning process. The students really enjoy it. Each of them has an opportunity to ask somebody to do something, and at the same time he/she has to respond to the request put forward by someone else. This activity not only ensures that the students know how to make a request by using two part verbs, but also checks if they can understand and act upon requests properly (either by taking actions accordingly or politely refusing).

TB tends to use paired/group work frequently. One main type of activity she employs is group discussion. She not only organizes speaking activities in this way during the lessons, but also assigns her students some collaborative homework – writing an essay in a group. She states clearly how the students should complete the task.

Extract 19:

TB: All right. What I want to say now is your homework. Some homework. I would like you to do it in a group. OK. Not by yourself, but in a group. I want you in your groups to think about the most useful invention, a new invention. I want you to write out what it is and what it is used for. So this invention is used for Or this invention is used to ...A great invention. I also want you to write out why this invention is good using 'P.R.E.P'. You have to work in groups. In

your group, I would like you to speak English. I can't watch you, but I want you to use English in discussion, at least most of the time in English. I want you to work in groups of 3 or 4. You can choose your own group. OK. I want you to send it in on Thursday. So your group only has to write one. You don't all have to write it out. Only one person has to write it out and give it to me. Also write down your group members' names. OK?

What is interesting about this extract is that although the use of group-task is an example of LC activities, the way TB presents it here involves very precise instructions ('I want you to ...', 'I would like you to ...', 'You don't have to ...') which show that she is still very much in control of the whole activity and that the lesson is one where the teacher is dominant. So to be more accurate, the lesson is more learning-centred instead of being learner-centred.

Role play is another favourite activity for TB. She uses it on several occasions during the observed sessions.

Extract 20:

TB: I want you now to talk about another machine – how to use it, in your groups. You can have groups of 2 or 3. You can talk about, for example, a computer. You can talk about your mobile phone. I want you to tell people how to use it. Pretend that the other person has never used it before. You have to tell him how to use it. OK, give him instructions on how to use that machine by using 'first', 'then', 'next' and 'finally' etc.

The students work in their groups for a few minutes before three groups volunteer or are nominated to show their role plays to the whole class. They talk about how to use a digital camera, how to recharge a battery in hot water and how to send a message from mobiles. There is a lot of laughter, especially when the second group performs their role play – recharging a battery in hot water.

9.4 Laughter

According to Hayes & Reed (2004:106), 'keeping a record of the instances of laughter gave a general indication of the atmosphere in the class.' In most cases, teaching and learning is a serious business. Laughter can ease the tension and anxiety involved so as to create a relaxing and dynamic environment. Learning is more effective in such an atmosphere. Students like to

share a laugh with their teachers or fellow students, and thus laughter can be a strong motivator for learning.

There is a lot of laughter in both teachers' classes. One example for TA is when she is interacting with her students on one of the computer functions – playing games.

Extract 21:

TA: The next one is going to give us a lot of fun – playing games. *(A lot of laughter from SS.)*

Tell me the truth. *(Laughter from SS.)* Let's start with the boys. *(Laughter from SS.)*

(TA turned to S1.)

TA: How often do you use the computer to play games?

S1: Two or three times a week.

TA: *(sounds surprised)* Really? What kind of games? What kind? Shooting games or adventure games?

S1: Card.

TA: Oh, card games. *(She laughs and there is a lot of laughter from SS.)*

(TA turns to S2.)

TA: What kind of computer games do you play?

S2: Car racing games.

(TA turns to S3.)

TA: How often do you play computer games?

(A few male students say simultaneously 'EVERYDAY' before S3 has a chance to answer this question. There is a lot of laughter here from the teacher and the whole class. It is probably because S3 is well-known among his fellow students for playing games quite frequently.)

TA: *(smiling)* What games do you play?

S3: Shooting games.

TA: How do you play? Do you play it on line with other people? Do you play in a team?

S3: Yes.

TA: So you play on line with other people.

(TA goes on to ask a few more male students some similar questions before she starts to ask female students questions on this topic.)

TA: Now let's listen to girls' answers. *(Laughter from SS)* S4, how often do you play computer games?

S4: Never.

(A lot of laughter from the teacher and the whole class.)

TA: Good, this is a good student.

(Again there is a lot of the laughter here.)

(Conversation about computer games continues until most of the students have had the chance to say something about this topic.)

During this part of the lesson when the class is talking about computer games, there are more than 20 instances of laughter, which undoubtedly exhibits a very pleasant and enjoyable learning atmosphere. The students tend to become more active and relaxed when they find fun in learning.

TB makes her class interesting with the use of her own sense of humour. The following is an extract from an exercise on language functions. TB is asking each student a question.

Extract 22:

TB: S1, why are you late?

S1: I'm sorry. I forgot the time for class.

TB: S2, why did you steal my food?

(SS laugh.)

S2: I'm sorry. I thought it was my food.

TB: Very good. S3, why did you kick me?

(Laughter from SS)

S3: I'm sorry. I didn't ...Er...I didn't...I didn't realize.

TB: Realize what?

S3: *(silence for a few seconds)* I think it was my chair.

TB: I thought it was my chair.

...

TB: S6, why did you burn down my house? *(SS laugh.)*

S6: I'm sorry I didn't realize it was your house.

...

TB: S13, why did you steal Jason's girlfriend? *(A lot of laughter from SS. Jason is a male student in that class.)*

S13: I'm sorry. I didn't realize she was Jason's girlfriend.

...

Each student has to give an excuse to the question raised by their teacher. Some of the questions are humorous and some answers given by the students are funny as well. Every student is engaged and interested in this learning process.

9.5 Praise and encouragement

It is commonly perceived that learners are motivated by rewards in learning, because everybody learns for a purpose. It is unlikely for learning to happen without rewards, so rewards from their teachers can function as a strong motivator for some students. Both teachers frequently offer rewards for the efforts their students put into learning, usually in the forms of praise, encouragement or sufficient attention to individuals. Praise and encouragement, instead of criticism, can create a positive and relaxing learning environment.

Extract 23:

TB: what I want you to do now is to open your books back to page 41. Right, I ask you to go through, read it aloud. Underline any words or phrases you do not understand. OK? Let's go. If you don't understand a word, stop, underline it.

(3 minutes later.)

TB: S1, what words you don't know?

S1: Er... guy.

TB: 'Guy', OK. 'The guy next door always parks his car in front of your driveway.' 'Guy next door'. S2, what do you think 'guy' means here?

S2: 'Guy' is a young man.

TB: A young man? Like you? OK. Very good. A Guy is a person, a boy. Originally 'guy' means young man, now guys mean young men, young women, old men, old women. OK. Now it means a person, but in this sentence it means a man, because it said 'his car'. Very good. S2, which word you don't know?

S2: Resentment.

TB: Resentment, resentment. S3? What does 'resentment' mean?

S3: It means...er...annoy.

TB: Annoy? Could you use resentment in a sentence?

S3: Er...If you, if you borrow my money and do not return, I think I will build up resentment.

TB: I will build up resentment against you. Very good. OK, resentment is when you feel angry at someone because they have done something bad to you in the past. S4, another word?

S4: Deliberately.

TB: Deliberately. 'Maybe they do it deliberately.' S5?

S5: I don't know.

TB: Can you just guess, try. What do you think it will mean? Guess. 'Maybe they like to annoy me. Maybe they do it deliberately.'

S5: Encourage?

TB: Encourage? Maybe they do it to encourage me? Maybe. Good try, good try. S6, deliberately?

.....

The students are asked to explain the words raised by another student, so that in this way all of them could be involved in the learning and teaching process. They are involved because they all have a chance to learn the specific word they do not know. TB gives her students a lot of praise and encouragement in this process. When S1 asks the meaning of a very simple word 'guy' (which is usually assumed to be simple to learners at higher education level), the teacher does not make any judgment or criticism of it. She accepts and appreciates the effort that S1 puts into learning. When S5 acknowledges that he has no idea of the meaning of 'deliberately', she does not respond negatively or give up on him; instead she encourages him to guess its meaning in the context. Even after S5 does not get it quite right in guessing, she still responds positively to his effort by commenting 'good try, good try'. She also gives a lot of praise whenever her students do well in anything, by saying 'Good' or 'Very good'. Furthermore, the way she organizes this learning activity is stimulating, which involves the students answering questions from fellow classmates. They may feel good if they can help other classmates in learning, which may help to strengthen their self-confidence in learning. It is also worth mentioning that the whole process lasts for about 9 minutes and altogether all 19 students who are present have the chance to speak (some may have two or three chances).

Extract 24 is one example showing the positive approaches TA adopts in her lessons. After explaining the meaning of a list of 30 words, she gives her students opportunities to use these words.

TA: What I'd like you to do next is to make sentences with these words, to practise how to use these words. We will start with S1, 'affect'?

S1: Er...your injury will affect our football match.

TA: Good. S2, 'browse'?

S2: I browse the books on the shelf.

TA: Good, next one 'download', S3?

S3: I download a game to my computer.

TA: I downloaded a game to my computer, to my PC. 'Escape', S4?

S4: Some soldiers want to escape the battle.

TA: OK. Some soldiers want to escape from the battle. After 'escape', use 'from'. Escape from the prison, escape from the class. S5, 'impression'?

S5: Impression... my first impression of his, ... of him is very stupid.

TA: My first impression of him was very stupid.

...

S10: There are a lot of geeks in the internet.

TA: There are a lot of geeks on the internet. Good, very authentic.

...

There are 16 students present in that class according to the observational notes, thus each of them has two chances to practise using these words by giving their own examples (in two instances two students practise on the same word). The students make some mistakes in this process but TA does not give any criticism or say anything negative, such as ‘do not..’ or ‘you should not ..’, although she does correct the mistakes made by the students: 1) she points out the correct usage directly; for instance, when S4 says ‘some soldiers want to escape the battle’, she makes it very clear that ‘from’ must be used after ‘escape’ in contexts like this and in this way she sounds as if she is explaining the usage to the whole class while not focusing on S4’s mistake; and 2) she also corrects the mistakes by repeating what her students say in a more accurate way, for example when S10 says ‘there are a lot of geeks in the internet,’ instead of pointing out the mistake explicitly, she just gives the correct way of expressing the same meaning: ‘there are a lot of geeks on the internet’. However, she does give ‘on’ a stress when repeating the whole sentence. She not only gives simple positive comments like ‘good’, but also comments on what the students have done well. When S10 gives a real-life example by using the word they are learning, TA said ‘very authentic’. Comments like this can give learners a clear idea about what is good about their work, which is essential in learning ‘partly to encourage further effort, but mainly because they often cannot judge this for themselves with certainty’ (Petty, 2004: 65).

9.6 Relevance to students’ own lives

It is important to relate learning to students’ personal or professional lives, which may concern their personal interests and the real-world applications of what they have learnt.

There are several examples in the previous discussion which can confirm that when learning is related to the students’ personal interest (e.g. computer games), they find a lot of fun in the learning process. Both teachers combine language knowledge with the practical use of it in genuine communication. Learners are usually more motivated if they see how the knowledge or skill relates to their own lives.

When TA is reviewing the use of the grammar point ‘be going to do’ and ‘will’, and the difference between them, she asks many questions regarding what her students will do at a certain time in the future, such as ‘what are you going to do after class?’ or ‘what are you going to do next week?’ TB adopts a similar approach in helping her students to learn ‘be going to’ and ‘will’ by giving them opportunities to talk about things they want to do in their vacations. As it is close to the holiday time when this lesson is observed, the students seem to have already started feeling excited and planning for the holiday. Many of them have some very fascinating ideas and some are eager to share their ideas with the teacher and classmates. However, the teacher also nominates the rest of the students to talk about their vacation plans as well so that every single student present on that day has a chance to practise the use of these two grammatical points.

‘Be going to’ and ‘will’ are relatively simple grammatical points for most learners, while conversations about future plans happen very often in daily life communication either in social or work situations. What is valuable is that these two teachers combine them together – to make the students talk about something relevant to their lives by using the grammatical points they are learning. This is the exchange of genuine information which is directly relevant to the students’ experiences.

9.7 Summary

This chapter has identified those methods of teaching and learning which can facilitate the development of learners’ speaking skills and the implementation of an LC approach: an expanded curriculum, opportunities to produce language output, learners’ engagement in the learning process, personal relevance of the learning activities, a variety of language features, and attention to learners’ affective factors in learning (e.g. praise and encouragement). Furthermore, teachers value the useful techniques which are ‘effective for passing the examination as well as for developing language skills usable in real life solutions’ (Watanabe, 2004:140). It is obvious that speaking skills and an LC approach are usually interrelated – an LC class is quite likely to assist the development of speaking skills and a class which emphasizes spoken English is quite often LC. Chapters 8 and 9 have explored the research questions from the perspective of the teachers by utilizing observational data. The next chapter will complement the analysis by investigating them from the perspective of the students with the use of interview data.

Chapter 10 Findings: Student Perceptions of the Learning Process

As the previous two chapters have principally explored the research focuses from the teachers' perspective by investigating how the teachers organize classroom teaching, it is necessary to supplement the discussion with the perceptions and behaviours of the students who are an equally important party in the teaching and learning process. As mentioned in the Research Methodology Chapter, 13 student interviews were conducted and transcribed – 8 students on the CE course and 5 students on the ITE course. My original plan was to interview 6 students from each course, but this turned out to be somewhat difficult due to the availability of the students. The interview questions are designed around the three research focuses of this study – speaking skills, the teaching and learning model, and the influence of testing. Some of the questions may have appeared in the questionnaire survey, but they are included to elicit more detailed and subtle thoughts from the students as most of the questions in the questionnaire are not open ones.

10.1 Language skills

Four aspects of language skills are researched: the students' perceptions of the language skills and the reason; what they do to improve them; previous learning experience in primary or middle schools and expectations of the development of language skills in higher education; and what the teachers do to support them. Findings that overlap with the findings from the previous analysis will not be discussed in further detail here. 4 key themes emerge from the students' responses to the above interview topics and each of these will be examined in turn.

10.1.1 What decides the students' perceptions of language skills

Although the students' perceptions of language skills have been studied in the analysis of the questionnaire data, there are new findings here as the interviewees are not limited to one single choice. In principle, it is practical concerns relating to the use of English that decide the importance of the language skills.

To these students, it is essential to have a good level of proficiency in each language skill, as they have a high expectation of what they can achieve in English during the study in higher education. They want to make the best use of their time in university to be fully prepared for their future. All the language skills should be developed in balance.

Lee: As soon as we graduate, we will face strong competition in employment. I think a good level of English will be an advantage, as employers value English skills. I would like to improve all four skills – listening, speaking, reading and writing.

These students entered the university with various levels of English competency due to different reasons such as previous education at middle schools and personal interests. They have a good understanding of their own strengths and weaknesses, and a clear plan for the future, which determine the importance of the language skills.

Amanda: Where I am from, there is no assessment of listening skills at all in the university entrance exam, thus I did not receive any training on listening in middle schools. To me, the weakest aspect is listening. ... It is impossible to communicate with English speakers if you do not understand what they are talking about. So for me I want to improve my listening skills most.

Peter: I think I am good at translation. Speaking is the most important skill, but also the one that I am not good at. Sometimes I have the ideas in mind, just cannot express myself. I really want to improve my spoken English. Some time ago, I had a conversation with the recruitment staff from several banking and trading companies, and I was told that as their companies are expanding their business overseas they make high demands on the spoken English of their employees.

They realize the role of English as a tool, and thus every learner may have a different emphasis as they may have different purposes for learning. Those students who major in finance may value spoken English; those who want to go abroad to further their study are eager to improve speaking, listening and writing skills; and those who are from an engineering background would like to be able to read more competently. However, the majority of them agree on the necessity and urgency of developing speaking skills, no matter what degree they are doing and what future plans they make. For them speaking is a productive skill which is not only essential in communication but also in exhibiting personal talents.

10.1.2 More practice on receptive than on productive skills by the students after class

This finding is basically consistent with the findings from the student questionnaire, but here the interviewees provide more insights into how they carry out exercises on the receptive

skills and what deters them from practising productive skills. Exercises on listening are easy to carry out as no other person is involved. Watching English movies is the most popular type of exercise on listening skills and other forms of exercise may include listening to English news (e.g. BBC or VOA), English songs, speeches in English by famous people, watching English TV series (such as *Friends* and *The Big Bang Theory*), and doing test papers or test coaching materials.

Wade: I have a MP4 so I regularly download some English news from the internet and listen to it, such as VOA. I also like watching English movies. I choose to watch those with English subtitles or without subtitles at all and I won't watch those with Chinese subtitles. There may be some parts in one movie that I don't understand, but I can grasp the main story. I find it easier now to appreciate and understand English movies.

Peter: When I watch those American TV series, I use the English subtitles. For example, when I watch *Friends* for the first time, I will look at the English subtitles and note down those unfamiliar vocabulary, phrases and sentence patterns. So when I watch it for the second time, I will concentrate on listening without using any subtitles. I think it helps me to enlarge my vocabulary and improve listening skills.

Films or TV programmes seem to be interesting culture-bounded learning materials which may help to maintain or even increase learners' motivation in learning. However, they are not the only useful ones - some students acknowledge that their listening skills are improved by doing previous tests or test coaching materials. They believe what really matters is the persistency and frequency of practising. When compared to listening materials, the materials that these students use to develop reading skills are comparatively boring - predominantly test papers and test coaching materials.

Writing and speaking receive less practice as in most cases they require cooperation from others. As to writing, the students can write on their own, but they would like comments from their teachers, native speakers or others with a much higher English proficiency. It is difficult to get hold of these people, and thus learners are less motivated to practise writing skills after class. One student (Alan) complains that there is not much that he can do to check his own writing. If he writes one composition, all he can do is to go through it once one day and again the next day to see if there are any mistakes. However, the mistakes he can find from his own writing are limited to spelling or grammar, while he needs more advice on the use of language.

As to speaking, the finding here is similar to one of the findings from the student questionnaire that the students on the ITE course do more practice than those on the CE course. However, the interviewees here have the opportunity to elaborate on the reasons. The shortage of opportunities is the key reason for the lack of productive and effective practice.

Alan: Spoken English is the most troublesome. Although I know it is crucial, I cannot practise it with the air. The best I can do is to mimick English news or films.

10.1.3 Training in speaking skills in class

It has been noted in the previous chapters that speaking skills do not receive the appropriate attention in class, especially in the CE lessons. Various reasons for this have been explored from the teachers' point of view. Similar findings appear in the interviews with the students and will not be repeated here.

10.1.4 Factors that influence the students' willingness to speak English in and after class

One advantage of conducting the semi-structured interviews with the students is that I am able to probe into the factors which prevent them from speaking enough English in or after class from their own point of view, rather than just discussing this issue from the teachers' perspective (e.g. classroom organization or learning activities).

Various themes emerge from the analysis of the transcribed interview data and they are categorized into 3 broader groups: psychological/affective factors, the situation and personal attributes/cultural traits (the dimensions are adapted from Shi's (2008) model of learners' willingness to communicate). Psychological factors may include anxiety, motivation, attitudes and self-confidence. The situation refers to those external physical factors which do not belong to or are not fully under the personal control of learners, such as teachers, peer students, the classroom atmosphere, class size and the language environment. Personal attributes involve personality, cultural background and face. It is found from the analysis that the situation and personal attributes may exert a direct impact on these learners' willingness to speak English, but in most cases they will work on the learners' psychology which in turn can have a subsequent influence on learners' willingness to practise spoken English.

Anxiety triggered by speaking English usually happens during the class – some students mention that they would feel anxious at the thought of being asked to speak English and

nervous when they were trying to speak it. It might be a sign of a lack of self-confidence in their spoken English proficiency, but various factors can influence the degree of anxiety experienced by these students. Teachers are definitely one of the primary factors.

Chris: I am always worried that I will make mistakes when I speak English. And when my teacher starts to correct the errors that I make, my fear will increase, and unfortunately I will become more nervous and make more mistakes.

Since these students come from different backgrounds, they may have entered the university with varying levels of English proficiency. The differences between their levels of proficiency can act as a motivator in inspiring them to work harder to decrease the gap, but sometimes it can be viewed as an adverse effect as it might put them off trying to speak English in class.

Cathy: I hardly received any training in spoken English before I came here, and thus my spoken English is very poor compared with some of my classmates who come from big cities and have started learning English very early. It always makes me anxious and scared when I have to speak English in front of the whole class.

The large size of the class is another factor causing students' anxiety. Cathy admits that she prefers a class with not so many students, as she will feel less afraid of speaking and making mistakes. She will feel more relaxed to volunteer to answer questions or actively participate in other activities when she is less nervous, and then she will have more opportunities to practise.

As shown in the above analysis, it seems that on the one hand anxiety is closely related to self-confidence, while on the other hand these two are always associated with the Chinese concept of face. Face is similar to the western value of reputation. One may lose face when one has done something wrong in public, which is detrimental to one's reputation. Learners may be able to protect their face and avoid embarrassment if they do not make mistakes in front of the teacher and fellow classmates. The easiest way to do so is not to speak in class, and that is why some students are not willing to speak English in class. Jason is one of them.

Jason: I understand the importance of speaking skills in learning a language. However, I may not be so active sometimes. It does not mean I am not concentrating well enough, because I

listen very carefully. I just find it hard to volunteer to speak because I worry that my classmates will laugh at me and look down on me.

Classroom atmosphere is another element in deciding the level of anxiety experienced by learners. Learning is a serious business and thus it can cause nervousness and stress. This is especially true in a teacher-centred classroom where the lesson is dominated by the teacher's lecturing and when students perceive their teacher as an authoritative and isolated figure. However, an LC classroom can create a relaxed and dynamic teaching and learning atmosphere which can ease the tensions and anxiety. Learning is more effective in such an atmosphere. Thus, it is apparent that the teaching approach and the role that teachers take are crucial here. Furthermore, the specific Chinese culture of being modest is not so helpful in creating a vibrant classroom atmosphere. Some students may not be afraid of speaking or making mistakes in front of the teachers and their peers; they just try to behave modestly by not showing off. That is the reason why some students do not volunteer and prefer to remain silent in class. Conversely, if the teacher is friendly, the students are generally active and there is a lively atmosphere, then even the reluctant students will become more willing to speak.

Stacy: Our teacher always presents and organizes the lesson in an interesting way, and she gives us plenty of praise and encouragement. I feel more willing to speak in her class. And when most students around me are talking, I will be keen to join in as well.

The above analysis focuses on the factors that can cause anxiety in learning, which leads to unwillingness to speak English in class. The next part of the analysis will demonstrate how motivation affects learners' willingness to speak English in and after class. 'Motivation is regarded by experienced and inexperienced teachers alike as a prerequisite for effective learning....If students do not want to learn, their learning efficiency will be so low that they may learn virtually nothing' (Petty, 2004:43). Motivation can exert influence on willingness directly, or it can be affected positively or negatively by other situational factors. The direct influence of motivation always comes in the form of interest, which is regarded as an intrinsic motivation. Learners who take an interest in the learning process are self-motivated and able to learn continuously. They realize their own role in learning and take personal responsibility for it, which is also an idea promoted by learner autonomy in LC teaching and learning.

Peter: I have been interested in English since middle school. I like to watch English films and listen to English songs. Sometimes I sincerely hope my English proficiency can be better so that I can understand and communicate better in English. I volunteer to answer questions in class so that I can get some feedback about my spoken English from my teacher.

Teachers have a strong influence on their students' motivation to learn, and sometimes the impact may be stronger than teachers expect.

Stacy: I met a teacher when I went to a private English training school in my spare time. He is really a charming teacher. I felt an urge to study English well in his class. He talked eloquently in class as if he was giving a public speech. I like this type of teacher and always take my own initiative to learn. Teachers will like good students, so I feel I need to show my best to those teachers I like.

Peer students' attitudes and responses also can greatly affect the speakers' motivation to speak in and after class. It is not strange that a learner becomes less motivated if his/her language partner shows no interest in the paired work assigned by the teacher in class. The influence of peer students may extend beyond the classroom.

Wade: Sometimes after I have listened to English for the whole day or watched an English film, I may want to speak English more. I will feel the urge to talk to friends or classmates in English. You know, to show off a bit. However, they will not be interested; instead they will think there is something wrong with me in trying to talk with them in English. As a result, I just lose my enthusiasm.

Peer students' language proficiency is equally significant here, because if your language partner's English level is too low it will spoil your effort and damage your desire to talk. The discrepancies of language proficiency between peer students may facilitate or hinder the success of learning activities.

Wade: When we gather around to carry out a certain task, I notice that some of my classmates are poor at their English pronunciation, while others may struggle to express their own ideas. As to the vocabulary involved in the learning activities, some of my classmates may have difficulty with those words that they were supposed know a long time ago. I do not think this current

situation is helpful in improving my speaking skills, so sometimes I just lose my interest in these tasks.

As shown in the above quotations, the availability of language partners who share the same interest and have the appropriate level of English proficiency is really essential in practising spoken English. However, with some extra effort, it is not an impossible mission.

Stacy: I practise spoken English frequently after class. On my way back to dormitory from study, I speak English with another girl living in the same dorm. We talk about a wide range of topics. I know maybe we cannot correct the grammar or use of vocabulary in each other's utterances as efficiently as native speakers of English, but as long as we talk in English we are making progress.

Learners' self-confidence and peer competition may also contribute to motivation to learn. Learning is reinforced through repeated success. Success acts as a main motivator, which can bring a sense of achievement and increase their self-esteem. Although as discussed above, the difference in English proficiency between peer students may cause anxiety to some learners, it may also inspire others to work harder, and especially inspire those mature enough to handle pressure.

Stacy: When I was in middle school, I was not interested in English as my level was in the middle of the whole class. After I entered university, I knew I had to work a bit harder on English. In the process of learning, I find that I am actually quite good at learning it, and thus I find interest in learning. In the meantime, all the other students are studying hard, so I don't want to be a loser when compared to other fellow students.

Other situational factors that may influence students' willingness to speak English include the size of the class, the classroom atmosphere and the language environment. The relatively large size of class is viewed as a trigger for anxiety by some students, and it can also damage learners' motivation to speak English in class.

Alan: There are too many students in our class. Our teacher tries to give equal attention to each student, so each of us won't get much attention anyway. Sometimes I won't be bothered to volunteer to speak.

The classroom atmosphere is equally crucial to learners' motivation to speak in class. Lee, on the CE course, believes that there are enough opportunities to speak English in class for those who are willing to actively participate in learning. He himself is one of them. Furthermore, he thinks that most of his classmates are enthusiastic about spoken English and there is a dynamic learning atmosphere in his class. On the other hand, Wade (on the CE course) considers himself one of the few active learners in his class as he always volunteers to answer questions in class, but some classmates may speak English only a few times during the whole term. There is a great difference between individual learners and different classes.

Here 'language environment' refers to the EFL communication context outside the classroom, which will influence learners psychologically to speak English after class in their daily life. It is a situational factor, which will work on learners directly or indirectly. For EFL learners, English is a foreign language in China and there are fewer native speakers of English compared to the number of EFL learners. As a result there may not be enough opportunities for them to communicate in English naturally.

Chris: Language environment is important. Some of my friends are studying overseas and their spoken English can improve a lot in just 2-3 months. As far as I know some universities have foreign teachers teaching English lessons and offer chances to students to communicate with foreign students. If there is a better language environment, I will certainly practise more.

It is not surprising that learners like to practise spoken English with a native speaker as it may feel more comfortable and natural. However, due to the unfavourable situation it is not possible to provide enough natural communicative opportunities to students. Sometimes an artificial communication context is useful and essential. Some learners are fond of attending a variety of extra-curricular English activities, such as drama, speech competitions, or English corners. Others may consider a more formal means of learning, such as optional English subjects or ESP.

Tracy: I attended an English drama contest with my roommates last year. It was such fun. There was always a heated discussion among us in creating the lines. Of course, we used English all the time. Although we didn't get any prize in the end, I did enjoy it.

Cathy: I did put my name down for one optional English class. It was something about listening and speaking in the context of English news. I deleted it later as I was told by a sophomore that it was very difficult to pass. I was put off by the fear that I would fail it. And one classmate who did attend that class also complained about the difficulty after a couple of lessons.

It can be seen from the above quotations that it is important for higher educational institutions to provide support in creating a friendly and adequate language environment. It can be included within and outside the obligatory teaching curriculum as long as they cater for learners' needs and interest. Although it is helpful to offer optional English subjects to students, especially classes about speaking skills, it is vital that they are designed at the appropriate level so that they won't inhibit potential attendants.

The stereotypical impression of Chinese learners is that they are shy and reserved. They may not want to talk to strangers and to demonstrate their talents to others, which is valued by some as being modest. They especially do not want to 'show off' in a language they do not excel at. However, being relatively extrovert in their personality may be beneficial in respect of developing speaking skills.

Helen: I am a very outgoing person. I actively participate in extra-curricular activities where I can make friends with native speakers of English so that I can communicate with them in English. I go to the English corner on campus every week. Earlier today, while I was practising spoken English, an English native speaker walked towards me, spoke English with me and promised to meet me in the future to help me in improving my speaking skills. I join in a few clubs on campus and volunteer in some social activities, such as volunteering in some international sports competitions held in this city. ... I've made some friends who are English native speakers and I find it easier to communicate with them when we go out to do such things as mountain-climbing or barbeques.

So far factors that will influence learners' practice of speaking skills in or outside class have been analyzed, which are not covered by the questionnaire and observational data. The next section will illustrate some more fresh ideas discovered in the interviews on the LC approach and learner autonomy.

10.2 Teaching model

The problem of the large number of students has been realized by scholars and government officials. It is stipulated in the New Teaching Requirements (2007) that ‘in view of the marked increase in student enrolments and relatively limited resources, colleges and universities should remould the existing unitary teacher-centred pattern of language teaching by introducing network/computer- and classroom-based teaching models. ...English language teaching and learning will be, to a certain extent ... geared towards students’ individualized and autonomous learning’. Modern information technology, an LC approach and autonomous learning are thus the characteristics of the new teaching model.

10.2.1 Students’ attitudes to a computer-based teaching and learning model

The benefits of using computer technology in teaching and learning languages are obvious. It can provide a more genuine communication context as learners can communicate with native speakers on line; it can cater for learners’ individual needs as they can choose the content and the pace which suits them best; and it has more learning resources available. However, it has its drawbacks as well and in fact many learners do not like it.

One problem with computer-based learning is related to learner autonomy, as all the above mentioned benefits are based on the assumption that students are able to study autonomously and efficiently.

Debbie: I don’t quite like the idea of network-based learning, because we do not have the necessary autonomy or self-control in doing that. Furthermore, even with some support and supervision from our teachers, it is not so ideal as there are so many students that the teachers cannot handle.

This idea is shared by several other students as well. Another typical concern is that interaction will be decreased in this type of learning.

Helen: I think one limitation is that there is less communication, not just between students and the teacher, but also with peers. Once there is less interaction, there will be less enjoyment in the learning process. It may help to improve the autonomy, but it will be at the price of losing delight. In universities, you must live in a happy atmosphere. Through interaction with others, I can improve my own spoken English as well as make some friends.

Another issue with computer- or network-based learning concerns its efficiency, which is overvalued sometimes. Students may study on their own without any external support from teachers or peers. So it may take longer for them to learn something new or difficult.

Cathy: In computer-based learning, I cannot get the same amount of help from my teacher and fellow students as from classroom teaching and learning. My English is not so good and I make mistakes sometimes. I have no clue why it is wrong, so that is the time when I need immediate help.

10.2.2 The LC approach

This research question has been explored in detail in the last two chapters from the angle of how the teachers organize lessons. Findings have shown that the CE course is not so LC and the ITE course exhibits more LC features. The analysis of the interviews will offer further insights into the students' perceptions of the current teaching and learning approach.

Some interviewees comment that although the CE course is not so LC, it is much better than their previous learning experience in middle schools. The whole process of English learning in middle schools was centred on exams, especially on the university entrance exam. Compared to this, the CE learning is more flexible and interesting.

Lee: First of all, multimedia technology is not so widely employed in middle schools. The picture is that the teacher lectures with a textbook in hand and the students sit there holding textbooks listening or repeating after the teacher. While in university, the class is more interactive. Our teacher will communicate with us and encourage us to think. And I have more opportunities to practise.

Some students complain about the excessive lecturing in class, which damages their motivation and concentration. If one lesson consists overwhelmingly of lecturing, students will find it boring and useless. One girl student told me that some of her classmates fell asleep in the course of the lesson. The way teachers teach has a great impact on students.

Salina: I don't consider it (CE) an interesting and useful course and I don't understand why we have to learn it. I don't like it. Most of the time, the teacher reads out the text, and then translates it into Chinese. She may ask some questions afterwards, but I usually don't know

what she is talking about. There are books for sale about the translation and analysis of the texts. I can read them after class.

Another disadvantage is that it is less effective in developing higher level skills in thinking such as analysis, synthesis, evaluation and reflection. All those skills can be better developed through a more LC approach and this has been realized by some learners as well.

Helen: Classes should belong to students not teachers. If the teacher has been trying to input his or her thoughts into the students' brains, the students will become numb. If the whole process is just about input without any output or feedback, there won't be any developments in our thoughts. Teachers should take a facilitative role.

Not all the student interviewees are so strongly against lecturing. Some regard it as a good way to lay a solid foundation, especially on the aspects of vocabulary and grammar.

10.2.3. Students' perceptions of their own autonomy in learning

As discussed in the Literature Review Chapter, learner autonomy is a key concept in an LC approach. The analysis of the teacher questionnaires has shown that the teachers in this specific university do not think their students hold a high level of autonomy in learning. However, the questionnaires fail to illustrate the factors that will influence learner autonomy. The next section will shed some light on those factors from the learners' own point of view.

10.2.3.1 Internal factors

Internal factors refer to individual learner's beliefs, attitudes, understandings, confidence, learning styles, capabilities and so on. Most student interviewees hold positive and optimistic attitudes to autonomous learning. They realize its importance and necessity. They want to take some responsibility for their own learning because this will better cater for their individual needs, especially the learning content and pace.

Wade: English learning relies on yourself. The university's unitary format may not suit every student, because students have different learning styles and proficiency levels. Students should have more control although there is a risk of loss in accessible learning resources. The original model has failed to take into account the difference of abilities and proficiencies between students, so for some more advanced learners it is a waste of time sometimes.

Although some learners realize it is crucial and necessary to be autonomous in learning, most of them fail to take effective action on this point. Some may only do a little autonomous learning, while others may have tried but failed to complete the whole process. When asked what kind of autonomous learning they have carried out, some acknowledge that autonomous learning only happens before a certain exam, such as end-of-term exams or CET4/6. It is interesting to notice that those learners have related autonomy in learning with the washback effect of testing.

Peter: To be honest, I think autonomous learning is formed through the pressure from exams. If there is much pressure from a certain exam, the autonomy in learning is greater. We had many extra-curricular activities during last term; as a result we hardly did any study in English in the whole term. However, before the final exam, everybody became autonomous – studying until late in the night but still getting up early the next morning to study. Nobody would go to the internet cafe or read novels.

Several internal factors that may hinder autonomous learning have been identified in the interview data, such as low levels of interest/motivation, lack of self-control and misunderstandings of what autonomy is. If a student does not have much motivation in learning a subject, it can be hard for them to take any autonomous actions.

Salina: Unlike maths, I don't value English so much. I won't spend much time on it. I will probably only spend some time on finishing our homework just before the deadline to hand it in.

Most interviewees admit that their ability to control or discipline themselves is poor. That is why they fail to take autonomous learning actions although they realize the importance of English and the significance of taking personal responsibility for that. Their lack of self-control is probably the greatest factor that hinders their autonomy in learning.

Jason: I think most of us have poor self-control. Maybe only those who have some interest in this language will carry out some autonomous learning, while most of us cannot do this. Like myself, sometimes I would rather play than study. We need supervision.

There are two main reasons for this relatively low level of self-control. The first reason is the big difference between the life in middle schools and higher education. Some interviewees think that there is much more free time compared to middle schools because they were under

great pressure there because of the university entrance exams. They have never had so much time under their own control and have felt a big change in their lives. Suddenly they feel relaxed and free from pressure.

Lee: We do have much free time for ourselves in university now, and that means there is more time to play, to enjoy ourselves. That also means there will be probably less time devoted to study when compared to middle schools. I know that we should exercise more autonomy in everything while in university, but it is very hard to do so. I still prefer more control or supervision from our teachers.

The second reason is that they probably have hardly had any chance to exercise self-control in the past, as almost everything from life to study was determined by their parents or teachers in primary schools or middle schools. As a result, they are inexperienced in self-control.

Debbie: Before entering university, my teachers would supervise us strictly at school and give a lot of homework to do after school. My parents would get me some private tutoring or send me to a private training school at weekends. I was under their supervision every day. I did not have any time of my own and I had little control of my life.

Some students assume that independent learning is the only form of autonomous learning. Their interpretation of being autonomous is to learn without any supervision or help from teachers or other people. It is independent learning behaviour, and usually happens only after class. However, according to the definitions and discussion of learner autonomy in the Literature Review Chapter, autonomous learning can take place both inside and outside the classroom. It refers to taking responsibility for one's own learning, though the teacher may still have an important role to play. Clearly, some students have misunderstood the meaning of being autonomous. However, this misunderstanding also shows their strong belief about what teaching and learning are. Culture usually plays an important role in influencing the ways that learners relate their beliefs to learning behaviours. In traditional Chinese culture, a teacher is perceived as the authority with the highest power in the classroom. According to this belief, the class activities should be decided by the teacher and the students are supposed to be compliant.

Wade: On second thoughts, autonomous learning can take place after class. There should be a teacher in class. During classroom time, it is better to seize every opportunity to communicate with the teacher.

Cathy: I think I can be autonomous, but I am not sure about the others. If students can't be autonomous, it is better to keep the current format of class teaching. When the teacher is teaching, at least those students are listening to English and they may learn some English as well.

It is apparent here that some students have contrasted classroom teaching/learning to autonomous learning as two distinct matters. They have never thought about the possibility of them sharing the power to make decisions with the teacher about the way the time in class is spent. They take it for granted that the class should be designed and decided by their teacher. Their job in class is to listen to lectures and to participate in learning activities. They don't need to think about and contribute to decisions about how the class should be organized. They may exercise some autonomy in learning, but it only happens after class.

10.2.3.2 External factors

There are some external factors that may affect the degree of learner autonomy, such as culture, which works on learners' autonomy indirectly through its influence on learners' beliefs or understandings. Other external factors may include their general study load in university, the guidance or supervision from their teachers, the training they have received in autonomous study and the accessibility of institutional facilities.

English is only one of the many subjects (Chinese, history, maths, politics and other major-related subjects) that these students have to learn at universities. Many students do not give it any priority over other subjects. In addition, some prefer to have a work-life balance, which means that study is not their only priority in universities.

Peter: I do think English is useful. However, we have many other lessons in one day and many extra-curricular activities to participate in. I really cannot afford too much time or energy on it. When we had just come to university, we were enthusiastic about learning English. However, we lost this enthusiasm later because we have other things to care about as well.

In the previous discussion on speaking skills, it was revealed that productive skills receive less training after class when compared to receptive skills. As to writing skills, some students have complained that they cannot get sufficient feedback on the work they do after class.

Chris: I don't see a close relationship between our teacher and us. Actually it can be described as being distant. I hardly have any contact with our teacher after class.

If learners are expected to take more responsibilities in their learning, teachers should provide guidance and help. However, the discouraging fact is that many learners can only receive help in their after-class English learning through reference books. They cannot have regular and sufficient supervision and guidance from their teachers. Teachers' help can improve the effectiveness and efficiency of students' autonomous learning, which may avoid learners' frustration when facing difficulties and keep them motivated. Furthermore, teachers' guidance could also link classroom teaching/learning to students' autonomous study after class, so that autonomous after-class study will not be perceived as a separate part of their English learning. When the link is established, it will be easier to bring some autonomy to classroom teaching and learning as well.

It is agreed in the literature on learner autonomy that the ability and willingness for learners to take personal responsibility in learning is not necessarily innate. In many cases, specific training in learner autonomy is essential. It looks as if it is almost impossible to carry out any autonomous learning actions in middle schools from what these students said in their interviews. This means that there is probably no training in autonomous study in middle schools. However, this ability is highly valued in higher education. Unfortunately, there is still not much, if any, of this kind of training available. Otherwise, there would not be so many students who confuse autonomous learning with independent learning.

Amanda: I have not received any training in autonomous learning. I just study English on my own after class. Sometimes I am not sure if I am doing it in the right way or not.

Institutional facilities are considered an external material type of support provided by the institution that students need in the process of developing autonomy. They may include original texts, and audio or video materials in English, such as English novels or newspapers, English news or films. Thanks to the advances in modern technology, it is very easy to obtain

these materials on the Internet. Universities and colleges are equipped with computer rooms for students to access the Internet or other electronic materials. Student dormitories are installed with Internet access so that students with personal computers or laptops can get on the Internet in their own dormitory. Books and newspapers in English are being sold in many book shops or newsagents and kept in university libraries now. What is scarce is a suitable and comfortable setting for them to practise spoken English. There should be more purposefully arranged and specifically labeled English study areas on campus. This point corresponds with the previous discussion of factors influencing students' willingness to speak English after class.

10.3 Testing and washback effects of testing

The analysis of the questionnaire data has depicted a clear picture of the washback effect of the two tests under investigation in this study – CET and IELTS. The interviews gave the students an opportunity to expand their ideas on this issue. Some qualitative narration and description will be presented next to help with the interpretation and understanding of the numbers or figures in the analysis of the questionnaires.

One of the intentions of the CET reform is to decrease the perception of its high stakes among stakeholders, especially students, in order to minimize its negative washback effects.

However, this attempt has failed to achieve the expected outcome. CETs are still regarded as the most important English exam in higher education by most students, which can be illustrated by the following points:-

1) Lee and some other interviewees think that the specific faculty they study at still requires all its students to pass CET4 before graduation. However, they are not sure if this is related to the award of the degree. Since the faculty has this requirement clearly specified and repeated at their meetings, all the students still have to take and pass the test.

2) The students will take not only CET4 but also CET 6. Some of them will re-sit the tests even though their scores are over the pass mark just in order to improve their scores.

Wade: So far I have passed both CET4 and CET6, but my score on CET6 is not very high – about 460. I will re-sit CET6 in the future to get a higher score.

3) The main reason to explain the high stakes of CETs is the role that the tests play in graduates' job seeking. A higher score on CET will give them some advantages over others when facing a highly competitive job market.

Peter: CET4 is a must as our school requires it. I took CET6 because of the pressure of future employment. It is necessary to have a CET6 score when applying for jobs.

4) The influence of CET has extended beyond English.

Amanda: One friend of mine studied Russian in middle schools, and is continuing to study Russian in university. However, he wants to take CET4/ 6 as well.

5) The influence of CET has extended beyond the CE course. Some students on the ITE course admit that they have taken CET4 and CET6 for the following reasons: to have their English proficiency evaluated; to compare their level of English with their friends in other schools; and to increase the chances of employment as the IELTS score is valid for two years only.

Although the fact that students still consider CET a high stake test may disappoint some test designers and government officials, these students do not hold a strong negative attitude towards it. It is assumed that if learners hold a strong aversive attitude to this English test, it will affect their attitude to English as a general subject. However, there is no sign of antipathy against CET shown during the interviews and the students seem to be rather relaxed and accepting of it.

Wade: Personally, I don't like or dislike it. However, I accept it and am willing to take it. There isn't any disgust against it. Just a mild attitude. It is good to hold such an attitude as there will be less pressure. Anyway, I can have my English proficiency assessed.

Peter: I have seen many comments on the Internet about cancelling CET. I think actually the test is useful. It does not place an out-of-range high requirement on test takers. Assessment can provide a constraint on English study. Some students will give it up without this test as a goal. English is still very useful.

As to the termination of CET, students who are not under the influence of CET will think that it can be cancelled. For example, Alan believes that other tests may achieve the same result in evaluating his English level. It has to be noted here that Alan is a 'good' student who has a relatively high English proficiency when compared to his classmates. It can be understood from the interview with him that he has a high level of self-control. However, he also admits that the test is still exerting a strong impact on most of his classmates. It is useful to them because they are not clear why they have to learn English. It is impossible for them to learn it well unless they understand this point.

As found from the analysis of the student questionnaires, learners have been able to identify the positive and negative sides of the test. The interview data tell a similar story, although there are several new and interesting points. The greatest benefit of preparing for the test is the improvement to listening skills for many learners, while the development of other skills is limited. Vocabulary is increased as well during the test preparation process. What is surprising is that some learners can develop an interest in studying English in the process of preparing for tests.

Jason: I think my English proficiency has improved and I also feel that my interest in learning it has increased. I have started to like reading something in English, which is different from my previous attitude of rejecting it completely.

In addition, some students on the ITE course have expressed their concerns about IELTS, which have not been covered in the previous analysis. The concerns are mainly about the reliability and validity of IELTS. As to reliability, some students think that the test is somewhat subjective because different human beings are involved in the measurement. If one test taker is lucky to have a lenient assessor, then it is more likely for him/her to get a high score in the tests. Similarly, if someone is unlucky to have a very strict assessor, it is possible that he/she will receive a score which is lower than his/her normal level. The concern about the test reliability is centred on the writing and speaking test in IELTS. As to the validity of IELTS, some students believe that the test may fail to accurately evaluate their language capabilities because there are so many different test-taking techniques. Some students in their class failed to achieve high scores in IELTS although they are generally perceived to have a high level of English proficiency by their teachers and fellow students. On the other hand, some who are at an average level in class have got extraordinarily high scores in IELTS.

There are many books for sale on the techniques of taking IELTS. One student (Helen) reveals that some people, relying on their memory, have summarized the testing items from the IELTS they have taken. Since some of the testing items are repeated from previous IELTS, people start accumulating these so-called test experiences. Gradually there is a database for almost all the test items from previous IELTS. They are published as books and on the Internet as JIJING (experience of computer tests). As a result, some learners may just need to memorize these JIJINGs as a technique to increase their test score.

10.4 Summary

This chapter has analyzed the data from the student interviews. As the interview questions were designed around the three research focuses, the analysis has been organized under these three main topics as well.

The importance of speaking skills has received recognition from the learners, which is consistent with the New CE Teaching Requirements. There are three types of factors that may facilitate or hinder learners' willingness to practise speaking skills in and after class: psychological/affective factors, situational factors and personal attributes/cultural traits.

What is unexpected is that many learners do not like the idea of computer- or network-based English teaching and learning, which is divergent from the intentions of the designers of the New Teaching Requirements. The interviewees think that the English courses are not very LC. Unlike the assumption that psychologically and physically they should more be prepared for autonomous learning, many learners are still not ready or able to take personal responsibility for their learning. Two types of reason have been identified from the interview data: internal (such as low levels of interest and motivation) and external (such as the nature of the teacher's guidance and support). The findings on testing and washback effects are similar to the previous findings, except for the concerns regarding the reliability and validity of IELTS.

So far all the data have been analyzed and various findings have been listed and presented. The next chapter will bring the findings together and examine and interpret them to see if there are any underlying principles and relations between them.

Chapter 11 Interpreting the Data: Identifying Key Factors in the Response to the New Teaching Requirements

11.1 Introduction

Chapters 1-3 have introduced three key issues in the CE Reform: the reform of the teaching objectives (in particular, the new emphasis on the development of speaking skills), the reform of the teaching model (in particular, the new LC approach to teaching) and the reform of assessment (in particular, the reformed CET). The first two are included in the New CE Teaching Requirements and the third is related to the Requirements as well. These three issues have been investigated through a variety of methods, including questionnaires, interviews and observations, with a particular emphasis on the responses of teachers and students to the reforms. Chapters 6-10 have reported the findings of these investigations according to the different methods used (questionnaires – chapters 6 and 7; observations – chapters 8 and 9; and interviews – chapters 8 and 10). Chapters 6-10 have also highlighted the main differences between CE and the ITE course, and between their respective approaches to testing (CET and IELTS). The current chapter digs deeper into the data to examine and interpret the underlying principles which influence the teachers' and the students' responses to the CE Reform (especially the New Teaching Requirements and CET) and to identify the common factors in their responses and the differences between them.

11.2 The social and cultural context

From birth, human beings are under the continuous and permeating influence of the specific culture or society they are exposed to. This long-time immersion in one's native culture can bring about a particular way of thinking and behaving, which is manifested in many aspects, including teaching and learning. Several cultural and social factors have been identified in the study, which can affect the implementation of the New CE Teaching Requirements, especially in relation to the three research topics of this study. Hofstede (2001) has identified five dimensions of 'cultural difference': individuality/collectivism, power distance, uncertainty avoidance, masculinity/femininity and long term orientation. The first three are relevant to the findings of this research and will be discussed below, along with other factors.

11.2.1 Underlying beliefs and values in teaching and learning

In the literature about cross-cultural research (Biggs, 1996; Kember 2001), significant differences have been found between Chinese learners and their Western counterparts in their beliefs and styles of learning, which are usually related to their distinct philosophical and cultural backgrounds. One important finding of the current research is that lecturing still occupies a large amount of time in both courses, which seems to be contradictory to the principle of an LC approach and be unfavourable to the development of speaking skills.

In Confucian philosophy it is claimed that knowing leads to doing: ‘knowing is the direction of doing and doing is the practice of knowing; knowing is the beginning of doing and doing is the consummation of knowing’ (Wang, collected by Chan, 1963:669-670). This does not mean that action is less important than knowledge, because Confucian philosophy also asserts the necessity of applying the knowledge in practice. However, when there is a conflict between knowing and doing because of the limitation of time, priority is given to knowing in most cases by Chinese teachers. That is probably why although the teachers in this case are willing to involve their students more in the teaching and learning process, they have to concentrate on presenting the knowledge (lecturing) because of the limited class time.

In such a case, Chinese learners usually regard knowledge as something transmitted by their teachers rather than discovered by themselves. This may affect their autonomy in learning. One learning style that is preferred by Chinese learners is rote learning, which was once assumed to be a superficial form of learning. However, recent empirical research has shown that Chinese learners can use this rote learning or repetition as a means to get a deeper understanding of knowledge (Kennedy, 2002). This is probably the reason why some students in the current case study expressed their support for lecturing and regard reciting or memorizing as an effective way of learning English.

However, according to Western educational theories, especially CLT and Constructivism which are considered the main theoretical foundations of the LC approach (as discussed in Chapter 4), learners build their knowledge through personal experience. Teachers provide only a facilitative role. Thus the core principle is to learn by doing. When applied to EFL or ESL, it means learning by communicating. It is clear the cultural difference here may become an obstacle in promoting the LC approach in EFL teaching/learning and the development of Chinese learners’ English speaking skills.

11.2.2 Collectivism and individuality

China is considered a collective society, where people value interdependence within and affiliation to their in-groups. The in-groups can refer to family, colleagues at work, school, society or even the nation. In education, it usually means a group of students or the whole class. Priority is given to the interests and goals of the in-groups rather than of individuals. People with collective thinking try to maintain harmony and avoid confrontation (Hofstede, 2001). They behave in a communal way, by following the norms of the in-group.

As mentioned in Chapter 10, some student interviewees complain that their partners in group or paired work can sometimes have a negative influence on their own motivation or enthusiasm in completing the learning tasks, but nothing has been done to improve the situation. One student acknowledges that if his partner shows little interest in the task, he will be affected and lose his enthusiasm as well. Instead of challenging his partner's low level of cooperation and participation, he chooses to accept it as a fact in order to avoid confrontation. Another example is that one student admits that she does not volunteer to answer questions in class although she sometimes knows the answers, simply because others remain silent as well. She chooses to follow the 'norm' of the in-group (the class in this case), rather than showing her own identity and individuality. The collective thinking is obvious in their learning behaviour. One example from my classroom observations is that the teachers usually ask the question to the whole class and sometimes have to offer the answers themselves if nobody volunteers to answer. This is done not only to save time, but also to avoid embarrassment caused to individuals and maintain harmony.

In a western context, an LC approach is an individualized one, in which learners are autonomous and independent. Priority is given to personal goals or benefits over those of the in-group. Unlike collective thinking, in individualized education tasks should take priority over relationships and speaking one's mind is a way of showing personal identity and honesty (ibid). Personal needs are more important than the norms of the in-group. In a Chinese context, these values need to be integrated with more traditional cultural understandings in the best interests of the students. Therefore, the above mentioned students may have to combine their need for self-development with the need to keep harmony, and show individuality as well as follow the group's norms. Similarly, the above mentioned teacher may need to emphasize developing individual students' potential by involving students in learning, but not ignore the Chinese value of harmony.

11.2.3 Power distance

Samovare and Porter (1995:93) define power distance as ‘the extent to which the people in the society accept the fact that power in institutions and organizations is distributed unequally’. China is a large power-distance society with a strong sense of hierarchy in its social structures. Believing that everyone has their place in society, the Chinese tend to accept power as a fact. They may not feel uncomfortable with the inequality and power distance. The hierarchy is also seen in education, where teachers are considered authority figures. Students usually show reverence to teachers whose knowledge and wisdom is taken for granted. As a result, they may become less autonomous, and more dependent on their teachers. They show more compliance than critical thinking in learning. At the same time, teachers are expected to be a good moral model, caring for and nurturing their students.

This principle in power distance can work as a barrier in the implementation of an LC approach, as it will reinforce students’ beliefs that knowledge is something imparted by the teacher, and the teacher is always right. According to the classroom observations, the students in this research seldom express their own views or raise questions in class, possibly because such behaviour may be perceived as expressing public disagreement or challenging their teachers’ authority. Another typical example is that the findings from the student interviews show that though they have realized the importance of being autonomous in learning, they have never thought of sharing the power in making decisions related to their classroom teaching and learning with their teachers, as they respect their teachers’ authority in the class. So their autonomy in learning could only be found in studying English after class. However, being respectful to the teachers by not expressing personal views in public does not necessarily mean that these students cannot think for themselves. On the one hand, some student interviewees have clear expectations of how the lessons should be taught, which shows that they have started to think critically of the ways their teachers work; on the other hand, they have never told their teachers about what they want. This is a paradox in that they have critical ideas about the teacher’s authority, but they still show acceptance of it.

11.2.4 Uncertainty avoidance

Uncertainty avoidance refers to ‘the extent to which the members of a culture feel threatened by uncertain or unknown situations’ (Hofstede, 2001:161), and the steps they take to avoid this threat. In a strong uncertainty avoidance society, such as the Chinese, teachers and students feel comfortable in a structured learning situation with strict timetables (Hofstede,

1986), which may explain why the completion of the teaching plan is so critical to the two teachers in this case study. Learners prefer clear guidelines and less risk, which explains why almost all the lessons observed are under the absolute control of the teachers because the students just take it for granted that they are supposed to follow the guidelines from their teacher and they have never thought about having their own say in how the lessons should be.

Members of a strong uncertainty avoidance society like to make sure they have acquired the necessary knowledge before taking any actions. They are concerned about making mistakes or failures. Students tend to avoid things that they are not certain of, as can be seen from the findings in this study that the teachers' questions frequently meet with silence when some students prefer to remain silent if they are not certain about the answers. However, for some learners, keeping silent does not mean that they are unfocused or not thinking. In fact, there is a positive relation between uncertainty avoidance and reflective observation (Hoppe, 1990 and Yamazaki, 2005). According to Kolb (1984 quoted in Yamazaki, 2005), those who prefer to use the abilities of reflective observation are likely to watch carefully and reflect upon their own answers or experience.

Furthermore, accuracy is emphasized in such a culture, which implies that students want to know the right answers. As a result, innovation or creativity may be sacrificed. However, in an LC teaching and learning situation, fluency may be considered more important than accuracy and students are encouraged to participate actively in class organization and learning activities. Once again, a cultural factor may pose some problems in the smooth implementation of an LC approach.

11.2.5 Exam-driven

Yu and Suen note the exam-oriented nature of the Chinese educational system:

'Paying great attention to education has been deeply integrated into Chinese culture with the influence of Confucian philosophy over more than 2000 years. Under the surface of education fever, high-stakes examinations have been and continue to be the hidden driving force.

Education fever in China is in fact fever for successes in exams' (2005:29).

In fact, the influence of examinations starts to work as soon as students begin their schooling, and it can spread into their employment and promotion.

In this study, there are widespread washback effects of CET and IELTS on many aspects of teaching and learning. For the teachers, the effects are found in the teaching content, teaching methods, depth and range of teaching, goals and motivation; for students, the effects are discovered in learning content, attitudes, motivation, learning focus and learning methods. The degree of influence on the various aspects is different for teachers and students. However, generally speaking, the washback effects are relatively large, except for teachers' language use in class.

Tests are usually perceived as the gatekeepers at every rung of the educational and career ladder in China. This exam-driven characteristic may be the reason that the Chinese MoE's attempt to reduce the high-stakes of CET has failed in this specific university. The students still consider it the most important English test in higher education and many schools or departments of the university still have specific requirements for CET although the MoE clearly stated that the students' CET score should not be related to the award of their degree. What is different in my research from some of the assumptions in the literature is that the students actually hold a rather accepting and positive attitude to CET and IELTS, although they point out several limitations of the tests.

As to the nature of the influence, mixed findings have emerged. As speaking is not assessed in CET, it may be neglected in teaching and learning. Since activities focusing on speaking skills are usually LC, the lack of assessment may impede the implementation of an LC approach. On the other hand, some students manage to develop an interest in learning English in the process of test preparation. Furthermore, the influence can be so great that the students effectively use testing as a way to autonomous learning by helping them to overcome their low level of self-control or self-management abilities.

To summarize, for those teachers and students, testing is not the only or the most important factor dominating their behaviour, but it is definitely one of the most significant and widespread elements.

11.2.6 The linguistic setting

As one element of the social context, 'linguistic setting' refers to the status the target language has in the learners' society. A distinction between EFL and ESL is necessary here. There are two types of interpretation. The first one is that EFL means that English is not used for any

formal day-to-day social interaction while ESL implies that although English is not a native language, it is used for such purposes as the conduct of commerce, industry, law, administration, politics and education (Wilkins, 1974). According to this definition, English is a foreign language in China or Japan, but a second language in India or Singapore. The second interpretation starts from an applied linguistic point of view which may involve the theories of Second Language Acquisition and teaching English. According to this definition, teaching English to non-native speakers in a non-English speaking country is termed EFL teaching, while teaching English to non-native speakers in an English-speaking country is called ESL teaching.

English is a foreign language in China no matter which definition is followed. This means that English is only taught as a subject in the classroom, but not used as a medium in communication outside of the classroom. In this case, learners' exposure to and immersion in the target language is limited and they have fewer opportunities to put what they have learnt in the classroom into practice. Most of the learning and practice activities happen in the classroom. Few students in my study could practise the language outside the English classroom. Some feel it unnatural and uncomfortable to speak English with non-native English speakers after class, while others may be willing to speak but have difficulties in finding the appropriate language partners and setting. Nowadays although with the help of advanced technology these students are able to have access to English news, TVs, or films, these may only help them with the development of receptive skills such as listening. Learners do not have the genuine need to speak the language in their daily life or work. This unfavourable linguistic setting may hinder the development of learners' speaking skills. Furthermore, when there is no genuine need to use the language in communication, learners' motivation in learning will be affected, which in turn may enhance the role of testing as a strong motivation to learn. When this central incentive of being able to use the language in daily communication is missing, learners may have other motivations for learning. As a result, they may have different interests and expectations, which may cause problems to the implementation of an LC approach as teachers will struggle to meet the different needs of their students.

11.2.7 Commentary

The above discussion of social and cultural factors in the response of teachers and students to the New Teaching Requirements is open to a number of possible criticisms. Kennedy (2002),

for example, warns of the danger of caricaturing or stereotyping Chinese learners as passive recipients of knowledge concerned only to memorize the ideas of their teachers. He provides evidence of the willingness of Chinese learners to adopt new learning styles. Similarly, Gieve and Clark (2005) report significant levels of flexibility, diversity and autonomy among the Chinese students they studied, and caution against any over-simplistic assumptions about culturally determined approaches to learning. Furthermore, some researchers (e.g. Stephens 1997) suggest that current changes in Chinese social, political and economic conditions may bring about changes to some cultural beliefs (such as collectivism vs individualism in Stephens' study), and that these changes will sooner or later be seen in approaches to education.

Nevertheless, these publications do not invalidate my own findings about the cultural traits of Chinese students in general, which are based on my own observations and interviews. They merely remind the reader of the risk of over-generalizing or assuming that there is no diversity or variation from the general cultural characteristics that have been described.

11.3 Influences on the teachers' response

11.3.1 Personal experience

The successful implementation of an educational policy, to a large extent, depends on the attitudes and expectations of the stakeholders, especially the teachers and students. Findings in this study show that these teachers' previous teaching experience and language learning experience as students are the most influential factors on how they teach now. Some of the teachers progressed directly from their university studies into teaching the CE course, but others gained their first teaching experience before they started official teaching in higher education, from part-time jobs while studying or placement years, for example. Some teachers in this university are young, while others had over 20 years of experience of teaching CE before the initiation of the CE reform. Throughout the process of teaching, they may have continuously revisited their beliefs and values about knowledge and education, and reflected on their actions in teaching and learning. For example, they can learn from previous teaching experience about what teaching is and what effective teaching methods are, and then hold on to these beliefs in their future career. At the same time, certain habits or conventions can be formed in teaching, which may have a substantial and lasting impact on their future teaching. These beliefs, assumptions, values, norms and conventions are regarded as their perspectives

on teaching (Collins et al, n.d.), which will guide and direct their actions subconsciously. Thus the placement year and first few years of teaching are very critical.

What is similarly important is their own experience as language learners. They will have formed various concepts about language teaching and learning from their personal experience as language learners. The way they were taught or treated, together with the knowledge and skills they learnt previously in schools and universities may have a profound and enduring effect on the ideas and practices in their current teaching career. For instance, in teaching a specific language point, they may recall the teaching method their teachers adopted as well as the learning strategy they personally used. If the method or the strategy was successful at that time, they will be very likely to adopt a similar approach. However, if the experience was negative, they will try something different. It is clear that they learn how to teach as well as how not to teach from their personal learning experience. In order to improve teaching practice at the higher education level, it is essential to improve teaching standards at the school level. English teaching is a continuous process, and the various stages involved are interrelated and interactive.

Of course, teachers' previous teaching and learning experience prior to becoming teachers in higher education is only part of their life experience. Other forms of life experience may include upbringing, background, other work experience, relations with and influence from other people and their current personal life, all of which may have some impact on their perspectives on and practices in teaching.

11.3.2 Students

Along with teachers' personal life experience, students may also exert great influence on teachers' perspectives on and practices in teaching. The current study shows that the teachers think a great deal about the expectations and needs of students. The teachers may change or adapt their ways of teaching in order to meet the needs of their students. For example, in this study, the teachers will adjust their normal classroom teaching to preparing the students for CET in order to meet the students' needs in passing the test. However, they will not spend time on preparing the students for CET-SET, because the majority of students will not have the need or opportunity to take CET-SET. Their own beliefs about the importance of speaking skills have to be compromised, and their conventional teaching practices (i.e. teaching according to the textbook) are disrupted because of their desire to better meet the students'

expectations and needs. Students' expectations or needs are only part of the influence that students can impose on their teachers.

The teacher interviewees in this study comment on the low level of students' self-discipline, which may influence the way they organize learning activities. Students' poor self-discipline can be considered as an indicator of their low autonomy in learning. When assigned a learning task to be completed on their own, students with poor self-discipline do not accept and exercise their own responsibilities properly. The teachers in this study identify two reasons: 1) some students may tend to rely on the teacher's instructions for everything as they are so accustomed to the traditional teaching methods; 2) for some other students, their attitudes to learning are passive or even negative - they lack initiative in learning and some may have lost interest in learning English. As a consequence, these students may fail to complete learning tasks successfully and independently. The explanation offered by the two teachers in this study suggests students' poor self-discipline is the cause of their low learner autonomy. However, I also think there might be another possibility that this causal relationship works in the totally opposite direction. Just because those students are deprived of the right to proactively participate in the decision-making or implementation process and their personal needs cannot be met, gradually they lose their enthusiasm for learning and become passive or even negative. Thus it could be low autonomy in learning that leads to the poor self-discipline. No matter which way the causal relationship works, what is certain is that these two have some correlation.

Other types of influence from students are their backgrounds, characteristics, attitudes, learning styles and evaluation of the course and the teacher. The influence of students on teachers' perspective on and practices in teaching is at the contextual level.

11.3.3 Personal attributes

Another personal factor that will influence teaching is teachers' personal attributes, i.e. their self-confidence, humour, personality, motivation and so on. As discovered from the observational data in this study, when the teachers are confident and motivated enough to go beyond the textbook both in terms of the content and the format of teaching, the curriculum will be expanded. For instance, on the ITE course in this study both teachers organize speaking activities to check the students' comprehension of a piece of reading material and

they always encourage students to come up with their own examples and not be limited to those provided in the textbook.

This study also shows that teachers' sense of humour has a certain impact on the teaching and learning process. There are a lot of instances of laughter recorded in the ITE lessons and the class atmosphere in both teachers' classes is light and relaxed. Berk (2002) summarizes the benefits, both psychological and physiological, of humour and laughter in teaching and learning: connection between teacher and students, classroom atmosphere, student responsiveness, performance in assessment and student attendance. There are other personal traits, such as introversion or extroversion that can influence a person's behaviour towards others. Researchers have identified a connection between teachers' personal traits and perspectives on teaching, and the strategies they adopt (Decker & Rimm-Kaufman, 2008).

11.3.4 Textbooks

In the current study, the primary sources of teaching materials are the textbooks on both courses. Textbooks are classified as a contextual factor in this study as the teachers do not have the appropriate control of textbooks – they do not design the textbooks and they cannot choose which textbook to use. The power to choose lies with the English Department in the university where the current study was carried out.

As discussed in Chapter 4 (Literature Review), there are two key characteristics of teaching materials in an LC curriculum: they are communication-oriented and authentic. The textbooks adopted in these two courses (*New Horizon College English* and *Interchange*) both fall into the category of being communication-oriented according to their compilers or editors. Furthermore, both teachers believe the genuineness of the language and cultural information in the textbooks. However, both teachers also comment on the potential problems concerning the authentic materials in the textbook used on the CE course, that some students may experience difficulties in learning because of the large amount of reading and vocabulary involved. As a result, the teachers may have to use lecturing more in explaining the reading materials and the new vocabulary, in order to complete the teaching plan set by the Department on time. Furthermore, in some cases, it is very hard for the students with lower English proficiency on entrance to higher education to learn those authentic materials. Consequently, students may become less interested or motivated. It looks as if the use of authentic teaching and learning materials may present an obstacle to an LC approach,

although it is supposed to be one characteristic of an LC curriculum. However, a deeper analysis reveals that it is the fact that the CE course is not LC enough that causes problems like these. If the course planners sufficiently take into account learners' different needs and provided more flexibility to the teachers, the above mentioned problems will not occur.

Textbooks, as a contextual factor, influence teaching practices because they are the main foundation for teachers to organize classroom activities. In the textbook used on the CE Integrated English course, reading materials and long lists of vocabulary and phrases are given priority, and thus TP and IW are frequently used. In the ITE textbook, on the other hand, lessons are organized around communicative topics and thus more communicative or LC activities are used on the ITE course.

11.3.5 Washback effects of summative testing

Testing has a strong impact on many aspects of teaching. As noted in Chapter 4, people complain that teachers will teach to the test, rather than teach to develop abilities and skills; for example, they may spend too much time on preparing students for the questions that are likely to appear in the exam. This will be a negative consequence on teaching content because the curriculum is narrowed. Others also discuss the influence of testing from the aspects of teaching methodology and teaching materials. Teachers may be tempted to overvalue the type of skills that lead to successful examination performance (Wall, 2000), and as a consequence other types of learning activities which do not always contribute directly to higher scores in the exam may be sacrificed (Alderson & Wall, 1993). Criticism of the negative influence of testing on teaching content is that too many real exam papers or coaching materials may be employed in the teaching process at the expense of other teaching materials that help to develop language skills (Cheng, 1997; Bailey 1999).

However, the findings from the current study are not exactly the same. What is inconsistent with the literature is that there is very little washback effect of testing on teaching/learning materials in both courses, because textbooks are the main teaching materials used by both teachers in order to achieve the teaching targets set in the teaching plan, and the use of test papers or test coaching materials in class is limited. As to the choice of textbooks, although TA does think that assessment might have an impact, testing is not the only reason. The content of the textbooks and the match with the teaching syllabus might have a stronger influence here than testing.

What is consistent with the literature is that both teachers acknowledge the impact of assessment on their use of teaching and learning activities. They do not give enough attention to speaking skills in the CE course; while they use more LC speaking activities in the ITE course as speaking is an obligatory subject in IELTS. TA will even use the same types of speaking tasks as those of IELTS in an effort to develop her students' speaking skills. The washback effect of testing on teaching methods and contents is corroborated here. Furthermore, special test preparation courses are offered to the students, in which test papers and coaching materials are the only materials used.

As to the nature of the washback effect, it is negative in that time is spent on test preparation and not on developing language proficiency as the teachers are supposed to do, but it is positive in that a certain skill, which would otherwise be neglected, can receive proper training. Test preparation is not always negative because it can facilitate the development of language proficiency. CET and IELTS exams are categorized as a contextual factor on teaching because they are external summative English tests. They can both directly influence what and how teachers teach, and also indirectly influence students' expectations prior to any effect they may have on teaching attitudes and practices.

11.3.6 Availability of technological facilities

Multimedia technology can assist language learning – it can make language learning easier, faster, more interesting and engaging. It is especially beneficial to cross-cultural understanding and communication. As discussed in Chapter 4, according to Nunan (1985) one feature of authentic materials is that they are not produced with an educational intention and are usually in the form of video clips, recording of authentic interactions, extracts from television, radio and newspapers, etc, most of which necessitate the use of multimedia technology. Thus advanced technological facilities may help the implementation of an LC model.

The university where the current study was carried out has invested a lot in improving the technological facilities used in language teaching and learning; for example a new language laboratory building has been put into service, containing one multimedia lab centre with over a thousand seats, one computer room for staff, one foreign language radio station and one library. Both teacher interviewees acknowledge the positive effect of this. The students enjoy watching English films or TV programmes and have more access to the target language

through the Internet. However, it is also clear from the previous analysis that the availability of more advanced teaching facilities does not necessarily guarantee the frequent use of them or the use of more varied teaching materials. Due to the limited classroom time and the teachers' own workload, it is not possible for them to design their own computer-assisted or multimedia teaching materials for frequent use during class time.

As discussed in the review of the relevant literature, interactivity among students or between teacher and students is essential to successful language teaching and learning. Surprisingly, however, the layout of the multimedia classrooms used for the CE course may fail to embody the essence of an LC approach. With the isolated cubicles and big computer screens in the computer rooms, the teachers and students may feel more distance than connection, which may cause problems to the implementation of an LC approach.

The technological facilities available can influence the implementation of an LC approach in both ways – positively and negatively. What is important is to maximize the positive potential of this contextual factor in facilitating English teaching and learning.

11.3.7 Size of class

Class size may decide the teaching approaches or methods adopted. The advantages of teaching in a small class may include more interaction between teachers and students and among students themselves, more opportunities to conduct innovative and LC activities, and more personal relevance of the teaching to individual students. On the other hand, problems caused by large classes fall into five categories: discomfort (experienced by both teachers and students), difficulty in control, less individual attention received by students, more difficulties with evaluation and less effective learning (Hayes, 1997). Findings in this study have also shown that the large class size is an unfavourable condition in implementing an LC approach and developing learners' speaking skills.

However, due to the continuously increasing enrolment of students in Chinese universities and colleges, the relatively large class size and shortage of teachers have become an unavoidable issue, which is common in China and unlikely to be solved in the foreseeable future. It is happening to all courses and programmes, not just English courses. However, according to the statistics released by the National Committee of Guidance in English teaching, the ratio of English teachers to students is 1:130 (cited in Ruan & Jacobs, 2009).

Although this does not mean one teacher has to teach 130 students at the same time, it will definitely increase the average size of classes and the teachers' workload. What needs to be noted is that class size should be treated as one of the many contextual factors contributing to the success of teaching, but not as a determining factor. Bearing this point in mind, teachers should hold on to the LC principle, and at the same time try to overcome this disadvantage and make sure effective teaching can take place in such a situation.

11.3.8 The university/faculty context

The policies and management of a university or faculty are influential on teachers' perspectives and practices in teaching. This can be manifested in many aspects such as the requirements and expectations from the university/faculty, the bureaucracy within it, the allocation of workload, and the tensions between the multiple roles teachers have to take (such as being a researcher as well as a teacher) (Leslie, 2002). What is obvious from the current study is the allocation of a heavy workload, which can be seen from the tight teaching plan and the limitations of time; both of these may limit the teachers' choices of teaching and learning activities. They believe that it will definitely take more time to carry out a G/P activity than TP, because when they are giving presentations they are talking about something they already know or have prepared, and can speak without hesitation. What the students need to do is to listen and to take notes. In this way, the teachers are able to have more control over the classroom time in order to complete the teaching targets. However, in G/P work, the students require time to react and prepare. It will also take some time for them to prepare and present the results. Finally the teachers or fellow students may need to comment on their performance. Thus, in total it would take a lot more time, resulting in an uncompleted teaching plan. However, the teaching plan must be completed as the teachers and students will be evaluated at the end of each term according to the teaching plan. Sometimes there is a conflict between effective teaching/learning and a demanding and tight teaching plan.

11.3.9 Commentary

Several other influential factors are identified in this study, such as training or the teaching syllabus. In-service training is not perceived as so important by teachers, which suggests the need to improve its quality or to help teachers formulate a more positive attitude to it. Surprisingly, when compared with the above mentioned factors, the teaching syllabus is considered the least influential factor underlying teaching. It seems that teachers are more easily influenced by practical factors such as their personal experience or the students'

expectation than by theoretical or policy issues such as training or the syllabus. Of course, there are other factors which are not discussed in this research but are referred to in the literature, such as global or national factors and colleagues. One limitation of the current research is that the teacher interviews were conducted only as follow-ups to the observation of the two teacher subjects. More in-depth interviews with a larger number of teachers might have yielded more significant findings.

Nevertheless, those factors identified in the current study as well as in the literature can be grouped into three categories: 1) the broader context, such as global, national, social or cultural factors; 2) the immediate context, such as students, facilities, school or university; 3) personal factors, such as previous teaching and learning experience. Factors in the same category can interact with and influence each other; for example, global issues may affect national policies. Factors at different levels are also interrelated; for instance, national policies will have an impact on university regulations and requirements. A certain factor at a higher level may directly influence factors at lower levels, or the impact can be mediated through another level; for example, global or national issues can affect a teacher's personal experience or attributes, but it can also work at the contextual level (e.g. university) first before it takes effect at a personal level. It is necessary to be aware of the fact that due to the complexity of the natures of these influences, it is sometimes not possible for them to be classified precisely at a certain level. Thus, these three levels of factors can overlap and interact in their impact on teaching.

To sum up, the influences on teachers have been discussed from two angles: perspectives on teaching and their practices in teaching. Perspectives on teaching refer to teachers' beliefs, values, thoughts, and conventions as well as many other points, some of which will affect teachers' teaching practices. However, at the same time, some teachers will reflect on their teaching practices to change or adapt their perspectives on teaching. The relationship between the three levels of influence and between the teachers' perspectives of and practices in teaching can be represented in the following diagram.

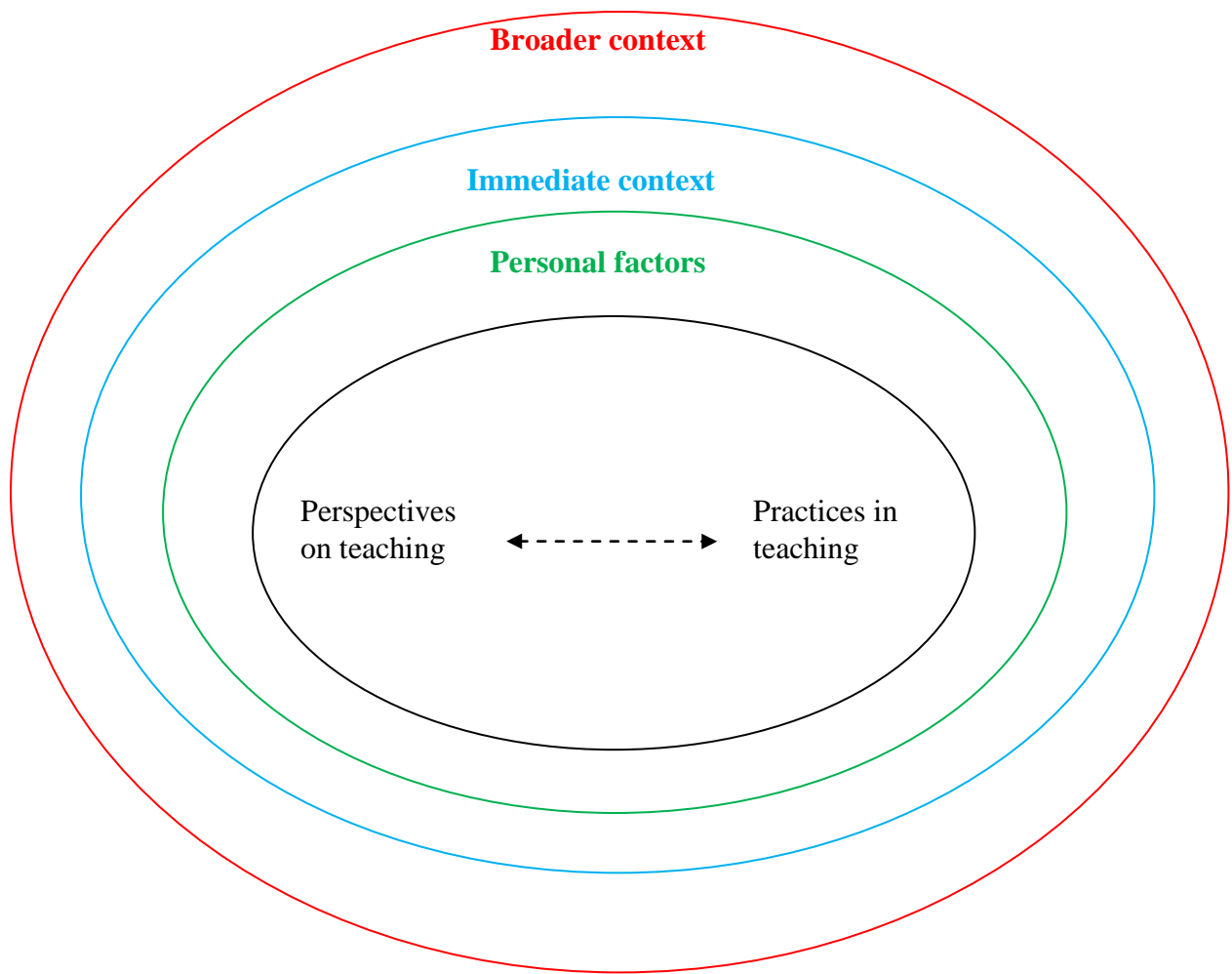


Diagram 11-1 Model of influences on the teachers' responses

11.4 Influences on the students' response

Section 3 of this chapter has discussed various influences on the teachers' responses to the changes in the CE teaching requirements and CET reform. This section does the same thing for the students' responses, focusing on three dimensions - situational, psychological/affective, and personal attributes/cultural traits.

11.4.1 Situational factors

Situational factors are similar to the contextual issues in the above discussion about the teachers. They include teachers, peers, classroom atmosphere, class size, curriculum, facilities available and many more factors. They can influence learning directly or indirectly through psychological/affective factors. Furthermore, these factors at the same situational level interact with each other as well. For instance, peer students have an impact on classroom atmosphere and how teachers teach affects the influence of peer students.

Teachers constitute a situational factor to students, and they have a profound impact on students. Many aspects of teaching can influence learning: the content of teaching (such as the topic teachers choose), the way of teaching (e.g. teaching methods and class activities), the medium of teaching, the assessment, the interaction between teachers and students, the feedback and support provided by teachers. Examples in Chapter 10 include students talking about how a specific teacher could motivate them in learning.

Stacy: I like this type of teacher and always take my own initiative to learn. Teachers will like good students, so I feel I need to show my best to those teachers I like.

Evidence can also be found in Chapter 9 from the observational data: when one teacher chooses computers as the topic, which is familiar and has personal relevance to the students, it turns out that the interest of the students is aroused and they all participate actively in the speaking activity.

The influence of peers comprises such things as their English proficiency, their cooperation and support, and their motivation in learning. Like the impact of the teachers, this type of influence can happen within and outside the classroom. For example, classmates' English proficiency can affect a learner positively and negatively. Wade (a student interviewee) works very hard after he realizes that his English proficiency (especially speaking) is very poor when compared with a female student who got the first place in the whole class in an English exam. The competition and comparison among fellow students can be a strong motivator to learn. However, sometimes the influence of peers' English proficiency can work in the opposite direction. To take Wade again as an example, he complains about the low English proficiency of his partners in the speaking activities, which may cause him to fail the learning task. The negative impact can work in two ways: one damages his own enthusiasm (a psychological/affective factor) so as to put him off working; the other affects the learning outcome (the development of speaking skills) directly because his partner's low English proficiency makes it impossible for them to complete the task.

Classroom atmosphere is the climate or feeling within the classroom, which will facilitate or inhibit teaching and learning. It can be influenced by several elements such as teacher-student relationships and interaction, student-student relationships and interaction, laughter, classroom layout and arrangement. The function of laughter in creating a comfortable learning

atmosphere has been discussed, and will not be repeated here. The relationship between teachers and students will also affect the classroom atmosphere. As noted in Chapter 9, when the teachers appreciate students' efforts and encourage them even if they have made some mistakes, the students will feel at ease in learning and the classroom atmosphere is friendly and relaxed, which in turn will facilitate their learning.

The facilities and resources are important as well. Access to English films and music has managed to arouse many learners' interest in English. Modern technological facilities and multimedia resources also provide more target language input to learners and are especially useful in improving learners' receptive skills (such as listening). Both the content and the ways of learning are enriched, and learning becomes more varied and less boring. However, care has to be taken in the use of technology because not every use can achieve an equally satisfactory result. As noted in Chapter 10, the students in this university do not favour the idea of computer- or network-based learning as much as the designers of the New CE Teaching Requirements expect. The students are concerned about the risk of decreased interaction between the teachers and themselves (which may lead to a delay in the development of speaking skills), and the effectiveness and efficiency of such a model.

The students' major is another situational factor in their response to the three main issues in the CE reform, especially their attitudes to speaking skills. As discovered from the student interviews, students in finance, business and other social science subjects may value speaking skills more than students majoring in engineering or science. As a result they are more willing to speak or communicate in English inside and outside the classrooms. For some students in engineering and science, good levels of reading skills are of more personal importance than speaking skills. Class size is another problem in the implementation of the New CE Teaching Requirements, and, as already noted, this is recognized as a crucial issue by the teachers as well. From the learners' point of view, large classes will cause discomfort, harm their motivation in learning when they fail to obtain enough attention from the teacher, and affect the learning outcome as students' various individual needs cannot be satisfied. An inflexible and tight English curriculum and other heavy study loads, together with extracurricular activities, may directly or indirectly influence the students' responses to the CE reforms.

11.4.2 Psychological/affective factors in EFL learning

Many psychological or affective factors such as motivation, anxiety, attitude and self-confidence can affect English learning. They can exert an immediate and direct impact on learning or can be influenced by the above mentioned situational factors so as to produce a subsequent impact on learning. At the same time, they may in turn affect situational factors.

11.4.2.1 Motivation in EFL learning

According to educational psychology, motivation is classified into two types: intrinsic and extrinsic. Learners who are motivated from within are curious about and interested in the learning subject because both the learning process and the outcome can bring them enjoyment, satisfaction and even a positive challenge. On the other hand, those who are motivated by external incentives only care about the result of the learning – a potential reward in the form of certificates, grades, praise, etc. Gardner and Lambert (1972) distinguish motivation in a similar way, referring to these two types as integrative and instrumental.

The findings in this study show that most of the students in the university have external or instrumental motivations in learning English because they have to take many issues into consideration when studying in higher education, such as scores in exams, rank, scholarship, personal image in the eyes of others and, more significantly, degree, graduation and their career prospects. Although some students can develop a genuine interest in English in the process of test preparation, most students will neglect speaking skills if passing tests is the only motivation in learning because speaking is not assessed in CET. However, other external or instrumental motivation may have a positive impact on the development of speaking skills such as when the future career requires a high level of spoken English.

This dichotomous categorization of intrinsic and extrinsic motivation does not always suit the Chinese context as Chinese learners tend to treat them as a single entity (Salili, Chiu & Lai, 2001). As discussed previously, it is commonly assumed in China that a good future is closely linked with academic success. Thus the prospect of a good future is internalized as an essential goal of education, which seems to be an instance of intrinsic motivation. Several student interviewees in this study have expressed the idea that they want to improve their speaking skills for the sake of their future career.

11.4.2.2 Anxiety in EFL learning

Like motivation, anxiety can affect learning both inside and outside the classroom. The more anxious students are, the less willing they are to speak English or to participate actively in learning activities, which may in turn affect the class atmosphere and impede the improvement of language proficiency. According to Horwitz (2001), speaking is the most anxiety-provoking skill when compared with other skills. Thus anxiety in learning will hinder the implementation of several aspects of the New CE Teaching Requirement, especially developing speaking skills and an LC model. One common reason for being anxious is the fear of making mistakes; as a result, students may choose to remain silent if possible. However, this is only one of the many triggers to anxiety, most of which are under the influence of other psychological factors, situational factors or personal attributes. The findings in this study are consistent with the previous studies in the literature. Situational factors may consist of language teachers' beliefs in the role they are taking (Young, 1991), pedagogical practices (Young, 1999), and peer competition (Bailey, 1983); other psychological or affective factors may refer to self-perceptions of English proficiency (MacIntyre, 1994) and personal beliefs about language learning (Horwitz, 1999); personal attributes/cultural traits may include personality or other personal qualities that are bounded by a specific culture.

11.4.2.3 Self-confidence in EFL learning

According to Yashima (2002), communicative confidence in a second language is characterized as a low level of anxiety and high level of self-perceived communicative competence. It is closely related to anxiety and crucial in helping learners to overcome the mistakes and setbacks in the learning process. Brown (1977:352) suggests that 'the person with high self-esteem is able to reach out beyond himself more freely, to be less inhibited, and because of his ego strength, to make the necessary mistakes involved in language learning with less threat to his ego'. Cathy, a student interviewee mentioned in Chapter 10, was not confident enough to take an optional English course about speaking and listening skills in the context of English news. Although originally she showed some interest in it and enrolled on it, she had to withdraw later simply because she was told by others that it was difficult to pass. The finding from this study also shows that learners with low self-confidence in learning EFL seldom volunteer to answer questions in class and are unlikely to speak English after class as well. To some extent, learners' self-confidence can determine the class atmosphere (a situational factor) and the learning outcome.

11.4.2.4 Attitudes towards EFL learning

Just as self-confidence is closely related to anxiety, so attitudes are strongly correlated with motivation. A strong and appropriate motivation always leads to positive attitudes to learning, and a positive attitude towards the target language and its culture may contribute to a genuine interest in learning. Students with a positive attitude towards EFL learning are willing to take their own initiative and personal responsibility in learning, which means that they are more autonomous in learning; they are willing to communicate in the target language and actively engage in learning activities, which helps to create a learning-friendly class atmosphere; they also seek every opportunity after class to practise the target language; they have a positive influence on fellow classmates both inside and outside the classroom. When teachers realize students' interest in learning, they will be more motivated to teach well (e.g. they will be more creative and flexible with the use of teaching materials or strategies). Conversely, teachers can also affect students' attitudes towards learning. If a student does not like the teacher, it is very unlikely he/she will like the subject either. However, when the teacher is supportive and encouraging (as in the example in Chapter 9) or the teacher has a charming personality (as in the example in Chapter 10), students will feel eager and positive to learn.

11.4.3 Personal attributes/cultural traits

It is hard to distinguish psychological/affective factors from personal attributes/cultural traits, because there is some overlap between the two. However, in this thesis the distinction is made in that psychological/affective factors refer to those special qualities an individual exhibits in EFL learning, while personal attributes/cultural traits are those general features that are relevant to one's personality or culturally-bound qualities. There are three factors identified here: introversion/extroversion, face and modesty. These attributes or traits can affect EFL learning indirectly through the mediation of psychological/affective or situational factors.

Personality is one of the individual differences which may influence EFL learning.

Introversion/extroversion is only one dimension within personality. According to Kiany (1998:115-116): 'SLA (second language acquisition) literature suggests that the more extrovert language learners would increase the amount of input (Krashen, 1985), prefer communicative approaches (Cook, 1991), are more likely to join the group activities (McDonough, 1986). Therefore, they increase their interaction in the language which maximizes the language output (Swain, 1985), hence yield a better product i.e. language proficiency.' This gives an exact description of Helen, an extrovert female student in this

study: she often volunteers to answer questions in class; she enjoys the communicative activities organized by the teacher; she is willing to contribute to paired/group work; she also actively participates in many extracurricular activities which involve English use. As a result, her speaking skills have improved a lot. On the other hand, EFL learners who are shy and introverted are likely to become anxious and less willing to engage in learning activities, which may hinder the development of language skills.

Face and modesty are two personal attributes typical of Chinese culture. Face can be interpreted as honour or a good image/reputation. It is an important concept in Chinese culture and can be manifested in many aspects of life, including learning. This study has shown that some students worry that their poor pronunciation or grammatical mistakes or misuse of vocabulary will make them lose face in front of the teacher and fellow classmates, so they choose to remain silent. Sometimes when they are uncertain about some language points, they will not ask their teachers or peers in class because they worry that their questions may sound silly or shallow. They would rather wait to ask the teacher after class or turn to other tutorial books in order to preserve their face. Modesty is another culturally-bound traditional Chinese virtue, mainly under the influence of Confucius. It is closely related to Collectivism, a cultural dimension previously discussed in this chapter. Some Chinese learners do not want to stand out. They tend to keep a low profile by not challenging others or showing off. If one student always volunteers to answer questions in class, he might be labeled as ‘showing off’ or self-promoting. It will be even worse if he gives a wrong answer because others may consider him as knowing nothing but being eager to show off.

11.4.4 Commentary

The influences on students’ responses to the CE reform have been explored under three headings – situational factors, psychological/affective factors and personal attributes/cultural traits. It has been shown that the components within each dimension can interact with each other as well as impact on components within a different dimension. For example, an EFL learner who is self-confident is usually less anxious in learning; and one with a strong motivation usually holds a positive attitude towards learning. This is an example when components within the same dimension interact with each other. One example of the influences that can happen between dimensions is that when a teacher chooses an obscure topic in learning, students will feel anxious, which leads to a negative class atmosphere. This example suggests that situational factors (e.g. teachers) can affect learners’

psychological/affective factors (anxiety), which in turn influence situational factors again (e.g. class atmosphere). It is also concluded in this study that in most cases psychological/affective factors will exert a direct impact on EFL learning which of course includes how students respond to the CE reforms. Situational factors will affect EFL learning directly or indirectly through psychological/affective factors, while the influence of personal attributes/cultural traits on EFL learning is always mediated through situational or psychological/affective factors. The relationship among them can be illustrated by the following diagram.

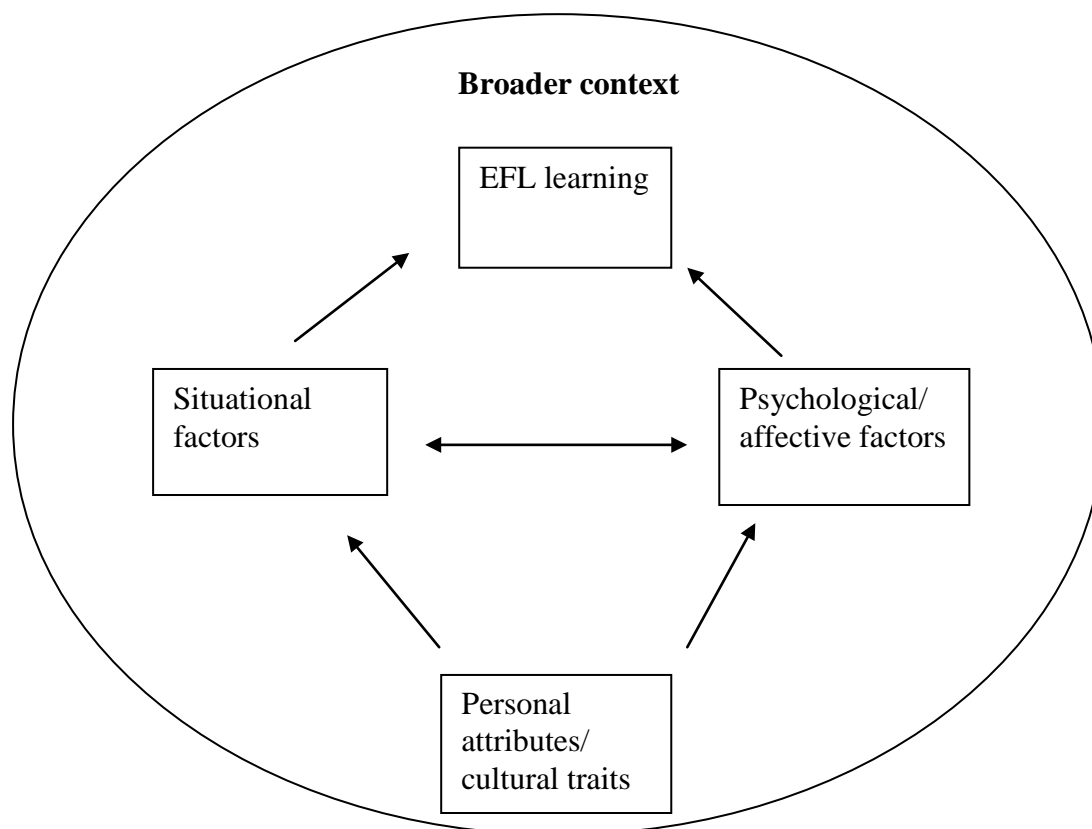


Diagram 11-2 Model of influences on the students' responses

11.5 Summary

This chapter has used the data from the research to identify the key factors in the response of the teachers and students to the New CE Teaching Requirements. These factors include the broader social and cultural context of education in China, as well as the immediate context of the specific institution and personal factors including personal experience and attributes and psychological/affective factors such as motivation, anxiety and self-confidence. The next chapter returns to the research questions to consider how far they have been answered in the course of the thesis, and concludes with a number of recommendations for policy makers, for teachers, for students and for future research.

Chapter 12 Conclusion and Study Implications

This chapter falls into three sections. The first summarizes the findings from the whole research project in terms of the answers it provides to the initial research questions and the original contributions to knowledge that it offers. The second draws out the implications of the research for policy makers, teachers and students, and includes a number of recommendations for each group. The chapter concludes with a brief statement about the limitations of the research and suggestions for further related research.

12.1 Summary of the research findings

The first section of this chapter is to summarize the findings from the whole research project to see how far the research questions have been answered.

12.1.1 Research topic one: development of speaking skills

China's integration into the global economic system and increasingly active participation in the global market have created the impetus for its education reforms (Liu, 2008), and a need for a better CC in foreign languages. Speaking takes a central role in the theory of EFL teaching and learning, especially in the development of CC. Thus it is set as a key objective in the New CE Teaching Requirements. Findings from this research suggest that there is a widespread support from both teachers and students for the policy: both parties have recognized its importance and usefulness.

However, actual practice in the classroom is a different story. Findings from multiple sources of data show that speaking is still somewhat neglected in the CE course, especially when compared with the ITE course. In the CE course, the teachers tend to lecture more, and vocabulary and reading skills are emphasized; the students do not produce adequate comprehensible language output which will assist them in building up the language system, while the students on the ITE course are in a more advantageous situation in this sense because the classroom arrangement in the ITE course is more agreeable to the development of speaking skills. The teachers on the ITE course give their students a lot of opportunities to produce language output in an oral form: they not only give explicit training in speaking skills, but also combine the training in speaking skills with the teaching of other language points and training of other skills. For example, they will combine the teaching of vocabulary and

grammar with spoken English practice, and they emphasize the development of integrated skills (such as listening with speaking). They also provide as many communicative opportunities as possible - paired/group discussion, teacher & student interaction, speech and games/puzzles/role plays. As a result, speaking skills and communication are more focused on in the ITE course. The majority of the learners on the ITE course agree that they have benefited a lot from the course in terms of their speaking abilities; on the contrary, learners' feedback on the CE course is not so positive. Various obstacles in the effort of developing speaking skills have been identified. They were discussed and classified into different categories in Chapter 11, such as, for teachers, the immediate contextual factors (e.g. class size) and for students, factors of personal attributes and cultural traits (e.g. personality).

12.1.2 Research topic two: adoption of LC teaching model

According to the review of the literature on learner-centredness, the investigation of the above questions starts from the following three perspectives: the teacher's role, autonomy in learning and an LC approach to teaching content and classroom teaching methods.

First, with regard to the teacher's role, in an ideal LC classroom, teachers should be facilitators or supporters, but not knowledge transferers or suppliers. However, my research shows that lecturing is still frequently used by both teachers on both courses, especially on the CE course. Both teachers spend quite a large amount of class time on supplying knowledge. Furthermore, the classrooms are still under the strict control of both teachers on both courses, with the teachers determining what and how students learn, while the students have no say in this matter. These findings seem to highlight the traditional role of teachers and be contradictory to the underlying principles of an LC approach according to which learners should assume full responsibility for their own learning. Although the teachers are still in strict control of the class, they do not ignore student's needs, interests and reactions, which is different from the traditional way of teaching.

Second, according to the literature, LC teaching and learning is not just about optimizing opportunities for students to learn, it also requires learners to be autonomous. As summarized by Gieve & Clark (2005) autonomous learning involves learners in exercising many responsibilities in their own learning such as setting objectives, selecting materials, making plans about how and when to achieve these objectives, monitoring their own progress and evaluating achievements, time management, coping with negative affective factors and

managing self-discipline. The teachers and students in this study all acknowledge that autonomy in learning is quite low for those students. The teachers control the class time and give assignments for the students to do after class. Most students have never thought about exercising their rights in making decisions regarding what and how to learn in class, and only a few of them take their own initiative in after-class learning. One main reason is their low level of self-discipline or self-management. They have become accustomed to everything being determined by their teachers or parents, and they have never learnt or seldom tried to be autonomous. The students are not so willing or ready to take full control of their own learning. They trust their teachers as an authority and an expert in guiding their learning.

Third, teaching content has been explored from three aspects: the source of teaching materials, the type of teaching materials and the skills emphasized in class. The primary source of teaching materials used in both courses by both teachers is the textbooks, although supplementary and test coaching materials are also used sometimes. The teaching materials are communicative and authentic, which confirms some learner-centredness about these two courses; however, greater use of supplementary materials will be more helpful in facilitating an LC approach. The teachers cannot share the power of choosing teaching and learning materials with the students as they themselves do not have personal control of the materials. Factors that might influence the use of teaching materials involve the teaching syllabus, testing, the teaching plan, time limitation, learning motivation and funding. Both courses are equipped with high technology teaching and learning facilities, but the use of them is not regular. The layout of a multimedia classroom does not necessarily help in implementing an LC approach. As to the skills emphasized in these courses, reading and listening are the priorities in the CE Integrated English lessons, followed by speaking and writing. On the other hand, the four skills are more balanced in the ITE Integrated English course. Testing, course planning, the textbooks used, teaching methods and the teachers' personal beliefs all play a part in the degree to which the skills are emphasized in class.

The teaching methods have also been investigated from three angles: classroom activities and organization patterns, time allocation and target language input/output. The two teachers involved in the research share many similarities in the way they organize classroom activities when teaching on the same course, but their approach to the CE course is significantly different to the ITE course. The CE course is more teacher-dominated as TP occupies a large portion of class time. Both courses are teacher-controlled, and the students have little

autonomy in the ways lessons are constructed in class. However, the ITE course is more interactive and communicative than the CE course as there are more opportunities for the students to interact and communicate with the teachers and other classmates. There is more group or paired work and speaking skills are able to be developed, and thus the ITE course is more LC as the students are more active and engaged in the teaching and learning process. Factors that may have some impact on the choice of classroom activities include: the teaching plan, the limitations of time, the size of the class, testing, the teaching materials and students' self-discipline.

The term learner-centredness is borrowed from western educational theories and used in the Chinese context. However, findings from the current research seem to suggest that it is very difficult or even impossible to adopt an LC approach in a strict sense in the current Chinese higher education due to those obstacles identified in this study though the ITE course is more successful in this regard than the CE course. First of all, the deeply-rooted cultural or social values and beliefs regarding teaching and learning make it hard for both parties (teachers and students) to accept and adjust to the change of roles or redistribution of power. Secondly, the lack of earlier training in managing their own learning makes it very difficult for college/university students to take on the task now. Some of them are not psychologically ready for this and most of them are not competent to undertake it effectively and efficiently. Thirdly, some unfavourable situational or contextual factors cannot be solved in the foreseeable future, which makes it unlikely for the implementation of the LC approach to succeed. For instance, the relatively large class size is not amenable to the LC approach.

Although this approach has been gradually accepted by many teachers of EFL in China, teachers are still short of scientific and theoretical guidance. Similarly students like the idea of learner-centredness, but their understanding of this concept is not quite the same as that discussed in the Literature Review chapter (e.g. Breen, 1987). According to the literature on learner-centredness, it involves learners taking an active role in making decisions regarding what and how to learn, and even the way learning outcome is assessed. However, these Chinese teachers and students' understanding is closer to learning-centredness than to learner-centredness. A learning-centred model means that learning should be the centre of the teaching and learning process; the needs of students are to be considered; the lessons can be controlled by teachers but not dominated by them; students may not necessarily be required to take full responsibility for learning for various reasons such as being not psychologically

ready and practically competent to do so. However, it is crucial that the skills that are essential for learners to make such decisions should be developed so that they can learn to take more responsibility for their learning and so that teachers and students can work from learning-centredness towards learner-centredness.

12.1.3 Research topic three: washback effects of CET and IELTS

The need for more empirical studies on washback effects in the Chinese context where non-empirical research prevails has already been mentioned. Cheng (2008:15) notes that, ‘due to the research tradition in China with its focus on knowledge dissemination, a fair number of the published articles on language testing in Chinese academic journals are review articles or state-of-the-art articles synthesized by known researchers in the field of language testing in China.’ According to a survey of the articles published in 8 major Chinese linguistic journals from 1996-2005 concerning English testing in China, non-empirical research played a dominant role (80.1%), which left empirical studies in a minor position (19.9%) (Jiang, 2007). The present research has attempted to play a part in meeting this need.

As discussed in the literature review, the negative influence of CET has been frequently mentioned, such as its low level of validity in assessing CC (Liu and Dai, 2003) and its interference with normal teaching and learning (Han et al, 2004). Some people even argue that it should be terminated. However, the findings in the present research, based on empirical data, are quite different: most teachers and students think that CET can, to a large extent, accurately assess learners’ English proficiency; students’ performance on CET is not related to teachers’ bonuses or promotion; the majority of students hold a neutral and accepting attitude towards CET; CET is not the only or the most important driving force behind EFL teaching and learning; the phenomenon of ‘teaching to the test’ no longer exists in this case; and its positive impacts are greater than the negative ones.

As discussed in Chapter 5, this third research question was further divided into several sub-questions covering the three elements of Hughes’ washback model: participants, process and products. My findings indicate that both tests exert influence on various aspects of teaching such as goals, content, methods, motivation, attitudes, quality, depth and range. Among them, teaching content receives the strongest impact from these two tests, while teaching methods and depth/range are also under a relatively strong influence. As to the intensity or degree of the washback effects on teachers, it is not so strong compared to some claims in the literature.

IELTS has a greater impact on the teachers on the ITE course than CET has on the teachers on the CE course. Testing is only one of the many factors that may affect teaching, and it is definitely not the most important one. With regard to the nature of the influence on the teachers, they all acknowledge some benefit these two tests have and most of them agree that the benefit these two tests have brought outweighs the detriment. However, generally speaking, the positive response of the ITE teachers towards IELTS is stronger than that of the CE teachers towards CET.

In the students' opinions, English assessment in general has a relatively strong influence on both teaching and learning, and the influence on their learning covers a wide range of aspects, among which learning content, attitudes and motivation are the top three aspects that receive the greatest impact. In line with some studies reviewed in Chapter 4, what students learn (their learning content and focus) is more prone to be influenced by testing than how they learn (their learning methods and strategies). Similar to the responses from the teachers, the students also state that testing is not the only driving force behind their EFL learning during tertiary education. Among the three tests (CET paper test, CET-SET and IELTS), IELTS has the strongest washback effects on its test takers, while the influence of CET-SET is the weakest. Furthermore, both CET and IELTS are considered to have more positive than negative effects.

There is also evidence showing some positive washback effects on learning outcome, which are manifested in the enlarged vocabulary and improved listening skills. However, at the same time, the students have also realized the negative influence, especially concerns about test-taking techniques in IELTS preparation.

12.1.4 Relationship between the three research topics

It is clear from the findings that the three research topics are closely interrelated. An LC course is more likely to be successful in developing learners' speaking skills. In an LC class, teachers try to involve every student in the teaching-learning process and expect their students to be active learners, not passive listeners or note-takers. Having the opportunities to communicate with teachers and fellow students, students could learn from their teacher, the textbook and each other – interactive and peer learning. Creativity and self-expression are encouraged. Teachers will also relate the learning activities to the students' own experience, and thus lessons become more interesting and motivating. A variety of language features will

be covered, such as pronunciation of sounds, stress and intonation, grammar, and sentence pattern. More importantly, features such as the notions and functions of language, sociolinguistic and cultural knowledge, and meaningful language use are valued, which will help to create a communicative and cross-cultural classroom.

Furthermore, in an LC classroom, students can receive a lot of praise or other forms of recognition for any effort or success in learning, which will not only help to increase their learning motivation and formulate a relaxing and comfortable learning environment, but also strengthen their self-confidence. It is human nature to enjoy the things one is good at, which means that learners will enjoy the learning process and become more self-confident if they have experienced some success. Self-confidence, in turn, gives them the persistence and determination to achieve a better learning outcome (Petty, 2004).

In short, an LC class is more interactive and communication-oriented so that learners have more opportunities to improve their spoken English; an LC class can create a more humanistic learning environment which will help to reduce the affective obstacles so that learners are more willing to speak; an LC class focuses more on social, interpersonal or cultural dimensions of the language in communication so that the output of learners' spoken English is not only formally acceptable but also feasible and appropriate.

There is also some correlation between learner-centredness and the washback effects of testing. As discussed above, learner autonomy is a crucial element of an LC approach. A low level of autonomy in learning is detrimental to the implementation of the LC approach. Although learners have realized the importance of it, they are not ready or able to put it in practice. In this research, the only form of study that shows a certain degree of being autonomous is found in exam preparation. Students link the pressure from a certain exam with their autonomy in learning, and believe that exams will help them to overcome their poor self-discipline and become more autonomous. In this way, the LC approach and the washback effects of testing are correlated in the Chinese EFL learning context, which is unique for the Chinese context and has rarely been mentioned in the literature. Furthermore, the washback effects of language testing can also affect the development of speaking skills. From the comparative study of the two courses and the two tests, it emerges that the lack of a compulsory speaking test in CET is one of two possible reasons why spoken English is

neglected in the CE course, and that the attention to spoken English in the ITE course is partly due to the assessment requirements.

In brief, an LC approach in EFL education can assist the development of speaking skills; an increase in speaking CC calls for a more LC model; testing can affect the cultivation of speaking abilities and the implementation of an LC approach. The relationship can be represented in the following diagram:

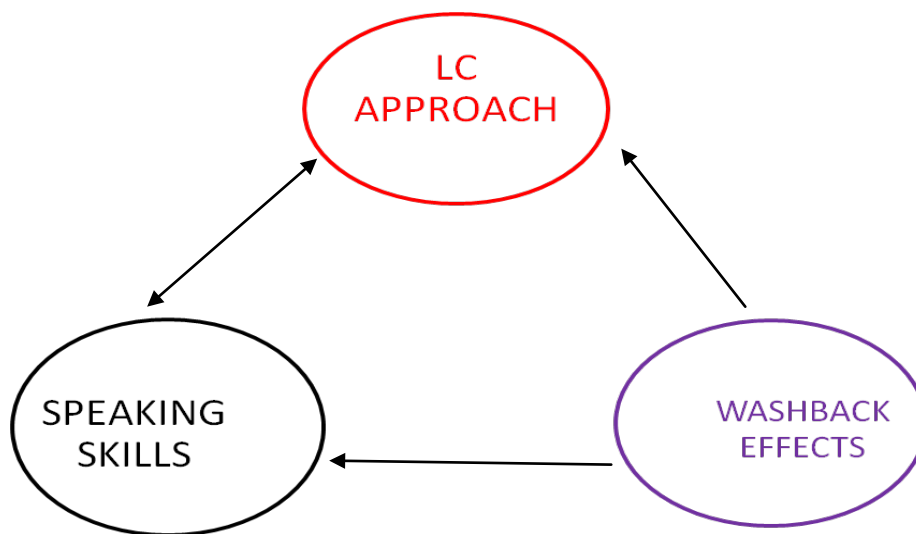


Diagram 12-1 Relationships between three research topics

12.2 Recommendations for policy makers, teachers and students

It is often argued that the findings from case studies cannot be generalised, and indeed it is in the very nature of the case study that it focuses on the detailed situation of one particular case which can perhaps never be replicated in its exact form elsewhere or on any future occasion. If this is true, then it may prove very difficult to draw recommendations for policy makers, teachers and students from the findings of this research. However, Silverman argues persuasively that ethnographic research and other kinds of case study are ‘not precluded from making generalisations’ and he particularly refers to ‘organisational studies’ as ones where generalisations may be both valid and valuable (2011:29). I believe that it may be valid to draw some generalisable knowledge and insights from the present case study and apply these to other similar settings (i.e. other higher educational institutions in China) in the form of recommendations. The description in Chapter 5 of the context where this research was

undertaken will facilitate comparison across institutions (ibid.:374) and increase an awareness of possibilities for change in other institutions (ibid.:375). It is the representativeness of situations, rather than the representativeness of demographics (sampling), that is the key issue when talking about generalisation in qualitative research. The situation in the specific university investigated in this research is likely to be representative to a large extent of the other 179 pilot centres because they adopt the same teaching requirements, many of them use the same textbooks and their students take the same test – CET. Even many universities which are not pilot centres also use the same textbooks, and students there take CET as well. In this situation it is likely that the findings of the present study will have a number of important implications for EFL teaching and learning in other universities, though individual readers may compare the nature of the English courses at this particular university with their own and make up their own minds about what knowledge or recommendations can be transferred.

12.2.1 Recommendations for policy makers

There should be more focused and regular staff development and training for teachers, which include not only training in technical skills (e.g. how to use multimedia teaching tools) or language skills (e.g. improving their own speaking skills) but also training in basic teaching/learning theories and curriculum reform or pedagogical innovations. Most English teachers in China have not received formal teacher training before taking up teaching. They have limited awareness of modern teaching methodologies, and tend to use traditional teaching methods (Shi, 2007). Since the research findings show that teachers tend to be influenced by their own academic background and personal beliefs or values in their current teaching practices, training provides an opportunity for teachers to reflect on their previous teaching/ learning experience and assumptions or beliefs. Professional development or training can take various forms, such as seminars, academic conferences, research activities, advanced studies or staff meetings. For example, teachers may be encouraged to share their opinions on factors which are likely to promote or impede the successful adoption of the LC approach and the implementation of the New Teaching Requirements in general at staff meetings.

The administration level should forge a stronger sense of partnership with teachers, especially on course planning. A tight teaching plan has been identified as a main barrier in adopting the LC approach, as sometimes teachers are not consulted fully in this process. However, the success of a curriculum innovation largely depends on the teaching staff because they are the

ones who directly undertake it and the people who can adopt, change or reject it (Carless, 2001). The administration level should actively seek teachers' opinions and value their feedback.

The size of the class is another issue in implementing the New Teaching Requirements.

According to Alderson and Hamp-Lyons (1996:23), 'clearly what an ESL/EFL teacher can achieve with 12 students is different from what he or she can achieve with 30'. The problem of large class size in Chinese tertiary education is closely related to the shortage of teaching staff when the number of students keeps increasing. As it is unreasonable to reduce the number of students who are eager to receive higher education, it is advisable to increase the number of EFL teaching staff as a measure to tackle the problem of large class sizes.

Universities have proved willing to invest in technological innovations, but due account needs to be given to the need to make those facilities more user friendly and the classroom layout more amenable to the LC approach. One important finding of the current study is that when compared with the CE course, the ITE course is more LC and more focused on spoken English. The washback effect of an obligatory assessment of speaking skills in IELTS is positive. The administration level should be aware of this and take measures to ensure that the CE course can learn from the ITE course. They should also make careful adjustment of assessment policies to reduce the negative and increase the positive impacts of testing, such as allocating at least 25% of the end-of-term English exam score to speaking.

University or Department authorities can provide better communication opportunities to students by organizing various activities in English (such as speech contests, drama shows, and debates), and by increasing the number of native speakers or strengthening international cooperation (such as through employing foreign teachers, inviting foreign visiting scholars, recruiting foreign students and holding international academic conferences). Another point that needs to be considered is the connection between higher education and secondary/primary education. Education is a progressive and continuous process, in which the different stages are closely related. For example, autonomy cannot suddenly become a prominent element in learning at tertiary education because students have not been equipped with the skills or abilities to be autonomous from their previous education. Thus educational policies at different stages of education should be connected.

12.2.2 Recommendations for teachers

Teachers may need to reflect on the roles that they take in teaching and learning. They may need to adapt their traditional or culturally-bounded beliefs in implementing curricular innovations. Exercising authority is seen by many Chinese teachers or even students as appropriate because it may reflect care for and nurture of students (Ho, 2001). Some teachers feel it is their moral responsibility to care for their students, so it is natural for them to be in complete charge of the classroom and to transmit knowledge, but this may not be helpful in developing speaking skills and in adopting a more LC model. They should be happy to share some of the decision-making power with students, and instead of imparting knowledge, they should provide scaffoldings or parameters while students are encouraged to actively fill in the gaps of their holistic knowledge system. In order to achieve this, teachers need to have more confidence in themselves and more trust in their students. Sharing decision-making power does not mean losing control of the class even though it may worry some teachers. On the contrary, it requires a higher degree of careful and detailed planning by teachers. More trust in students may help students to learn how to think critically, and to become less dependent on teachers.

Since this research has indicated that many psychological or affective factors play significant roles in the implementation of the New Teaching Requirements, it is necessary for teachers to create a more humanistic learning environment, which can be achieved through the following measures: caring for students' personal needs and responding sincerely to students' requests; setting up a friendly and appropriate learning context, where students feel relaxed, comfortable and less anxious; stimulating and helping students to sustain their interests in learning (He, 2003); assisting learners in realizing their own motivation to learn; leading students to cooperate with each other in the knowledge construction process (*ibid*); welcoming different ideas so that students are free to express their own opinions; participating in the activities as partners and closely monitoring activities to ensure the best results (Littlewood, 1981).

It is also important for teachers to help students develop a stronger sense of responsibility in learning. One effective method is by learning strategy training. Students may have learnt in middle schools how to gain high academic achievement rather than how to learn; as a result many of them do not know how to learn English efficiently and effectively despite many years of study (Nunan, 2002). Therefore, it is essential to teach them the strategies in learning

EFL, which can be integrated with normal language teaching. Strategy instruction can happen in the following sequence: first, assigning a task for students to complete; secondly, helping them to become aware of the strategies they are already using in undertaking the task through discussion; then presenting and explaining a strategy which the teacher thinks effective; fourthly, giving students the opportunity to practise it through another task while offering assistance and support; then encouraging the students to evaluate the effectiveness of the strategy; and finally explaining how this strategy can be transferred to other tasks and providing frequent practice of the strategy. Other ways to develop learner autonomy may include learning journals (in which students keep a personal account of their learning process in English so that they can reflect upon their own learning and after reading them teachers can discuss the problems as well as offer feedback), learning portfolios (which may include a student's study plan, the progress they have made, copies of the assignments, and the results of assessment, so that students learn how to identify personal learning goals and monitor their own progress), and cooperative learning (in which students are active and work closely with teachers or peers, and will even be given the chance to teach).

Another recommendation to teachers is that they may consider not relying on textbooks too much. More supplementary materials are beneficial because they can be adapted to the needs of individual students.

12.2.3 Recommendations for students

As identified in Chapter 11, various learner factors may affect the implementation of the New Teaching Requirements such as personal beliefs about learning, students' self-perceived EFL proficiency, competition among peers, personalities, and cultural traits. Accordingly, the following recommendations are offered to students:-

- 1) They need to adjust some of their beliefs about learning. For instance, knowledge is something constructed by themselves rather than transmitted from their teachers, and skills can only be developed through practice but not be learnt. Therefore, they should be actively engaged in the teaching and learning process and should be more willing to speak or volunteer to answer questions in class.
- 2) They should try to cultivate an interest in EFL, especially in speaking, as interest is a strong motivator in learning.
- 3) They need to become more confident and make fewer comparisons between themselves and their peers.

- 4) They need to overcome the barrier of 'face' by forming an appropriate attitude to learning. It is normal to make mistakes because that is the exact reason they need to learn and it is natural that they have inaccurate pronunciations sometimes as they are not native speakers and excellent pronunciation is not the main focus in EFL learning. Instead, it is intelligibility, CC or socio-pragmatic awareness that are the key issues (Bernat, 2006).
- 5) They need to have a positive approach to peer learning and show more care and patience towards their conversation partner(s).
- 6) They need to cooperate with their teachers and provide instant feedback to the teachers about the problems they have experienced in learning.
- 7) They need to have a better understanding of the functions that assessment has.
- 8) They need to gradually take on more responsibility for personal learning.

12.3 Suggestions for future research

This research has endeavoured to provide a snapshot of the implementation of three key concepts of the New CE Teaching Requirements and the influence of the reformed CET in one institution. It is intended to provide insights into the process of educational reform and to provide evidence of the most effective ways of implementing reform. In addition, it can provide a strong basis for further research. As a case study, however, all the findings are based on data collected from one specific university, which may affect its external validity (generalization). Only two parties (teachers and students) have been studied. Other stakeholders such as syllabus designers, administrators, and future employers who may influence how the New Teaching Requirements are implemented are not included. While two components of the washback model (participants and process) have been explored in detail, the third element (product) has not been investigated fully. More systematic and empirical studies could therefore be undertaken in other universities in the future to present a fuller picture of the CE reform. It is advisable that in future studies stakeholders other than teachers and students (e.g. administrators, employers, society) are taken into account and the washback effect on the learning product is investigated.

With regard to research methodology, the classroom observations in the present study could have been conducted more widely and longitudinally. The observations were detailed and thorough, but only involved two teachers for part of the academic year. In addition, the sample of teachers interviewed could have been larger. Interviews with more teachers would

enrich the data and offer more insights into the research topics. It is recommended that future research should be both cross-sectional and longitudinal (Gu, 2007).

The current study can also act as a baseline study for future washback studies. A ‘baseline’ study seeks to identify the characteristics of an educational context before the introduction of an innovation that is meant to produce change (Wall & Horak, 2007). This type of study is important in that without a baseline study, ‘it is extremely difficult to provide convincing qualitative and quantitative evidence of change’ (Bray & Luxon, 1999:34). Baseline studies are able to describe the conditions before an innovation or treatment is introduced, so that comparisons can be made afterwards. There is one more change planned to CET – in the listening section, test takers will be required to repeat a piece of material sentence by sentence after listening to it. This specific university has once again been chosen as one of the pioneers in starting this reform. It is recommended that more washback studies can be carried out after the introduction of this component to CET.

The implementation of these suggestions would demonstrate not only that the present research has made a significant and original contribution to our knowledge of the implementation of the New CE Teaching Requirements and the influence of the reformed CET in China, but also that it is capable of providing an appropriate and reliable launch-pad for further related research.

Bibliography

- Alcón, E. (2004) Research on language and learning: implications for language teaching, *International Journal of English Studies*, 4(1), 173-196
- Alderson, J. C. & Banerjee, J. (2002) Language testing and assessment, Part 2, *Language Teaching*, 35, 79-113
- Alderson, J. C., Clapham, C. & Wall, D. (2000) *Language test construction and evaluation*, Beijing: Foreign Language Teaching and Research Press
- Alderson, J. C. & Hamp-Lyons, L. (1996) TOEFL preparation courses: a study of washback. *Language Testing* 13(3), 280-297
- Alderson, J. C. & Wall, D. (1993) Does washback exist? *Applied Linguistics*, 14(2), 115-129
- Allwright, D. & Bailey, K. M. (1991) *Focus on the language classroom: an introduction to classroom research for language teachers*, New York: Cambridge University Press
- Andrews, S. (1994) Washback or washout? The relationship between examination reform and curriculum innovation, In D. Nunan, R. Berry, & V. Berry (Eds) *Bringing about change in language education, 'Proceedings of the International Language in Education Conference 1994'*, 67-81, Hong Kong: University of Hong Kong
- Andrews, S., Fullilove, J. & Wong, Y. (2002) Targeting washback—a case study, *System*, 30, 207-223
- Andrews, S. (2004) Washback and curriculum innovation, In L. Cheng, Y. Watanabe & A. Curtis (Eds) *Washback in language testing: research contexts and methods*, 37-50, Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates
- Atkinson, P. & Silverman, D. (1997) Kundera's Immortality: The interview society and the invention of the self, *Qualitative Inquiry*, 3, 304-325
- Bachman, L. F. (1990) *Fundamental considerations in language testing*, Oxford: Oxford University Press
- Bachman, L. F. & Palmer, A. S. (1997) *Language Testing in Practice*, Oxford: Oxford University Press
- Bailey, K. M. (1983) Competitiveness and anxiety in adult second language learning: looking at and through the diary studies, In Seliger, H. W. & Long, M. H. (Eds) *Classroom oriented research in second language acquisition*, 67-102, Rowley, MA: Newbury House
- Bailey, K. M. (1996) Working for washback: a review of the washback concept in language testing, *Language Testing* 13(3), 257-279
- Bailey, K. M. (1999) Washback in language testing, *TOEFL Monograph Series*, 15, Princeton, NJ: Educational Testing Service

- Bassey, M. (1999) *Case study research in educational settings*, Buckingham: Open University Press
- Berk, R. A. (2002) *Humor as an instructional defibrillator*, Sterling, VA: Stylus
- Bernat, E. (2006) Assessing EAP learners' beliefs about language learning in the Australian context, *Asian EFL Journal*, 8, 202-227
- Biggs, J. B. (1996) Western misperceptions of the Confucian-heritage learning culture, in D. A. Watkins and J. B. Biggs (Eds) *The Chinese learners: cultural, psychological and contextual influences*, 45-67, Hong Kong: Comparative Education Research Centre
- Bonk, C. J. & Cunningham, D. J. (1998) Searching for learner-centered, constructivist, and sociocultural components of collaborative educational learning tools, In C. J. Bonk & K. S. King (Eds) *Electronic collaborators: learner-centered technology for literacy, apprenticeship, and discourse*, 25-50, Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates
- Boyle, J. & Falvey, P. (Eds) (1994) *English Language Testing in Hong Kong*. Hong Kong: Chinese University Press
- Braun, V. & Clark, V. (2006) Using thematic analysis in psychology, *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 3(2), 77-101
- Bray, T. & Luxon, T. (1999) The role of baseline studies in ELT projects, In C. Kennedy (Ed) *Innovation and best practice*, 32-39, Harlow: Longman in association with the British Council
- Breen, M. (1987) Contemporary paradigms in syllabus design, *Language Teaching*, 20, 36-49
- Brewer, R. T. & Hunter, A. (1989) *Multimethod research: a synthesis of styles*, Newbury Park, CA: SAGE Publications
- Brown, H. D. (1977) Cognitive and affective characteristics of good language learners, Paper presented at Los Angeles Second Language Acquisition Research Forum, UCLA, February 1977
- Brown, H. D. (2004) *Language assessment: principles and classroom practices*, New York: Pearson/Longman
- Brown, J. D. (1998) An investigation into approaches to IELTS preparation, with particular focus on the Academic Writing component of the test, In S. Wood (Ed) *IELTS Research Reports Volume 1*, 20-37, Sydney: IELTS Australia
- Brundage, D. H. & MacKeracher, D. (1980) *Adult learning principles and their application to program planning*, Toronto: Ontario Institute for Studies in Education
- Burns, J. M. & Grove, K. (1993) *The practice of nursing research: conduct, critique and utilization*, (2nd ed), Philadelphia: Saunders
- Burrows, C. (2004) Washback in classroom-based assessment: a study of the washback effect in the Australian adult migrant English program, In L. Cheng, Y. Watanabe & A. Curtis (Eds)

Washback in language testing: research contexts and methods, 113-128, Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates

Cai, J. G. (2004) On the basic principles of College English Teaching Requirements, *Foreign Languages and their Teaching*, 2004(1),18-22

Cai, J. G. (2005) On issues faced by College English teaching, *Foreign Language Teaching and Research*, 37(2),83-91

Campbell, C. & Kryszyewska, H. (1992) *Learner-based teaching*, Oxford: Oxford University Press

Canale, M. (1983) From Communicative Competence to Communicative Language Pedagogy, In J. C. Richards & R. W. Schmidt (Eds) *Language and Communication*. 2-27, Harlow: Longman

Canale, M. & Swain, M. (1980) Theoretical bases of communicative approaches to second language teaching and testing, *Applied Linguistics*, 1(1), 1-47

Cannon, R. & Newble, D. (2000) *A guide to improving teaching method: a handbook for teachers in university and colleges*, London: Kogan Page

Carless, D. R. (2001) A case study of curriculum implementation in Hong Kong, In D. Hall and A. Hewings (Eds) *Innovation in English language teaching: a reader*, 263-274, London: Routledge

Chan, W-T. (1963) *A source book in Chinese philosophy*, Princeton: Princeton University Press

Cheng, L. (1997) How does washback influence teaching? Implications for Hong Kong, *Language and Education*, 11(1), 38-54

Cheng, L. (1998) Impact of a public English examination change on students' perceptions and attitudes toward their English learning, *Studies in Educational Evaluation*, 24(3), 279-301

Cheng, L. (1999) Changing assessment: washback on teacher perceptions and actions, *Teaching and Teacher Education* 15, 253-271

Cheng, L. (2003) Looking closely at the impact of a public examination change on classroom teaching, *Journal of Classroom Interaction*, 38(1), 1-10

Cheng, L. (2004) The washback effect of a public examination change on teachers' perceptions toward their classroom teaching, In L. Cheng, Y. Watanabe & A. Curtis (Eds) *Washback in language testing: research contexts and methods*, 147-170, Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates

Cheng, L. (2008) The key to success: English language testing in China, *Language Testing*, 25(1), 15-27

- Cheng, L and Curtis, A. (2004) Washback or backwash: a review of the impact of testing on teaching and learning, In L. Cheng, Y. Watanabe & A. Curtis (Eds) *Washback in language testing: research contexts and methods*, 3-17, Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates
- Chinese Ministry of Education (MoE) (2005) Second Press Conference: an introduction to CET 4 and CET 6 Reform, Available at http://www.cet.edu.cn/gaige_news02.htm, accessed on 12/07/2007
- Chomsky, N. (1965). *Aspects of the theory of syntax*, Cambridge, MA: MIT Press
- Coles, A., Hoskyns, J., Worrow, G., Wilson, D. & Gallais, T. (2004) *Teaching post-compulsory education: policy, practice and values*, London: David Fulton
- Collins, J.B., Selinger, S. J. & Pratt, D.D. (n.d.) How do perspectives on teaching vary across disciplinary majors for students enrolled in teacher preparation, available at <http://teachingperspectives.com/PDF/howdoteachers.pdf>, accessed on 03/03/2011
- Cooley, W. W. (1991) State-wide student assessment, *Educational Measurement: Issues and Practice*, 10, 3-6
- Cortazzi, M. & Jin, L. X. (1996) English teaching and learning in China, *Language Teaching*, 29(2), 61-80
- Cotterall, S. (1995) Developing a course strategy for learner autonomy, *English Language Teaching Journal*, 49(3), 219-227
- Cotterall, S. (2000) Promoting learner autonomy through the curriculum: principles for designing language courses, *English Language Teaching Journal*, 54(2), 109-117
- Cranton, P. (2000) *Planning instruction for adult learners*, Toronto: Wall & Emerson
- Dai, W. D. (2001) Constructing a holistic English teaching system of Chinese characteristics, *Foreign Language Teaching and Research*, 2001(5), 322-327
- Dam, L., Eriksson, R., Little, D., Miliander, J. & Trebbi, T. (1990) Towards a definition of autonomy, In T. Trebbi (Ed) *Third Nordic Workshop on Developing Autonomous Learning in the FL Classroom*. Bergen: University of Bergen. Available at http://www.warwick.ac.uk/go/dahla/archive/trebbi_1990, accessed on 26/02/2011
- Darlin-Hammond, L. & Wise, A.E. (1985) Beyond standardization: state standards and school improvement. *The Elementary School Journal*, 85, 315-336
- Deakin, G. (1996) IELTS in context: issues in EAP for overseas students, *EA Journal*, 15(2), 7-28
- Decker, L. E. & Rimm-Kaufman, S. E. (2008) Personality characteristics and teacher beliefs among pre-service teachers, *Teacher Education Quarterly*, 35(2), 45-64
- Denzin, N. K. (1970) *The research act in sociology*, Chicago: Aldine

- Denzin, N. K. & Lincoln, Y. S. (2005) *Handbook of qualitative research*, (3rd ed), London: Sage
- Department of Higher Education, Ministry of Education (2004) *College English Teaching Requirements (Trial)*, Beijing: Higher Education Press
- Department of Higher Education, Ministry of Education (2007) *College English Teaching Requirements*, Beijing: Higher Education Press
- Dewey, J (1938) *Experience and Education*, New York: Macmillan
- Dickman, Y. (2008) Theories, methods and learning, in F. Fawbert (Ed) *Teaching in post-compulsory education*, London: Continuum
- Du, H. (2002) An investigation of College English teaching in four universities in China, *International Education Journal*, 3(2), 71-84
- Ehroman, M. E. & Dornyei, Z. (1998) *Interpersonal dynamics in second language: the visible and invisible classroom*, California: SAGE Publication
- Fazey, J. & Parker, S. (2000) Variation in practice: testing a teaching strategy for promoting understanding, In C. Rust (Ed) *Improving student learning, improving student learning strategically*, Proceedings of the 8th International Symposium, Oxford: Oxford Centre for Staff and Learning Development
- Feagin, J., Orum, A. & Sjoberg, G. (1991) (Eds) *A case for case study*, Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press
- Ferman, I. (2004) The washback of an EFL national oral matriculation test to teaching and learning, In L. Cheng, Y. Watanabe & A. Curtis (Eds) *Washback in language testing: research contexts and methods*, 191-210, Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates
- Fosnot, C. T. (1996) Constructivism: a psychological theory of learning, In C. T. Fosnot (Ed), *Constructivism: theory, perspectives and practice*, 8-33, New York: Teachers College Press, Columbia University
- Fox, J. & Cheng, L. (2007) Did we take the same test? Differing accounts of the Ontario Secondary School Literacy Test by first and second language test-takers, *Assessment in Education*, 14(1), 9-26
- Fraenkel, J. R. & Wallen, N. E. (2006) *How to design and evaluate research in education*, (6th ed), Boston, MA: McGraw-Hill Higher Education
- Fredericksen, J. R. (1984) The real test bias, *American Psychologist*, March, 193-202
- Fu, Z., Pang, J. X. & Zhou, X. (2001) The influence of China's entry into the WTO on College English teaching and prediction of needs, *Foreign Language World*, 2001(5), 16-21
- Gao, P. & Zhang, X. (2005) Cultivating learners' learning autonomy in College English classrooms, *Foreign Language World*, 2005(1), 33-39

- Gardner, D. & Miller, L. (2002) *Establishing self-access: from theory to practice*, Shanghai: Shanghai Foreign Language Press
- Gardner, R. C. & Lambert, W. E. (1972) Motivational variables in second language acquisition, In R. C. Gardner & W. Lambert (Eds) *Attitudes and motivation in second language learning*, 119-216, Rowley, MA: Newbury House.
- Gibbons, J. & Gray, M. (2002) An integrated and experience-based approach to social work education: the Newcastle model, *Social Work and Education*, 21(5), 529-545
- Gieve, S. & Clark, R. (2005) 'The Chinese approach to learning': cultural trait or situated response? The case of a self-directed learning programme, *System*, 33, 261-276
- Green, A. (2007) Washback to learning outcomes: a comparative study of IELTS preparation and university pre-sessional language courses, *Assessment in Education*, 14(1), 75-97
- Gu, W. P. & Liu, J. (2006) Test analysis of college students' communicative competence in English, *CELEA Journal*, 29(5), 81-88
- Gu, X. (2007) *Positive or negative – an empirical study of CET washback*, Chong Qing: Chong Qing University Press
- Hammersley, M. & Atkinson, P. (1983) *Ethnography: principles in practice*, London: Routledge
- Han, B., Dai, M., & Yang, L. (2004) Problems with College English Test as they emerged from a survey, *Foreign languages and their teaching*, 179(2), 17-23
- Hart, I. (2003) The outsider's gaze: A learner-centred approach to language-teaching materials, *Educational Media International*, 40 (3-4), 298-292
- Hawkey, R. A. (2006) Impact theory and practice: studies of the IELTS test and Progetto Lingue 2000, *Studies in Language Testing* 24, Cambridge: Cambridge ESOL/Cambridge University Press
- Hayes, D. (1997) Helping teachers to cope with large classes, *ELT Journal*, 51(2), 106-116
- Hayes, B. & Read, J. (2004) IELTS test preparation in New Zealand: preparing students for the IELTS academic module, In L. Cheng, Y. Watanabe & A. Curtis (Eds): *Washback in language testing: research contexts and methods*, 97-112, Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates
- He, L. (2003) Autonomous learning and cultivating the ability of autonomous learning, *Foreign Language Teaching and Research*, 35(4), 287-289
- He, Q. (2001) English language education in China, In S. J. Baker (Ed) *Language policy: lessons from global models*, 225-231, Monterey CA: Monterey Institute of International Studies
- Hill, B. (1994) Self-managed learning, *Language Teaching*, 27, 213-223

- Ho, I. T. (2001) Are Chinese teachers authoritarian? In D. A. Watkins & J. B. Biggs (Eds) *Teaching the Chinese learner: psychological and pedagogical perspectives*, 97-112, Hong Kong: Comparative Education Research Centre
- Hoepfl, M. C. (1997) Choosing qualitative research: a primer for technology education researchers, *Journal of Technology Education*, 9(1), 47-63
- Hofstede, G. (1986) Cultural differences in teaching and learning, *International Journal of Cultural Relations*, 10, 301-320
- Hofstede, G. (2001) (2nd ed.) *Culture's consequences: Comparing values, behaviors, institutions, and organizations across nations*, Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications
- Holec, H. (1979) Learner-centered communicative language teaching: needs analysis revisited, *Studies in Second Language Acquisition*, 31(1), 16-22
- Holec, H. (1981) *Autonomy and foreign language learning*, Oxford: Pergamon
- Hoppe, M. H. (1990). *A comparative study of country elites: international differences in work related values and learning and their implications for managerial training and development*, unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill
- Horwitz, E. K. (1999) Cultural and situational influences on foreign language learners' beliefs about language learning: a review of BALLI studies, *System*, 27, 557-576
- Horwitz, E. K. (2001) Language anxiety and achievement, *Annual Review of Applied Linguistics*, 21, 112-121
- Howatt, D. (1984) *A history of English language teaching*, Oxford: Oxford University Press
- Hu, G. W. (2002) Potential cultural resistance to pedagogical imports: the case of communicative language teaching in China, *Language, Culture and Curriculum*, 5(2), 93-105
- Hu, Z. L. (2002) The problem of low efficiency in China's English teaching, *Foreign Language Teaching*, 2002 (4), 3-7
- Huang, D. Y. (2002) *A preliminary investigation of CET-4 washback*, Paper presented at the International Conference on Language Testing and Language Teaching, Shanghai: Shanghai Jiao Tong University
- Huang, S. B. & Shao, Y. Z. (1998) The way out for College English reform, *Foreign Language World*, 1998(4), 22-24
- Hughes, A. (1988) Introducing a needs-based test of English proficiency into an English medium university in Turkey. In A. Hughes (Ed.) *Testing English for University Study*, ELT Documents (127), 134-146, London: Modern English Publication in association with the British Council.
- Hughes, A. (1989) *Testing for language teachers*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press

- Hughes, A. (1993) *Backwash and TOEFL 2000*, unpublished manuscript, University of Reading
- Hymes, D. (1972) On Communicative Competence, In J. B. Pride & J. Holmes (Eds) *Sociolinguistics*, 269-293, Harmondsworth: Penguin Education
- Hymes, D. (1971). Competence and performance in linguistic theory. In R. Huxley & E. Ingram (Eds.), *Language acquisition: Models and methods*, 3-28, London: Academic Press
- Jia, G. D. (2006) Discussions on the achievement, problems and countermeasures in College English reform, *Foreign Language World*, 2006(sup), 42-47
- Jiang, C. S. & Tian, H. N. (2003) The pressure and reform faced by College English teaching, *Journal of Shaanxi Normal University (Social Science)*, 32 (sup), 29-32
- Jiang, X. J. (2007) A study on national English tests: a review of the last 10 years and a preview of the future, *Foreign Language World*, 2007(2), 89-96
- Jin, Y. (2000) The washback effects of College English Test – Spoken English Test on teaching, *Foreign Language World*, 118(2), 56-61
- Jin, Y. (2006) Improving the validity and washback effects of exams – a study on the washback effects of CET-4 and 6, *Foreign Language World*, 2006(6), 65-73
- Johnson, R. B. & Onwuegbuzie, A. J. (2004) Mixed methods research: a research paradigm whose time has come, *Educational Researcher*, 33(7), 14-26
- Kember, D. (2001) Transforming teaching through action research, in D. A. Watkins and J. B. Biggs (Eds) *Teaching the Chinese learners: psychological and pedagogical perspectives*, 253-271, Hong Kong: Comparative Education Research Centre
- Kennedy, P. (2002) Learning cultures and learning styles: myth-understandings about adult (Hong Kong) Chinese learners, *International Journal of Lifelong Education*, 21(5), 430-445
- Kiany, G. R. (1998) English proficiency and academic achievement in relation to extraversion: a preliminary study, *International Journal of Applied Linguistics*, 8(10), 113-130
- Kilic, A. (2010) Learner-centered micro teaching in teacher education, *International Journal of Instruction*, 3(1), 78-100
- Knowles, M. S., Holton III, E. F. & Swanson, R. A. (1998) *The adult learner: the definitive classic in adult education and human resource development*, Woburn, MA: Butterworth-Heinemann
- Kolb, D. A. (1984) *Experiential learning: experience as the source of learning and development*, Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall
- Kvale, S. (1996) *Interviews*, London: Sage Publications

- Larson-Freeman, D. (1986) *Techniques and principles in language teaching*, New York: Oxford University Press
- Lee, J. & Lee, W. (2008) The relationship of e-learner's self-regulatory efficacy and perception of e-learning environmental quality, *Computers in Human Behavior*, 2008 (24), 32-47
- Leslie, D. W. (2002) Resolving the dispute: teaching is academe's core value, *The Journal of Higher Education*, 73(1), 49-73
- Li, C. Y. & Li, L. J. (2009) Causes for ineffective College English Teaching and relevant countermeasures, *International Education Studies*, 2(2), 113-120
- Liao, N. & Su, Q. (2006) The application of the student-centred teaching model in College English, *Journal of Guangxi University of Finance and Economics*, 19 (supplementary), 219-221
- Lincoln, Y. S. & Guba, E. G. (1985) *Naturalistic inquiry*, Beverly Hills, CA: Sage Publications
- Little, D. (1991) *Learner autonomy. 1: definitions, issues and problems*, Dublin: Authentik
- Little, D., Devitt, S. & Singleton, D. (1989) *Learning languages from authentic texts*, Dublin: Authentik, in association with CILT, London
- Littlewood, W. (1981) *The second language curriculum*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press
- Littlewood, W. (1999) Defining and developing autonomy in East Asian context, *Applied Linguistics*, 20(1), 71-94
- Liu, C. L. & Zhou, Y. C. (2003) The new model of College English modern teaching, *Journal of Shaanxi Normal University (Social Science)*, 32 (sup), 43-44
- Liu, L. Z (2003) A new perspective on the goals of TEFL in China, *The Internet TESL Journal*, Vol. IX, No.11
- Liu, N. R. (2008) Restructuring China's adult higher education: an examination of the driving forces behind the reform, *Research in Post-Compulsory Education*, 13(1), 107-121
- Liu, R. Q. & Dai, M. C. (2003) *Research results on the current situations and developing strategies of the foreign language teaching reform at Chinese higher educational institutions*, Beijing: Beijing Foreign Language Education Press
- Liu, R., Qiao, X. & Liu, Y. (2006) A paradigm shift of learner-centered teaching style: reality or illusion? *Arizona Working Papers in SLAT*, 13, 77-91
- Liu, Y. (2009) The anchored instruction model and the multiple roles of teachers – the application of constructivism in the College English listening and speaking course, *Journal of Xi'an International Studies University*, 17(2), 110-113

- Luo, L. S. & Zhang, W. X. (2003) Promoting College English reform on the basis of practical English teaching, *Foreign Language World*, 2003(1), 21-25
- McCombs, B. L., & Whisler, J. S. (1997) *The learner-centered classroom and school: Strategies for increasing student motivation and achievement*, San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass
- McGarry, D. (1995) *Learner autonomy 4: The role of authentic texts*, Dublin: Authentik
- MacIntyre, P. D (1994) Variables underlying willingness to communicate: a causal analysis, *Communication Research Reports*, 11, 135-142
- Mackey, A and Gass, S M (2005) *Second language research: methodology and design*, Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum
- MacKinnon, A. & Scarff-Seatter, C. (1997) Constructivism: contradictions and confusion in teacher education, In V. Richardson (Ed) *Constructivist teacher education: building new understandings*, 38-55, Washington, DC: Falmer Press
- McLeod, B. (1994) *Language and learning: educating linguistically diverse students*, New York: State University of New York Press
- Madaus, G. F. (1988) The influence of testing on the curriculum. In L. N. Tanner, (Ed) *Critical Issues in Curriculum: Eighty-seventh Yearbook of the National Society for the Study of Education*. 83-121, Chicago: University of Chicago Press
- Marshall, C. & Rossman, G. B. (1989) *Designing qualitative research*, Newbury Park, CA: Sage
- Maslow, A. H. (1968) *The psychology of being*, New York: Van Nostrand Reinhold
- Messick, S. (1996) Validity and washback in language testing. *Language Testing*, 13, 241-256
- Mezirow, J. (2000) (Ed.) *Learning as transformation: critical perspectives on a theory in progress*, San Francisco: Jossey-Bass
- Mo, L. (2002) *Educational psychology*, Guangzhou: Guangdong Higher Education Press
- Muñoz, A. P. & Álvarez, M. E. (2010) Washback of an oral assessment system in the EFL classroom, *Language testing*, 27(1), 33-49
- Neuman, W. L. (2005) *Social research methods: qualitative and quantitative approaches*, (6th ed), Boston, London: Pearson/Allyn and Bacon
- Nunan, D. (1985) *Language teaching course design: trends and issues*, Adelaide: National Curriculum Resource Centre
- Nunan, D. (1988) *The learner-centred curriculum: a study in second language teaching*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press

- Nunan, D. (1996) Towards autonomous learning: some theoretical, empirical and practical issues, In P. Pemberton, S. L. Edward, W. W. F. Or & H. D. Pierson (Eds) *Taking control: autonomy in language learning*, 13-26, Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press
- Nunan, D. (1997) Designing and adapting materials to encourage learner autonomy. In P. Benson, & P. Voller. (Eds) *Autonomy and independence in language learning*, 193-203, Harlow: Longman,
- Nunan, D. (2001) *The learner-centred curriculum: a study in second language teaching*, Shanghai: Shanghai Foreign Education Press
- Nunan, D. (2002) Learning strategy training in the classroom: an action research study, In J. C. Richards & W. A. Renandya (Eds) *Methodology in language teaching: an anthology of current practice*, 133-144, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press
- O'Banion, T. (1997) *A Learning College for the 21st Century*, Washington, DC: American Association of Community Colleges and American Council on Education Series on Higher Education and the Oryx Press
- Ormrod, J. (2009) *Human learning*, Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson Prentice Hall
- Patton, M. Q. (1990) *Qualitative evaluation and research methods*, (2nd ed), Newbury Park, CA: Sage Publications
- Petty, G. (2004) *Teaching today*, (3rd ed), Cheltenham: Nelson Thornes
- Piaget, J. (1973) *Main Trends in Psychology*, London: George Allen & Unwin
- Pierce, B. N. (1992) Demystifying the TOEFL reading test, *TESOL Quarterly*, 26 (4), 665-691
- Qi, L. (2003) *The intended washback of the National Matriculation English Test in China: intentions and reality*, unpublished PhD thesis, Hong Kong: The City University of Hong Kong
- Qi, L. (2004) Has a high-stakes test produced the intended changes? In L. Cheng, Y. Watanabe & A. Curtis (Eds) *Washback in language testing: research contexts and methods*, 171-190, Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates
- Qi, L. (2005) Stakeholders' conflicting aims undermine the washback functions of a high-stakes test, *Language Testing*, 22(2), 142-173
- Rapley, T. (2011) Some pragmatics of data analysis, In D. Silverman (Ed) *Qualitative research*, (3rd ed), 273-290, London: Sage
- Rea-Dickins, P. & Scott, C. (2007) Washback from language tests on teaching, learning and policy: evidence from diverse settings, *Assessment in Education*, 14(1), 1-7
- Reece, I. & Walker, S. (2000) *Teaching training and learning*, Sunderland: Business Education Publishers Limited

Revising Team (1985) *College English Syllabus (Applicable to Undergraduates of Science and Engineering)*, Beijing: Higher Education Press.

Revising Team (1986) *College English Syllabus (Applicable to Undergraduates of Humanities)*, Beijing: Higher Education Press

Revising Team (1999) *College English Syllabus*, Beijing: Higher Education Press

Richards, J. C., Platt, J. & Platt, H. (1992) *Longman dictionary of language and applied linguistics*, Harlow: Longman

Richards, J. C. & Rodgers, T. S (2000) *Approaches and methods in language teaching*, Beijing: Foreign Language Teaching and Research Press

Rogers, C. (1969) *Freedom to learn*, Columbus, Ohio: Merrill Press

Rogers, C. (1990) The interpersonal relationship in the facilitation of learning, In H. Kirschenbaum & V. L. Henderson (Eds) *The Carl Rogers reader*, 304-311, London: Constable

Ruan, Y. H. & Jacobs, W. J (2009) The transformation of College English in China, *Front Education China*, 4(3), 466-487

Saif, S. (2006) Aiming for positive washback: a case study of international teaching assistants, *Language Testing*, 23(1), 1-34

Salili, F., Chiu, C., & Lai, S. (2001). The influence of culture and context on students' motivational orientation and performance, In F. Salili, C. Chiu & Y. Hong (Eds), *Student motivation: the culture and context of learning*, 221-247, New York: Plenum

Samovar, L. A. & Porter, R. E. (1995) *Communication between cultures*, Belmont, California: Wadsworth Publishing Company

Saville, N. & Hawkey, R. (2004) The IELTS impact study: investigating washback effect on teaching material, In L. Cheng, Y. Watanabe & A. Curtis (Eds) *Washback in language testing: research contexts and methods*, 73-96, Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates

Shi, G. D. (2007) A study on the problems of College English teaching and countermeasures, *Culture Construction*, 2007(6), 54-55

Shi, Y. H. (2008) *A study of Chinese English learners' willingness to communicate inside and outside the classroom*, unpublished PhD thesis, Shandong University, China

Shohamy, E. (1992) Beyond performance testing: a diagnostic feedback testing model for assessing foreign language learning, *Modern Language Journal*, 76(4), 513-521

Shohamy, E. (1993) The power of tests: the impact of language tests on teaching and learning, *National Foreign Language Centre Occasional Papers*, Washington: The National Foreign Language Centre at Johns Hopkins University

Shohamy, E., Donitsa-Schmidt, S. & Ferman, I. (1996) Test impact revisited: washback effect over time, *Language Testing*, 13, 298-317

Silverman, D. (1993) *Interpreting qualitative data: methods for analyzing talk, test, and interaction*, London: Sage.

Silverman, D. (2011) *Qualitative research* (3rd edition), London: Sage.

Smith, J. A. & Osborn, M. (2008) Interpretative phenomenological analysis, In J. A. Smith (Ed) *Qualitative psychology: a practical guide to methods*, (2nd ed), 51-80, London: Sage

Smith, M. L., Edelsky, C., Draper, K., Rottenberg, C. & Cherland, M. (1989) *The role of testing in elementary schools (Monograph)*. Tempe, AZ: Arizona State University, Centre for Research on Evaluation, Standards and Student Testing

Social Research Association (2003) *Ethical guidelines*, (online) Available at <http://www.the-sra.org.uk/documents/pdfs/ethics03.pdf>, accessed on 01 May 2011

Spada, N. & Fröhlich, M. (1995) *COLT: communicative orientation of language observation scheme: coding conventions and applications*, Sydney, NSW: Macquarie University, National Center for English Language Teaching and Research

Spratt, M. (2005) Washback and the classroom: the implications for teaching and learning of studies of washback from exams, *Language Teaching Research*, 9, 5-29.

Stephens, K. (1997) Cultural stereotyping and intercultural communication: working with students from the People's Republic of China in the UK, *Language and Education*, 11 (2), 113-124

Stern, H. H. (1999) *Fundamental concepts of language testing*, Shanghai: Shanghai Foreign Language Education Press

Strauss, A. & Corbin, J. (1990) *Basics of qualitative research: grounded theory procedures and techniques*, Newbury Park: Sage

Tang, R. (2008) On student-centred College English teaching, *Journal of Nanjing Audit University*, 5 (1), 98-101

Tarone, E. & Yule, G. (2000) *Focus on the language learner*, Shanghai: Shanghai Foreign Education Press

Taylor, L. (2006) The changing landscape of English: implications for language assessment, *ELT Journal*, 60(1), 51-60

Terenzini, P. T. & Passcarella, E. T. (1994) Living with myths: undergraduate education in America, *Change*, 1994 (Jan/Feb), 28-30

Tuckman, B. W. (1999) *Conducting educational research*, (5th ed), Fort Worth, TX: Harcourt Brace College Publishers

- Tudor, I. (1993) Teacher roles in the learner-centred classroom, *ELT Journal*, 47(1), 22-31
- Tudor, I. (1996) *Learner-centredness as language education*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press
- Turner, C. E (2001) The need for impact studies of L2 performance testing and rating: identifying areas of potential consequences at all levels of the testing cycle, In C. Elder, A. Brown, N. Iwashita, E. Grove, K. Hill & T. Lumley (Eds) *Studies in language testing 11: experimenting with uncertainty essays in Honour of Alan Davies*, 138-149, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press
- Vernon, P. E. (1956) *The measurement of abilities (2nd edition)*, London: University of London Press
- Wall, D. (1997) Impact and washback in language testing, In C. M. Clapham & D. Corson (Eds) *Language testing and assessment, encyclopedia of language and education*, Vol. 7, Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers
- Wall, D. (2000) The impact of high-stakes testing on teaching and learning: can this be predicted or controlled? *System*, 28, 499-509
- Wall, D. & Alderson, J. C. (1993) Examining washback : the Sri Lankan impact study, *Language Testing*, 10(1), 41-69
- Wall, D. & Horak, T. (2007) Using baseline studies in the investigation of test impact, *Assessment in Education: Principles, Policy & Practice*, 14(1), 99-116
- Wang, H.L. (2007) Rethinking ‘student-centredness’ and the development of learners’ autonomy, *Journal of Basic English Education*, 9 (6), 14-18
- Wang, L.F. (2000) *Modern foreign language teaching methodologies*, Shanghai: Shanghai Education Press
- Wang, S. R. (2006) Promoting College English Reform to improve the teaching quality of China’s higher education, *Foreign Language World*, 2006(5), 2-6
- Watanabe, Y. J. (1996) Does grammar-translation come from entrance examination? *Language Testing* 13(3), 318-333
- Watanabe, Y. J. (2004) Teacher factors mediating washback, In L. Cheng, Y. Watanabe & A. Curtis (Eds) *Washback in language testing: research contexts and methods*, 129-146, Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates
- Weimer, M. (2002) *Learner-centered teaching: five key changes to practice*, San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass
- Widdowson, H. G. (1987) The roles of teacher and learner, *ELT Journal*, 41(2), 83-88
- Wilkins, D. A. (1974) *Second language learning and teaching*, Oxford: Oxford University Press

- Williams, M. & Burden, R. (2000) *Psychology for language teachers*, Beijing: Foreign Language Teaching and Research Press, People's Education Press and Cambridge University Press
- Willis, J. W., Stephens, E. C. & Matthew, K. I (1996) *Technology, reading and language arts*, Boston: Allyn & Bacon
- Wohlfarth, D., Sheras, D., Bennett, J., Simon, B., Pimentel, J. & Gabel, L. (2008) Student perceptions of learner-centered teaching, *Insight: a Journal of Scholarly Teaching*, 2008 (3), 67-74
- Wolffe, R. J. & McMullen, D. W. (1996) The constructivist connection: linking theory, best practice and technology, *Journal of Computing in Teacher Education*, 12(2), 25-28
- Woolfork, A. (2003) *Educational psychology*, Beijing: Higher Educational Press
- Xia, J. M. (2003) *Theory and practice of foreign language course design*, Shanghai: Shanghai Foreign Language Education Press
- Xue, G. F. & Wang, Y. H. (2003) Modern western constructive teaching theory, *Higher Education Research*, 2003 (1), 18-21
- Yamazaki, Y. (2005) Learning styles and typologies of cultural differences: a theoretical and empirical comparison, *International Journal of Inter-Cultural Relations*, 29, 521-548
- Yang, H. Z (2000) The current competency of China's university students in using practical English based on CET-4 and 6, *Foreign Language World*, 1, 46-51
- Yang, H. Z. & Weir, C (1998) *Validation study of the national College English Test*, Shanghai: Shanghai Foreign Language Education Press
- Yashima, T. (2002) Willingness to communicate in a second language: the Japanese EFL context, *Modern Language Journal*, 86, 54-66
- Yeary, M. B. (1998) Teacher-centered to learner-centered educational model, *Proceedings, Frontiers in Education 1998 Conference*, Tempe, Arizona, Nov, 4-7
- Yin, R. K. (2003) *Case study research: design and methods (3rd ed)*, London: Sage Publications
- Ying, Y. S. (2005) Trial centre of College English reform - a research report on web teaching, In Z. X. Zhuang (Ed) *Reports on web teaching trial of national 'new concept' College English teaching*, 72-98, Shanghai: Shanghai Foreign Language Education Press
- Young, D. J. (1991) Creating a low-anxiety classroom environment: what does language anxiety research suggest? *Modern Language Journal*, 75(4), 426-439
- Young, D. J. (1999) *Affect in foreign language and second language learning: a practical guide to creating a low-anxiety classroom atmosphere*, Boston: McGraw-Hill

- Yu, L. & Suen, H. K. (2005) Historical and contemporary exam-driven education fever in China, *KEDI Journal of Educational Policy*, 2(1), 17-33
- Zhang, Y. X. (2003) Rethink about the public English teaching reform at the undergraduate level, *China University Teaching*, 2003 (7), 4
- Zhang, Z. D. & Du, P. (1999) *The theory and model of foreign language three-dimensional teaching*, Beijing: Science Press
- Zhao, S. F. (2005) *A consideration of the washback effect of English as a foreign language oral examinations at tertiary level in China: teaching, testing, and syllabus change*, unpublished PhD thesis, Cardiff University
- Zhong, H. (2010) *The effectiveness of student-centred learning in the development of a new communication curriculum in China*, unpublished PhD thesis, University of Huddersfield
- Zhou, P. D. (2002) *Washback of the CET-4 on College English teaching and learning – a case study*, Paper presented at the International Conference on Language Testing and Language Teaching, Shanghai: Shanghai Jiao Tong University
- Zhuang, Z. X. & Huang, W. (2003) On theories and practice of constructing three-dimensional teaching materials, *Foreign Languages World*, 2003(6), 8-14

Appendix I: Table of Influential Empirical Washback Studies

Researcher & Time	Test	Context	Subjects	Data types
Alderson & Wall 1993	O-Level English exam	Sri Lanka Secondary schools	Teachers in 18 schools	Questionnaire Interview Classroom observation
Shohamy et al 1996	National EFL test	Israel Secondary schools	25 teachers 112 students 6 inspectors	Questionnaire Interview Document analysis
Alderson & Hamp- Lyons 1996	TOEFL	USA Preparation programmes	2 teachers	Interview Classroom observation
Watanabe 1996	English College Entrance Exam	Japan Secondary schools	2 teachers	Classroom observation
Cheng 1997	The revised HKCEE in English	Hong Kong Secondary schools	3 teachers 1287 students	Questionnaire Interview Classroom observation
Andrews et al 2002	Use of English Oral exam	Hong Kong Secondary Schools	31 students 3 cohorts	Mock test Test results
Ferman 2004	EFL oral English matriculation test	Israel Secondary schools	18 teachers 120 students 4 inspectors	Questionnaire Interview Document analysis
Hayes & Read 2004	IELTS	New Zealand 2 English Preparation courses for higher education	One class from each course	Interviews Classroom observation Pre-/post-tests
Green 2007	IELTS	UK 3 types of English courses for higher education	476 students 15 British institutions	Questionnaire Course documentation Pre-/post-tests
Qi 2003, 2004, 2005	NMET	Mainland China Senior high schools	8 test constructors 6 inspectors 388 teachers 986 students	Questionnaire Interview

Jin 2000	CET-SET	Mainland China Higher educational institutes	28 examiners 358 test takers	Questionnaire
Huang 2002	CET-4	Mainland China Higher educational institutes	120 teachers 1200 students 18 CE teachers' classes	Questionnaire Interview Classroom observation
Zhou 2002	CET-4	Mainland China Higher educational institutes	14 teachers 99 students 6 CE teachers' classes	Questionnaire Interview Classroom observation
Han, Dai & Yang 2004	CET	Mainland China Higher educational institutes	1194 CE teachers from 40 colleges	Questionnaire
Gu 2002-2005	CET	Mainland China Higher educational institutes	About 4500 stakeholders including government officials, text-book writers, teachers and students, etc.	Questionnaire Interview Classroom observation Document analysis Test output

Appendix II: Teacher Questionnaire

The aim of this questionnaire is to collect information concerning your opinions about two types of English courses and their corresponding tests for research purposes only. Your comments are important and all information will be kept anonymous and confidential. Thank you for your participation. Unless clearly specified, please only choose one answer for multiple choice questions.

Part I:

1. Age _____

2. Gender _____

A. male; B. female;

3. How long have you been teaching English in universities/colleges? _____years.

4. Choose among the following English skills:

A. listening; B. reading; C. grammar; D. translation; E. writing; F. spoken English; G. vocabulary; H. pronunciation/intonation.

Which is the most important one in English teaching at higher education stage? _____

Which is the most difficult one to your students? _____

Which is the most useful in students' future career? _____

5. Please comment on the factors that may influence your teaching by ticking the appropriate bracket on this five point scale:

	great influence(5)	no influence at all(1)
1) Personal experience as a language learner:	() () () () ()	() () () () ()
2) Personality:	() () () () ()	() () () () ()
3) Professional training:	() () () () ()	() () () () ()
4) Teaching experience:	() () () () ()	() () () () ()
5) Syllabus:	() () () () ()	() () () () ()
6) Textbooks:	() () () () ()	() () () () ()
7) Examinations:	() () () () ()	() () () () ()
8) Students' expectations/needs:	() () () () ()	() () () () ()
9) University's/college's expectations:	() () () () ()	() () () () ()

6. Please comment on the influence that testing has on your teaching by ticking the appropriate bracket on this five point scale:

	great influence(5)	no influence at all(1)
1) On teaching methodology:	() () () () ()	() () () () ()
2) On choosing or designing teaching materials:	() () () () ()	() () () () ()
3) On curriculum arrangement:	() () () () ()	() () () () ()
4) On allocation of teaching time:	() () () () ()	() () () () ()

Part B: CE and CET - If you have the experience of teaching CE, please complete the questions in this part; if not please continue with Part C of questions on International English course.

7. 1) Does the university/college you work for offer specialized oral English courses to

students?

A. Yes, and it is a) a speaking course b) a speaking and listening course c) other, please specify _____

B. No,

2). On average, how much time do you spend on training learners' speaking skills?
_____ per week.

8. How do your students on the CE course perceive the importance of speaking skills judged from their learning behaviours?

very important(5)

() () () () ()

not important at all(1)

9. Do you think if it is necessary to include an oral English test as a compulsory component in CET-4?

very necessary(5)

() () () () ()

not necessary at all (1)

The reason is

10. If an oral English test becomes compulsory in CET-4, what will be its influence on curriculum planning, teaching and learning?

11. How often do you use the following teaching methods or activities in teaching?

(A=always; B=often; C=sometimes; D=occasionally; E=never)

- 1). Explanation about grammar in textbook _____
- 2). Explanation about vocabulary and phrases in textbook _____
- 3). Reading aloud (teacher) _____
- 4). Reading aloud (students) _____
- 5). Students read after the teacher _____
- 6). Reading silently (students) _____
- 7). Dictation _____
- 8). Role play/dialogue/simulation _____
- 9). Discussion/debate _____
- 10). Presentation (students) _____
- 11). Translation between Chinese and English _____
- 12). Writing _____
- 13). Explanation and /or exercises of discourse _____
- 14). Explanation and /or exercises of different cultures or socio-cultural rules for language use _____
- 15). Explanation and/or exercises of communication strategies _____
- 16). Multiple-choice grammar/vocabulary exercises _____
- 17). Multiple-choice reading comprehension exercises _____
- 18). Multiple-choice listening comprehension exercises _____
- 19). Gap-filling exercises/short answer questions in reading _____
- 20). Gap-filling exercises/short answer questions in listening _____
- 21). Teacher interacts with students and gives feedback on their language output _____

12. How do you use your language in teaching?
 A. I will use English only.
 B. Mainly I will use English, only occasionally I will use Chinese to explain some difficult points.
 C. Half of the time I will use English and half of the time I will use Chinese.
 D. I will mainly use Chinese in the classroom.

13. How does your university/college or department perceive the importance of CET4?
very important(5) () () () () () **not important at all(1)**

14. My students' performance on CET-4 has _____ on my professional evaluation, promotion or bonus.
great influence(5) () () () () () **no influence at all(1)**

15. In what respect does CET-4 have some impact on your English teaching? (You may choose more than one answer.)
 A. teaching goals; B. teaching contents; C. teaching methods; D. teaching motivation;
 E. teaching rate and sequences; F. teaching attitude; G. teaching quality;
 H. depth and range; I. others, please specify _____;
 J. no influence at all.

16. Please tick the appropriate bracket on this five point scale to show your opinion:
 What do you think about the degree of the influence that CET has on your CE teaching?
great influence(5) () () () () () **no influence at all(1)**

17. Please tick the appropriate bracket on this five point scale to show your opinion:
 What do you think about the nature of the influence that CET-4 imposes on your College English teaching?
Absolutely positive (5) () () () () () **absolutely negative (1)**

18. Please comment on the validity of CET-4 in evaluating learners' basic communicative competence in English.
Very valid (5) () () () () () **not valid at all(1)**

The reason is

19. Please comment on your students' autonomy in learning CE:
Very Strong (5) () () () () () **no autonomy at all (1)**

20. 1) Will you help students prepare for CET4 paper test in or after class? What is the reason?

2) Will you help students prepare for CET-SET in or after class? What is the reason?

Part C: International English course and IELTS - If you have the experience of teaching International English courses, please continue to answer the following questions; if not, this is the end of this questionnaire.

21. In the International English course, are there any lessons specially designed for spoken English?

1) A. Yes, and it is a) a speaking course b) a speaking and listening course c) other, please specify _____

B. No.

2) On average, how much time do you spend on training learners' speaking skill? _____ per week.

22. How do your students in International English course perceive the importance of speaking skills judged from their learning behaviours?

very important(5)

() () () () ()

not important at all(1)

23. How often do you use the following teaching methods or activities in teaching?

(A=always; B=often; C=sometimes; D=occasionally; E=never)

- 1) Explanation about grammar in textbook _____
- 2) Explanation about vocabulary and phrases in textbook _____
- 3) Reading aloud (teacher) _____
- 4) Reading aloud (students) _____
- 5) Students read after the teacher _____
- 6) Reading silently (students) _____
- 7) Dictation _____
- 8) Role play/dialogue/simulation _____
- 9) Discussion/debate _____
- 10) Presentation (students) _____
- 11) Translation between Chinese and English _____
- 12) Writing _____
- 13) Explanation and /or exercises of discourse _____
- 14) Explanation and /or exercises of different cultures or socio-cultural rules for language use _____
- 15) Explanation and/or exercises of communication strategies _____
- 16) Multiple-choice grammar/vocabulary exercises _____
- 17) Multiple-choice reading comprehension exercises _____
- 18) Multiple-choice listening comprehension exercises _____
- 19) Gap-filling exercises/short answer questions in reading _____
- 20) Gap-filling exercises/short answer questions in listening _____
- 21) Teacher interacts with student(s) and gives feedback on his/her language output _____

Appendix III: Student Questionnaire

The aim of this questionnaire is to collect information concerning your opinions about two types of English courses and their corresponding tests for research purposes only. Your comments are important and all information will be kept anonymous and confidential. If you are willing to participate in this survey, please return the completed questionnaire before the deadline. Thank you for your participation. Unless clearly specified, please only choose one answer for multiple choice questions.

Part 1:

1. What is your main motivation for learning English while in university/college?

(You may choose more than one answer)

- A. to pass exams
- B. out of the interest in English
- C. for the needs of future career
- D. to get enough academic credits in order to graduate
- E. to meet the requirements of society
- F. to prepare for study/travel/work/live abroad
- G. other, please specify _____.

2. Choose among the following choices:

- A. listening
- B. reading
- C. grammar
- D. translation
- E. writing
- F. spoken English
- G. vocabulary
- H. pronunciation/intonation.

What are you best at? _____

What is the most difficult one to you? _____

What do you want to improve most? _____

What is the most helpful one to your future career? _____

3. Do you think if it is necessary to have a specialized course in spoken English or a combination course for listening and speaking skills in university?

A. Yes, it is necessary. Why?

B. No, it is not necessary. Why?

4. How do you think about the influence of testing on your teacher's teaching?

Great influence no influence at all

() () () () ()

How do you think about the influence of testing on your own learning?

Great influence no influence at all

() () () () ()

5. In what respect does testing have some impact on your English study? (You may choose more than one answer)

- A. motivation
- B. content
- C. approach
- D. attitude
- E. interest
- F. emphasis
- G. strategy
- H. sequences
- I. depth and breadth
- J. choice of materials
- K. speed
- L. no impact at all

If you are studying on the College English course, please complete the questions in Part 2; otherwise please ignore Part 2 and complete the questions in Part 3.

Part 2: College English course and CET

6. Please comment on the frequency of practicing the following skills:
(5=always; 4=often; 3=sometimes; 2=occasionally; 1=never)

	in class	after class
1) Listening	_____	_____
2) Reading	_____	_____
3) Grammar	_____	_____
4) Translation	_____	_____
5) Writing	_____	_____
6) Speaking	_____	_____
7) Vocabulary	_____	_____
8) Pronunciation and intonation	_____	_____

7. What do you think about the following features the College English course has?
(5=very good; 4=good; 3=ok; 2=not very good; 1=not good at all)

- 1) Being lively and interesting_____
- 2) Knowledge learning_____
- 3) Being close to the needs of real life or work_____
- 4) Opportunities for group/paired work or interaction among fellow students_____
- 5) Opportunities to interact with the teacher and get feedback_____

8. How much time per week on average do you spend on practising spoken English when studying the College English course?
_____ hours.

9. What do you think about the oral English practice you have had in class time?

- A. It is of great help.
- B. It is very helpful.
- C. It is helpful to some extent.
- D. It is of little help.
- E. It is not helpful at all.
- F. We have no opportunities to practice oral English in class at all.

10. Among the following, which aspects of the CET-4 paper test are you familiar with? (You may choose more than one answer)

- A. date when it is held
- B. formats of the test
- C. testing procedures
- D. marking criteria and proportion
- E. no idea at all

11. How often does your teacher talk about or mention the CET-4 paper test in class?

- Always
- Never
- () () () () ()

12. Among the following, which aspects of CET-SET are you familiar with? (You may choose more than one answer)

- A. date when it is held
- B. formats of the test
- C. testing procedures
- D. marking criteria and proportion
- E. no idea at all

13. How often does your teacher talk about or mention CET-SET in class?

Always Never
() () () () ()

14. Please tick the appropriate bracket on this five point scale to show your opinions:
How do you think about the importance of CET-4 paper test?

very important not important at all
() () () () ()

15. Please tick the appropriate bracket on this five point scale to show your opinions:
How do you think about the importance of the score in CET-SET?

very important not important at all
() () () () ()

16. How do you think about the overall influence of CET-4 on you?

absolutely positive influence absolutely negative influence.
() () () () ()

17. Does your future employer have any specific requirements for your score in **CET-4 paper test**?

A. Yes B. No.

Does your future employer have any specific requirement on your score in **CET-SET**?

A. Yes B. No.

18. Do you think if it is necessary to include an oral English test as a compulsory test item in CET-4?

very necessary not necessary at all.
() () () () ()

Please give your reason _____

Part 3: International English course and IELTS

19. Please comment on the frequency of practising the following skills:

(5=always; 4=often; 3=sometimes; 2=occasionally; 1=never)

	in class	after class
1) Listening	_____	_____
2) Reading	_____	_____
3) Grammar	_____	_____
4) Translation	_____	_____
5) Writing	_____	_____
6) Speaking	_____	_____
7) Vocabulary	_____	_____
8) Pronunciation and intonation	_____	_____

20. What do you think about the following features the International English course has?

(5=very good; 4=good; 3=ok; 2=not very good; 1=not good at all)

- 1) Being lively and interesting _____
- 2) Knowledge learning _____
- 3) Being close to the needs of real life or work _____

4) Opportunities for group/paired work or interaction among fellow students_____

5) Opportunities to interact with the teacher and get feedback_____

21. How much time per week on average do you spend on practising spoken English when studying the International English course?

_____ hours.

22. What do you think about the oral English practice you have had in class time?

A. It is of great help.

B. It is very helpful.

C. It is helpful to some extent.

D. It is of little help.

E. It is not helpful at all.

F. We have no opportunities to practice oral English in class at all

23. Among the following, which aspects of IELTS are you familiar with? (You may choose more than one answer)

A. date when it is held

B. formats of the test

C. testing procedures

D. marking criteria and proportion

E. no idea at all

24. How often does your teacher talk about or mention IELTS in class?

Always

Never

() () () () ()

25. Please tick the appropriate bracket on this five point scale to show your opinions:

How do you think about the importance of IELTS?

very important

not important at all

() () () () ()

26. How do you think about the overall influence of IELTS on you?

absolutely positive influence

absolutely negative influence.

() () () () ()

This is the end of the questionnaire. Thank you for your participation!

Appendix IV: Observation Scheme

Observation Scheme

Class: _____

Teacher: _____

Time/Date: _____

Page: _____

Time		Activities		Organization Patterns							Skills				Materials	Language use	Memo
from	to	T	S	Class			Group		Individual		R	L	W	S			
				T-S/C	S-S/C	Choral	Same task	Different task	Same Task	Different Task							

Appendix V: Interview Schedules

A. Follow-up interview schedule with the two teachers in the classroom observations

Semi-structured interview schedule with the two teacher interviewees

1. Please comment on your students' proficiency in the four language skills: listening, speaking, reading and writing.
2. Please comment on your students' motivation and enthusiasm in spoken English, and recommend some strategies to improve learners' spoken English.
3. Please describe how you train the language skills in these two courses: CE and ITE.
4. Please illustrate how and why you chose the source of teaching materials in these two courses (supplementary materials, test papers or test coaching materials, and textbooks).
5. Please explain the factors which influence your choices of teaching and learning activities. (After a preliminary analysis of the observational data, discrepancies were discovered in how these teachers used group/paired work in these two courses. The teachers were asked specifically to explain the reasons for this difference.)
6. After a preliminary analysis of the classroom observations, it was found out that both courses were not so learner-centred, although the ITE course was a bit better in this sense. Please clarify the reasons.
7. Please comment on the learning autonomy of your students.
8. Please envisage the potential positive or negative impacts of a compulsory speaking assessment in CET or the end-of-term English exam.

B. Interview schedule for student interviewees

Semi-structured interview schedule for student interviewees

1. Four language skills (with an emphasis on speaking skills):

How do you perceive the importance of these four skills and why?

What do you do to improve the four skills?

Please describe your previous learning experience (in primary or middle schools). What are your expectations of achievement in English in higher education?

What do your teachers do to support speaking skills (in or after class)?

2. Teaching model:

2.1 What is the form of teaching adopted in the English course (classroom or web/computer based, percentage of each)? What do you think about it?

2.2 What is the teaching model in the classroom? What do you think about it?

2.3 How does it compare to the previous model in middle school?

2.4 What do you think of 'autonomy in learning'? Have you done or will you plan to do any autonomous learning?

3. Influence of tests:

3.1 How do you perceive the test (CET or IELTS) that you need to take?

3.2 What influence does the English test (CET or IELTS) have on your learning?

Degree, nature (positive or negative), reason (individual, career, university or society)

Perception, process and products

3.3 What are the other English tests that you have taken or you will take in the future? Why?

3.4 How do you perceive the spoken English part in these two tests? What kind of washback effects do they have on you?

3.5 What suggestions do you have to maximize the beneficial washback of the English test (CET or IELTS)?

4. What are the other factors that may influence your learning?

5. What are the recommendations that you have on how to improve English teaching and learning on this specific course (CE or ITE)?

Appendix VI: Sample Interview with a Student

I: I would like to ask you some questions regarding CE teaching & learning and CET. First, I want to know how you perceive the four language skills: listening, speaking, reading and writing. For example, how do you perceive their importance and why?

L: I think speaking is the most important skill.

I: Why?

L: I think...er...First of all, you should be able to express yourself clearly. Secondly, communication involves listening and speaking. Although I think listening skills are significant too, it is better if one can express one's ideas clearly and accurately.

I: What about other skills? What order are they in?

L: That is speaking, listening ...(silence as he was thinking), then writing. I think it should be writing. After that it should be reading.

I: ok, so for yourself, speaking is the most important one?

L: Yes.

I: My second question is what you usually do to improve these skills.

L: There are some opportunities in class to do conversations and listening practice. After class, CE is always linked with CET4 and CET6.

I: For listening, do you mean that your teacher plays the cassettes or ...?

L: They are test questions in previous CET4 and CET6.

I: Is this something you do after class?

L: Yes. And occasionally I will listen to such materials as Voice of Music, English news, BBC, etc. I will download them from the Internet and listen to them if I have spare time. However, of course, I will need to follow the transcribed texts when listening to these materials. Without the written texts, I still cannot understand the content very well.

I: So it looks as if the main practice you do is listening.

L: Yes. That is because ...how to say it...the language environment is still not so good after all.

I: You mean the practice of speaking skills mainly happens in class?

L: Yes, in class.

I: How about the number of opportunities you have for such exercises?

L: I think it is ok as long as you are active and volunteer to answer questions. We also do a lot of reading aloud in class. I mean reading texts or dialogues.

I: How active are your classmates in the CE class?

L: I think we are relatively enthusiastic about learning foreign languages. It is obvious in the process of completing a speaking task. However, the teachers' talk still takes up a lot of time. Generally speaking, in the last academic year, there was not enough practice on speaking. The situation is a bit better this year. We have received more training on writing this year as well. It is difficult to train speaking skills when the class has over 30 students. So the focuses are on grammar, vocabulary and texts. These are the focuses in tests as well.

I: When did you start learning English?

L: Third year in primary school.

I: Can you please say something about your previous English learning experience? The experience before you entered university?

L: At that time, from primary to junior middle school, even in senior middle school, speaking only took up a very small proportion of time. From primary education, the focus was on vocabulary, grammar and texts. You know, always among these three. You could hardly have an opportunity to express your own ideas. In principle, we just read those materials in the form of texts. There was very little room for us to be creative, and few opportunities to

express our subjective ideas or to make up a dialogue or do a role play. Very few opportunities, almost none at all. Compared to this situation, the situation in higher education is better. Although there was not enough practice of speaking skills last term, at least there was some and we did speak English. The situation this term is better.

I: What do you expect to achieve in English at higher education level?

L: I have a relatively high expectation of English learning in university. At least, I want to be able to communicate with foreigners when I have contact with them. Regarding listening, I should be able to understand the main meaning if not every word. What is equally important is that I need to express myself clearly. Furthermore, as soon as we graduate, we will face strong competition in employment. I think a good level of English will be an advantage, as employers value English skills. I would like to improve all four skills – listening, speaking, reading and writing.

I: What kinds of activities does your CE teacher organize either in class or after class to improve your speaking skills?

L: Occasionally she will assign a conversation for us to make up. The conversations are similar to those in the textbook. She will assign it for us to complete after class and ask if anybody will volunteer to show their work to the whole class the next week.

I: Only occasionally?

L: Yes, occasionally.

I: Roughly how many times did your class have this kind of practice last term?

L: There were more opportunities in class. Occasionally, we did it after class. However, only a small number of students had the chance to show their work in class.

I: Since you have listening and speaking in one lesson, what is the proportion of time spent on each of them?

L: About 70% of the time is spent on listening skills and 30% on speaking.

I: What about in the Integrated English class? Any chance to practise speaking skills there?

L: There are opportunities for us to speak English, but not many. Maybe 20% or less, I think. This 20% also includes reading aloud such as reading texts or vocabulary. The process of reading aloud is a kind of practice of speaking as well, because it helps with our pronunciation and intonation. This 20% literally includes every chance to speak English in class. We do have the chance to produce spoken English output rather than just reading out something, but there are only a few opportunities like that.

I: Thank you. The second principal aspect I want to ask is about the teaching and learning model. What kind of teaching model do you prefer?

L: I like those with a relatively small class size. I felt that I was back to the middle school last term. Our teacher was teaching at the front and we just listened. There was not enough practice on spoken English or scope for creativity. Furthermore, when the teacher was talking most of the class time at the front, the students would feel bored. If we do not speak, we will feel sleepy. So small class size is better, because there will be more excitement.

I: Between the web-/computer-based learning and the more traditional class with a teacher, which one do you prefer? And why?

L: I prefer the class with a teacher. The learning is not so effective even if we spend every day in front of the computer. We do sometimes use computers for English learning, such as doing exercises on TOEFL. But computer-based learning can only take up a small part of English learning, because it is not so effective, at least to me. It makes high demands on autonomy and on self-discipline. However, I am not good at these and most of us are not good at these.

I: Is your English class teacher-centred or student-centred?

L: I think the Integrated English class is still teacher-centred. Teachers' talk takes up the majority of class time – about 70%. There isn't much students' practice. In the listening and speaking class, it is about 50% to 50%. 50% of the time, we practise, which involves doing

exercises on the textbook. There is not so much teacher's talk. Maybe she will explain a new word or a difficult part of the listening materials. Basically students practise by themselves. The lesson is still controlled by our teacher and we cannot take any initiative. The students cannot control what happens in class.

I: What are the differences and similarities between your learning experience in HE and that in middle schools?

L: It's difficult to find common areas as they are few except for studying texts. There are many differences. First of all, the study mode has changed. In the past, we used to study English every day. We were forced to do so. It is totally different in university now. Now it makes high demands on one's own initiative. Every week, there are only a few hours' lessons. The amount of in-class study has decreased a lot. There is a higher requirement for your own work after class. You need to make a lot of effort and do more exercises, such as listening. I think this is the difference between university and middle schools.

I: What about the teaching approach or in-class learning activities?

L: They are not the same either. First of all, multimedia technology is not so widely employed in middle schools. The picture is that the teacher lectures with a textbook in hand and the students sit there holding textbooks listening or repeating after the teacher. In university, the class is more interactive. Our teacher will communicate with us and encourage us to think. And I have more opportunities to practise. Compared to the past, it is better now.

I: OK. The next question is what you think about autonomy in learning English.

L: Actually I don't quite agree with this idea, but there is no other option. You have to learn by yourself in university. To take vocabulary, for example, our teacher does not have a high requirement on this aspect and she only asks us to memorize vocabulary. However, you will find that there is a great difference between the vocabulary in middle schools and that in the university both in the number and the difficulty of words. Students have to complement this by working hard on their own. However, I don't like this way. I still prefer more supervision from the teacher.

I: Are you aware that in the CE reform one of the important aspects is to train students' autonomy in learning?

L: Yes, but autonomy is required in every subject in HE. English is no exception. I can accept that, but the time on study might be much less when compared to the past. I still prefer to be supervised by the teacher. We do have much free time for ourselves in university now, and that means there is more time to play, to enjoy ourselves. That also means there will probably be less time devoted to study when compared to middle schools. I know that we should exercise more autonomy in everything while in university, but it is very hard to do so. I still prefer more control or supervision from our teachers. The learning will more effective.

I: Have you ever done or planned to do any autonomous learning?

L: I will do some before the end-of-term exam, and one or two months before CET4/6.

I: So what you do is mainly to prepare for the exams?

L: Yes, yes.

I: Have you ever made any plans for English learning? For example what do you aim to achieve this term? How frequently will you read an English article or listen to some English news?

L: Hardly any. The most frequent thing I do is to read and memorize vocabulary. For example, before the start of a new term, I will make a plan that I must pass CET4 or CET6. I then will buy a book of CET4/6 vocabulary, and divide the total number of pages by the number of days to the exam. I will then study a fixed amount of vocabulary every day no matter what happens. However, I don't think it is very effective as when I get to the second half of the book, I have forgotten many of the previous words. This is my current situation. However, I

have been doing this and I will continue with it. Sometimes I will get up very early in the morning to memorize vocabulary.

I: It looks as if the only sort of autonomous study you have done is to memorize vocabulary. And you have done this to prepare for the exams. Is that true?

L: Yes, that is right.

I: Have you made a plan for this new term?

L: In fact, before the start of the new term I wanted to read a book written in English.

I: Do you mean in the holiday time?

L: No, at the beginning of the new term. It's impossible to read during the holiday. I did have such an idea, but I have never carried it out. I have not even been to the library to search for such a book.

I: Are you still going to take CET6 this term?

L: Yes, definitely.

I: OK, thank you. The third major aspect I want to ask is about testing – CET4/6. I have heard that now students can choose if they want to take these two tests or not, and universities or colleges will not require their students to take these tests. Is it right?

L: We still have to pass CET4. Our faculty's minimum requirement is to pass CET4.

I: What if there wasn't such a requirement from the faculty? Would you still take CET?

L: Yes, of course. I will definitely pass CET4, but I would also like to pass CET6. They are helpful to students.

I: In what aspects are they helpful?

L: First of all they will help you with your English language learning, no matter whether it is vocabulary, writing or reading skills. Secondly, it is a qualification for future work. It can give you an advantage. Employers value foreign language skills. Therefore, it is necessary for us to take these tests.

I: So you mean that your English skills improved while you were preparing for CET4/6?

L: Yes, there was some improvement.

I: Is the second reason that it is a requirement from your future employers?

L: Yes, that's right.

I: Can you please comment on the influence that testing has on your English learning?

L: The influence is relatively strong.

I: Is it positive or negative? Or both?

L: How to say it, er ...we do not like to prepare for tests, but we have to in order to get a high score in tests. The initiative is from the pressure of tests. I think personally it is 100% positive for myself. It is quite helpful.

I: Some students may think it is not of much use because they will not be able to use those skills they have learnt in the process of test preparation after the test. Have you ever had such thoughts?

L: No, I have not. I think I should not make my own life hard. Since it is necessary to do one thing at a certain stage, then we just need to accept it and do it. It is going to be helpful.

Actually preparation for the tests did help me to improve my English skills. Without them, I would not have studied English so hard.

I: What is your attitude to English? Would you like it if it were not an obligatory subject or test?

L: It is a bit similar to sports or exercises. That is to say you will never realize that your knowledge or skill is not good enough until it is time for you to use it. However, it will be too late then. Sometimes I listen to English, such as English speeches on TV. It always motivates me strongly to learn English. I want to understand them. Maybe it is not possible to understand every single word or phrase. However, when I am able to understand most of it or the main idea of it, I feel really happy. I think I have become a bit lazy in university now. I

have lost the persistence in learning English. I used to study English every day when I was in middle school. The time I spend on studying English is less than before, but I am interested in it. Testing can give us some motivation to learn. That is not to say I don't like tests. We all consider tests very important, but in reality we only study English hard before tests. It is easy to forget the things you've learnt in such a short and intensive period.

I: If there wasn't such a test now, would you still study English in the same way?

L: Without the test, I would probably memorize some vocabulary and read some English magazines. That is the best situation.

I: What other English tests would you consider taking in the future?

L: After CET4 or CET6, ...er..., it depends. If I have time, I may consider taking IELTS or TOEFL. I attended one session of IELTS class in the same training school where I was attending the CET4 preparation class. When I saw there were IELTS and TOEFL classes going on, I went into the IELTS one for a trial session. Basically, I could not understand a lot, but there were so many students there. When I asked them why they attended this class, some of them said it was out of personal interest.

I: A personal interest in taking the test?

L: Yes. They want the certificate. Some may need it for job hunting. My purpose is to get a certificate, and so I will take it if I have any spare time. Basically, I think CET4 and CET6 are enough. If I do intend to learn IELTS or TOEFL in the future, I hope my English skills can improve. It is a target for me to achieve.

I: Did they tell you anything about whether or not their English skills have improved after taking IELTS or TOEFL?

L: Probably yes. There may be some improvement.

I: Right now speaking is not a compulsory assessment item and you can only take the speaking test if your score on the paper test has reached the minimum requirement. What do you think about this?

L: I don't quite agree with this. I believe everybody should have the opportunity to take the speaking test no matter what score they have on the paper test. A good mark on the paper test does not necessarily mean you are good at speaking or communicating. In the area of languages, especially foreign languages, one's communicative competence cannot be proved by an exam mark. For example, one may be good at speaking skills but a bit poor at writing. Like those native speakers of English, they definitely speak better English than us, but they may not be able to get a higher score in paper tests than some of the Chinese students. Therefore, I do not quite agree with this. There isn't much correlation between the mark on a paper test and speaking skills.

I: What kind of influence will it have on you if speaking is included in CET as an obligatory assessment item?

L: It will be of great help. Yes, I think it is very important to do so. It will be a strong motivator. Because of it, you will do more practice on speaking skills in everyday life.

I: What did you think about the speaking test before you took CET4 last year?

L: I didn't know much about the speaking test at that time. All I knew was that there is a threshold – one can only take the speaking test if one can achieve a certain score on the paper test. I didn't think much about it at that time. All I wanted was to pass the paper test, so I did more training on listening skills.

I: What if you knew that all skills were going to be tested?

L: Then maybe I would prepare for all, although I am not sure how much improvement I could get from this.

I: Do you think that your language skills won't be able to improve a lot from test preparation? The amount of vocabulary? Reading speed or listening skills?

L: I think listening skills will improve, as well as vocabulary, but reading skills are still not good enough.

I: What about writing skills?

L: There was little practice on writing, and thus there was very little improvement. The same as the speaking skills. I did more training on listening, and thus made more improvement on it.

I: What will you suggest that can be done to maximize the positive influence of testing on English study?

L: To enhance our own initiative in learning.

I: Let me to be a bit more specific. What kind of changes do you recommend to CETs?

L: I think there should be more subjective testing items so that students can express their own ideas. Maybe just on writing or speaking. Things like listening, I think, are exam-oriented and unchangeable. There isn't much that can be done. Not to reading as well. I don't think there is much to do.

I: So you mainly recommend changes to speaking and writing?

L: The proportion of writing in the total mark should be increased, and then there should be a speaking test so that every test taker is able to have an opportunity to have their speaking skills assessed. In such a way, students will be more active in practising speaking skills.

I: What are the other elements that may influence your English learning?

L: I think for myself, listening to speeches in English is definitely a strong one. It will greatly motivate me to learn English well.

I: Do you wish to do it by yourself after class or in class organized by your teacher?

L: I want to do it after class by myself.

I: What about other aspects, such as the society, employers, teachers or personal interests?

L: I think it is a personal thing. It's better when I am able to take my own initiative. It all comes down to our own actions or efforts in the end, no matter what external pressure there is. It's impossible to work without any personal motivation or personal interests. I don't have many requirements for our teachers. They are just fine. However, I do hope there will be more opportunities to demonstrate my abilities, and to practise language use in class. You know, there should be more students' practice and more students' creativity.

I: OK. What about the university? What will you suggest to the university on how to improve the CE teaching and learning situation? Or what suggestions do you have for the CE course?

L: My suggestion is that there should be more students' talk and less teacher's talk. The teacher controls the whole process, but the students will be able to express their own subjective ideas, which will be of more help to the students. Then, things like reading vocabulary or reading texts, we can do most of them after class by ourselves. The reason is that we have those exams there (CETs or end-of-term English exams). We will study the texts by ourselves without much supervision or pressure from the teachers. Then there will be more interaction between the teacher and the students in English class. This way should be better as there should be more interaction and communication.

I: OK, that is very good. This is the end of my interview. Thank you very much for your time and cooperation.

Appendix VII: Sample of the Analysis of Content

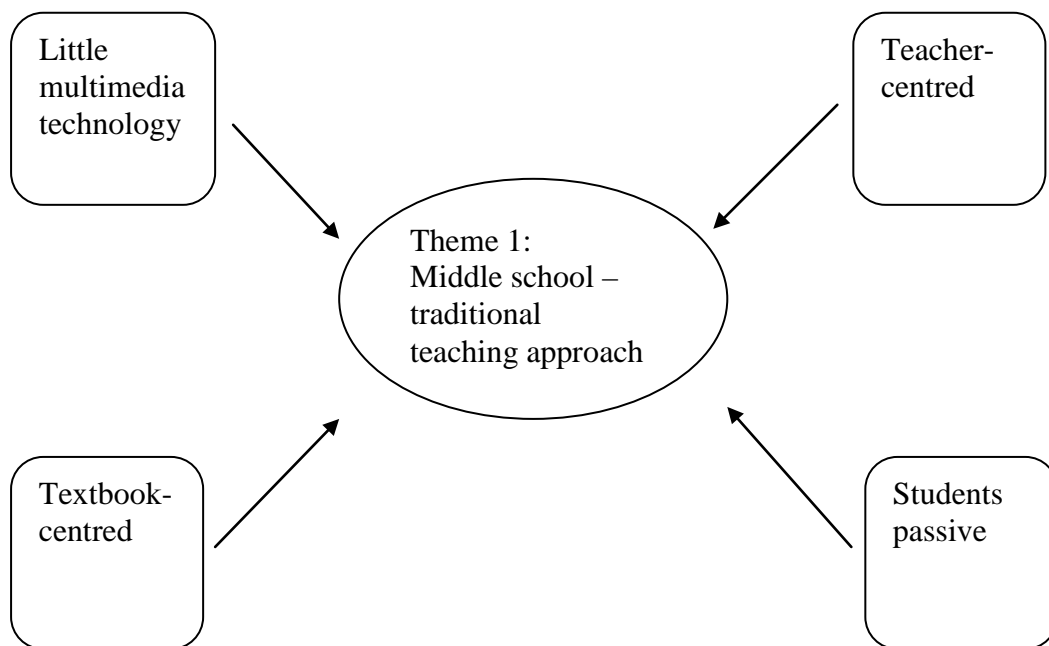
This is a worked example of content analysis based on a number of paragraphs from the translated transcript of the interview in appendix VI between myself as the interviewer (I) and the student Lee as the interviewee (L). The actual analysis was undertaken following the step-by-step guide of doing thematic analysis given by Braun and Clark (2006). After reading and familiarizing myself with the data (phase one according to Braun and Clark, 2006), I started to generate initial codes from the data set (phase two, *ibid*). The initial codings were handwritten onto the margins of the transcription in Chinese, but are translated into English in the table below to illustrate the approach adopted.

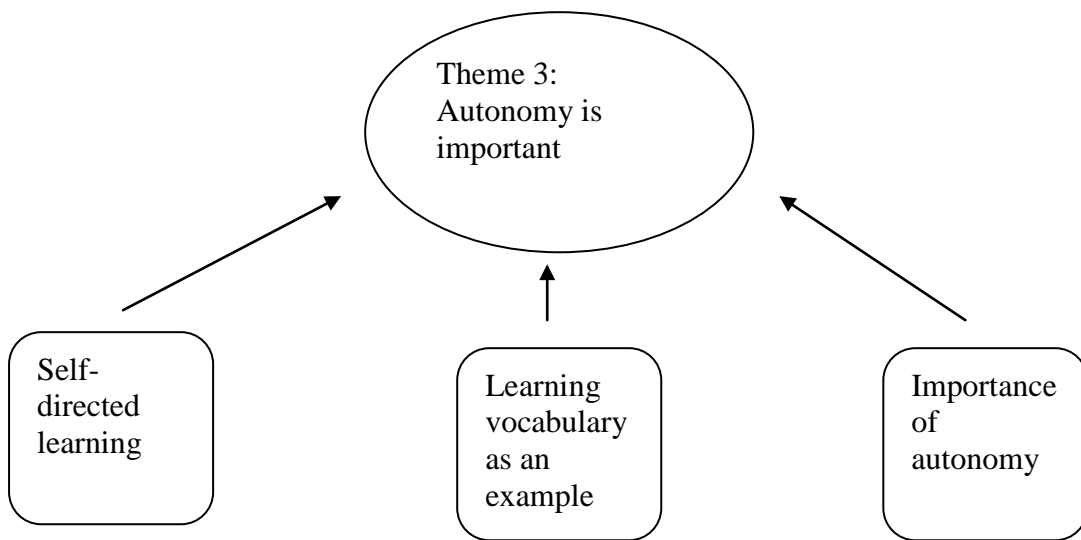
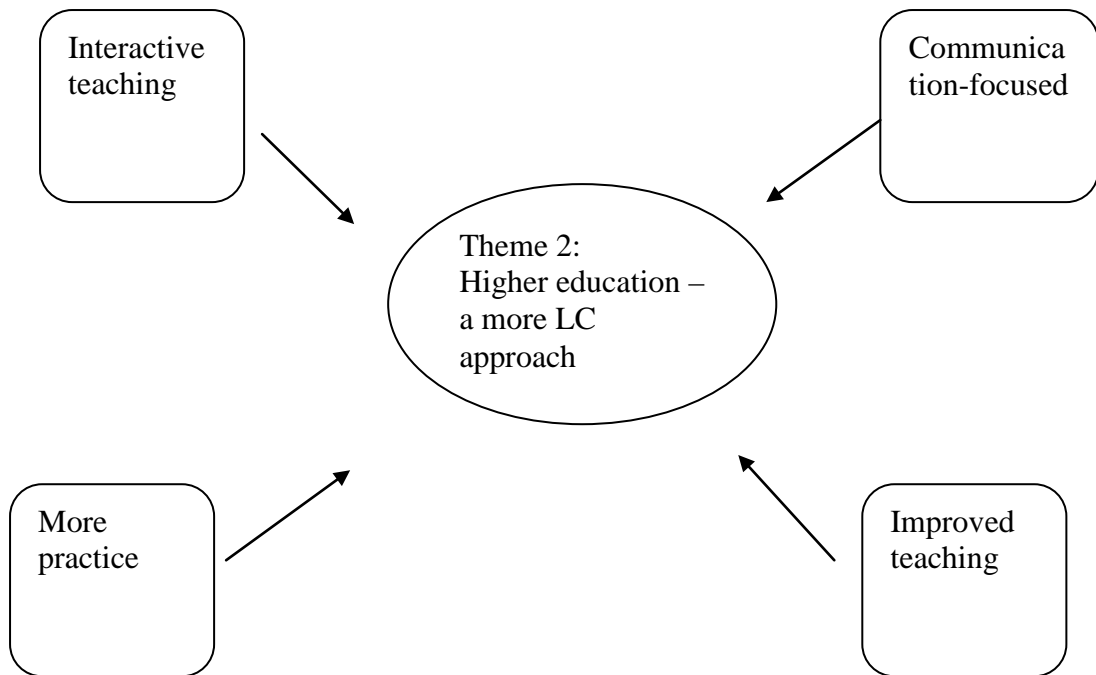
Data extract	Coded for
<p>I: What about the teaching approach or in-class learning activities?</p> <p>L: They are not the same either. First of all, multimedia technology is not so widely employed in middle schools. The picture is that the teacher lectures with a textbook in hand and the students sit there holding textbooks listening or repeating after the teacher. In university, the class is more interactive. Our teacher will communicate with us and encourage us to think. And I have more opportunities to practise. Compared to the past, it is better now.</p> <p>I: OK. The next question is what you think about autonomy in learning English.</p> <p>L: Actually I don't quite agree with this idea, but there is no other option. You have to learn by yourself in university. To take vocabulary, for example, our teacher does not have a high requirement on this aspect and she only asks us to memorize vocabulary. However, you will find that there is a great difference between the vocabulary in middle schools and that in the university both in the number and the difficulty of words. Students have to complement this by working hard on their own. However, I don't like this way. I still prefer more supervision from the teacher.</p> <p>I: Are you aware that in the CE reform one of the important aspects is to train students' autonomy in learning?</p> <p>L: Yes, but autonomy is required in every subject in HE. English is no exception. I can accept that, but the time on study might be much less when compared to the past. I still prefer to be supervised by the teacher. We do have much free time for ourselves in university now, and that means there is more</p>	<p>Little multimedia technology</p> <p>Teacher-centred Textbook-centred Students passive</p> <p>Interactive teaching Communication-focused More practice Improved teaching</p> <p>Doubt about autonomy</p> <p>Self-directed learning</p> <p>Learning vocabulary as an example</p> <p>Preference for teachers' guidance</p> <p>Importance of autonomy</p> <p>Less time on study</p> <p>Preference for teachers' guidance</p> <p>More free time/big difference</p>

<p>time to play, to enjoy ourselves. That also means there will probably be less time devoted to study when compared to middle schools. I know that we should exercise more autonomy in everything while in university, but it is very hard to do so. I still prefer more control or supervision from our teachers. The learning will more effective.</p>	<p>Less time on study</p> <p>Importance of autonomy</p> <p>Difficulty in being autonomous</p> <p>Preference for teachers' guidance</p> <p>Improved learning</p>
---	---

Table: A worked example of initial coding

This detailed coding process was carried out for the entire interview data (13 sets of student interviews) until a long list of codes were compiled. Codes which may be different but relevant were combined into a broader theme, and the relationships between various themes or different levels of themes were explored, so that a preliminary thematic map was formulated (phase 3, *ibid*). The codes in the above example were first grouped into the following themes:





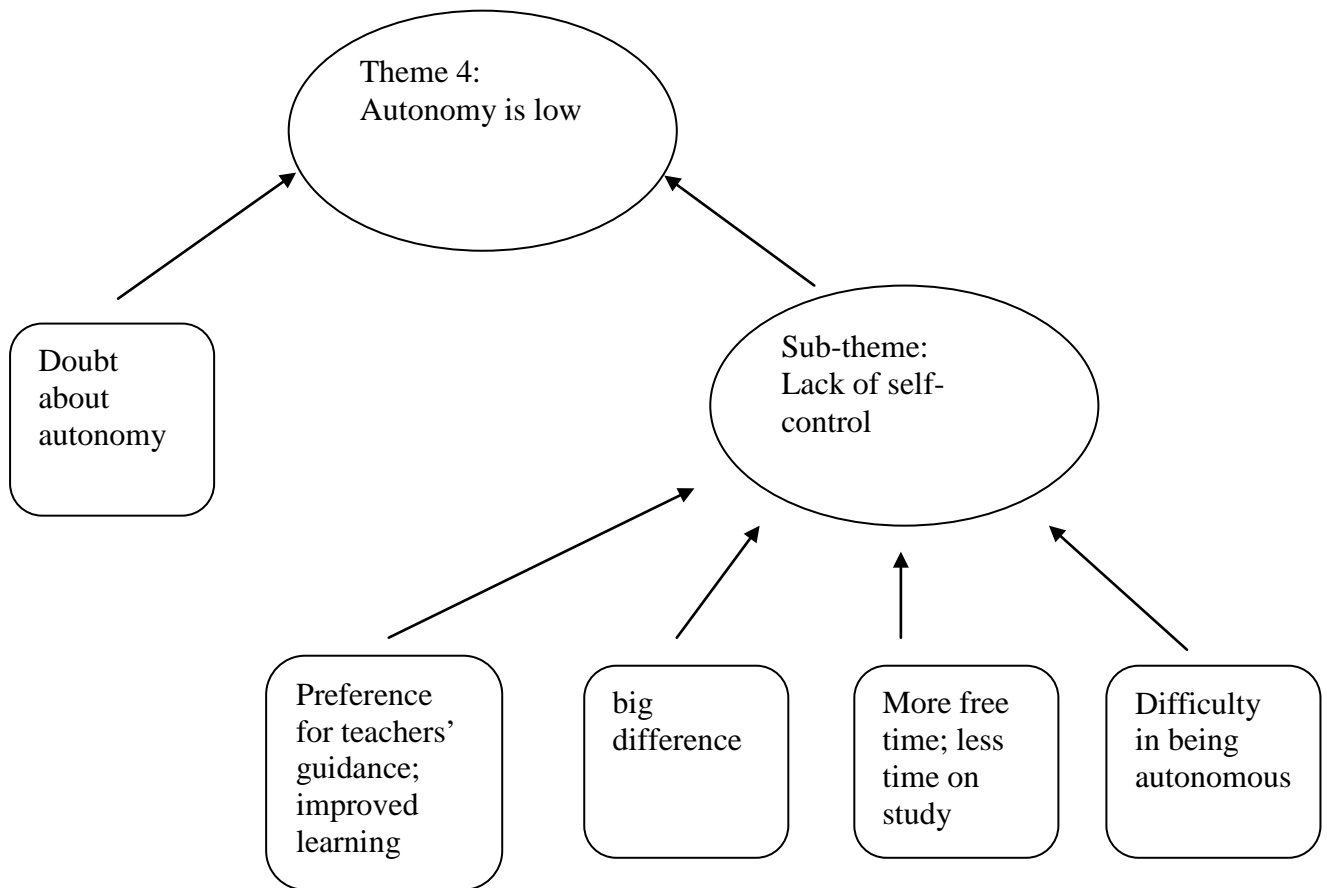


Figure: A worked sample of formulating themes

These initial themes and subthemes were reviewed and refined together with other themes and sub-themes generated from the rest of data (phase 4 & phase 5, *ibid*). The figure below shows how the above themes and sub-themes fit into the whole thematic map.

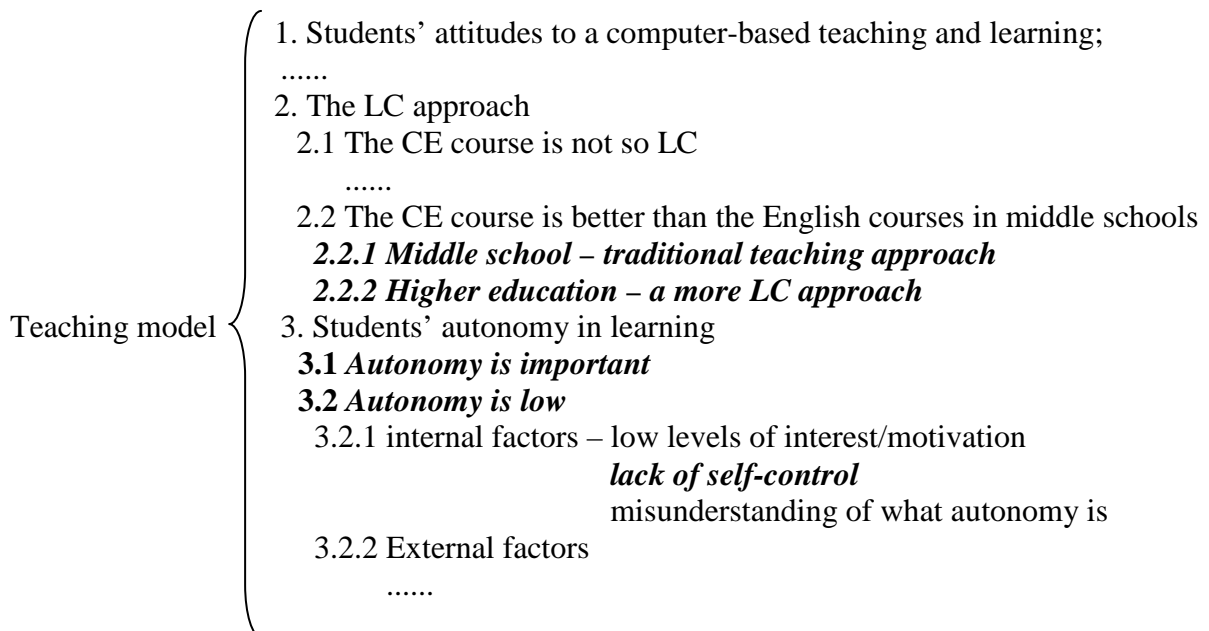


Figure: A worked example of how the identified themes and sub-themes fit into the whole thematic map

According to Braun and Clarke (2006), the final phase (phase 6) is to produce a report. Chapter 10 of this thesis presents a detailed report of the analysis of the students' interviews following this thematic approach.

Appendix VIII: CE Teaching Requirements 2007

With a view to keeping up with the new developments of higher education in China, deepening teaching reform, improving teaching quality, and meeting the needs of the country and society for qualified personnel in the new era, College English Curriculum Requirements (Requirements hereafter) has been drawn up to provide colleges and universities with the guidelines for English instruction to non-English major students.

Because institutions of higher learning differ from each other in terms of teaching resources, students' level of English upon entering college, and the social demands they face, colleges and universities should formulate, in accordance with the Requirements and in the light of their specific circumstances, a scientific, systematic and individualized College English syllabus to guide their own College English teaching.

I. Characteristics and Objectives of College English

College English, an integral part of higher learning, is a required basic course for undergraduate students. Under the guidance of theories of foreign language teaching, College English has as its main components knowledge and practical skills of the English language, learning strategies and intercultural communication. It is a systematic whole, incorporating different teaching models and approaches.

The objective of College English is to develop students' ability to use English in a well-rounded way, especially in listening and speaking, so that in their future studies and careers as well as social interactions they will be able to communicate effectively, and at the same time enhance their ability to study independently and improve their general cultural awareness so as to meet the needs of China's social development and international exchanges.

II. Teaching Requirements

As China is a large country with conditions that vary from region to region and from college to college, the teaching of College English should follow the principle of providing different guidance for different groups of students and instructing them in accordance with their aptitude so as to meet the specific needs of individualized teaching.

The requirements for undergraduate College English teaching are set at three levels, i.e., basic requirements, intermediate requirements, and higher requirements. Non-English majors are required to attain to one of the three levels of requirements after studying and practicing English at school. The basic requirements are the minimum level that all non-English majors have to reach before graduation. Intermediate and advanced requirements are recommended for those colleges and universities which have more favorable conditions; they should select their levels according to the school's status, types and education goals.

Institutions of higher learning should set their own objectives in the light of their specific circumstances, strive to create favorable conditions, and enable those students who have a relatively higher English proficiency and stronger capacity for learning to meet the intermediate or advanced requirements.

The three levels of requirements are set as follows:

Basic requirements

1. **Listening:** Students should be able to follow classroom instructions, everyday conversations, and lectures on general topics conducted in English. They should be able to understand English radio and TV programs spoken at a speed of about 130 to 150 words per minute (wpm), grasping the main ideas and key points. They are expected to be able to employ basic listening strategies to facilitate comprehension.
2. **Speaking:** Students should be able to communicate in English in the course of learning, to conduct discussions on a given theme, and to talk about everyday topics in English. They should be able to give, after some preparation, short talks on familiar topics with clear articulation and basically correct pronunciation and intonation. They are expected to be able to use basic conversational strategies in dialogue.
3. **Reading:** Students should generally be able to read English texts on general topics at a speed of 70 wpm. With longer yet less difficult texts, the reading speed should be 100 wpm. Students should be able to do skimming and scanning. With the help of dictionaries, they should be able to read textbooks in their areas of specialty, and newspaper and magazine articles on familiar topics, grasping the main ideas and understanding major facts and relevant details. They should be able to understand texts of practical styles commonly used in work and daily life. They are expected to be able to employ effective reading strategies while reading.
4. **Writing:** Students should be able to complete writing tasks for general purposes, e.g., describing personal experiences, impressions, feelings, or some events, and to undertake practical writing. They should be able to write within 30 minutes a short composition of no less than 120 words on a general topic, or an outline. The composition should be basically complete in content, clear in main idea, appropriate in diction and coherent in discourse. Students are expected to be able to have a command of basic writing strategies.
5. **Translation:** With the help of dictionaries, students should be able to translate essays on familiar topics from English into Chinese and vice versa. The speed of translation from English into Chinese should be about 300 English words per hour whereas the speed of translation from Chinese into English should be around 250 Chinese characters per hour. The translation should be basically accurate, free from serious mistakes in comprehension or expression.
6. **Recommended Vocabulary:** Students should acquire a total of 4,795 words and 700 phrases (including those that are covered in high school English courses), among which 2,000 are active words. (See Appendix III: College English Vocabulary.) Students should not only be able to comprehend the active words but be proficient in using them when expressing themselves in speaking or writing.

Intermediate requirements:

1. **Listening:** Students should generally be able to follow talks and lectures in English, to understand longer English radio and TV programs on familiar topics spoken at a speed of around 150 to 180 wpm, grasping the main ideas, key points and relevant details. They should be able to understand, by and large, courses in their areas of specialty taught in English.
2. **Speaking:** Students should be able to hold conversations in fairly fluent English. They should, by and large, be able to express their personal opinions, feelings and views, to state facts and reasons, and to describe events with clear articulation and basically correct pronunciation and intonation.
3. **Reading:** Students should generally be able to read essays on general topics in popular newspapers and magazines published in English-speaking countries at a speed of 70 to 90 wpm. With longer texts for fast reading, the reading speed should be 120 wpm. Students should be able to skim or scan reading materials. When reading summary literature in their

areas of specialty, students should be able to get a correct understanding of the main ideas, major facts and relevant details.

4. Writing: Students should be able to express, by and large, personal views on general topics, compose English abstracts for theses in their own specialization, and write short English papers on topics in their field. They should be able to describe charts and graphs, and to complete within 30 minutes a short composition of no less than 160 words. The composition should be complete in content, clear in idea, well-organized in presentation and coherent in discourse.

5. Translation: With the help of dictionaries, students should be able to translate on a selective basis English literature in their field, and to translate texts on familiar topics in popular newspapers and magazines published in English-speaking countries. The speed of translation from English into Chinese should be about 350 English words per hour, whereas the speed of translation from Chinese into English should be around 300 Chinese characters per hour. The translation should read smoothly, convey the original meaning and be, in the main, free from mistakes in understanding or expression. Students are expected to be able to use appropriate translation techniques.

6. Recommended Vocabulary: Students should acquire a total of 6,395 words and 1,200 phrases (including those that are covered in high school English courses and the Basic Requirements), among which 2,200 are active words (including the active words that have been covered in the Basic Requirements). (See Appendix III: College English Vocabulary.)

Advanced Requirements:

1. Listening: Students should, by and large, be able to understand radio and TV programs produced in English-speaking countries and grasp the gist and key points. They should be able to follow talks by people from English-speaking countries given at normal speed, and to understand courses in their areas of specialty and lectures in English.

2. Speaking: Students should be able to conduct dialogues or discussions with a certain degree of fluency and accuracy on general or specialized topics, and to make concise summaries of extended texts or speeches in fairly difficult language. They should be able to deliver papers at academic conferences and participate in discussions.

3. Reading: Students should be able to read rather difficult texts, and understand their main ideas and details. They should be able to read English articles in newspapers and magazines published abroad, and to read English literature related to their areas of specialty without much difficulty.

4. Writing: Students should be able to write brief reports and papers in their areas of specialty, to express their opinions freely, and to write within 30 minutes expository or argumentative essays of no less than 200 words on a given topic. The text should be characterized by clear expression of ideas, rich content, neat structure, and good logic.

5. Translation: With the help of dictionaries, students should be able to translate into Chinese fairly difficult English texts in literature related to their areas of specialty and in newspapers and magazines published in English-speaking countries; they should also be able to translate Chinese introductory texts on the conditions of China or Chinese culture into English. The speed of translation from English into Chinese should be about 400 English words per hour whereas the speed of translation from Chinese into English should be around 350 Chinese characters per hour. The translation should convey the idea with accuracy and smoothness and be basically free from misinterpretation, omission and mistakes in expression.

6. Recommended Vocabulary: Students should acquire a total of 7,675 words and 1,870 phrases (including those that are covered in high school English courses, the Basic Requirements and Intermediate Requirements), among which 2,360 are active words

(including the active words that have been covered in the Basic Requirements and Intermediate Requirements). (See Appendix III: College English Vocabulary.)

The above-mentioned three requirements serve as reference standards for colleges and universities in preparing their own College English teaching documents. They could, in the light of their respective circumstances, make due adjustments to the specific requirements for listening, speaking, reading, writing and translation at the three levels. In doing so they should place more emphasis on the cultivation and training of listening and speaking abilities.

III. Course Design

Taking into account the school's circumstances, colleges and universities should follow the guidelines of the Requirements and the goals of their College English teaching in designing their College English course systems. A course system, which is a combination of required and elective courses in comprehensive English, language skills, English for practical uses, language and culture, and English of specialty, should ensure that students at different levels receive adequate training and make improvement in their ability to use English.

In designing College English courses, requirements for cultivating competence in listening and speaking should be fully considered, and corresponding teaching hours and credits should be adequately allocated. Moreover, the extensive use of advanced information technology should be encouraged, computer- and Web-based courses should be developed, and students should be provided with favorable environment and facilities for language learning.

College English is not only a language course that provides basic knowledge about English, but also a capacity enhancement course that helps students to broaden their horizons and learn about different cultures in the world. It not only serves as an instrument, but also has humanistic values. When designing College English courses, therefore, it is necessary to take into full consideration the development of students' cultural capacity and the teaching of knowledge about different cultures in the world.

All the courses, whether computer-based or classroom-based, should be fully individual-oriented, taking into account students with different starting points, so that students who start from lower levels will be well taken care of while students whose English is better will find room for further development. College English course design should help students to have a solid foundation in the English language while developing their ability to use English, especially their ability to listen and speak in English. It should ensure that students make steady progress in English proficiency throughout their undergraduate studies, and it should encourage students' individualized learning so as to meet the needs of their development in different specialties.

IV. Teaching Model

In view of the marked increase in student enrolments and the relatively limited resources, colleges and universities should remould the existing unitary teacher-centered pattern of language teaching by introducing computer- and classroom-based teaching models. The new model should be built on modern information technology, particularly network technology, so that English language teaching and learning will be, to a certain extent, free from the constraints of time or place and geared towards students' individualized and autonomous learning. The new model should combine the principles of practicality, knowledge and interest, facilitate mobilizing the initiative of both teachers and students, and attach particular importance to the central position of students and the leading role of teachers in the teaching and learning process. This model should incorporate into it the strengths of the current model

and give play to the advantages of traditional classroom teaching while fully employing modern information technology.

Colleges and universities should explore and establish a Web-based listening and speaking teaching model that suits their own needs in line with their own conditions and students' English proficiency, and deliver listening and speaking courses via the intranet or campus network. The teaching of reading, writing and translation can be conducted either in the classroom or online. With regard to computer- and Web-based courses, face-to-face coaching should be provided in order to guarantee the effects of learning.

The network-based teaching system developed in an attempt to implement the new teaching model should cover the complete process of teaching, learning, feedback and management, including such modules as students' learning and self-assessment, teachers' lectures, and online coaching, as well as the monitoring and management of learning and coaching. It should be able to track down, record and check the progress of learning in addition to teaching and coaching, and attain to a high level of interactivity, multimedia-use and operability. Colleges and universities should adopt good teaching software and encourage teachers to make effective use of web multimedia and other teaching resources.

One of the objectives of the reform of the teaching model is to promote the development of individualized study methods and the autonomous learning ability on the part of students. The new model should enable students to select materials and methods suited to their individual needs, obtain guidance in learning strategies, and gradually improve their autonomous learning ability.

Changes in the teaching model by no means call for changes in teaching methods and approaches only, but, more important, consist of changes in teaching philosophy and practice, and in a shift from a teacher-centered pattern, in which knowledge of the language and skills are imparted by the teacher in class only, to a student-centered pattern, in which the ability to use the language and the ability to learn independently are cultivated in addition to language knowledge and skills, and also to lifelong education, geared towards cultivating students' lifelong learning ability.

V. Evaluation

Evaluation is a key component in College English teaching. A comprehensive, objective, scientific and accurate evaluation system is of vital importance to the achievement of course goals. It not only helps teachers obtain feedback, improve the administration of teaching, and ensure teaching quality but also provides students with an effective means to adjust their learning strategies and methods, improve their learning efficiency and achieve the desired learning effects.

The evaluation of students' learning consists of formative assessment and summative assessment.

Formative assessment refers to procedural and developmental assessment conducted in the teaching process, i.e., tracking the teaching process, providing feedback and promoting an all-round development of the students, in accordance with the teaching objectives and by means of various evaluative methods. It facilitates the effective monitoring of students' autonomous learning, and is particularly important in implementing the computer- and classroom-based teaching model. It includes students' self-assessment, peer assessment, and assessment conducted by teachers and school administrators. Formative assessment takes such forms as

keeping a record of students' in and outside of classroom activities and online self-learning data, keeping files on students' study results, and conducting interviews and holding meetings. This allows students' learning processes to be subjected to observation, evaluation and supervision, thus contributing to the enhancement of their learning efficiency.

Summative assessment is conducted at the end of a teaching phase. It mainly consists of final tests and proficiency tests, designed to evaluate student's all-round ability to use English. These tests aim to assess not only students' competence in reading, writing and translation, but also their competence in listening and speaking.

To make a summative assessment of teaching, colleges and universities may administer tests of their own, run tests at the intercollegiate or regional level, or let students take the national test after meeting the different standards set by the Requirements. Whatever form the tests may take, the focus should be on the assessment of students' ability to use English in communication, particularly their ability to listen and speak in English.

Evaluation also includes that of the teachers, i.e., the assessment of their teaching processes and effects. This should not be merely based on students' test scores, but take into account teachers' attitudes, approaches, and methods; it should also consider the content and organization of their courses, and the effects of their teaching.

Government education administrative offices at different levels and colleges and universities should regard the evaluation of College English teaching as an important part of the evaluation of the overall undergraduate education of the school.

VI. Teaching Administration

Teaching administration should cover the whole process of College English teaching. To ensure that the set teaching objectives can be achieved, efforts should be made to strengthen the guidance for and supervision of the teaching process. For this purpose, the following measures should be taken:

1. A system for teaching and teaching administration documentation should be established. Documents of teaching include College English Curriculum of the colleges and universities concerned, as well as the documents stipulating the teaching objectives, course description, teaching arrangement, content of teaching, teaching progress, and methods of assessment for all the courses within the program. Documents of teaching administration include documents registering students' status and their academic credits, regulations of assessment, students' academic scores and records, analyses of exam papers, guidelines for teaching and records of teaching and research activities.
2. The College English program should adapt itself to the overall credit system of the colleges and universities concerned and should account for 10% (around 16) of the total undergraduate credits. The credits students acquire via computer-based courses should be equally acknowledged once students pass the exams. It is suggested that these credits should account for no less than 30% of the total credits in College English learning.
3. Faculty employment and management should be improved in order to guarantee a reasonable teacher-student ratio. In addition to classroom teaching, the hours spent on face-to-face coaching, instructions on network usage and on extracurricular activities should be counted in the teachers' teaching load.
4. A system of faculty development should be established. The quality of teachers is the key to the improvement of the teaching quality, and to the development of the College English program. Colleges and universities should build a faculty team with a good structure of age,

educational backgrounds and professional titles, lay emphasis on the training and development of College English teachers, encourage them to conduct teaching and research with a focus on the improvement of teaching quality, create conditions for them to carry out relevant activities in various forms, and promote effective cooperation among them, so that they can better adapt to the new teaching model. Meanwhile, opportunities should be created so that the teachers can enjoy sabbaticals and engage in advanced studies, thus ensuring sustainable improvement in their academic performance and methods of teaching.

(Department of Higher Education, Ministry of Education, 2007)