Communicative Competence and Critical Thinking: a Crosscultural View of Chinese EFL Learners and Teachers In a University Context

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Declaration

I hereby certify that this material, which I now submit for assessment on the programme of study leading to the award of the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy is entirely my own work and has not been taken from the work of others save and to the extent that such work has been cited and acknowledged within the text of my work.

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Abstract

Lixin Xiao - *Communicative Competence and Critical Thinking: A Cross-cultural View of Chinese EFL learners and Teachers in a University Context*

This study explores a pedagogical framework for tertiary level learners which takes full account of the traditions and context of Chinese English language teaching. It aims to adapt the western-based communicative language teaching approach and communicative competence model to the Chinese setting at university level so that both learner and teachers can benefit.

The research methodology consists of a quantitative survey and a qualitative study which includes in-depth interviews and classroom observations. The aim is to compile first-hand information on learner/teacher attitudes towards teacher-centred and student-centred teaching approaches, culture learning in EFL programs, and the major difficulties faced by both students and teachers in the teaching/learning process when CLT is introduced into English classes.

Quantitative Data are analysed using the statistics package for social science (SPSS), and qualitative data is categorized to identify possible patterns for analysis and discussion. A comparison between students' and teachers' data reveals perceptual matches and mismatches between the two groups. Survey findings are evaluated in relation to the theoretical foundations of communicative competence (Canale & Swain, 1980; Canale, 1983). On a practical level, some effective strategy for teaching EFL to Chinese English majors at third level are suggested. On a theoretical level, a synthesized approach for integrating communicative language teaching into current Chinese traditional teaching methods is proposed whose aim is to enhance Chinese English majors' communicative competence.

List of Abbreviations

ACD:	American College Dublin
BEC:	Cambridge Business English Certificate
CA:	Communicative Activities
CC:	Communicative Competence
CIDA:	Canadian International Development Agency
CLT:	Communicative Language Teaching
CR:	Comprehensive Reading Course
CT:	Critical Thinking
DCU:	Dublin City University
DCULS:	Dublin City University Language Services
EFL:	English as a Foreign Language
EMGs:	English-Major Graduates
ESL:	English as a Second Language
EU:	European Union
FL:	Foreign Language
GRE:	Graduate Record Exams
IELTS	International English Language Testing System
IR:	Intensive Reading Course
L1:	First Language
L2:	Second Language
LLS:	Language learning strategy
NCA:	Non-Communicative Activities
NK:	Nankai University
NPG:	[The] North Project Group
SCA:	Student-Centred Approach
SPSS:	Statistic Package for Social Science
TCA:	Teacher-Centred Approach
TEFL:	Teaching English as a Foreign Language
TNU:	Tianjin Normal University
TOEFL:	Test of English as a Foreign Language

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Introduction

The reason why teaching is so difficult to talk about is not because it is so unfamiliar, but because it is too familiar.

Kramsch (1993: 104)

Development of personal interest

Twenty five years ago, when I was still an English language university student, learning English meant little more than acquiring a thorough knowledge of grammatical rules and vocabulary and reading literary masterpieces. The fact that the primary goal of any language is communication did not seem to have any bearing on how it was taught. As long as students could reproduce grammatical rules and apply them to the most intricate translation exercises, the teacher was happy and convinced that s/he was doing a good job. The traditional dominant model of EFL teaching in China today still presents language as a system of cognitive patterns and reference items to be learned and mastered, in a fashion not dissimilar to mathematical and physical laws.

Although the revised national English curriculum for English-major students at tertiary level claims the cultivation of learners' communicative competence as a goal of EFL education and calls for a further reform, in reality with this teaching approach little intercultural sensitivity or communicative competence has been achieved. As a university teacher of the English language in China for 20 years, I have realized the merits and demerits of the traditional language teaching approach. However, given the situation of EFL teaching in China, a fundamental shift cannot take place without a fundamental pedagogical change both at a theoretical and a practical level. From the Chinese perspective, this shift is of great significance because China has the largest national population of English language learners in the world, and at present enthusiasm for English language learning is unprecedented in her history.

Significance of this study

This thesis explores how to enhance Chinese English major students' communicative competence by examining the specific problems encountered in Chinese English language classrooms in a university context, namely, Nankai University, China (See Chapter 4 for further details). Communicative language teaching (CLT) was introduced to China in the early 1980s, but the changes it has brought about have been more on the theoretical level rather than affecting what actually goes on in English classrooms. As a result, the outcome of EFL teaching of college-level English majors has not been satisfactory. In China, the dominant teaching practices are traditional grammar-translation and audio-lingual teaching methods which do not prove helpful in developing learners' communicative competence as 'students became almost structurally competent but communicatively incompetent' (Johnson & Morrow: 1981:1). The results of this study will be of significance to current EFL reform at tertiary level in China and to native speakers of English who teach Chinese students in multicultural classrooms outside China, the latter having experienced an extraordinary rise in recent times. For instance, in Ireland the past 7 years have witnessed a substantial increase from a few hundred Chinese students to an estimated 40,000 now arriving to study English or pursue an advanced degree at tertiary level.

Focus of this study

This research falls into two parts, as it involves both teachers and learners. As teaching and learning are interlinked, the enhancement of Chinese learners' communicative competence will proceed from change in the classroom involving both teachers and learners. The questions this thesis seeks to answer are the following:

1. What are the attitudes of Chinese English-major students and their teachers towards: a). communicative language teaching (CLT), b). the traditional Chinese teaching approach in English class? Does any major perceptual match or mismatch on these subjects exist between students and teachers?

2. What are the major difficulties that Chinese EFL students and teachers might have encountered in their attempts to adopt CLT in the Chinese context?

3. How can Chinese English learners' communicative competence be enhanced within the EFL programmes at tertiary level?

4. How can Chinese English learners' critical thinking skills be developed?

It should be emphasized that these concerns have arisen from my direct experience as a lecturer at university level and this thesis draws from the teaching of English for English majors at Nankai University as the empirical research in this study bears witness. Unless specified otherwise, the Chinese EFL learners in this thesis are referred to as university-level English major students.

Organization of the thesis

This thesis consists of 10 chapters detailed below:

Chapter 1 presents a history of EFL education in China over the past century. It also gives a description of the various challenges confronting EFL education for English majors at university level in China.

Chapter 2 presents a review of the related literature, and is divided into two sections. The first section begins with an overview of the notion of communicative competence. It examines its application in CLT and presents a review of the various critiques of CLT. The second section examines the current state of the communicative competence of Chinese EFL majors, and the debate over the application of CLT in Chinese EFL education at university level.

Chapter 3 outlines a review of cultural factors affecting the EFL education in China by discussing the concepts of 'individualism vs. collectivism', 'high vs. low power distance' and 'strong vs. weak uncertainty avoidance' and the 'Chinese culture of learning'.

Chapter 4 describes the research design used in this study and includes a detailed description of both the quantitative and qualitative research methodological procedures used in data collection, presentation and analysis.

Chapter 5 focuses on the presentation and discussion of the quantitative data. The first section begins with quantitative data findings of the student group including Chinese EFL students' attitudes towards CLT, the traditional approach, authority in class, and learning foreign cultures in English language programmes. The second section provides a comparison between quantitative data of students' and teachers' perceptions of the above-mentioned items in the first section.

Chapter 6 presents an analysis of qualitative data collected through interviews and questionnaires from both students and teachers. A detailed account of both groups' comments is given, focusing on why they might favour or disfavour CLT or traditional teaching methods. The problems they encounter in the process of their learning and teaching are explored.

Chapter 7 focuses on an analysis of qualitative data arising from classroom observations of five teacher participants. Similarities and differences in terms of their classroom instruction patterns are presented and discussed. Contributory factors, such as those which lead to the discrepancy between what most teachers claimed to do and what they actually did in class, are also examined.

Chapter 8 proposes a pedagogical model for an eclectic approach which integrates communicative components into the traditional approach in order to suit the Chinese EFL context.

Chapter 9 focuses on ways of addressing a major problem identified in this study: namely, learners' inability to think critically in EFL programs at tertiary level in China. I suggest suitable pedagogical strategies for the development and assessment of critical thinking instruction in English class.

Finally in Chapter 10, I discuss the significant implications of this thesis in the area of English language education for English majors at tertiary level within and outside China.

Chapter 1

A historical overview of EFL education in China

Introduction

This chapter begins with a chronological overview of English language teaching in China. This is followed by an overview of the present state of English teaching at tertiary level, including the differences between English education for English majors and for non-majors. New challenges facing English teaching for English majors in the Chinese context are also examined and discussed in order to provide the background and context for the research.

1. 1. A brief history of EFL education in China

Over the last 150 years, China has experienced tremendous changes in its foreign language teaching policies, especially in the area of English as a foreign language (EFL). The evolution and development of foreign language education in China has undergone various twists and turns. It is generally agreed that two broad historical periods are significant: *old China* (1759 -1949) and *new China* (1949 to present day) with the founding of the People's Republic of China (1st October, 1949) as a demarcation line (Fu, 1986; Li *et al*, 1988; Ross, 1993; Adamson, 2002; Lam, 2002). (See Table 1.1 and 1.2)

Table - 1   **Historical Period One: Old China (1759-1949)**

Period		Role and status	English language Education
Later Qing Dynasty	1759-1860	English perceived as a 'barbarian' tongue, low official status	Private study
	1861-1911	English as a vehicle for gaining access to Western science and technology; helpful to the development of China's international diplomacy	On the curriculum of newly established secondary schools
The Republican Era	1911-1923	English as a vehicle for exploring Western philosophy and other ideas; opportunities for study abroad; high official status	On the curricula of secondary and tertiary institutions
	1924-1949	English as a vehicle for diplomatic, military and intercultural interaction with the West; resistance from nationalistic scholars and politicians fearing unwanted cultural transfer	On the curricula of secondary and tertiary institutions

Source: Fu (1986), Adamson (2002), Lam (2002)

Table -1.2.   **Historical Period Two: New China (1949 to present day)**

Historical Period	Phase in FL education	Time
Before the Cultural Revolution	Russian as the first foreign language in China	1949 -1950s
	English as the first foreign language in China	1957-65
During the Cultural Revolution	Repudiation of Foreign language learning	1966-70
	English for renewing ties with the West	1971-76
After the Cultural Revolution	English learning for modernization	1977 –1990
	English learning for international relations	From 1991 onwards

Source: (ibid.)

At different times throughout the history, the English language has been perceived variously as a threat to national integrity or as a conduit for strengthening China's position in the world community (Lam, 2002). From 1759 to 1860, under the

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influence of Chinese rulers' parochial arrogance and closed-door policy, English was regarded as the language of a 'technically powerful enemy' whose culture appeared to the Chinese as essentially 'barbaric' (Adamson, 2002: 231). In this period there was little need for learning or teaching English and, as a result, little took place.

However, China's defeat in the opium war against Great Britain (1839–1842) signalled the end of the Chinese rulers' delusions. It revealed the technological inferiority of Chinese weaponry and the state's inability to protect its territorial integrity. This had far-reaching implications on the nation's cultural and political well-being and finally led to the birth of a strategy of synthesis - *Ti-Yong Dichotomy* - put forward by Zhang Zhidong (1837-1909), a statesman and reformer, who promoted modernization in China during the last years of the Qing dynasty. The principle was 'study China for *essence*, study the West for *utility*' [*zhong xue wei ti, xi xue wei yong*]. In other words, traditional Chinese philosophy was studied for its fundamental principles *ti*, and Western civilization was studied for practical applications *yong*. (Ross, 1993; Feng, 2000). Chinese scholars and rulers recognized that this principle necessitated the study of English and other languages to gain access to Western technology. They believed that once access to such skills was obtained, foreign aggression could be challenged, leaving the spiritual core of Chinese cultural traditions - Confucianism - intact (Adamson, 2002: 234; Ross, 1993; He, 2000).

Thus in 1861, the Chinese government set up the first foreign language school *Jingshi Tongwen Guan* (literally School of Combined Learning) in Beijing with British missionary, J. C. Burdon, as its first English instructor (He, 2002). Two years later, a similar establishment was established in Shanghai. By the late 1870s, graduates from the *Jingshi Tongwen Guan* began to gain appointments within the civil service and diplomatic postings overseas. The status of the school, and of studying English, rose accordingly. In the following years, more schools based on the model of the *Tongwen Guan* were established and English was taught in schools set up by foreign missionary organizations and became a way of capturing the hearts and minds of the Chinese people and a means of peaceful transformation. However, it

was the economic benefits of learning English that attracted most Chinese students (Adamson, 2002).

The revolution of 1911 [1] overthrew of the Qing Dynasty and ushered in the Republican era in 1911. English was one of the three core subjects (along with Chinese and Mathematics) in the secondary school curriculum (Rose, 1993). But the wider function of English language teaching and learning as a medium for accessing philosophical, economic, social and political ideas was resisted by traditionalists who viewed English as a 'threat' to Chinese traditional values. (Fu, 1986; Li *et al*, 1988; Ross, 1993; Adamson, 2002). Moreover, at that time the government's budget for education was curtailed due to economic difficulties. All this had a very negative impact on formal English language teaching. During the years of Japanese invasion (1937-1945) followed by the civil war (1946-1949), the country was left economically devastated and psychologically scarred. Given the desperate situation in China, it was extremely hard to carry on normal schooling.

The New China phase began after the founding of the People's Republic of China on October 1st 1949 (See Table-1.2). In the New China phase, learning a foreign language became a compulsory subject not just in high schools but also in universities under the order of the Ministry of Education. But from 1949 till the mid-1950s, English was rarely found in the school curriculum, as Russian was the main foreign language due to China's extremely close economic and diplomatic relationship with the Soviet Union (Xu, 1990; Scovel, 1995 cited in Lam, 2002: 246). Meanwhile, a number of English-speaking countries refused to recognize the People's Republic of China and imposed an economic blockade.

Under this hostile international environment and the antagonistic relations between China and Western English-speaking countries, China kept the door of the country tightly closed to the Western world. English and other modern languages were almost stamped out at that time and it became somehow unpatriotic to study the language of our enemies (Tang, 1986).

However, as Sino-Soviet relations became strained, China began to look to the West for economic ties in the late 1950s and mid 1960s and the teaching of foreign

languages other than Russian was resumed. From 1957-1965, the Chinese government's foreign language policy pendulum swung from Russian to Western modern languages, especially English. In 1962, the Ministry of Education promulgated the 'English Language Teaching Syllabus for Middle School Students (A Trial Draft) (Feng, 2000; Lam, 2002 : 246) and great efforts were made in the area of syllabus planning and English textbook writing for middle school students and third-level students of social science and humanities including English-majors.

In October 1964, the Ministry of Education promulgated the 'Seven-year Plan for Foreign Language Education in China'. Its purpose was to establish English as the main foreign language to be taught in China and to improve the quality of foreign language teaching at various levels (Feng, 2000). However, from 1966 to 1976, the Cultural Revolution [2] swept through China and it disapproved consequently the teaching or learning of anything foreign since Western powers were once again viewed as enemies of communist China. The impact of the Cultural Revolution on foreign language education was such that foreign languages in general were labelled as an opening to capitalism, Westernisation or revisionism (Feng, 2000). English learning in China at that time was in fact not foreign language learning in its real sense, but a kind of symbolic learning of 'political slogans' or quotations of Mao, Zedong (the top leader of the People's Republic of China). It was not unusual to find China-specific contents written in English in English textbooks, with little input of real life context, let alone authentic materials. Beginners usually started their first lesson with a slogan, such as 'Long Live Chairman Mao' (Fu, 1986: 85) and 'Long Live the Communist Party of China'. And some 'Western-culture-free' texts were selected exclusively from Chinese periodicals such *Beijing Review* [*Beijing ZhouBao*] and *China Reconstructs* [*ZhongGuo JianShe*] (Dong, 1986). According to Scott (1980):

> China produces its own materials which are clearly modelled on British EFL texts of the 1960s with one major variation - a thoroughly transformed cultural content that aims at reinforcing Chinese cultural norms and values (p.14 cited in Alptekin & Alptekin 1984: 16).

This period of the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976) included an intensive ideological or political orientation for all English teaching. In 1977, one year after the end of the

Cultural Revolution, the country for the first time revived its annual college-entrance examination in which English became a compulsory subject for all types of universities and colleges. The written part of the English examination covered English vocabulary, grammar, reading and writing. (Listening comprehension was added to the exam in 2001). China's tertiary education was claimed to be back on a normal track. With the announcement of China's campaign of Four Modernizations (i.e. to modernize the sectors of Agriculture, Industry, Science & Technology, and National Defence) and its policy of opening to the outside world, the enthusiasm of Chinese people for learning English developed at an unprecedented rate.

As the country became more and more exposed to the outside world, especially to Western countries, its awareness of the importance of English as the language of international commerce and communications increased. In the late 1970s, Departments of English Literature, and Departments of English for Science and Technology [*Ke ji yingyu xi*] sprang up in many universities and colleges. The Chinese government accelerated its efforts to import English teaching and learning materials from Western countries, especially from English-native speaking countries. (Fu, 1986: 91). From 1990s onwards, the Chinese government has attached even more importance to improving the teaching and learning of English at various levels in China and has claimed that English education is not merely an educational issue *per se,* but an issue associated with the effective realization of the modernization campaign of the country as a whole (Pang *et al,* 2002).

1.2. Overview of the present state of English language education for English majors at tertiary level

Having outlined a brief history of English language education in China, this section focuses on the differences between English education for English majors and that for non-English majors. It will also give a detailed account of the challenges facing EFL teaching for English majors at tertiary level.

1.2.1. Differences between English education for English majors and that for non-English majors

China's English education at tertiary level is divided into two distinct groups: English majors and non-English majors. Each group is concerned with a different emphasis and different criteria for attaining target language competence within each curriculum. The core difference lies in the fact that for English majors, English constitutes the totality of their training and expertise in their four-year undergraduate programmes. These lead to a BA degree in the English Language and Literature. For non-majors English is just one required 2-year course in their core curriculum. Non-majors have to pass various English courses to complete their college education (Feng, 2000; Cheng, 2002: 263; Lin, 2002; He, 2002). According to the English Syllabus for non-majors at university level,

> The teaching of English for non-majors aims at developing in students a relatively high level of competence in reading, and an intermediate level of competence in listening, speaking, writing and translating so that they can exchange information in English (College English Syllabus Revision Team, 1999: 1).

At institutional level, the teaching of English for English majors and non-majors are separate in terms of textbook writing, curriculum design, administration and staff training. According to the most recent statistics, in 2002 there were a total of 2,003 universities and colleges with more than 6 million enrolments in China. However, only 400 of these third-level institutions offered a four-year bachelor's program in the English language (He, 2002). All non-English majors at third level institutions in China are required to take English courses for at least two years in their undergraduate programs. Before graduation, they must pass a nation-wide English proficiency test for non-majors - CET-4 (College English Test, Band-4) - in order to achieve a BA degree, while the higher level test CET-6 is optional. Given the large population and large class size together with a tight syllabus, the teaching and learning of English for non-majors focuses on the reading comprehension necessary to prepare learners to pass various English tests rather than on their practical ability to use the language for communication. EFL majors, by contrast, aim to be proficient in communicative competence.

1.2.2. English education for English majors: context and problems

English language education for English majors in China aims at training interpreters, translators, teachers, researchers and administrators for institutions of higher learning, public or private organisations, business and trading companies, and research institutions. These professionals are required to have communicative competence including fluent command of written and oral English, as well as some specific knowledge in the humanities and social sciences (English Division of the Advisory Committee for the Teaching of Foreign Languages for Foreign Language Majors, 2000)[1]. During the four years of the undergraduate programmes for English majors, language training is part of the curriculum, although an essential part during the first two years. Language training for English majors includes training in listening, speaking, reading, writing, interpreting and translating.

The most recently revised national English language curriculum for English majors (English Division, 2000) emphasizes the students' communicative competence and intercultural sensitivity, a new feature in English language education for English majors in comparison with the previous curriculum. To present a general picture of the proficiency level of English majors in Chinese universities, it is worth mentioning the requirements of each language skill which English majors should meet upon graduation according to criteria stipulated in the revised national English Curriculum for English Majors at tertiary level (English Division, 2000; He, 2002).

I. Listening Comprehension: Students should be able to understand radio or television programs of English-speaking countries (for instance, CNN) and political, economic, cultural, educational and scientific issues, special reports and lectures on similar subjects.

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[1] In the rest of the thesis, English Division of the Advisory Committee for the Teaching of Foreign Languages for Foreign Language Majors (2000) is referred to as English Division (2000) hereafter.

II. Speaking Ability: Students are required to exchange ideas with people from English-speaking countries on major international or domestic issues, to be able to engage in lengthy and in-depth discussions on similar subjects, and to express themselves clearly, assertively and coherently.

III. Reading Comprehension: Students must be able to read editorials and critical essays on political issues from British and American newspapers and magazines (for instance, *Times, New York Times*), to understand literature published in English-speaking countries, and to be able to analyse the argument, the structure, the language and the style of the above writings.

IV. Writing Ability: Students are required to write descriptive, narrative, expository and opinion essays, expressing themselves effectively, fluently and correctly. The required writing speed is 300 to 400 words per 30 minutes. A thesis of 3,000 to 5,000 words in length is part of the requirement for a bachelor's degree.

V. Translating Ability: Students should be able to render into Chinese literary works and newspaper or magazine articles published in English-speaking countries, and to translate Chinese literature or newspaper articles into English. They are required to translate 250–300 English words per hour. They are also asked to serve as interpreters at public functions involving people from English-speaking countries (English Division, 2000; He, 2002).

To guarantee the proper training of students' language skills and communicative ability, at present three types of courses are designed for English majors during the four-year undergraduate program: skill courses, content courses, and courses on other subjects relevant to the jobs that the students might have after graduation.

Skill courses are aimed at training the students in the five language skills (i.e. Speaking, Listening, Reading, Writing and Translating) by way of compulsory courses offered during the first two years of the undergraduate programme. Some schools offer elective courses during the last two years, such as Foreign Newspaper Reading, and Reading on the Internet.

Content courses refer to courses on literature, linguistics and cultural studies. Compulsory courses include Introduction to Linguistics, A Survey of English and American Literature, Thesis Writing and Introduction to English-speaking Country Studies.

Elective courses: a wide range of elective courses are offered in the English Departments of different third-level institutions, including introductory courses to subjects such as Western civilization, American studies, British studies, English and American literary history, phonetics, lexicology, English grammar, teaching methodology and rhetoric. While the content of elective courses varies from school to school, they all aim at preparing students for a particular job market.

Based on the above-mentioned requirements, it is evident that the Chinese education officials have envisioned the importance for Chinese EFL learners to achieve an English language competence, which involves both wide-ranging knowledge of general and culture specific topics and a critical thinking ability in order to be in a position to 'to engage with English native speakers in lengthy and in-depth discussion on various subjects, and to express themselves clearly, assertively and coherently' and 'to write a graduation thesis of 3,000 - 5,000 words in length' (Points II and IV above). Although not exactly using the term 'critical thinking ability', the English Curriculum for English Majors at tertiary level (English Division, 2000; He, 2002) implies that Chinese EFL learners should develop their critical thinking abilities through the study of the foreign language and the level of competence achieved should reflect this. The findings of this thesis also point to the importance/desirability of developing the learners' 'critical thinking ability' in foreign language learning and the model suggested in Chapter 9 explores this concept in detail.

Given the various constraints confronting EFL teaching in the Chinese context, which will be discussed in detail in following chapters, the ideal level of competence aimed at in the new English Curriculum above is hard to achieve. It is crucial to point out that neither the requirements for students' language skills nor the course offerings mentioned above indicate the present proficiency level of the majority of English-major graduates from Chinese universities and colleges, nor the courses

offered in every English department. These language skill and course requirements are included in the revised national teaching program for English majors, as a guideline for all institutions offering a four-year bachelor's program in English. However, the real situation of EFL education does not match the requirements stipulated in the revised curriculum for English majors. The actual situation of teaching English as a foreign language (TEFL) for English-majors in China is inadequate and faces serious challenges or even 'crises' (North Project Group, 1998; Zhang & Yang, 2000).

As will be discussed in Chapter 6, students surveyed during the research for this thesis reported a perceived deficiency in their critical thinking competence, which they thought fell far short of an optimum level for university students. In addition, teachers surveyed also found out that students lacked critical thinking, manifested throughout their group discussions, written assignments and graduation theses. Critical thinking is a fundamental issue in EFL education at university level and deserves sufficient attention from Chinese EFL professionals. This issue will be addressed in depth in Chapter 9. The next section focuses on various crises confronting English majors to set the scene of deeper investigation into these various challenges that Chinese EFL students and teachers face.

1.3. New challenges confronting TEFL for English majors in China at institutional level

This section discusses new challenges confronting EFL teaching for English majors as revealed by Chinese EFL researchers in two separate surveys in China. Comments are then made on their proposed 'mixed talents' model for EFL education for English majors.

1.3.1. The North Project Group (NPG) survey report

These new challenges are best discussed by the investigations conducted by the Foreign Language Education Department of the State Education Commission (now renamed Ministry of Education). A project group was set up in 1996-1997 for in-depth surveys on a large number of English-major university graduates and their

current employers. Questionnaires were used to collect information from the student and employer respondents (North Project Group, 1998).

The student subjects were former English-major students of five well-known universities in China – University of International Business and Economics (UIBE), University of Foreign Affairs, Beijing University, Beijing Normal University and Nanjing University. The first four universities are located in Beijing, and the final one in Southeast China. The questionnaire for employers covered the following areas:

1.   Comments on the target language skills exhibited by the English-major graduates (hereafter refers to as EMGs) who are employed there;

2.   Comments on the ability of the EMGs to use the English language for the purpose of interaction, communication and management;

3.   Comment on the EMGs' knowledge about the related fields of humanities pertaining to their work.

The questionnaire for student respondents was sent to those who graduated from the above-mentioned five universities in July 1993. It consisted of their self-assessment of their language skills, comments on syllabus design and the course scheme they covered when they were in university, and comments on the administration of the English language teaching programme. The findings revealed steps which most needed to be taken in order to improve the quality of TEFL for English majors. For instance, the survey showed that employers were not satisfied with the communicative competence exhibited by the English-major graduates employed in their companies or organizations. The employers were not content with English-major graduates who possessed only mediocre target language skills. They required English-major graduates with both communicative competence in the target language and knowledge of other fields of the humanities as well.

The results of the self-evaluation of their own level of English proficiency by employees (former English majors) showed that 60% of them rated their own English skills to be 'satisfactory' whereas 21% found their English proficiency 'poor'. However, the evaluation figures given by their employers were different, being 50% and 29% respectively. In terms of skills most needed for improvement, the former

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English majors, in general, rated the skill of speaking, listening and writing as the weakest, indicating an urgent call for improvement.

Here it is worthwhile citing the preliminary conclusion of the NPG survey (NPG 1998):

> Foreign language education at tertiary level in China (mainly English education) was a success in general. Of the five basic language skills, listening and reading proved to be better than interpreting and translating skills whereas poor speaking skills were reported. However, foreign-language-majors who graduated from foreign languages universities or institutes with *only* one talent, i.e. target-language knowledge / skills were no longer welcomed by employers (p. 3, my translation[2]).

It is worth noting that the situation may be worse than stated above given the fact that the English language proficiency of English-major graduates did not match the requirements specified in the curriculum. The NPG (1998) researchers assert that:

> Foreign-language-majors are required to possess at least a specialized knowledge of humanities in addition to a target language so as to meet the challenge of their future career development (p.3).

The NPG researchers conclude:

> EFL education for English majors, with its obvious inadequacies and weaknesses is not able to meet the requirements in the new millennium. And in the job market the demand for English majors with only pure linguistic skills has dropped down almost to zero (NPG, 1998: 5).

Therefore, the researchers suggest that university leaders and teachers should update their views on foreign language education, and pay more attention to training university students of the 'composite type', that is, students with mixed talents. The NPG researchers also call for improving EFL syllabus design and reforming teaching both in content and methodology. The findings of their report contributed to the birth of the Revised National Curriculum of English Language Education for English Majors at Tertiary Level (English Division, 2000). However, neither the NPG researchers nor the revised curriculum provides a detailed outline of the reform

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[2] Unless specified otherwise, all the quotations from Chinese sources, interviews and open-ended questions are translated into English by the author of this thesis.

pedagogically or methodologically although they believe 'reforming is the only way out for the survival and development of English language teaching programs for English majors in the 21st century' (NPG, 1998: 9). They realize that 'the challenges confronting EFL teaching is much greater than any other academic disciplines' (NPG, 1998: 9).

1.3.2. The Zhang and Yang study

In a later separate study, the NGP researchers' claims are echoed by Zhang and Yang (2000). They contend that if the issue of 'composite type' is not properly handled, the consequences will be 'disastrous' for China's TEFL for English majors (2000: 4). They point out the problems inherent in EFL education for English majors both at societal and institutional levels. According to Zhang and Yang (2000), these problems can be summarized as follows:

First, for decades EFL has been a 'problem-ridden' disciplinary field or 'disastrous area' in China (p.4): the pattern of cultivation of EFL majors has not changed for decades, that is, literature-oriented syllabus design, basic language skills plus literature plus linguistics. The teaching methodology has been very rigid and teacher-centred. The college or departmental heads do not pay enough attention to this. It is the product of a previously centralized planned economy and is absolutely out of tune with current modern economic and social thinking.

Second, the advantage of the specialized discipline (target language) is shrinking. English majors used to be hired by such government organizations as Ministry of Foreign Affairs, foreign trade companies, foreign-funded ventures, joint ventures and other English-language-related institutions. But now the demands from these institutions and businesses have changed from graduates with language skills alone to those with 'mixed talents'. The advantage English majors used to enjoy has been whittled away and superseded by university graduates of other academic disciplines with relatively good English language skills. One of the contributory factors is the fact that the communicative competence of English majors is not up to the expectations of potential or current employers.

corresponding teaching pedagogy in the Chinese EFL context rather than set it hastily as a goal of EFL education for English majors at tertiary level.

First, although both NPG experts and Zhang & Yang point out the problems inherent in EFL education of English majors in their reports, they fail to explain the causal relations regarding the current difficulties for English-majors. It would be easier for policy makers and curriculum designers if they could identify the reasons for this social phenomenon. For instance, does the falling demand for English-majors in the job market reflect their communicative incompetence? As mentioned earlier, since China has opened to the outside world and become more deeply involved in the process of globalisation, there is a greater need for English language personnel with a good command of English, that is, a large number of competent, first-class bilinguals who are able to interpret and translate for important international political, economic and cultural events as well as for daily business-related communications.

The crux lies in whether English majors can meet such requirements upon their university graduation. The above mentioned investigations show the short-comings of English majors, but the other side is the fact that the country is experiencing a shortage of well-qualified English majors who possess good cross-cultural communicative competence as required in the national curriculum. Various studies show that non-majors, who only study the target language for two years throughout their university or college program, can hardly match English majors in terms of the four basic language skills (Li, 1984; Burnaby & Sun, 1989; Li 1997; He *et al*, 1999; Feng, 2000; Pang *et al*, 2002). The key point is to upgrade the quality of the EFL programme and prepare English majors to meet the social demands and requirements not only in terms of linguistic but also cross-cultural abilities. For instance, in a recent study, Pang *et al* (2002) claim that the obvious weakness of the present EFL education is the inadequate ability of English major graduates to communicate effectively in English, and their lack of cross-cultural awareness. Even English majors with a high TOEFL score are weak in speaking and writing. Pang *et al* remind us that in an age of globalisation, EFL education at tertiary level should be aimed at training learners to become both linguistically proficient and culturally literate (ibid).

Second, both studies fail to address clearly the fact that cross-cultural communicative competence is the aim of EFL education for English majors at university level. This may lead a switching of focus from fostering EFL majors' communicative competence. It is understandable that the proponents of the 'mixed talents' model (English plus business and so on) based their proposals on the recent trends in job market and social demands for English majors. However, this simple solution exclusively focuses on the issue of developing EFL learners' 'mixed talents' as if their lack of cross-cultural communicative competence, which is stipulated as a goal of EFL teaching in the revised curriculum, could be compensated by so-called 'mixed talents' - some other knowledge of humanities added to the English teaching programme. It is implied that this new solution can help EFL learners with 'mixed talents' meet the social demand in the country. While being overwhelmed by the immediate needs of the job market, English language education for English majors should not ignore the ultimate goal of EFL education: developing learners' communicative competence, - a good understanding of the way in which 'English-speaking peoples structure their knowledge, their literary, political, economic thinking, as well as a comparative study between Chinese and English structure of knowledge, apart from the target language skills' (Cheng, 2002: 257).

Judging from this aspect, both Zhang & Yang (2000) and the NPG (1998) reports fail to address the core roots of the issue of 'crisis' facing EFL education of English-majors, that is, lack of communicative competence among English-major graduates. This indicates that in EFL teaching, the development of the ability to use the target language in real communicative situations in Chinese EFL learners' future work environment should be prioritised. Whatever other skills English-majors possess, they have to, first of all, learn to develop their communicative competence during their four-year formal BA undergraduate programmes. Otherwise, reform of EFL education in terms of syllabus design, content and methodology is just lip service and of no real practical value.

Third, there is only vague mention of the teaching and learning of culture - the core aspect of socio-linguistic competence (Canale & Swain, 1980; Canale, 1983) - throughout the whole English programmes in their reports. Both studies give the impression that as long as English-majors become 'mixed talented', they will

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automatically attain a good command of English, both oral and written, for their career purposes. The fact that communicative competence, a goal of EFL programmes for English majors, is seen as secondary to 'mixed talents' development, further supports this assumption. It can be seen that the lack of a cultural dimension in the English teaching programme at tertiary level is an obvious weakness. Some Chinese EFL professionals point out the shortcomings of over-emphasizing 'mixed talents' while ignoring the ultimate goal of EFL education for English majors. For instance, Cheng (2002) argues that 'the academic training of an English major is thus not only the training of a potential specialist [in English language]; it is also the training of a potentially interdisciplinary scholar. And this training, again is training of a responsible citizen, a citizen who gains an insight into the important issues of his or her society and who responds to all the demands of that society' (p. 263).

As part of the training to become 'responsible citizens', EFL education for English majors should be aimed at helping them to be 'culturally literate' (Pang *et al*, 2002), that is, they should be liberal-minded through exposure to studying cultures with different value systems. 'They will understand the ways of thinking of different peoples and thus avoid condescension, insularity, narrow-mindedness, self-centeredness, and parochialism' (Cheng 2002: 262). Through formal learning in EFL programs, apart from development in linguistic competence, English majors are also expected to develop other relevant abilities. For instance, they 'should contribute to their own culture [understanding] by injecting foreign elements into it, and shaking it out of a rut' (p. 262). Therefore, we can say that if such aspects in the EFL programs remain vague in the curriculum design, EFL reform will hardly bring satisfactory outcomes.

Fourth, another barrier to the successful implementation of the 'mixed talents' curriculum lies in the competence of EFL teachers to undertake the task required. An English department is not qualified to teach Economics, Business, Finance, Law or Journalism, and does not have lecturers specialized in these disciplines. Cheng (2002) asserts that the 'mixed talents' model for EFL education in an English Department 'would compromise its integrity and its own work, in its own academic discipline' (p. 264). Therefore, he cautions EFL teaching against '*venturing into*

disciplines in which it is only an amateur and a dilettante (Cheng, 2002: 264, my emphasis).

Moreover, many researchers and departmental heads also cast doubts on the legitimacy of such a 'mixed talents' model (Pang *et al*, 2002). They view changes like this as educational utilitarianism and think that the setting up of specialized courses of a utilitarian nature affects the students' study of English, with the result that English majors are not well specialized either in communicative competence or the interdisciplinary subjects. EFL students end up learning bits and pieces of everything and knowing nothing in depth. A lower common denominator approach to subject expertise, in other words, may be counter-productive from a learning point of view.

Dudley-Evans *et al* (1996 cited in Pang *et al*, 2002: 204) stress that the interdisciplinary nature of 'mixed talents' model is both a stimulating and challenging demand for teachers. Pang *et al* (2002) directly address the problem of non-systemality and immaturity inherent in this model at present. 'The teaching of Business English in the EFL program is still at the stage of an intuition- or experience-led academic activity' (Pang *et al*, 2002: 204).

As is evident above, it can be seen that the training of specialists in English language and other disciplines will never be the same, nor as simple as it sometimes seems. However, this does not mean that EFL students should not be engaged in learning of other subjects beyond the domain of English studies. English majors are able to study other subjects in the relevant departments clearly marked as their 'minors' instead of becoming so-called 'mixed talents' who just know bits and pieces of these humanities subjects, but are poor at communicative competence. English teaching for English majors should aim to develop learners' communicative competence including their ability to use the target language appropriately for the purpose of real communication in various social, work and cultural situations.

Chapter Summary

In this chapter, I have given a chronological account of the history of EFL education in China and the radical changes in foreign language teaching policy over the past century. I have also outlined the differences between English education for English majors and that for non-majors. This is followed by a detailed description of recent changes in the English language curriculum as well as challenges facing EFL education for English majors, including the 'mixed talents' model proposed by NPG researchers, and Zhang & Yang in two separate studies. Following this, I have analysed the weaknesses inherent in the 'mixed talents' model, which, in significant ways, deviates from the goal of fostering EFL learners' communicative competence in the EFL programme. Finally I suggest that more research is necessary to investigate the nature of the 'mixed talents' model and the corresponding teaching pedagogy in the Chinese EFL context rather than set it over hastily as a goal of EFL education for English majors at university level. Having outlined the historical and contemporary context of English as a foreign language (EFL) education in China, the following chapter will introduce a theoretical overview of the communicative competence model and the communicative language teaching approach, and will examine the communicative competence of English majors at tertiary level in China.

Notes:

[1]. The 1911 Revolution

The revolution really began with the uprising in Sichuan province. Angered at the nationalization of the railway, students took to the streets on August 24, 1911, demanding a delay in the proposed nationalization. When the leaders of the movement were arrested, conflict broke out between troops and the protestors. When the revolutionaries seized Wuchang, a series of provinces declared independence from the emperor. By the end of November, two-thirds of China had seceded from the Qing Empire. In December, a delegation of provincial delegates from central and northern China declared China a republic and elected Sun Yat-sen (1866-1925) as the provisional president of the Republic of China.

[2] The Cultural Revolution

In 1966 Mao Zhedong, the top leader of China, launched the Cultural Revolution to remove his political rivals and consequently set the country back on a rigid communist course. The Cultural Revolution ended in 1976 after Mao's death.

Chapter 2

Literature review: communicative competence and CLT

Introduction

This chapter begins with an overview of the notion of communicative competence and a pedagogical overview of communicative language teaching (CLT). This is followed by a summary of the major critiques of CLT. Details are given of the current state of the communicative competence of Chinese EFL majors and why their achievement levels are so low. Finally, the debate over the application of, and resistance to CLT in China is presented.

2.1. The concept of communicative competence

The concept of communicative competence was first proposed by Hymes (1972) as an expansion of Chomsky's linguistic competence (1965). In light of Chomsky's theory, linguistic competence refers to the learner's ability to understand and create unheard / unseen sentences (1965:40). This ability can be viewed in term of linguistic knowledge or linguistic skills. Linguistic knowledge refers to the learner's command of the phonological, grammatical and lexical systems of a language. Linguistic competence is manifested in the accuracy of the language forms produced.

Chomsky's definition of linguistic competence has been criticized since it has come to be associated with a rigid and narrowly defined concept of grammatical competence, and has failed to include the social aspects of language (Hymes, 1972; Halliday, 1979). Hymes (1972, 1974) introduces a broader notion of competence, that is the idea of 'communicative competence'. This has become generally defined

as 'the socially appropriate use of language' (Hymes, 1972). The concept of communicative competence, therefore, is a broader competence than strictly linguistic competence, as language is used for communicative purposes, and communication involves more than knowing accurate language forms. There is some difference of emphasis among proponents of this concept, especially in their classifications of the components in communicative competence. It is commonly held that communicative competence, in Hymes' original formulation, has four components: 1. *possibility* or grammaticality; 2. *feasibility,* or the complexity of the speech relative to man's cognitive ability; 3. *appropriateness,* or the correct choice of the speech relative to a specific context; 4. *done,* or the actual realization of the speech (Hymes, 1972).

Hymes argues that while a person acquires communicative competence, he or she acquires both knowledge of the language as well as ability to use the language for real communicative purposes (Hymes, 1972: 281).

Since then, many researchers have made efforts to elaborate on and develop the concept of communicative competence. For example, Widdowson (1978) points out that 'the notion of competence has to do with a language user's knowledge of abstract linguistic rules, and this knowledge has to be put into effect as behaviour; it has to be revealed through performance.' (p.3). He then describes the relationship between linguistic systems and their communicative values in text and discourse and proposes the distinction of language 'usage' and 'use' (ibid.). According to Widdowson (1978), 'usage' means manifestation of the knowledge of a language system and 'use' refers to realization of the language system as meaningful communicative behaviour, and both are the aspects of 'performance' since in normal circumstances, 'linguistic performance involves the simultaneous manifestation of the language system as usage and its realization as use' (p. 3).

Two Canadian linguists, Canale and Swain (1980) and later on Canale (1983) further developed and enriched the concept of communicative competence. They proposed a four-dimensional model which is the most frequently cited model of communicative competence. Canale and Swain (1980) and Canale (1983) assert that the theoretical framework for communicative competence includes four areas of knowledge and skills as follows:

Bachman (1990) puts forward new views and proposes schematisation of what he calls *language competence*. According to Bachman (1990), communicative language ability (CLA) can be described as consisting of *both knowledge or competence,* and *the capacity for implementing or executing that competence in appropriate, contextualised communicative language use* (p. 84, my emphasis). He states that language competence consists of two components: 1) organizational competence, and 2) pragmatic competence (p. 87) and each component comprises its own sub-components. The former is composed of grammatical competence and textual competence (equal to 'discourse' competence in Canale's model). Pragmatic competence is focused on functional aspects of language and consists of illocutionary competence and sociolinguistic competence. The former pertains to sending and receiving intended meanings and the latter concerns politeness, formality, metaphor, register, and culturally related aspects of language (see Figure 2.1). It is worth noting that Bachman's pragmatic competence is more or less equal to the definition of sociolinguistic competence in Canale and Swain's (1980) and Canale's (1983) four-dimensional model of communicative competence (See Figure-2.1).

Figure-2.1. Components of language competence
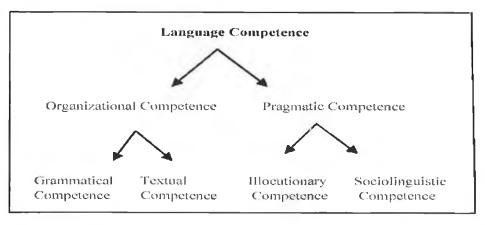
Figure 2.1. Components of language competence (Bachman, 1990: 87)

From the review of notions of communicative competence outlined above, it is clear that proponents of communicative competence (CC) hold that CC is the ability to use the language system appropriately in cross-cultural circumstances, with regard to the functions and the varieties of language, as well as shared sociocultural suppositions. It is by no means enough for a foreign language (FL) or second language (L2) learner

to know just the rules of the language, that is, the usage, without acquiring the practical ability to use the language for a real communicative purpose.

2.2. Historical review of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT)

Communicative language teaching (CLT) starts from a theory of language as communication. The goal of language teaching is to develop what Hymes (1972) referred to as 'communicative competence'. CLT is not really a coherent and cohesive theory aimed at supporting a set of techniques for foreign or second language (L2) teaching in a clear-cut way. Rather it is more an eclectic collection of emphases in the teaching of language that are drawn from many sources, which tend to promote or lead to the teaching and learning of FL or L2 as and for communication (Widdowson, 1978; Littlewood, 1981). It stresses the importance of using the language in interaction rather than mastering the rules of usage. The goal of the approach is to increase learners' communicative competence. Littlewood (1981) points out that one of the most characteristic features of CLT is that 'it pays systematic attention to functional as well as structural aspects of language, combining these into a more fully communicative view' (p. 1). CLT advocates go beyond teaching grammatical rules of the target language, and propose that, by using the target language in a meaningful way, learners will develop communicative competence.

Since its introduction in the early 1970s, CLT has been a topic of discussion among many scholars in the field of language teaching. There have been numerous papers and books published in an attempt to define and capture the characteristics of CLT (Rivers, 1968, 1981; Littlewood, 1981; Canale, 1983; Richards & Schmidt, 1983; Savignon, 1983, 1997; Howatt, 1984; Richards & Rodgers, 1986, 2001; Widdowson, 1978, 1990; Scarcella & Oxford, 1992; Pica, 1994, 2000; Bax 2003). Other researchers and practitioners have written various articles and reports on CLT and the main elements of communicative competence (Rivers, 1968; Hymes, 1972; Canale & Swain, 1980; Li, 1984; McGroarty, 1984; Larsen-Freeman, 1986; Nunan, 1991; Savignon, 1991, 2002; Celce-Murcia *et al*, 1997).

There is considerable debate as to appropriate ways of defining CLT, and no single model of CLT is universally accepted as authoritative (McGroarty, 1984; Markee, 1997). Many researchers give various interpretations of what CLT actually means and involves. Although L2 and EFL experts have presented different versions of what CLT is and how it functions, there are a few general concepts that are agreed upon. According to Richards and Rodgers (1986), CLT starts with a theory of language as communication, and its goal is to develop learners' communicative competence. In fact, the communicative approach has expanded on the goal of creating 'communicative competence' beyond its original definitions. Teaching students how to use the language is considered to be at least as important as learning the language itself. Nunan (1991) lists five basic characteristics of CLT:

1. An emphasis on learning to communicate through interaction in the target language.

2. The introduction of authentic texts into the learning situation.

3. The provision of opportunities for learners to focus, not only on the language but also on the learning process itself.

4. An enhancement of the learner's own personal experiences as important contributing elements to classroom learning.

5. An attempt to link classroom language learning with language activation outside the classroom (p.279).

The most obvious characteristic of CLT which differs from the traditional grammatical approach, according to Larsen-Freeman (1986: 132), is that 'almost everything that is done is done with a communicative intent'. In CLT, meaning is paramount. There are a variety of communicative activities (e.g. games, role plays, simulations, and problem-solving tasks), which give students an opportunity to practise communicating meaningfully in different contexts and in different roles. In the process of the performance of these activities, students' native language is avoided and error correction may be infrequent or absent.

Another characteristic of CLT is that 'activities in the Communicative Approach are often carried out by students in small groups' (Larsen-Freeman, 1986, p. 132). Students are expected to interact with each other in order to maximize the time

allotted to each student for learning to negotiate meaning. Through these small group activities, the students are engaged in meaningful and authentic language use rather than in the merely mechanical practice of language patterns. Furthermore, CLT favours the introduction of authentic materials (Larsen-Freeman, 1986, 1990; Dubin, 1995; Widdowson, 1996). It is considered desirable to give learners the opportunity to develop strategies for understanding language as it is actually used by native speakers (Canale & Swain, 1980).

Other aspects of CLT are given by Savignon (1991) who states that:

> Communicative language teaching has become a term for methods and curricula that embrace both the goals and the processes of classroom learning, for teaching practice that views competence in terms of social interaction (p. 263).

The final characteristic of CLT is 'its learner-centred and experience-based view of second language teaching' (Richards & Rodgers, 1986: 69), in other words, CLT requires a change in teachers' roles in the classroom. In CLT, classroom performance is managed not just by the teacher, but also by all present. Teachers are not seen only as teachers, or learners simply as learners, because both are, for good or ill, managers of learning (Allwright, 1984). Instead of being the dominating authority in the classroom, one primary role for the teacher is to facilitate the communicative process in the classroom where students feel secure, unthreatened and non-defensive.

Learners are described as active participants in the language learning process. As a result, CLT alters the role of the teacher. According to Breen and Candlin (1980), the teacher has two main roles: the first role is to facilitate the communication process between all participants in the classroom, and between these participants and the various activities and texts. The second role is to act as an independent participant within the learning-teaching group (p. 99). Therefore, due to the different roles of the teacher, when teachers consider implementing CLT, it is important to consider the different teaching environments. Richards and Rodgers (1986, 2001) also explain that 'the emphasis in communicative language teaching on the processes of communication, rather than mastery of language forms, leads to different roles for learners from those found in more traditional second language classrooms' (p. 166).

In addition, CLT consists of a *strong* version and a *weak* version (Howatt, 1984). According to Howatt:

> There is, in a sense, a 'strong' version of the communicative approach and a 'weak' version. The 'weak' version...stresses the importance of providing learners with opportunities to use their English for communicative purposes and, characteristically, attempts to integrate such activities into a wider program of language teaching.

> The 'strong' version of communicative teaching, on the other hand, advances the claim that language is acquired through communication, so that it is not merely a question of activating an existing but inert knowledge of the language, but of stimulating the development of the language system itself. If the former could be described as 'learning to use' English, the latter entails 'using English to learn it.' (Howatt, 1984: 279).

In China, English language is taught and learned in a non-native English environment in which the English language classroom is the only formal place where learners are exposed to the target language and able to practise it, especially oral English. Outside the classroom, Chinese EFL learners have no access to an English-speaking environment in which they can reinforce their classroom learning as can their English as a second language (ESL) counterparts. According to Howatt's classification, English teaching in China is appropriate to adopt the *weak* version of CLT, that is, teachers need to engage students in meaningful activities using English in class.

2.3. Critiques of CLT

However, CLT is not without its critics. The English language teaching (ELT) profession is undergoing what has been labelled by some as a major paradigm shift (Woodward 1996). Starting as far back as the mid 1980's, some researchers began to question many aspects of CLT (Swan 1985). Since then, many more have joined in expressing concern with the direction that CLT has taken.

One difficulty has been the inability to define exactly what is meant by 'CLT' (Hadley, 2003). Jennings and Doyle (1996) state that CLT as an approach has often become the platform for 'unprincipled eclecticism, varying from teacher to teacher'

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(p.169). Shortall (1996:31) points out that the failure to clarify CLT has allowed for a wide range of approaches (Presentation-Practice-Production, Task-based Learning, Notional-Functional, Silent Way, and so on) to be called 'communicative'. He also reports that popular applications of many of these approaches have tended to reduce or reject the explicit teaching of grammar. Skehan (1996: 30) states that this trend in CLT to focus on verbal fluency over formal accuracy 'runs the risk of learners becoming confined to the strategic solutions they develop, without sufficient focus for structural change or accuracy'. Batstone (1995: 229) also warns that such an unbalanced approach to language teaching can lead to the early fossilization of the learners' language skills. Whitley (1993) points out that confusion about CLT in the research community has hampered the transmission of CLT from scholars to teachers. He suggests that further progress of CLT relies on overcoming these obstacles and translating consensus into standard course materials appropriate to local teaching conditions with emphasis on linking research with practice.

It is worth noting that there are generic disadvantages involved in adopting CLT in the classroom-based setting, such as, heavy demands upon non-native teachers of English in terms of communicative competence, a possible sense of insecurity due to deprivation of dependence on a textbook, higher skills in classroom management, potential inclination to meeting with resistance, and greater costs (cf. Widdowson, 1978; Canale & Swain, 1980; Savignon, 1983; Maley,1984; Richards & Rodgers, 1986; Stern, 1992). However, some researchers take a much deeper and more insightful look at CLT as the dominant approach in L2 or the EFL teaching. The latest critical comments come from Bax (2003) who argues that the dominance of CLT has led to the neglect of one crucial aspect of language pedagogy, namely the context in which that pedagogy takes place, for instance, contextual factors such as students' attitudes, cultural expectations and so on. Bax argues that it is time to replace CLT as the central paradigm in language teaching with a *Context Approach* which places context at the heart of the profession. Bax (2003) argues that although CLT has served a useful function in the profession, particularly as a corrective to shortcomings in previous methodologies,

> CLT has always neglected one key aspect of language teaching, namely the
> context in which it takes place, and the consequences of this are serious - to the
> extent that we need to demote CLT as our main paradigm and adopt what I shall

call a Context Approach (Bax, 2003: 278).

The Context Approach, in Bax's term, diverges with the CLT tenets fundamentally by arguing that methodology is *not* the magic solution, and that there are many different ways of learning languages, but that the context is a crucial factor in the success or failure of learners. He has devised the following chart which compares the two approaches as follows:

Table-2.1. **CLT Approach vs. Context Approach**

CLT Approach	Context Approach
CLT is the complete answer	We must consider the whole context
If we don't have CLT then we can't learn a language.	Methodology (including CLT) is just one factor in learning a language
No other factors count in learning a language - only teaching methodology.	Other factors may be more important
If you don't have CLT, you are backward	Other methods and approaches may be equally valid

Source: Bax (2003)

According to Bax, a *Context Approach* would insist that while methodology is important, it is just one factor in successful language learning. It is becoming clearer that contextual factors hugely influence learners' ability to effectively learn a second or foreign language.

> Many aspects of the context - such as students' attitudes, cultural expectations and so on - are clearly at least as important as teaching method. Any training course should therefore make it a priority to teach not only methodology but also a heightened awareness of contextual factors and an ability to deal with them, in fact to *put consideration of the context first and only then consider the teaching approach* (Bax, 2003: 278-87, my emphasis).

Bax (2003) asserts that in the context approach, the first priority is the learning context. That is, the first step is to identify key aspects of that context before deciding what and how to teach in any given class. This will include an understanding of individual students and their learning needs, wants, styles, and strategies as well as the course-book, local conditions, the classroom culture, school culture, national culture and so on, as far as possible at the time of teaching. With all these factors accorded their full importance in each teaching and learning situation, the teacher will be able to identify a suitable approach and language focus. He emphasizes that the decision will depend on the 'context analysis'.

> It may be that an emphasis on grammar is useful to start with, or an emphasis on oral communication. It may be that lexis will come first. It may be that group work is suitable, or a more formal lecture mode. The approach will probably be eclectic, in order to meet varied learner needs. All this will take place within a framework of generating communication - CLT will not be forgotten. But it will not be allowed to overrule context (Bax 2003:280).

Bax's argument serves as a timely reminder to us that the social and cultural context in which L2 or EFL learning takes place is of vital importance to the success of L2 / FL acquisition. The wholesale adoption of teaching practices from one context to another one is not appropriate. In adopting CLT, Chinese teachers must treat both *context* and *methodology* as equally important in order to integrate them in an appropriate way. Otherwise, a culturally insensitive insistence on an imported methodology in the EFL classroom ignoring the teaching and learning realities in China will not achieve satisfactory results.

As early as the mid 1980s, Swan (1985) expressed his critical thoughts on CLT. Swan (1985) argued:

> Along with its many virtues, the Communicative Approach (CA) unfortunately over-generalizes valid but limited insights; it makes exaggerated claims for the power and novelty of its doctrines; it misrepresents the currents of thought it has replaced; it is often characterized by serious intellectual confusion; it is choked with jargon (p. 2).

He points out that CLT ignores the knowledge and skills which language students bring with them from their mother tongue and their experience of the world. In many

cases, students 'know what they want to say more often than they know how to say it' (p. 11). Rules of use are not often relevant to the teaching of English. He argues:

> Although the CA may have some new information and insight to contribute (for instance, about the language of social interaction), there is nothing here to justify the announcement that we need to adopt a whole new approach to the teaching of meaning. The argument about 'usage and 'use', whatever value is, may have for philosophers, has little relevance to foreign language teaching. (P. 5).

Swan also objects to the idea that 'appropriacy' of language is the real goal of language teaching and he claims that 'appropriacy' is 'one aspect among many - an important corner of linguistic description, but not by any means of feature of the language as a whole' (p.6). He then points out how the discussion of appropriacy often obscures a perfectly valid point about the need for increased attention to the teaching of lexis (p. 7).

> If we are now adopting a more informed and systematic approach to vocabulary teaching, that is all to the good. But we should understand clearly that this is what we are doing. Inappropriate references to appropriacy merely confuse the issue. (Swan 1985:8)

Swan also looks critically at notions regarding skills and strategies in CLT which takes for granted that language learners cannot transfer communication skills from their mother tongue, and that these must be taught anew if the learners are to solve the 'problems of code and context correction which lie at the heart of the communicative ability' (Widdowson, 1979: 87-8 cited in Swan, 1985: 8). Swan claims that language learners already know generally how to predict, guess and negotiate meaning while they learn their mother tongue. What they lack or what they do not know is what words to use or how to do it in foreign language. In other words, what they need is lexical items rather than skills or strategies. (Swan 1985: 11).

In addition, Swan also takes a very critical look at some of the pedagogical aspects of CLT, including the idea of a 'semantic syllabus' and the question of 'authenticity' in materials and methodology. He argues that the CLT generally presents an over-simplified and misleading account of these issues and that a sensible approach to

language teaching, in his opinion, involves integrating semantic and formal syllabuses and combining authentic with specially-written materials. While mentioning some typical drawbacks of traditional language courses, Swan argues that 'it is quite false to represent older courses as concentrating throughout on form at the expense of meaning, or as failing to teach people to do things with language' (Swan 1985:77). Swan goes on with stating that the core of CLT is that of a 'semantic syllabus'. In a course based on a semantic syllabus it is meaning rather than structures that are given priority. But the fact is grammar has not been any easier to learn since the communicative revolution:

> Language is not only a set of formal systems, but also it is a set of systems. It is perverse not to focus on questions of form when this is desirable. Some points of grammar are difficult to learn, and need to be studied in isolation before students can do interesting things with them. It is no use making meaning tidy if grammar then becomes so untidy that it cannot be learnt properly (Swan 1985: 78).

Swan suggests that a sensible approach to language teaching involves integrating semantic and formal syllabuses. Some grammar points can be taught simultaneously with work on a relevant notion or function of the target language. By a similar token, some functions and notions may be expressible entirely through structures which are already known while other functions and notions are expressed mainly through lexis.

Swan is, no doubt, quite right in emphasizing that knowing what students already know is a very important element in conducting a needs analysis, and then teaching them what they do not know, rather than the other way round. More attention should be paid to the role that the mother tongue plays in the L2 or FL learning process. But he ignores the fact that earlier studies prove that mother tongue plays a more important role in the early stages of L2 or FL learning and its role decreases as the learner progresses in his or her learning process (cf. Li, 1997: 69). Many other researchers argue that CLT proponents, while taking into proper account notional and socio-functional aspects of language, neglect linguistic competence and accept the premise that linguistic form emerges on its own as a result of learners' engaging in communicative activities (Long, 1983, 1991; Long & Crookes, 1992). They recommend that some amendments and reforms be made regarding the CLT approach. Other researchers propose that CLT needs to focus on the linguistic

content as well and formal instruction (Larsen-Freeman, 1990; Savignon, 1990; Widdowson, 1990; Celce-Murcia, 1991; 1991; Schmidt, 1991; Domyei & Thrurell, 1991, 1992; Kumaravadivelu, 1992; Scarcella & Oxford, 1992).

2.4. The communicative competence of Chinese EFL majors: the *status quo*

Having outlined the theoretical framework of communicative competence and CLT, the following sections examine the communicative competence of Chinese EFL majors at tertiary level.

2.4.1. Inadequate communicative competence

For many years, Chinese students have been found to score high in English tests focused on reading and listening (TOFEL and GRE) but to score low in English tests focused on the practical use of language for communication purposes, for instance, the Cambridge Business English Certificate Test. In spite of the fact that the communicative competence model (Canale & Swain, 1980; Canale, 1983) is most often cited by Chinese EFL scholars and made a goal of TEFL for English majors at tertiary level in China (English Division, 2000: 12), Chinese EFL learners fall well short of the stated aims of communicative competence as a whole, and the real situation is far from adequate. The development of the various components of communicative competence are quite weak and unbalanced among Chinese EFL learners. 'Students tend to become almost structurally competent but communicatively incompetent' (Johnson & Morrow, 1981:1). All the evidence is that the communicative goal is seldom achieved, and little use is made of interactive-oriented teaching methods in the classroom.

Wang (1994), a senior Chinese EFL researcher, claims that Chinese students have lower socio-cultural abilities in comparison with their linguistic competence of the target language and he argues that special attention should be given to these cultural elements in EFL teaching in China (Wang, 1994: 108-118). Lack of research on the practical application of sociocultural theories into EFL programs in China has

resulted in this situation remaining unchanged for a long time. The selection of socio-cultural items for cultural learning in EFL programs is still problematic at tertiary level across the board (See Appendix D-2 for textbook samples).

2.4.2. Causes of poor communicative competence of Chinese EFL learners

The weaknesses or deficiencies of Chinese English majors at tertiary level shown in previous studies mainly centre on two broad aspects of EFL teaching and learning: one relating to linguistic issues and the other cultural (NPG, 1998; English Division of the Advisory Committee, 1999; He *et al*, 1999; He, 2001; Yao, 2001). The problems relating to linguistic issues are summarized by NPG experts (1998: 6-7). They argue that the problems inherent in EFL education for English-majors at tertiary level fall into 7 categories as follows.

1. Out-of-date mentality and concepts of EFL teachers
2. Shortage of competent EFL teachers
3. Lack of combining language skill-oriented courses and content-based courses
4. Inadequate knowledge structure of English majors
5. Rigid teaching methodology and inadequate teaching content
6. English major graduates' weak linguistic abilities and deficient critical and creative thinking abilities
7. Problems in the English language teaching administration at tertiary level

The problems pertaining to cultural issues in the EFL programmes at tertiary level are highlighted by Hu (1994), a long-standing Chinese EFL scholar. His questionnaire was distributed to 36 English native speakers who taught English-majors at tertiary level in China. Of 36 foreign teachers, 28 responded. According to Hu, these English-native speaker teachers argued that while communicating with Chinese EFL learners, they found their students' cultural mistakes more intolerable than linguistic mistakes (Hu, 1994:127). Hu's study supports Wolfson's (1983) argument:

> In interacting with foreigners, native speakers tend to be rather tolerant of errors in pronunciation or syntax. In contrast, violations of rules of speaking

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are often interpreted as bad manners since the native speakers are unlikely to be aware of sociolinguistic relativity (p. 62).

Hu also conducted an investigation of English majors on the subject of their abilities in cross-cultural communication. Based on his findings, Hu (1994) made a summary of the causes of 'cultural mistakes' that Chinese students are prone to make in their EFL learning process. He stratified these cultural mistakes into four kinds as follows:

1. Inappropriateness from a socio-linguistic perspective

E.g. addressing someone by surname without any prefix. Taking leave in a social gathering is also found problematic for Chinese students. 'Where are you going?' (*ni qu nar?*) is a common greeting in China and is nothing more than a Chinese way of saying 'Hello' or 'Hi'. But if the phrase is translated literally into English and is mistaken for a greeting by Chinese students when they meet their foreigner teachers, it would sound rather strange and unnecessarily direct. All this evidence reveals the degrees of linguistic interference from Chinese norms when Chinese EFL learners use the target language for a communication purpose.

2. Cultural inappropriateness

An example of this is self-effacement and sounding extremely modest when being complimented by native-speakers of English. In China, modesty is considered as a virtue and it is common for Chinese people to murmur some reply about not being worthy of the praise when they receive a compliment. However, the reply could be misinterpreted by Westerners as 'you are saying that to be polite; you may not really mean that'.

3. Cultural conflict in values and patterns of thinking

Chinese students are not too much concerned with the *privacy* of others, showing too much concern to foreigners and giving too much unnecessary advice to the extent that foreigners may feel that their privacy is infringed upon. In China, people think

(1996) recounts the following true story illustrating a typical cultural mistake made by a Chinese EFL learner:

> A Chinese university student approached his American expatriate teacher for consultation. The American teacher helped the student solve the problem. Just before leaving, the student expressed his appreciation by saying, *I am sorry to have wasted a lot of your valuable time. Now I am leaving.* The American teacher felt a little annoyed at what he said.

The problem in this story lies in the utterance *I am sorry to have wasted you a lot of your valuable time* which is perfectly acceptable in Chinese culture in this situation as a way to express one's appreciation of the time, attention and help extended by another person. However, literal translation of this Chinese leaving-taking expression sounds very awkward to English native speakers. In the above case, the American teacher did not see helping his student as a waste of time at all. On the contrary, he would see it as his responsibility. The teacher felt a little annoyed because he may have thought that 'he gave his student an impression that time was being wasted' (Zhao, 1996: 63).

The root cause of Chinese EFL learners' deficiency in cross-cultural communicative competence is multi-faceted. Scattered discussions of the teaching of target culture in English-major programs at tertiary level started in early 1980s and were encouraged by a few seminars held in China on intercultural communication in mid-1990s. The consequence of this developing trend is the publication of several collections of papers on this subject. However, although these publications and discussions of the issue are beginning to shed light on the teaching of culture in EFL programs at tertiary level in China, and efforts have been made to attempt to put the theory into practice, any discussion of culture remains at a very general level. It seems that there is a lack of pedagogical direction towards the issue of integrating culture teaching into the English language teaching. Even the revised national curriculum of English teaching for English majors, which has specified that a goal of EFL education is to foster learners' intercultural communicative competence, fails to advise how to integrate culture teaching into the EFL programmes (English Division, 2000). The present status of culture teaching in EFL programs as something subordinated to the

teaching of English 'has made the teaching of the target culture in the English classroom difficult to manage' (Xiao, 2001: 132).

Cao (1998) points out that one of the main conventions in foreign language teaching in tertiary institutions is that culture courses are taught solely as imparting knowledge or facts. It seems that as long as learners get to know the facts, they are assumed to be equipped with competence for intercultural communication. This view is dominant in EFL teaching for English majors in China and my classroom observations in this study confirms this assumption (See Chapter 7 for details).
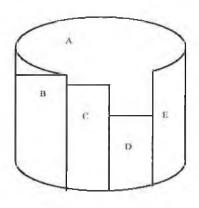
Despite the fact that some introductory courses on Western cultures are offered for English majors either as an optional or required course, the issue of teaching culture linked to the teaching methodology is much less discussed. Consequently it is not uncommon that in such culture classes teachers follow the traditional way of approaching the language while the sociocultural context per se is ignored. Moreover, EFL teachers' own intercultural sensitivity and competence casts doubt on the effectiveness and quality of teaching culture in the EFL programs.

2.4.3. The 'Bucket Model'

To illustrate the importance of equilibrating the different components of communicative competence in the EFL program, it is useful to refer to Chinese sociologist, Xu's (1991) 'bucket model' (see Figure-2.2) to describe the relationship between the communicative competence model and its four components: grammatical, sociolinguistic, discourse and strategic competencies (Canale & Swain, 1980; Canale, 1983).

Figure 2.2.   **The Bucket Model**

The Bucket Model

Source: Xu (1991)

In Figure 2.2. **A**: stands for communicative competence (CC) which consists of 4 components:

B: Linguistic competence
C: Discourse competence
D: Sociolinguistic competence
E: Strategic competence

The 'bucket' illustrates the relations between the various components of communicative competence which English majors must learn during their four-year formal study in the English Department of a Chinese university or college. As can be seen, the total capacity of the bucket stands for communicative competence (CC) – the outcome of EFL learning and how well one can communicate in the target language for a real communicative purpose, in other words, how much communicative competence one possesses depends on the length of the 'wooden boards' that make up the whole water bucket. Obviously, of all these wooden boards, which stand for the four different components of communicative competence, the 'water' level that the bucket can hold depends on A, B, C, D rather than the longest wooden boards B or E alone. Instead, the 'water capacity' is inevitably down to the level of the shortest wooden board. That means that even if a learner acquires linguistic competence or discourse competence, it still may be impossible for him or

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Based on this experience, Li claims that CLT can and should be implemented in the Chinese context. She also argues that EFL education in China must change pedagogically to fit the communicative language teaching approach. There has been a top-down movement to reform EFL teaching in China since the late 1980s, and an important component of this reform has been an effort to import CLT and transfer it into the Chinese context (Hu 2002b: 94). In order to promote CLT, a great deal of effort and resources have been expended on revamping curricula for various levels of education, and updating English syllabuses to include principles and practices that are advocated by CLT. These efforts also include various attempts aimed at producing communication-oriented English textbooks, developing skill-oriented examinations, and upgrading teachers' knowledge of new language learning theories and pedagogies (Adamson & Morris 1997; Hu, 2002b).

In addition, there are a number of government-sponsored projects in collaboration with foreign organizations, such as British Council (U.K.) and Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA). The purpose of the collaboration is to introduce CLT to China through joint efforts between native English-speaker experts and their Chinese counterparts at tertiary level. In spite of the efforts and resources expended, many Chinese teachers and learners of English do not seem to have undergone any fundamental changes either in their conception of effective language instruction or in their daily practices (Hu, 2002b: 94). In other words, CLT has not received widespread support and the traditional approach is still dominant in many classrooms (Hu, 2002b). Although many teachers claim to be followers of CLT and claim to use the communicative language teaching approach in their class, a closer look at EFL teachers' teaching practices shows that it turns out to be not the case and 'this is often a matter of paying lip-service' to the new method (Hu, 2002: 94b). Most EFL teachers still stick to the conventional teacher-centred methods, focusing on grammar and structure whereas the core aim of EFL education is ignored: to enable learners to use the target language appropriately for real communicative purposes. The CLT approach, in reality, has encountered enormous resistance in China, and it has stimulated much debate from both Chinese and Western EFL or L2 specialists on the appropriateness and effectiveness of adopting CLT in China (Maley, 1982, 1984;

Li, 1984; Harvey, 1985, Wang, 1985; Burnaby & Sun, 1989; Li, 1989; Anderson, 1993; Rao, 1996; Cortazzi & Jin, 1996; Leng, 1997; Rao, 2002).

An outcome of this debate had been the 'identification of a host of constraints on the adoption of CLT in the Chinese context' (Hu 2002b: 94). These constraints are quite complex and multi-dimensional and include lack of necessary resources, limited instructional time, lack of teacher training including language proficiency and sociolinguistic competence, examination pressure, poor English-speaking environment, and cultural factors. Another result of this debate is that there has been growing scepticism about:

1. Introducing drastic changes into the English classroom and
2. Adopting uncritically pedagogies which have been developed in totally different social, cultural and economic conditions (Chen, 1988; Coleman, 1996 cited in Hu 2002: 94b).

Generally speaking, there are three positions concerning implanting CLT in China, namely, 1. a pro-CLT approach, 2. a more balanced approach, and 3. a pro-traditional approach. At one end of the continuum (1), there are researchers and EFL/ESL professionals who call for a complete adoption of CLT (Maley, 1982, 1984; Li, 1984; Cotton 1990). Li, Xiaoju (1984), a well-known EFL scholar of pro-CLT approach in China, insists on the use of authentic, appropriate language, and stresses the necessity of sufficient input in the English class. She makes critical comments on the traditional teaching approach:

> In China everything the teacher wants to teach is taught through a written text and the way the *Intensive [English] Reading* course is commonly taught in China not only does not help to promote extensive reading skills, but it may actually fossilize the reading style of students so that they are hindered from even reading efficiently (p. 8-9).

Maley (1984), based on his experience of teaching English in China, also supports the adoption of CLT in China. He concludes that introducing CLT into China is not only desirable but also feasible and inevitable (1984).

At the other end of the continuum (3), there are people who stress the necessity and importance of traditional teaching methods as well as the progress and achievements that these methods have brought to EFL teaching in China (Sampson 1984; Harvey, 1985; Wang, 1985; Wei 1997; Wang 1997; Han 2001; Hu, 2002b). For instance, Wei (1997: 86) strongly defends traditional teaching methods and argues that the real question is not to abandon traditional teaching methods but how to use them effectively and creatively (1997: 86).

Harvey (1985), for instance, based on his own teaching experience in China, finds the constructive side of grammar instruction and learning in the classroom, and he points out that Chinese learners not only memorize grammatical points taught and learned in class but they also use them. He claims that Chinese learning methods cannot simply be dismissed as 'primitive, old fashioned or misguided' (p.186).

> There are a number of obvious historical, pedagogical and psychological reasons for them. What might be called 'traditional' methods and skills are not fundamentally or necessarily unworkable alongside modern EFL teaching methods. The idea that the two are mutually exclusive is absurd. EFL in China needs Western experience and expertise, not Western dogma. A balanced approach and the potential use of both have a fundamental part to play in the development of language teaching in China (Harvey 1985: 186).

In the middle of the continuum (2), stand the majority of EFL professionals who are in favour of a more inclusive position and adopt a balanced approach (Jia, 1989; Li, 1989; White 1989; Fei & Duan 1993; Su & Zhuang 1996; Li, 1997; Rao, 1996, 2002; Wang, 1999; Wu & Lan 2002; Xiao, 2002). These 'pro-balance' or 'pro-eclectic' commentators are aware of the inadequacies of traditional teaching methods and problems in the process of the English language teaching and learning in China. On the other hand, they also see the potential of adopting CLT as a means of overcoming some of the problems inherent in traditional teaching methods. They thus call for the right mix of traditional and communicative methods applicable to the Chinese EFL situation. For instance, Fei & Duan (1993) remind us that if we can successfully combine both the traditional approach and CLT, the result will be positive and serve to put EFL teaching in China on a better track. Rao (1996, 2002) notes the

importance of considering the learning styles and the actual needs of Chinese EFL learners when deciding which method(s) to use.

'Pro-balance' researchers are also aware of the various constraints confronting Chinese EFL teachers and learners who attempt to import CLT wholesale. Anderson (1993) points to the lack of properly trained EFL teachers in China, lack of appropriate text materials and difficulties in evaluation in CLT. White (1989) reminds us:

> By acknowledging the expectations of the students in terms of what they wanted to learn and how they were used to learning language, and by making careful *compromises*, it was possible to meet their needs, to expose them to new ways of learning English and to encourage them to put their language to work in meaningful ways (p. 213, my emphasis).

Some studies seek to understand and explain the sources of constraints facing Chinese EFL teachers and learners in using CLT from an intercultural perspective. Sampson (1984) cautions that CLT is laden with cultural and political values and cannot be exported easily to other dissimilar cultures. Penner (1995) emphasizes that classroom culture, beliefs, and pedagogy in China set limits on the pedagogical change required by CLT principles. Hird (1995) examines and compares the culture-specific factors embodied in CLT and Chinese traditional teaching methods regarding learning processes, language learning modes, teaching styles and classroom relationships. He thus concludes that CLT does have a role in English language teaching in China. However, due to the very nature of CLT and the past traditions and current circumstances of English language teaching and learning in China, aspects of the CLT approach need to be applied selectively and with caution in the Chinese context which is 'vastly different from the one that spawned and nurtured the communicative [language teaching] approach (Hird 1995: 21). 'Imported, allegedly universal, Western teaching methodologies that dismiss the local context are unlikely to flourish' (p. 26).

The above review serves to highlight the issues under study in this thesis. However, it is important to note two features of the above literature in light of further research in the related areas.

First, in their comments on introducing CLT into China, most of the researchers cited above based their opinions on their personal teaching experience, observations and their understanding of the differences between Chinese and Western cultures. Such comments are often perceptive but they lack the more objective findings of data. It is also not clear how well their comments can bear the weight of hard empirical data. So more objective studies are required to test the validity of their conclusions.

Second, Western ESL specialists, often teaching a short-term in China may be generalizing from their own personal teaching practice in China, and observing the immediately obvious obstacles to adopting CLT in China. Perhaps they do not have a full grasp of all aspects of English language teaching in China, and especially EFL for English majors at tertiary level. Very little of the literature focuses on this group of English learners. Much work needs to be devoted to the research in this area. Moreover, their suggestion of incorporating a communicative component into traditional methods may be too vague to be useful. They tend to focus on methodological issues rather than the socio-cultural aspects of English teaching and learning. Moreover, very little has been written on the relationship between EFL teaching and critical thinking instruction in English language classrooms, nor the pedagogy of critical thinking instruction through English language teaching and learning at university level - one of the very important areas in which Chinese English majors have been found to be deficient. This is also one of the main research questions, which this present study explores in order to construct a theoretical and practical pedagogy for effective teaching of English at university level in the Chinese context.

In sum, teaching methods are culturally laden, and not easily transferable from one culture to another without proper adjustment. The three different stances presented above: 1. Pro-CLT approach, 2. Balanced approach, and 3. Pro-traditional approach, represent the state of current English language teaching and learning in China at tertiary level. The balanced approach of combining traditional methods with CLT is gaining popularity in China. As people begin to investigate the conflicts in the transfer of CLT into the Chinese context, they realize that innovation in EFL

teaching in China will succeed only if there is 'cultural continuity between CLT and more traditional forms' (Ellis 1996).

Chapter summary

In this chapter, I have given a pedagogical overview of development in the notion of communicative competence in the West. The pedagogical review started with Chomsky's linguistic competence, which was critiqued and developed by Hymes into a concept of communicative competence. Hymes' original idea was that speakers of a language must have more than grammatical competence in order to be able to communicate effectively in a language. Later on the concept of communicative competence has been further refined by a number of researchers such as Canale and Swain, Canale, Savignon, Widdowson, and Bachman. I also outlined a pedagogical review of communicative language teaching. This is followed by critical comments of CLT made by L2 researchers. Finally I presented the debate in China over the application of CLT to the Chinese context and pointed out the importance of identifying various challenges facing Chinese EFL teachers in their attempts to adopt CLT into their English classes.

Chapter 3

Cultural Impacts on EFL teaching in the Chinese context

Introduction

In this chapter, I examine the cultural impacts on EFL teaching at tertiary level in the Chinese context. First I discuss the Confucian philosophies. Following this, I present Hofstede's 4-Dimensional Model of Cultural Differences and its relevance to the culture-related issues of this thesis. Finally, I discuss the Chinese culture of learning.

As stated in Chapter 2, the principles underpinning CLT are culturally specific and not easily transferable from Western culture to the substantially different Chinese cultural context. In their attempts to adopt CLT into the Chinese context, conflicts arise between the principles underpinning CLT and inveterate beliefs and value systems held by Chinese teachers and students. Teaching approaches and methodologies, despite appearances, are not value-free.

As cultural beings, we take for granted our assumptions and value systems regarding what makes good teachers and good students. In this sense, both teachers and students need to have a thorough understanding of the cultural differences inherent in the two above-mentioned approaches before they venture into applying CLT into their own teaching practices. In addressing this issue, we need to be cautions about overgeneralizing. Hu (2002b) warns us that it is dangerous to generalize about the cultural behaviours of a social group as huge and complex as the Chinese one. Nonetheless, there are some culturally rooted assumptions about social and

educational practices which underpin the models of teaching and learning within each society. In addressing this issue, Hofstede's (1991, 1994) 4-Dimensional Model of Cultural Differences is very pertinent when it comes to explaining the culture-related constraints involved in adopting CLT in the Chinese context.

It is important to note that many other researchers also discuss cultural variations relevant to differences between East and West cultures, for instance, Trompennaars' concept of 'achieved status' and 'ascribed status' (Trompennaars, 1993, 1997) and Hall's concept of 'high context' and 'low context' (1976). Scollon and Scollon (1995) also, for example, suggest that the Confucian cultural tradition places a very high value on the communication of subtle aspects of feeling and relationship and a much lower value on the communication of information, whereas the Anglo-American cultural tradition places a higher premium on clear exposition of facts.

As this present study focuses on various factors affecting the effective teaching and learning of English at university level within the Chinese cultural context, I refer exclusively to Hofstede's 4-Dimensional Model of Cultural Differences in analysis, since I find it much more relevant to my research data analysis and discussion than models/concepts proposed by other researchers. Hofstede's multi-dimensional model looks at the effects of culture on the expectations of student and teacher roles in classroom interaction. Hofstede (1986) claims that the values represented by these dimensions result in different understandings of how teachers and students are supposed to behave in the classroom context. 'They lead to feelings of good and evil, right and wrong, rational and irrational, proper and improper; feelings of which we seldom recognize the cultural relativity' (P. 305). Hofstede (1986, 1994) draws our attention to the cultural phenomena that the pervasive influence that our cultural models have on our behaviors, judgments and feelings is often taken for granted; we may consider our judgments, feelings and reactions simply to be 'normal' or based on 'common sense' when they are actually entirely relative to our particular cultural inheritance.

As will be seen below, both teachers and students in the Chinese EFL context need to become aware of the fact that the cultural difference in the process of radical

pedagogical innovation is a strong factor, and should be handled properly. A good understanding of these differences is a very necessary first step.

3.1 Confucianism

The teachings of Confucius (551-479, B. C) have been transmitted for over two thousand years of Chinese civilization. Confucianism has become deeply rooted in Chinese culture and has moulded Chinese thinking. China is a communist country with Confucian ethics permeating all levels and spheres of Chinese society. The official reinforcement of the dominant position of Confucianism in Chinese culture has an especially strong impact on education at various levels; it influences the beliefs and value systems underpinning the teaching and learning of a foreign language in China.

As a system of social norms and values, the four Confucian virtues of [*zhong*] loyalty, [*xiao*] respect for elders, [*ren*] benevolence and [*yi*] righteousness provide the foundation of model behaviours in various unequal relationships. It hinges on reciprocal duties and obligations. These moral imperatives, namely righteousness between the ruler and subject, proper rapport between father and son, separation of functions between husband and wife, proper recognition of the sequence of birth between elder and younger brothers and faithfulness between friends are the principal guidelines for interpersonal relationships (Hofstede 1994; Lewis, 1999). One of the famous sayings of Confucius is 'Let emperor be an emperor, the subject a subject, the father a father and the son a son' [*jun jun chen chen, fu fu zi zi*]. The implication is that within the family as within the nation, personal desires are best subjugated to the wills of the patriarch. Each person in the hierarchy should be involved in activity which is appropriate to his or her social status.

For over two thousand years, Chinese society has attached extreme importance to collectivistic rather than personal interests. Emphasis is placed on maintaining harmonious interaction from group members at all levels. China is known as a country of Confucian culture, and on the whole, Chinese philosophy is based on ethics or moral principles - the core of Confucianism - rather than on logical,

analytical and rational dialectics as in the West (Jin, 1992). When this cultural trait is reflected in classroom, 'Chinese students are found quite ready to accept authority', and 'most students are too shy to challenge teachers or books' (Mao, 1996: 15). This is typically reflected in the relationship between teachers and students and the teaching and learning styles in class. Teachers transmit knowledge and students expect the right answers from teachers. This is in stark contrast with the principles underpinning CLT, which emphasize engaging students in communicative activities and learning a target language by using it. In the CLT approach, teachers are not knowledge transmitters but facilitators; students are not passive learners but active participants. To analyse in detail the complex nature of cultural differences, Hofstede's 4-Dimensional Model of Cultural Differences enables us to examine various culture-related aspects involved in the process of applying CLT into the Chinese context.

3.2. Hofstede 4-Dimensonal Model of Cultural Differences

Hofstede (1991, 1994), a well-known Dutch sociologist, conducted studies on cultural differences in work-related values as they applied to different peoples and created a 4-Dimensional Model of Cultural Differences. Hofstede outlines cultural aspects that differentiate 1. *Individualism vs. Collectivism*, 2. *Power Distance* (high or low), 3.*Uncertainty Avoidance* (strong or weak), and 4. *Masculinity* vs. *Femininity*. Later on, Hofstede has added Michael Bond's *Confucian dynamism* as a fifth dimension to this model (1994). According to Hofstede (1991, 1994):

> *Individualism* pertains to societies in which ties between individuals are loose; everyone is expected to look after himself or herself and his or her immediate family. *Collectivism* pertains to societies in which people from birth onwards are integrated into strong, cohesive in-groups which throughout people's lifetimes continue to protect them in exchange for unquestioned loyalty. (1994: 51).

Hofstede demonstrates that the collectivism vs. individualism distinction is an effective means of finding differential patterns in the responses of members of different cultures. He points out the differences between individualist and collectivist societies in terms of the teacher-student relationships. He uses the term 'power distance' which refers to 'the extent to which the less powerful members of institutions and organizations within a country expect and accept that power is

distributed unequally' (Hofstede, 1991: 28). He notes that inequality exists within any culture, but the degree to which it is tolerated varies between one culture and another. He stresses that the larger the power distance, the more students become dependent on teachers; the smaller the power distance, the more students become independent of teachers. China is on the continuum of collectivist society in which there is large power distance, and there exists a teacher-student inequality which 'caters to the need for dependence well established in the student's mind' (Hofstede, 1991:34). In such a situation, the teacher-centeredness in the language classroom is viewed as the normal and core practice in the educational process and students do not hesitate to follow directions given by teachers. This process inevitably leads to an educational environment in which 'the quality of one's learning is exclusively dependent on the excellence of one's teachers' (Hofstede, 1991: 35). An old Chinese proverb says: 'an accomplished disciple owes his accomplishments to his great teacher' (*ming shi chu gao tu)*. Therefore, the teacher views it as his or her role to transmit knowledge to the students.

This assumption is in line with what Maley (1982) has called *Pint-pot* model of teaching, by which he means a teacher simply empties his or her barrel of knowledge into the pint pot of his or her students. 'There is no organic interchange. It is the students' job to absorb as much of the elixir as he can contain and not to spill any. Intake is said to equal input' (Maley, 1982: 43). This is clearly reflected in a Chinese maxim that 'to give students a bowl of water *(yi wan shui),* the teacher must have a full bucket of water to dispense' *(yi tong shui)*.

In contrast, in small power distance situations, teachers and students are expected and encouraged to assume an equal position. When this is reflected in the education process, according to Hofstede (1991), it is characterized by student-centeredness, 'with a premium on student initiative; students are expected to find their own intellectual paths' (p. 34). Students' independence is highly valued as the core and the norm of the educational system. This reflects Maley's (1982) *Home Brewery Kit Model,* which means that teachers are seen as a provider of raw materials (a kit with ingredients) and instruction on how to use them. The learner then works on them at his own individual pace and in his own style. However, input is identical for all. Intake and output are different for everyone (Maley, 1982: 43).

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Another dimension of his 4-Dimensional Model is *Uncertainty Avoidance*. Within cultures with strong uncertainty avoidance, people feel nervous in situations which they perceive as unstructured, unclear or unpredictable, therefore they try to seek security rather than take personal risks. In cultures with a weak uncertainty avoidance, people are contemplative, relaxed, accepting personal risk, and relatively tolerant. In applying this 4-Dimensional Model to a classroom-based setting, Hofstede summarizes the following cultural aspects of teacher-student and student-student interaction related to *Power Distance* dimension and *Uncertainty Avoidance* dimension (See Table 2.1 and 2.2).

Differences in teacher-student and student-student interaction related to the Power Distance Dimension

Table-3.1

Small Power Distance society	Large Power Distance society
Stress on impersonal truth obtained from any competent person	Stress on personal wisdom handed down by a teacher
Teacher should respect the independence of students	Teacher merits the respect of his or her students
Student-centred teaching methodology	Teacher-centred teaching methodology
Teacher expects students to initiate communication	Students expect teacher to initiate communication
Students speak up spontaneously in class	Students speak up only when invited by teacher in class
Students contradict teacher	Teacher is not contradicted publicly in class
Effectiveness of learning depends on 2-way communication in class	Effectiveness of learning depends on excellence of teacher in class
Younger teachers are more liked than older teachers	Older teachers are more liked than younger teachers

Differences in teacher-student and student-student interaction related to the Uncertainty Avoidance Dimension

Table-3.2

Weak Uncertainty Avoidance	Strong Uncertainty Avoidance
Students like unstructured learning situations, broad assignments	Students like structured learning situations, detailed assignments
Teachers are allowed to say 'I don't know' in class	Teachers are expected to provide all correct answers
Students are awarded for innovative approaches to problem solving	Students are awarded for accuracy in problem solving
Teachers interpret intellectual disagreement as stimulating exercise	Teachers interpret intellectual disagreement as personal disloyalty

Source: Hofstede, (1986:314)

Three out of Hofstede's 4-Dimensitonal Model, namely: *Individualism vs. Collectivism*, *Power Distance* and *Uncertainty Avoidance* are particularly relevant to this thesis and therefore I use these frameworks in discussing some of the survey findings. I subsequently exclude the fourth dimension, namely, *Masculinity and Femininity* from the discussion as it is not closely related to the current thesis. Hofstede's fifth dimension *Confucian dynamism* has been discussed in Section 3.1 of this Chapter. The following section focuses on Chinese culture of learning, a typical representation in the Chinese collectivistic culture.

3.3. The Chinese culture of learning and its influence on EFL Education in China

Having outlined a general scenario of Hofstede's 4-Dimensional Model of Cultural Differences, we need to delve into the particular characteristics of Chinese culture in

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order to know how to adapt CLT to the Chinese context for the purpose of enhancing EFL majors' communicative competence. Cortazzi and Jin (1996) use the term Chinese 'culture of learning' to describe a whole set of expectations, attitudes, beliefs, values, perceptions, preferences, experiences, and behaviours that are characteristic of Chinese society with regard to teaching and learning (Cortazzi & Jin, 1996: 74). Another Chinese EFL researcher, Cheng (2000) gives a more detailed account of the Chinese culture of learning:

1. Teachers have absolute authority in the classroom. Students show great respect to teachers, but they also expect teachers to have thorough knowledge of the subjects they teach. The central aim of education is to distribute knowledge. In order to avoid loss of face, open challenge to what teachers say is not encouraged.

2. The Chinese language is non-roman alphabetic language and thereby the rote learning method is used in the early stages of learning to memorize the Chinese characters. Therefore this method continues to exist at later education stages.

3. The Chinese people have a long tradition of diligence. They trust working hard more than working efficiently. Both teachers and students believe that it is hardworking efforts that count.

4. A strong centralized educational system has been predominating for a very long time in China. Educational institutions have been under pressure from National Curriculum and matriculation systems that are usually exam-centred or knowledge-oriented.

5. Due to the Chinese modesty or face-saving philosophy, to remain reticent about one's strength is a virtue. In addition, to remain quiet about one's ignorance can avoid losing face. For both these reasons, many Chinese students do not consider asking questions in public a good habit (Cheng, 2000: 47-48).

Under the influence of this culture of learning, the EFL classrooms in China often take the form of 'knowledge transmission' from teacher to students. Much of this knowledge is grammar, structure, and vocabulary. Therefore, it is not surprising that in EFL classrooms in the Chinese context, there is lack of active and dynamic interaction, individualization, creativity and self-expression - many of the prerequisites of CLT. If students are presented with student-centred activities, they often complain that they have not indeed learned as much as they expected (see Chapter 6 for discussion). Teacher-centred methods to which students are exposed from early childhood, make use of repetition and gradually become fixed into

routines. If students feel a teacher is 'knowledgeable, qualified and eloquent', they feel they learn a lot from the teacher despite their apparent inactivity in English class. If, on the other hand, they find a teacher 'unqualified', their indifference to a monotonous teaching method is manifested, to varying degrees, by silence, absent-mindedness or divided attention, inactivity in initiating or asking and answering questions in class, as the classroom observations revealed in this study (See Chapter 7 for details).

3.4. The Role of the Teacher in class

The roles of teacher and student have to be examined in light of this pattern of hierarchical or unequal relationships. Its implications for EFL education are obvious: the teacher is seen as a 'fount of knowledge' (Liu: 1998) who is the means whereby the received wisdom is passed on to students. In China, the teacher-student interaction is not 'lubricated with the democratic oil of warmth and first names, but with the oil of respect' (Biggs, 1998:730). The latter can serve as a more effective lubricant in a collective society like China.

One of the favourite metaphors in China likens a teacher to a 'gardener' (*Yuan ding*). It implies that a successful Chinese teacher has traditionally been honoured for producing 'a world of peaches and plums' (*Tao li man tian xia*) whose far-flung goodness is a mentor's greatest tribute (Ross, 1993). Another metaphor used almost as frequently is to describe teachers as 'engineers of human soul' (*ren lei ling hun gong cheng shi)*, that is, 'being models for students to follow' (*Wei ren shi biao*). The teacher should impart his knowledge to students and at the same time cultivate students' good morality [*Jiao shu yu ren*].

Therefore, it is not surprising that teachers are regarded as authorities in the classroom. Given the elevated status of teachers, it is not considered proper for students to challenge or openly disagree with what the teacher says in public. If a teacher is shown to be wrong by a student in the classroom, this would indicate a grave face-threatening act. It is not uncommon that 'Chinese students are more accustomed to a highly directed, teacher-centred system than non-structured and

class is thought to have an impact on the development of the students' own personality. If students like a teacher's personality, they are very likely, in many cases, to find his or her lecture interesting and vice versa. This is referred to as a Pygmalion effect [1] (Ke, 2003).

3.6. Traditional attitudes towards learning

The importance, as well as the benefits, of learning can be best reflected in some Chinese sayings: 'Thousands of professions and activities are at the lower level while study is considered to be at the highest' (*Wan ban jie xiapin, wei you dushu gao*) and 'It is in learning that there are gold houses and beautiful girls' (*shu zhong zi you huang jin wu, shu zhong zi you yan ru yu*). As revealed in these sayings, learning is a key that opens many doors to most people, and the only way to find prestige, material reward, a happy marriage and successful careers. Moreover teachers tend to assume that Chinese students cannot tolerate a course that is totally student-centred, with no specific textbook since they are used to a teacher-dominated class in which 'listening attentively to the teacher' is considered to be the most appropriate behaviour. In addition, this also implies that it would be unusual if students were asked to learn English by 'playing games'.

To illustrate Chinese EFL teachers' attitudes towards the learning of English, it is useful at this stage to quote a paragraph from an English newsletter *Bell* in the English Department where the empirical study for this thesis was conducted. The *Bell* (2000) which is edited by the staff and students together in the English Department, carried a short article written by a senior EFL teacher, giving freshmen some advice of how to study English:

> You [students] cannot expect to be a good and fluent speaker of English overnight. The first thing you have to do is *to try to learn by heart as many English words as you can. Feed your head with thousands of new words.* Keep doing that every day. The next thing [to do] is put your heart into learning it – be hardworking. In so doing, you will succeed as a good foreign language learner, just as a Chinese proverb says *practice makes perfect* (*Bell*, 2001: 3, my emphasis).

From the above quotation, we can see that it is quite common that people view learning as the accumulation of knowledge and the reading of books. According to Confucius, things are learned little by little, and one by one. As one of the most frequently cited sayings puts it, 'study as if you were never to master it' (*Xue wu zhi jing*) and 'when the time comes to use your knowledge, you will regret how little you have read' (S*hu dao yong shi fang hen shao*). In Confucian teaching, knowledge being acquired now may not be of immediate use, however, as long as you have mastered it, it is your own [asset] and it will be at your disposal later on when you might have to use it (Rao, 1996: 460).

It is not uncommon for teachers to instil in students the morals of diligence since English learning is often viewed as a process of *learning vocabulary plus grammar plus practice plus industriousness*. As such, the most efficient way of teaching is to transmit as much as possible of the knowledge about the language in class. Consequently recitation is considered to be one of most effective ways for learning a foreign language and it is viewed as 'a basic acquisition technique' (Rao, 1996: 461). An old Chinese saying indicates recitation as a way of a consolidation of knowledge and a deepening of understanding of what has been learned: 'when one can memorize 300 Tang-dynasty poems, one is sure to be able to compose poems of one's own even though one is not a poet at all' (*shu du tang shi san bai shou, bu hui zou shi ye hui yin*).

3.7 The concept of 'face'

'Face' is defined as 'the public self-image that every member in a society wants to claim for himself' (Brown & Levinson, 1987: 61). A Chinese adage illustrates the importance of 'face' in a daily life: 'a person needs face just like a tree needs bark' (*ren yao lian, shu yao pi*). According to Brown and Levinson (1987), there are two types of face. One is negative face that is 'the want to have his freedom of action unhindered and his attention unimpeded' (p. 129). The other is positive face, which is 'the want of every member that his want [should] be desirable to at least some others' (p. 62) as well as 'the perennial desire that his wants or the actions, acquisitions or values resulting from them should be considered as desirable (p. 101).

One of the key characteristics of Chinese face is that the overall composition of 'face' does not place oneself in the most important position (Mao, 1994: 460 cited in Liu, 2002). Rather, Chinese face 'encodes a reputable image that individuals can claim for themselves as they interact with others in a given community' (ibid). Therefore, Chinese face is within the consideration of the community in a given context, and how an individual thinks his or her character or behaviour is being judged or perceived by the people around him or her in that community (Mao, 1994 cited in Liu, 2002). To use this face-saving view to look into the classroom behaviours of both Chinese students and teachers in this study is beneficial as 'face-saving strategies are widely practised in Chinese society' (Liu & Littlewood, 1997).

China is a hierarchical society with its culture score rating 80 on the Power Distance Index (PDI) scale (Hosfede, 2001: 502). This provides an explanation as to why Chinese learners do not like to openly challenge authority in class and air their opinions in public. The reason is obvious that they do not want to make their teacher lose 'face', that is, not to embarrass their teacher in class. At the same time, such an act tends to preserve their own face, by not asking 'stupid' questions which would show their ignorance.

In the pilot study conducted for this research (See Section 4.4-4.5 in Chapter 4) I was told by an Irish ESL teacher who taught Chinese students English in a language college in Ireland that he was often surrounded by his Chinese students who kept asking him questions *after class* instead of *in class*. The teacher was surprised why these questions were not raised during class. The key point is that Chinese students tend to think of 'asking to know rather than knowing by asking' (Cortazzi & Jin, 1996). If one asks a question it would indicate that one does not learn as quickly as others or is slow to understand and this amounts to a face-threatening act. Therefore students do not tend to raise questions unless they are sure that they have understood what the teacher has said. On the contrary, in low power distance societies, students tend to acquire new information by asking and they take it for granted that it is a good way of learning and discovering rather than a loss of face.

In Chinese EFL class, if someone is asked to give an impromptu speech, it is not uncommon to see her or him beginning the speech by saying, 'I am not well prepared

Chapter 4

Research Methodology

Introduction

As briefly stated in the Introduction, this study explores Chinese EFL learners' and teachers' views of CLT, the traditional approach, the teaching and learning of the target culture in English classes, and the main challenges confronting them in their learning and teaching process. This study also examines students' attitudes towards authority in class and the real causes for their apparent reticence in English classes as well as their perceived deficiency in critical thinking skills. The final research question addressed is how to develop alternative pedagogical models that can effectively combine the strengths of both CLT and the Chinese traditional approach [1] in order to most effectively develop Chinese EFL learners' communicative competence including their critical thinking ability.

Exploration of these research questions needs to take full account of the cultural context and traditions of English language teaching and learning in China. As stated in Chapter 2, although CLT began to be introduced into China in early 1980s, numerous Chinese teachers and learners of English do not seem to have gone through any fundamental changes in their conception of effective language instruction and in their daily practice. The traditional approach is still dominant in many English classrooms. Even if many teachers claim to be followers of CLT, this is often a matter of only 'paying lip service' to the concept. In reality, 'there has been resistance deep down to CLT since its very introduction' (Hu, 2002b: 94). As such, a vigorous study on an effective pedagogical solution to the above problem in EFL education in the Chinese context is of great significance.

This chapter will describe the research design of this thesis and give a detailed account of the research procedures utilized in this study. It includes questionnaire design, interview and classroom observation. The questionnaire survey is designed to elicit respondents' attitudes towards and perceptions on CLT (SCA), TCA, culture learning, respect for authority in class, use of language learning strategy, motivation in learning English, and main challenges confronting them. The interview design is to elicit in-depth information from informants on why they favor or disfavor TCA and SCA, the main problems or challenges encountered and students' attitudes towards authority in class. Classroom observation is conducted to identify whether both teachers' and students' responses to CLT (SCA), TCA and students' attitudes towards authority and towards speaking out in English classes are really reflected in their classroom practices and behaviours. This chapter also explains why both quantitative and qualitative research methods are used as well as how the data is collected, presented and analysed.

4.1. Research Design: combined quantitative and qualitative approach

This study combines both a quantitative and a qualitative research methodology, representing the two major kinds of investigative methods for empirical studies used by researchers in the social sciences. Both approaches have their advantages and disadvantages. Griffee (1999) points out that one popular way of carrying out classroom-based research is to use quantitative data generated from questionnaires. It is easier, more manageable and less expensive than other forms of data collection and large amounts of data can be collected in a fairly short time. Questionnaires can also be used to research almost any aspect of teaching or learning and they can be easily used in field settings such as classrooms (Brown, 1988; Nunan, 1989, 1992; Seliger & Shohamy, 1989). The quantitative approach has the merits of being replicable and easy to use for large samples. It also seems to enable studies to be scientific and objective.

Despite these advantages, the quantitative approach has limitations. The quantitative approach treats complex data in a fragmented and isolated manner and inadequately demonstrates how these variables under investigation are interrelated in real human lives. As a result, it does not allow the researcher to reach deep and wide into the problem under investigation and capture the 'rich and thick stuff' (Gao, 2001: 67). Moreover, the strict control conditions required for such methods frequently restrict a researcher's ability to deal with many important issues concerning actual human and subjective factors. Quantitative research methods need to be informed and interpreted by qualitative methods in order to shed greater light on the complex nature of the variables under investigation.

Qualitative methods, on the other hand, can be used for in-depth investigations. They are particularly good in soliciting detailed information concerning cognitive and mental factors which the quantitative approach passes over. Quantitative methods provide precise evidence for or against a theoretical proposition, and can reveal detailed specification of its applicability in various domains. One research method complements the other since each approaches the subject from different angles.

4.2. Research aim of this study

This empirical study aims to obtain first-hand information for a pedagogical framework to enhance Chinese English language learners' communicative competence. In order to be able to access the opinions of 210 university students and 50 teachers, I chose to use two sets of questionnaires as a primary research instrument in this study: one for students and the other for teachers. A questionnaire can explore informants' attitudes towards teacher-centred and student-centred teaching methodology. It can also explore attitudes towards culture learning and difficulties encountered by both students and teachers respectively. A specific reason for adopting such an approach is that a learner-centred approach inevitably leads to a greater emphasis on students' involvement, attitudes and perceptions of classroom aims and events. A learner-centred approach also implies that teachers should study students' perceptions and needs. Yet various studies have shown that there can be considerable discrepancies of opinion between learners and their teachers in relation

to what learners need, what they prefer, and how language learning takes place (Brindley, 1984; Nunan, 1988; Kumaravadivelu, 1991; Kern, 1995; Peacock, 1997).

4.3. Data Collection

For the formal field survey in Nankai University and Tianjin Normal University, China, two questionnaires were designed and administered to two groups of respondents: one to 210 undergraduate and postgraduate students and the other to 50 teachers. The research data was collected primarily through a quantitative survey analysed by using a software package, namely, the Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS). The findings of the questionnaire data were supplemented by qualitative data collected through open-ended questions, interviews and classroom observations. Qualitative methods were used to elicit responses which the questionnaire did not address. Such responses would provide a better understanding of the complex nature of the cognitive, affective, pedagogic and psychological aspects of the data collected. Furthermore, classroom observations were also carried out as the most direct means of gaining insights into classroom teaching and learning activities in order to assess the consistency between what the informants surveyed claimed to do and what they actually did in their English classes.

4.4. Pilot study: questionnaire design

First, a pilot study was conducted to test the effectiveness of the questionnaire. Nunan (1992) stresses the importance of a pilot study when using questionnaire in academic research:

> [The] creation of valid and reliable questionnaires is a specialized business. A teacher cannot simply make a questionnaire, administer it and report the results. Before a questionnaire can be used for research purposes, it must be reported how the questionnaire was constructed, how it was piloted, what the results of the pilot were, and what, if any, revisions were made based on the pilot questionnaire results (Nunan, 1992:143).

In the pilot study, the combined methods of questionnaire, interviews and classroom observations were conducted in the American College Dublin (ACD) and in Language Services, Dublin City University (DCULS). Both language schools had a

relatively large number of Chinese students learning English at intermediate level and student attendance was reported to be much better than in other private language schools. In analysing the data, special attention was paid to the questionnaire items that needed clarification and amendment for developing the field survey to be carried out at Nankai University and Tianjin Normal University, China. A questionnaire was designed for eliciting information from Chinese students in the pilot study (See Appendix A-1). The questionnaire consisted of 41 questions grouped into the following categories:

1. Students' attitudes towards speaking out in class
2. The nature of students' motivation in learning English
3. Students' attitudes towards communicative activities in class
4. Students' attitudes towards authority in class
5. Students' use of language learning strategies
6. Students' attitudes towards a mono-cultural class (consisting of all Chinese students) and a multi-cultural class (students with different cultural backgrounds), and class size
7. Function-based strategies
8. Form-based strategies (See Appendix A-1 for details).

This questionnaire was written in Chinese and the questionnaire items were drawn from three sources: firstly from some pre-arranged class observations and informal talks with teachers who were native speakers of English and who taught English to Chinese students in DCULS. Secondly, the well-established questionnaire Strategy Inventory for Language Learning (S.I.L.L.) (Oxford, 1990) was consulted as well as the questionnaire items used in earlier studies (Littlewood, 2001, Spratt, 1999, Wen, 2000). Finally, I drew on my own professional experience as a university teacher of English in China for 20 years.

The questionnaire used a 5-point Likert Scale illustrated in Table-3.1. Student informants were asked to respond to each statement by ticking off the number that corresponded to his or her opinion. For example, each student was asked to indicate the extent of their agreement or disagreement with statements such as in the following example:

- The advisability of designing the questionnaire in the Chinese language for the convenience of the informants. This would make it easier for students to understand and avoid possible misunderstanding due to possibly unfamiliar English words in the questionnaire.

4.6. Formal field survey: student questionnaire design

Some changes were made to the questionnaires for the formal empirical survey which consisted of four new additional item categories and an open-ended section, making a final total of 86 questionnaire items. As the formal questionnaire survey was designed for undergraduate and postgraduate students at Nankai University, China, the questionnaire items had to be revised to suit the English majors at university level. They were obviously different subjects from those in the pilot study who were mainly fresh from high schools and who were studying English in an English-speaking country. These four new item categories were designed to elicit information on the current situation of English language teaching and learning at university level in China. These items concerned students':

1. Attitudes towards learning the target culture in EFL class
2. Attitudes towards non-communicative activities in class
3. Opinions on the difficulties confronting Chinese learners of English at tertiary level in adopting communicative activities
4. Attitudes towards dependence on their native language

Furthermore, 6 open-ended questions were also included. These questions concerned students' opinions on the teaching methodology currently used by English language teachers, and on the learning of culture (See Appendix A-2 and A-3 for the student questionnaire and categorization). The second amendment was to delete an item category that did not suit English language teaching and learning in the Chinese context. Since the formal survey was carried out in China, where all students were Chinese, and class was an average size of 18 to 20 students, an item category in the pilot study 'Attitudes to type of mono-cultural or multi-cultural class, and class size' was excluded from the survey.

Student sample population

The sample population consisted of 210 English language majors and details of the student population are presented in Table-4.2 below.

Table 4.2. Student sample population

University year of study at Nankai Univ.	Number of students
2nd year undergraduates	34
3rd year undergraduates	24
4th year undergraduates	81
1st year graduates (M.A)	39
2nd year graduates (M.A)	32
Total	210

The questionnaire data were gathered in the last 20 minutes of the students' class time, via prior agreement with the teachers. The selection of student informants was completely random with a view to accessing a large number of students from different levels. These students had been exposed to different kinds of teaching methods in various English courses, including both skill-oriented and content-based courses.

I decided to survey 39 newly enrolled postgraduate students in the English Department during the first week of their graduate program in Nankai University in September, 2002. Of these 39 students, 18, that is, 46% had just finished their undergraduate study in the English Department of Nankai University and were continuing with their graduate study in the same department. The rest of the 21 students, that is, 54% had graduated from 19 institutions and universities in 14 different cities and municipalities across the country, stretching from Northeast to Southeast China. Since they had just finished their undergraduate study in their individual institutions and passed the very competitive graduate-entrance exams, they were representative of above average English language students. Their views would reveal their own learning experiences and attitudes to the way the target language had been learned and taught while they were undergraduates in their own

institutions. This would provide me with more information about the communicative language teaching (CLT) approach in institutions at university level, beyond that of Nankai University. Likewise, more than 50% of the second-year M.A students in the English Department had finished their undergraduate programme in different universities in China and their responses would be also informative in the same way. Therefore, although this study focused on just one university, data collected were informative of a much wider sample of teaching styles in China.

4.7. Teacher questionnaire design

The teacher questionnaire consisted of 39 items and 6 open-ended questions (See Appendix A-3 for details). In fact, it was a trimmed down version of the student questionnaire with three marked differences. The first major difference was that each teacher informant was asked to indicate how much he or she agreed or disagreed with 39 questionnaire items taken from the student questionnaire. In other words, to what extent each teacher informant surveyed thought that the statement was true of the students in his or her English class. For example, the teacher informant was asked to answer:

In English class, I think that _____
Students like language learning activities in which there are group discussions
with peers.

The second major difference reflected the reduced number of items contained in the teacher questionnaire. This was due to the fact that some items that appeared on the students' questionnaire related to cognitive and psychological factors, which was not relevant to teachers. For instance, the items regarding students' use of a meta-cognitive language learning strategy, the nature of their motivation towards their EFL learning processes, and their attitudes towards authority in class. In this case, by using intuitive judgment, it would not be possible for teachers to accurately assess whether students' reticence in the class was attributable to their shyness, to their reverence for the authority, boring lessons or indeed all of these. These items were excluded from the teachers' questionnaire.

Finally, 6 open-ended questions were designed to elicit teachers' attitudes and opinions of communicative language teaching, traditional teaching methods, the teaching of culture and their own perceived roles in class.

These 39 items served as a basis for comparison with exactly the same quantitative data taken from the student questionnaire. The reason for adopting such an approach is that a learning-centred approach to lesson materials and syllabus design advocates the involvement of learners in contributing to this design (Spratt, 1999). It is very important for teachers to confidently assume that they know what their learners' preferences are in order to actively engage students in communicative language learning activities in class. Consequently, I wished to investigate with what accuracy teachers could capture learners' activity preferences because students' perceptions were often at variance with those of teachers' (Barkhuizen, 1998: 87). Good teaching or learning outcomes could hardly be achieved if perceptual mismatches were not bridged. In other words, teachers' educational attitudes and theories, although in many cases held unconsciously, would have an effect on their classroom instruction. This, in turn, would influence what students actually learned in class. This has been recognized by L2 and EFL researchers (Karavas-Doukas, 1996). Therefore, an investigation of teachers' attitudes can help to identify the relationship between their perceptions and beliefs and their classroom instruction practice. The teacher questionnaire consisted of the following categories:

1. CLT approach in the classroom-based setting
2. Target culture learning in EFL education
3. Teachers' perceptions of students' preferred teaching methods in English class
4. Teacher training and teaching materials (See Appendix A-4. for teacher questionnaire).

Teacher sample population

There were 50 Chinese university teacher participants in this study: 30 teachers from the English Department of Nankai University, Tiianjin, and 20 teachers from the

English Department of Tianjin Normal University. These teacher informants had teaching experience ranging from 4 and 25 years as illustrated in Table 4.3. Most of the teachers surveyed lectured on different courses to undergraduates and graduates in both universities (See Table 4.4).

Table 4.3. Teacher sample population age range

Nankai University		Tianjin Normal University	
Age range	Number =30	Age range	Number =20
26 – 30	2 (7%)	26 – 30	7 (35%)
31 – 40	13 (43%)	31 – 40	10 (50%)
41 – 50	13 (43%)	41 – 50	3 (15%)
51 - 58	2 (7%)	0	0

Table 4.4. Teacher sample courses

Courses	Nankai.		TNU	
	Level	No.	Level	No.
Listening	U	3	U	9
Writing	U	2	0	0
Extensive Reading	U	7	U	4
Intensive Reading	U	12	U	13
Translation	U & P	4	U	1
Business English	U	4	0	0
Literature	P	4	U	1
Western Culture	U	2	0	0
Linguistics	U & P	3	0	0
Others	U	4	0	0
Spoken English	0	0	U	2
Teaching methodology	0	0	U	1

Note: U = undergraduate students; P= Postgraduate students

As is evident in Table 4.4, the courses taught are very varied and therefore their points of views would be widely representative in terms of teaching methodology.

4.8. Choosing the university for this study

I realized that choosing only one tertiary institution in one city would certainly limit the representativeness of the target subjects which, in turn, would affect the validity and reliability of this survey. Chinese teachers of English in different institutions might have different ideas about EFL education based on their own school-specific environment. Collecting data from more institutions would increase the range of information to serve the general aims of the research. However, due to limitations of time, financial resources and manpower, a practical decision was made to carry out a major intensive investigation at Nankai University and a similar minor investigation at Tianjin Normal University. Both universities were located in the same city. The reasons for choosing Nankai University as a major site of investigation were as follows:

1. It is both my alma mater and the university where I have taught English for 20 years as a full-time faculty member for the English Department. Since I was familiar with the faculty staff, I had the advantage of being more likely to obtain friendly cooperation from the informants. However, I realized that the teachers would not like to be tape-recorded during interviews for fear of having any potentially critical comments about this institution or the administration recorded.

2. Nankai University is one of the main multi-faculty universities in China and its English Department was founded in 1931. It is one of the few English departments in China with over 70 years of history. Many teachers have learning, research or working experiences in major English speaking countries, such as the U.S.A, Canada, the U.K, Australia, New Zealand, and Ireland. It has undergraduate and postgraduate degree programs in English-related studies. The quality of English language teaching would reflect the current level of English language teaching at university level in China.

The second site chosen for the research survey was Tianjin Normal University (TNU), another main multi-faculty university with about 45 years of history. 20 teachers from TNU completed the questionnaires. The purpose of choosing to conduct a supplementary survey in TNU was that having two universities involved in the empirical survey would improve the validity and representativeness of the data.

4.9. Interview Design

The purpose of using interviews in this study was mainly to supplement the findings of data collected through questionnaires by eliciting responses not dealt with in the questionnaire. Interviewees were selected in a random manner which would help enhance the reliability of the research data.

Conducting the interviews: the teacher interviewees

Interviews were carried out with 15 teachers of Nankai University, 5 teachers of TNU. The interviews were open and questions were semi-structured but when it was necessary to obtain in-depth information, I probed the interviewees with specific questions. In interviews, interviewees were requested to give opinions on the following topics.

1. Attitudes to student-centred or teacher-centred methods in the classroom, and reasons for such attitudes.
2. Problems encountered or problems that might confront them in adopting CLT in their classroom instruction
3. Perceptions of their teaching role in the classroom
4. Attitudes to culture learning in EFL in the classroom
5. Ways of improving English language teaching in English class

As previously mentioned, many teacher interviewees did not want to be recorded, so no tape recording was used in order to keep the conversation relaxed. I also realized that the presence of a tape recorder during interview might change the behaviour,

frankness, and openness of respondents, especially when they intended to make some critical remarks. As Seliger and Shohamy (1989) note, measures taken to make data more representative may conflict with measures taken to make data retrievable (p.104). Therefore, as interviewer, I took notes while listening. Nunan (1992) points out the advantage of note-taking: it can record central issues or facts and context can be recorded (Nunan, 1992: 153).

The interviews were carried out in Chinese, as it was easier to keep the conversation going more smoothly. The length of each interview varied, lasting from 30 minutes to 1½ hours. On the whole, the interviews were carried out in an informal manner. About two thirds of the interviews took place in the English department office and classrooms. Two interviews took place in the interviewees' houses. In another two cases, the interviews were carried out while the participants were having a walk, a chat or having meals. On such an occasion, note taking was done immediately after the interview. Supplementary data also came from talks in the informal gatherings.

Conducting the interviews: the student interviewees

Two ways were used to conduct interviews with student respondents. One was by pre-arrangement with students through phone calls in advance to obtain their agreement. The other was by going into classroom usually in the afternoon when few tutorials or lectures took place. In most of these classrooms, there were usually a few students doing self-study. A friendly greeting and a brief but persuasive explanation of the survey in most cases gained their agreement to take part in an informal interview. In total, 26 students were interviewed. Among those interviewees, 9 were 4th-year students, 5 from 3rd-year, 7 from 2nd-year undergraduates and 5 were 2nd-year MA students. The interviews were not recorded and again I took notes with the date and time for the interviews or immediately following the interview as Lincoln and Guba (1985) stressed, when note taking could not be done during the talk. Most interviews lasted half an hour but pre-arranged interviews on the weekends with more than one individual lasted much longer depending on interviewees' interests and time arrangements.

4.10. Classroom observation

Classroom observation was, no doubt, the most direct means of gaining insight into teachers' English language instruction as well as learners' classroom behaviour. It also enabled me to find a match or mismatch between what informants claimed to do in the survey and what they actually did in their class. Lincoln and Guba (1985) point out the importance of detailed observation as 'prolonged engagement provides scope and persistent observation provides depth' (P. 302). Kleinsasser and Savignon (1991) also note that there is a difference between information about teaching practice and the reality of that practice. They claim that 'observation can mirror what they [informants] do rather than what they profess to be [do]' (p. 293). Consequently, observations were carried out on 5 teacher participants in their English classes. Each participant was observed for between 2 and 4 class hours to gain understanding of the way each teacher participant handled his or her classroom instruction of an English lesson from the textbook. The details of the teachers and the courses observed are in Table-4.5.

During the classroom observations, I focused on the whole proceedings of the class events which were observable: setting, participants, events, acts and gestures (Glesne & Peshkin, 1992). This enabled me to capture an overall view of class events rather than determining in advance what to look for in the observed context.

Table 4.5. Classroom observation details

Teacher	Course	Years of Teaching	Academic Degree	Class Hours observed	Student Level
Lan	Comprehensive Reading	8	MA	4	2nd U
Shan	Comprehensive Reading	14	MA	4	2nd U
Ming	Introduction to Western Cultures	21	PhD	4	2nd U
Chang	Linguistics	5	MA	2	4th-U
Cai	Selected Readings from Western Business Journals and Magazines	20	MA	2	3rd-U

Note: U = undergraduate students

The classroom observation took place in the English Department, Nankai University. In order not to make the teacher feel uncomfortable or nervous, I did not use a tape-recorder. I took notes on the events that were going on in the class, such as types of practice, and types of interactions and classroom activities. In addition, immediately following the observations, I 'reviewed and expanded all notes to include further information and detail' (Glesne & Peshkin, 1992).

I chose two of the teachers observed (Ms.Lan and Ms.Shan) for detailed comparison and analysis since these two teachers, during the interviews, expressed their strong support of the communicative language teaching approach which they also claimed to have used respectively in their own instructional practice. In addition, Lan had received the Dean's Award for her impressive efforts in initiating communicative teaching methods in the English Department, Nankai University for the academic year of 2001/2002. The teaching methods she used in class were the most liked by the students. This further aroused my interest in observing her class to see if there were any discrepancies or similarities between the two teachers who taught the same course with the same textbook.

In general, the process of data collection was smoothly conducted. For classroom observation, however, it transpired that many teacher informants did not like to have their classes observed (See Chapter 7 for further details).

4.11. Approaches to Data presentation and analysis

The empirical survey resulted in a considerable amount of quantitative and qualitative data for analysis, comparison and interpretation including 260 valid returns of 2 different sets of questionnaires and over 89 pages of notes. To analyse different types of data, I selected various methods drawn from the standard practices for social science research.

Statistical techniques

The quantitative data collected from questionnaires were entered into the computer and then analysed by using the computer software package Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS 11.0). Student data were grouped into 5 different subcategories based on their university year at undergraduate and postgraduate level, namely, 1st-year, 2nd-year, 3rd-year, 4th-year undergraduates, 1st-year MA and 2nd-year MA students (See Table 3.3). In analysing the 5 subgroups, a statistical technique - the analysis of variance or one-way ANOVA Test - was used to identify whether the mean scores on a variable differed significantly from one group to another by taking into account variation within groups as well as between groups (SPSS-X User's Guide, 1988). Following this, questionnaire data collected from teachers were used as a basis for a comparison with the whole student group in order to ascertain if there was any perceptual match or mismatch between the two groups. Although a comparison of Likert mean scores for each item gives some indication of similarities and differences between the two groups, it cannot differentiate what apparent differences are statistically significant. Therefore the Mann Whitney Test was used because this test can identify which differences were statistically significant and which were not, thus providing more detailed and reliable information than the Likert score.

Categorization

The data collected from the open-ended section and interviews were analysed by hand, and then categorized according to the same headings of the research questions under study. Then classifications were developed using the constant comparative method suggested by Glaser and Strauss (1967), and other similar procedure descriptions or analysis suggestions from various publications (Gao, 2001; Feng, 2000; Sato & Kleinsasser, 1999; Spratt, 1999; Jin, 1993). Key words and interview accounts from both teachers and students were cited to supplement the findings of data collected through questionnaires, especially concerning their feelings, attitudes, experiences, evaluations of different teaching methods and the main problems encountered. After the questionnaire items were presented and interpreted, evaluative comments were made to discuss the properties and dimensions of the categories, and the circumstances under which they were interrelated. This interpretation of the phenomena under investigation provided the main basis for the suggestions made in

the final chapters of this thesis. Both interviewees and teacher participants whose lessons were observed for this study were given pseudonyms to protect their privacy and anonymity. Teacher and student interviewees in this thesis were referred to as:

FT: female teacher   MT: male teacher

FM1: female teacher 1   MT1: male teacher 1

In a similar fashion, students were referred to as:

FS: female student   MS: male student

FS1: female student1   MS1: male student1

4.12. Assessment of research methodology

Reliability and validity are always viewed as two important criteria for assuring the quality of the data collection procedures in an empirical survey in a social science project. They are also the standards that I have to meet for this study. According to Nunan (1992), *reliability* is defined as the consistency of the results obtained from a research. *Validity* refers to the extent to which a piece of research actually investigates what a researcher purports to investigate (p.14). Similar definitions can be found in works by other social science researchers such as Seliger and Shohamy (1989).

As Chapters 5, 6 and 7 will show, the quantitative data collected through questionnaires were triangulated with comments from open-ended questions and also with the interview accounts analysed qualitatively in order to ascertain the reliability of the findings of quantitative data. Triangulation is a term used to describe the use of a number of different research methods in a single research study in the belief that variety will increase the validity of findings (Riley *et al.*, 2000). Mathison (1988) also notes the value of triangulation in which the researcher would construct meaningful explanations from multiple data sources - sources that may appear inconsistent or contradictory rather than cohering round a single proposition (cited in Sato & Kleinsasser, 1999: 499). Therefore, the above findings were re-checked

against the classroom observation analysis. I also examined the quality of questionnaire items in order to find out whether the questions were too easy or too difficult, how relevant they were to the information that was designed to be elicited, and whether the questions were correctly phrased and easily understood by the respondents. I adopted the reclassification of categorizations of the informants' attitudes and opinions from their open-ended comments and interview data in order to re-check 'whether the study actually is investigating what it is supposed to be investigating' (Seliger & Shohamy, 1989: 189).

After comparing the questionnaire items and responses from the respondents, I was confident that the data collection procedure measured what needed to be measured and served the purpose of this empirical study. There were only a very few exceptions where the questionnaire items were not as useful for the in-depth analysis of informants' cognitive, behavioural and psychological factors in the learning process. With regard to interviews, when the informants were asked to describe their favourite or ideal teaching methods in the EFL classroom, some interviewees said something that added little value to the qualitative data analysis. This was then excluded from the analysis. In this study, the above-mentioned measures were taken whenever possible so as to increase the credibility of the findings and interpretation of the data.

4.13. Limitations

The limitations inherent in this research involve the scope and number of informants being observed. The research gathering would have benefited from incorporating English major students in Tianjin Normal University in order to increase the range of information to serve the general aims of this study. But in this study only TNU teachers were included. With respect to qualitative data, it equally would have been better to incorporate long-term classroom observations into this research, if sufficient time and resources had been available. Both of these additions would, no doubt, constitute fruitful avenues of research in the future. Fortunately this limitation mentioned above was compensated, to some extent, by the information elicited from

the extensive contacts with the students and teachers in both universities where the empirical survey was conducted.

Chapter summary

In this chapter, I have given an account of the way I proceeded to design this research project. I have described the criteria of data-gathering instruments, and of interviewing and classroom observation. Finally I have given an account of the data analysis process and included the assessment of research methodology. I have also suggested limitations concerning this research, which in themselves may lay the foundation for further research in the future. The following Chapters, 5, 6, and 7 will present the data analysis and discussions, starting with the analysis of the student questionnaire in Chapter 5.

Note:

[1]. The Chinese traditional approach:

A combination of grammar-translation and audio-lingual teaching methods characterized by a very detailed study of grammar, extensive use of paraphrases, translation, and memorization of structural patterns and vocabulary. The emphasis is placed on English reading skills and written language with a very high degree of teacher dominance in class.

Chapter 5

Quantitative data analysis: student questionnaire (Part I)

Introduction

This chapter focuses on the quantitative data analysis of the student questionnaire. In the first part of this chapter, the results of 77 out of 80 structured questionnaire items are presented and discussed. Three items (Questions 30, 38, 39) were found to have little value to the main research questions in this study and were subsequently excluded from this analysis. The whole student group is categorised into 5 subgroups, namely, 2nd-year, 3rd-year, 4th-year undergraduates; 1st-year MA and 2nd-year MA students, based on their study year at the university. The advantage of this categorization is to find out whether there is any significant difference between the subgroups and subsequently the causes of the variation can be explored.

The quantitative data questions cover 17 categories, each of which is presented and discussed in detail below (See Table-4.1 to 4.17). The main categories include students' attitudes towards: 1. the CLT approach, 2. the traditional approach, 3. authority in class; 4. nature of their motivation for learning target language, 5. culture learning in EFL programmes; 6. problems encountered in their learning process; 7. use of language learning strategies (See Appendix A-3 for details). The second part of this chapter addresses a 39-item quantitative data comparison and analysis between students and teachers to find out where the perceptual match or mismatch lies. The Mann Whitney Test is used to find out if there are any significant differences between the two groups. As will be discussed in the final section of this

chapter, the findings can help to improve teachers' understanding of learners and learning variables, meet learners' needs and possibly revise their teaching practices.

5.1. Definitions of communicative and non-communicative classroom learning activities

Prior to the data analysis, it is important to define the communicative (or student-centred) and non-communicative (or teacher-centred) classroom learning activities in this thesis. Communicative activities (CA) or SCA are defined as those which involve students in using the language for communicative purposes, (e.g. work in pairs or group discussion or even role plays as a setting for a communicative task), and which focus more on fluency than accuracy (Cf. Candlin, 1982; Wong-Fillmore, 1985; Nunan, 1988; Garrett & Shortall: 2002). Wong-Fillmore (1985) defines communicative activities (CA) as those that are open in structure and in which students work in groups cooperatively without much teacher involvement. Garrett and Shortall (2002) contend that CA is characterized by having very little explicit teacher control or with the teacher not playing a central participatory role. It is important to note that in this study the term 'student-centred' is used only in relation to classroom learning activities.

The non-communicative activities (NCA) or teacher-centred activities refer to the language classroom activities where the teacher is very much the focal point of the class work, exercising considerable control over the activity and the language which is elicited from the students (Garrett & Shortall, 2002: 26). Thus NCA are characterized 'by a high level of explicit teacher control in the classroom' (Wong-Fillmore, 1985).

Having outlined the definitions of communicative and non-communicative activities in English class, the following sections focus on a detailed analysis of preliminary findings arising out of the data collected through student questionnaire.

5.2. Students' attitudes towards group work in class (Items 1, 2, 3, 4)

Table-5.1

	2nd - year	3rd - year	4th-year	1st-year M.A	2nd-year MA	Total	Items No.
	N = 35	N = 24	N = 80	N = 39	N = 32	N = 210	
Mean Stdev	4.09 .89	4. 00 .88	3. 77 . 97	3.95 .76	4.41 .61	3.98 .88	Item1*[1]
Mean Stdev	4.46 .78	4.46 .51	4.22 .78	4.28 .79	4.59 .61	4.36 .74	Item2
Mean Stdev	4.03 .95	3.67 1.17	3.80 .97	3.92 .81	4.19 .82	3.90 .95	Item3
Mean Stdev	3.86 1.03	4.12 .99	3.64 1.17	3.59 1.12	3.78 1.21	3.74 1.13	Item4

* Note: Each questionnaire item number in the tables of this chapter corresponds with its ordinal order in the student questionnaire.

These four items measure students' attitudes towards group work in class (See Appendix A-2.for student questionnaire). The findings show that the students approach group-work positively. The results indicate that students like small discussion groups and working in pairs in English class. Taking this categorization as a whole, the ANOVA Test finds that *Item 1* to be statistically significant ($P < 0.013$). The difference mainly exists between 2nd-year MA graduates and 4th-year undergraduates. The former is much more interested in group-work than the latter. These differences might be explained by the fact that MA students have a smaller class with teacher directed or initiated discussions. Given their advanced English proficiency and their specialized area of their study, there is more group work in which students and teachers, and students among themselves interact. This positive experience reinforces, in turn, their own positive attitudes towards working in a small group in class.

For 4th-year undergraduates, both the larger class size and the nature of courses taught resulted in a less positive attitude towards group work. Job placement was their major concern and many of them were busy preparing for graduate-study entrance exams or TOEFL, ITESL, or GRE. Some were hoping English would be a springboard to further study in other departments, e.g. Finance, International Trade

English than a situation in which they were forced to speak in front of the whole class. The results indicate the following:

1.   Their attitudes reflect their own perceptions of student role in class, that is, learning from the teacher and not challenging what teachers said. Asking questions for clarification in class would indicate that the student has not grasped a good understanding of what the teacher said. In this case, asking questions would expose one's ignorance, thus a loss of face.

2.   The way the questions which were raised by the teacher might be the cause of their reticence. Perhaps these questions did not stimulate a response, adequately arouse their interest or seemingly did not challenge the students enough.

The interview data supported the second assumption as the following comment given by students shows: 'some teachers just asked questions whose answers were quite obvious or questions that focused on grammar and vocabulary'. (MS-1, my translation).[2] The classroom observations carried out in this study also confirm these comments (See Chapter 7 for details).

A preliminary analysis of *Item 75* (2.93/1.02) indicates that this result, to certain degree, seems to support the claims reported in earlier studies that Chinese students were reticent in class and did not answer questions unless asked to (Burnaby & Sun, 1989), or 'Chinese students are expected to show total obedience or submission to their teachers' (Song, 1995: 35-36). However, what the interview data reveals is that the reasons for their apparent reticence in the English language class was more closely related with teaching performance than cultural or psychological traits. In other words, what really matters in class is multi-faceted and includes many factors: teaching methodology, the ways the questions were asked and whether answers were specifically elicited, the topics chosen for group discussion, and the students' own perceptions of being active in class.

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[2] Unless specified otherwise, all the quotations of interviews in this thesis are translated verbatim from Chinese into English by the author of this thesis.

When asked if they would like to outperform their peers or maintain harmony in class or in group work, students' responses to *Item 7[3]* revealed their mixed feelings about this: about 32% of the students were concerned about group harmony in class and tended to avoid 'showing off' whereas 35% of them showed their intent to be very active in group-work. Another 32% of the students remained neutral (See Appendix B-7 for Student Questionnaire Frequency Table). The findings indicated that more students seemed to feel comfortable speaking English in a small group and they tended to view a small group (2-4 students) as a more protective environment than speaking in front of the whole class. Linking *Item 7* to *Item 6*, we can find that the majority of students were concerned with maintaining group harmony, and some of them were willing to be more active than others in group activities. This finding supports some other studies of Chinese students' behaviours, which reveal collective-oriented national cultural traits in the classroom (Cortazzi & Jin, 1996; Littlewood, 2001).

Students' responses to *Item 9* revealed that students often thought carefully before speaking English in class. The Frequency Table (See Appendix B-7) indicated that about 60% of students surveyed tended to focus more on accuracy than on fluency as this would help them avoid making mistakes or experiencing loss of 'face' (Bond, 1991; Mao, 1994). The implication of this finding is that teachers should give students enough time to think before they speak while also encouraging quick and impromptu replies from the students. In Chinese culture, being active in class does not necessarily mean getting *physically* involved in the classroom activities. Being mentally active also means being co-operative with the teacher and actively listening to the teacher (Cortazzi & Jin, 1996). Students are often concerned about their own linguistic accuracy or fearful of losing 'face', and therefore actually speak very little in English class. This goes against communicative English language teaching principles, which emphasizes fluency over accuracy and focuses on students' involvement in classroom activities. The classroom observations in this study confirmed the above findings: students *read* their oral presentation in class rather than *talked* it through, recited rather than using notes as a prop (See Chapter 7 for details).

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[3] Questionnaire Item 7 was different from other items in that it was unfavourably phrased.

On *Item 8*, the ANOVA Test shows that significant difference exists between the 2nd-year MA students and 2nd-year undergraduate ($P<0.002$). The findings remind teachers that language learning strategies (LLS) need to be taught explicitly rather than leave it to learners themselves to cope unconsciously in their EFL learning process. The gap between 2nd-year undergraduates and 2-year MA students might derive from the different language skills acquired by the two groups. This also indicates that the improvement of language skills, in the case of 2nd-year MA students boosted their confidence with the result that their anxiety is lower than 2nd-year undergraduates. This assumption is supported by earlier studies. For instance, insecurity and anxiety tend to diminish if learners gain more linguistic proficiency and more positive experience (MacIntyre & Gardner, 1989).

The implication of this finding for teachers is that they should be aware of the fact that student anxiety created by, among other things, a tense classroom environment might be one of the most potent factors undermining students' classroom behaviour. On the other hand, explicit explanation of language learning strategies and frequent engagement of students in interactive classroom activities are very important and necessary in class. In short, teachers need to 'create a pleasant, relaxed atmosphere in the classroom' (Garret & Shortall, 2002: 30) and provide more opportunities for learners to practise in interactive group activities in order to reinforce the positive experience. Less practice will lead to less confidence and therefore less actual ability to use the target language, especially orally.

5.4. Students' function-based strategy (Items 77, 78)

Table-5.3

	2nd-year	3rd-year	4th-year	1st-year MA	2nd-year MA	Total	Item No.
Mean	2.74	2.63	2.49	2.69	2.56	2.60	Item77
Stdev	.98	.92	.97	.89	1.19	.98	
Mean	2.69	2.92	2.79	3.03	2.94	2.85	Item78
Stdev	.96	1.14	1.10	.87	1.11	1.04	

Items 77 and 78 revealed students' attitudes towards practising their oral English outside class. Their responses showed that students did not often practise their

spoken English with their peers or teachers outside class. Clearly a healthy environment in which both teachers and students use the target language outside class has not yet come into being. Conversely, however, the students' need for communication in English outside class is problematic since the classroom appears to be the only environment in which the target language is required. Outside class, students seem to have little need or desire to use it among themselves.

5. 5. Nature and strength of motivation among students (Item 10, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17)

Table- 5.4.

	2nd-year	3rd-year	4th-year	1st-year M.A	2nd-year MA	Total	Items No.
Mean Stdev	4.37 1.03	4.33 .87	4.41 .88	4.21 .77	4.09 .86	4.31 .88	Item10
Mean Stdev	4.06 1.14	4.25 .85	4.16 .86	4.49 .76	4.13 1.01	4.21 .92	Item12
Mean Stdev	4.49 .66	4.33 1.01	4.13 .95	4.49 .68	4.19 .90	4.29 .87	Item13
Mean Stdev	4.20 .87	4.42 .72	3.91 1.00	4.10 .88	3.94 .95	4.06 .93	Item14
Mean Stdev	4.57 .95	4.46 1.18	4.56 .87	4.49 .82	4.19 .93	4.48 .92	Item15
Mean Stdev	3.57 1.07	3.50 1.64	3.84 1.51	4.31 1.20	4.22 1.31	3.97 1.39	Item16
Mean Stdev	3.63 1.24	3.25 1.39	3.15 1.36	3.28 1.07	3.03 1.28	3.25 1.29	Item17
Mean Stdev	3.34 1.21	3.46 1.28	3.51 1.10	3.18 1.05	3.50 1.08	3.41 1.13	Item47

The results of *Items 10, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 47* showed students liked learning English and were interested in learning about major English-speaking countries Their interest focused on the culture, science and technology of English-speaking countries. The findings also indicated that students had an instrumental motivation in learning English which encompassed their desire to work very hard towards a goal which would benefit their families as well as themselves. This finding supports similar assumptions made by some earlier studies (Littlewood, 2001; Bond, 1991). Littlewood described Chinese college students in Hong Kong as having a typical social achievement motivation, characterized in a collectivist-oriented culture, that is,

they are motivated to succeed because success would bring prestige and other benefits to their families. In China, it is a virtue to involve the value and interest of family with what one is pursuing (Littlewood, 2001, Bond, 1991).

However, the findings of *Item 47* revealed that sustaining strong motivation exclusively through a long-term goal is, to certain extent, problematic. This situation possibly derives from the fact that most students were not clear what they would do after graduation. Neither were they content with EFL teaching in the university since teaching and learning have reciprocal effects. This assumption is confirmed by the qualitative data findings (see Chapter 6 and 7 for further details).

5.6. Students' attitudes towards TCA in class (Item 18)

Table-5.5

	2nd-year	3rd-year	4th-year	1st-year M.A	2nd-year MA	Total	Items No.
Mean Stdv	2.71 1.20	2.38 1.13	3.05 1.14	3.00 1.12	2.34 1.00	2.80 1.15	Item 18*

The results showed that the student group as a whole held a mildly negative attitude towards teacher-centred approach (TCA). The Frequency Table (See Appendix B-7) showed that 19% (40) and 8.1% (17) of students chose '4' (agree) and '5' (strongly agree) respectively whereas 25.7% (54) and 14.8% (31) selected '2' (disagree) and '1' (strongly disagree). There are 32.4% (68) respondents remaining neutral. This indicates that students found TCA to be effective on some occasions but ineffective on others. The perceived effectiveness seemed to depend on different variables, such as the teacher's competence, the textbook, and the nature of the course taught. (See Chapter 6 for further discussion).

The results of the ANOVA test shows that the difference between 2nd-year MA graduates and 4th-year undergraduates is statistically significant (P<0.008). This result reveals that different classroom activities carried out between the two groups could reinforce their disposition to their different favoured activities in class. As mentioned earlier, a smaller class size and more teacher-initiated or directed

5.7. Students' attitudes towards SCA in class (Item 19)

Table-5.6

	2nd-year	3rd-year	4th-year	1st-year MA	2nd-year MA	Total	Items No.
Mean Stdev	3.77 .97	3.63 1.10	3.44 1.02	3.38 .75	3.78 .94	3.56 .97	Item 19

In contrast to *Item 18*, the findings of *Item 19* showed that the students surveyed liked a student-centred approach. 17.1% (36) of the students selected '5' (strongly agree) and 35.7% (75) chose '4' (agree), 2.9% (6) students chose '1' (strongly disagree), and 18 (8.6%) select '2' (disagree). Moreover, 75 (35.7%) students acknowledged that they had mixed feelings about SCA, i.e. they considered student-centred methods to be efficient in some ways but unhelpful in others. Of the students surveyed as a whole, it seems that the pendulum of their favoured teaching methods swings from TCA to SCA although they consider both approaches to be useful in their own way.

This reveals that a 'pure' student- or teacher-centred approach falls wide of the mark regarding English classes; both need to be used in combination to suit the Chinese EFL context. A Chinese saying sums up the need for synthesis thus, 'extracting the essence while discarding the dross' (*qu chu   qu jing*) and 'making foreign things serve China' (*yang wei zhong yong*), indicating that the strengths inherent in both approaches need to be maintained and synthesised to make EFL teaching effective.

5.8. Students' attitudes to communicative activities in class (*Items 21, 22, 25*)

Table - 5.7

	2nd-year	3rd-year	4th-year	1st-year M.A	2nd-year M.A.	Total	Items No.
Mean Stdev	4.06 .94	4.08 .72	3.93 .94	3.90 .94	4.06 1.01	3.98 .95	Item21
Mean Stdev	4.03 1.07	4.08 .83	4.21 .82	4.18 .79	4.03 1.06	4.13 .90	Item22
Mean Stdev	4.40 .81	4.46 .66	4.09 .92	4.10 .82	4.09 .86	4.19 .85	Item25

The findings of these 3 items showed that students liked class discussions and enjoyed seeing English films or watching video shows. If students found that they had something to talk about after seeing a film or a video show, they would like to participate in a group discussion with the teacher's guidance and facilitation which would help them increase their understanding of the films / video shows. They also expressed their strong desires that in their English class they would expect teachers to stimulate their interest and analytical thinking ability through thought-provoking questions. Such findings are not surprising. The classroom observations in this study revealed that the ways teachers elicited answers or responses were found to be quite ill thought out. The teachers concerned very often asked only 'display question' (questions that had obvious right answers) (Long & Sato, 1983 cited in Walsh, 2002: 6). As Walsh argues display questions are possibly appropriate to geography or maths classes, but in L2 or EFL classes they seem to deny language learners access to critical thinking and real language use (Walsh, 2002). The implications of these findings are clear. Teachers need to initiate questions at a discourse level which allow the students' judgement, reasoning and critical thinking to be brought into play.

5.9. Students' attitudes towards non-communicative activities in class (Item 20, 24, 42)

Table - 5.8

	2nd-year	3rd-year	4th-year	1st-year M.A	2nd-year M.A.	Total	Items No.
Mean	3.66	2.96	3.05	2.69	2.81	3.04	Item20*
Stdev	1.08	1.43	1.27	1.06	1.03	1.22	
Mean	3.31	2.46	2.79	2.51	2.31	2.71	Item24*
Stdev	1.13	1.14	1.14	1.14	1.09	1.17	
Mean	2.63	2.29	2.89	2.74	2.09	2.63	Item42*
Stdev	1.19	1.16	1.23	1.12	.96	1.18	

The findings of *Item 20* showed that students expressed mixed attitudes towards the traditional *Intensive Reading* method – a kind of teaching method in which the English text materials are dealt with in over-meticulous detail and a sentence-by-sentence way. The Frequency Table (See Appendix B-7) showed that 36.2% (76) of

the students favoured this teaching method whereas 34.2% (72) did not favour it and 30% (62) remained neutral.

The results indicate that many students still think the *Intensive Reading* (now *renamed comprehensive reading*) method is a very important way of teaching and learning English in class, and that grammatical structures need to be emphasised. It was clear that teacher-centeredness was commonly found to be a dominant teaching method in the classroom. The ANOVA test showed that the results of *Item 20* were significantly different between the 2nd-year undergraduates and the MA students' (P<0.008). As described in Section 5.2 of this chapter, given the MA students' advanced English proficiency and their positive experience in small group activities in class, they responded to this meticulous teaching method negatively whereas the 2nd-year undergraduates seemed to feel comfortable with this traditional teaching method which they had been exposed to since their pre-college schooling.

The results of *Item 24* revealed that the students as a whole responded negatively to simulation test exercises in which teachers explained the answers to students in class. The ANOVA test showed that a significant difference existed between the 2nd-year undergraduates and the other groups, except the 4th-year undergraduates (P<0.003). The findings indicated that the 2nd-year students seemed to be exam-oriented and were under pressure to pass English tests, especially the EMT-4. This was confirmed by their responses to *Item 53*: the EMT-4 test was found to exert heavy pressure on them. Although the 4th-year students had to take EMT-8 test, they seemed to be less pressurised than the 2nd-year students because the passing of MET-8, unlike EMT-4, has not been linked to the awarding of a BA degree in the EFL programme.

On *Item 42,* 47% (99) of the students surveyed did not consider that the main task of students in class was to receive knowledge from the teacher whereas 25% (52) students thought that the students' role in class was to listen to the teacher. 28% (59) students were neutral, believing in the mixed roles for students to play in class. The findings of this item support the results of *Item 18*: students showed a mildly negative attitude to TCA in class. The ANOVA test showed that a significant difference existed between the 4th-year undergraduates and the 2nd-year MA students

regarding *Item 42* (P<0.012). The difference may be explained by the fact that the 4th-year students were busy looking for jobs and were less committed to their English learning. Therefore they regarded teacher-centred methods 'secure' and relaxing' whereas the 2nd-year MA students were susceptible to participating in small group activities in which students were expected to take more initiatives in class (See Section 5.2 of this chapter).

In sum, the findings of *Item 42* reveal that, about half of the students in this survey hold positive attitudes towards learning whereas the other half of students surveyed still stick to the traditional roles of students in class or have unclear perceptions of different roles which students are expected to play in class. The findings also demonstrate the necessity of making explicit what roles both students and teachers are supposed to play in the classroom-based setting. However, it would be inaccurate to deduce that 'Chinese students are mere passive learners' as reported in some earlier studies (Oxford & Anderson, 1995; Stefani, 1997)' We need to know the real cause of their apparent passivity.

5.10. Culture learning in EFL (Items 11, 36, 37, 23)

Table- 5.9

	2nd-year	3rd-year	4th-year	1st-year M.A	2nd-year MA	Total	Items No.
Mean	4.60	4.67	4.52	4.59	4.47	4.56	Item11
Stdev	.60	.56	.73	.55	.72	.66	
Mean	3.60	3.50	3.54	3.79	3.69	3.61	Item23
Stdev	.91	1.02	1.01	.89	1.06	.98	
Mean	3.06	3.42	2.95	2.90	2.78	2.99	Item36
Stdev	1.16	.93	1.17	.97	1.10	1.10	
Mean	4.60	4.29	4.21	4.41	4.06	4.30	Item37
Stdev	.60	.69	.98	.55	.88	.82	

Students' responses to *Items 11 and 37* indicated that in English class they liked to learn about target cultures, including the Western people's way of life, social customs and so on. They expressed a strong desire for a synthesised pedagogy that could properly combine learning English and learning target cultures in EFL programmes. At the same time, students indicated that although they had learned a little about target cultures in English class, they would like to learn more [Q23, Q36].

This finding indicates the need to develop a pedagogy which can integrate the teaching of culture into EFL education in order to 'enhance students' sociocultural competence' (Savignon, 2001).

5.11. Students' attitudes towards compensation strategies (Item 29, 31, 32)

Table-5.10

	2nd-year	3rd-year	4th-year	1st-year M.A	2nd-year MA	Total	Items No.
Mean Stdev	3.69 .87	2.92 1.35	2.94 1.16	2.62 .78	2.75 1.11	2.97 1.11	Item29 *
Mean Stdev	3.26 1.04	2.88 1.03	3.44 1.10	3.13 1.03	3.19 .90	3.25 1.05	Item31
Mean Stdev	3.60 .88	4.00 .88	3.95 .87	3.85 .74	4.03 .93	3.89 .87	Item32

On *Item 29*, the results of the ANOVA Test showed a significant difference between the 2nd-year undergraduates and other groups (P<0.000). The 2nd-year undergraduates tended to refer to L1 when they found it hard to express themselves orally in English whereas the other groups responded negatively (See Table-5.10 above). The results reveal that their dependence on L1 is closely related to their target language skills and awareness of use of language learning strategies (LLS). The dependence on L1 tends to drop with improvement in target language skills and awareness of LLS use in the EFL learning process.

The results of *Item 31* showed that students did not often use gestures to enhance their communication, indicating the need to learn and use LLS on their part. The findings of *Item 32* showed that students preferred to use paraphrases to 'get meanings across' when they could not think of a word during a conversation in English. By linking *Item 32 to Item 29*, we find that even if most students tended to use 'paraphrases' in English conversations, about 30% of the students were not content with their own ability to 'get meanings across'. This could be due to their inadequate target language proficiency and lack of conscious use of LLS. The findings alerted teachers to the importance of the explicit teaching of communication and language learning strategies in English class. It is misplaced to assume that students can automatically make use of the skills of their native language when

communicating in the target language. These communicative skills are not transferred automatically without explicit teaching or learning. Teachers need to raise students' consciousness and provide them with more opportunities to use these strategies (O'Malley & Chamot, 1990; Oxford 1990). This reflects the necessity of integrating communicative components of CLT into current traditional teaching methods in order to develop learners' communicative competence.

5.12. Students' attitudes towards social strategies (Item 33, 34, 35)

Table-5.11

	2nd-year	3rd-year	4th-year	1st-year M.A	2nd-year MA	Total	Items No.
Mean	2.97	2.46	2.25	2.54	2.16	2.43	Item33*
Stdev	1.29	1.35	1.16	1.17	1.17	1.23	
Mean	3.03	2.54	2.65	2.95	2.78	2.78	Item34
Stdev	1.25	1.28	1.18	1.05	1.31	1.20	
Mean	3.09	2.96	2.90	2.77	2.78	2.90	Item35
Stdev	1.25	1.20	1.12	1.04	1.07	1.12	

The findings of *Item 33* clearly revealed that most students did not have a peer with whom they often practised oral English on a regular basis. The results of the ANOVA Test showed a significant difference between 2nd-year and 4th-year undergraduates (P<0.032). This finding reveals that the 4th-year students who are taken up with job seeking spend even less time than 2nd-year students practising their oral English with peers outside class. The 2nd-year undergraduates need to take EMT-4 oral test along with its written test, and therefore they have to pay more attention to oral practice. Once the EMT-4 test is behind them, it seems that practising English outside class recedes and students do not seek opportunities to speak English with peers.

Item 34 and 35 also revealed that students surveyed are not interested in taking part in after-class activities in which English was practised, for example, in an English corner [1], drama group or newspaper group. Their reasons for not being interested in this might be that they thought such activities did not provide them with authentic English input and that they could not learn idiomatic or 'real' English by practising spoken English with their peers. The findings show that it is vital to create a teacher-

initiated environment in which students feel relaxed and confident to practise their spoken English in the Chinese EFL context.

5.13. Students' attitudes towards authority in class (Items 43, 44, 45, 46)

Table-5.12

	2nd-year	3rd-year	4th-year	1st-year M.A	2nd-year MA	Total	Items No.
Mean	3.03	2.50	2.85	2.74	2.81	2.81	Item43
Stdev	1.07	.83	1.10	.82	.90	.99	
Mean	2.23	2.00	2.29	2.23	2.47	2.26	Item44
Stdev	.91	.83	.93	.81	.98	.90	
Mean	1.74	2.12	2.01	1.82	1.78	1.91	Item45
Stdev	.51	1.03	.91	.64	.87	.82	
Mean	4.17	4.17	4.06	4.23	3.97	4.11	Item46
Stdev	.92	.87	1.12	.90	.86	.98	

The findings of *Item 44* indicated that students did not rate teacher authority very highly (See Table 5.12 above). This finding is supported by the results of *Items 43 and 45* which reveal that most students want to be active rather than passive learners in the process of acquiring knowledge. The findings of these items are incongruent with the reports in earlier studies which claim that teachers are perceived as a 'fount of knowledge' from whom the knowledge is transmitted to students (Maley 1984; Liu, 1998; Song, 1995) and Asian students including Chinese are expected to show 'total obedience or submission to their teachers', to be 'passive receivers of knowledge' and that they offer 'little input to the class' (Song, 1995: 35-36). Generalizations such as these are often expressed not only by outsiders but also by Chinese researchers as well (Littlewood, 2001). It is usually claimed that differences in power and authority are accepted most readily in more collectivist cultures (Hofstede, 1994: 54-57; Smith & Bond, 1993: Triandis, 1995). In a classroom-based setting, a general orientation towards (or dependence on) the group is also likely to lead students to accepting roles which are defined in terms of their position within that group, from the teacher at the top of the hierarchy to the students at the bottom (Littlewood, 2001).

The findings of *Item 44* (See Table 5.12) seem to indicate that a change in concepts of learning and teaching has been taking place, especially among young people who now are exposed increasingly to the foreign cultures via TV, films, multimedia,

personal contacts, and Internet. This change will, in principle, certainly have an impact on their English language learning and classroom behaviours. However, it is worth noting that the results of *Item 44* are not backed up by the findings in the follow-up interviews and classroom observations in this study.

When they were asked to comment on their attitudes towards teacher's authority in class during the interviews, many students said that they were reluctant to challenge teacher's authority in class. When asked to elaborate on perceptual mismatch between the interview accounts and questionnaire data, some students' comments are very informative. They said that they certainly held teacher's authority high in class and showed their respect to the teacher. They thought that it was the basic thing they should do in class, but they emphasized that only *good teachers* would deserve a *heart-felt respect* from students whereas those teachers whose lectures were found to be boring, would *not receive the real respect* from students. This indicates that while teacher authority is important to them, it also has to be *won*, not taken as *given*. Good teachers are *really* respected while incompetent teachers are *not,* even though they are perceived to have 'authority' in the classroom. Consequently, when students find the courses they have been taking are not up to their expectations, they will inevitably notch down the teachers' authority accordingly, at least in their minds.

This is similar to the Chinese equivalent of the English word *respect - Zun Jing*. Each of these two Chinese words has a separate meaning although, used in combination, they equate to *respect* in English. *Zun* means showing respect in action (body language or facial expressions) but this is at surface level. The real respect derives from *Jing* which means a kind of admiration from the bottom of one's heart. Therefore we can say that the justification of *real respect* is based on good quality of teaching performance and teacher's being a moral example to students *(Jiao shu yu ren)* rather than a perceived unequal relationship between Chinese teachers and students in the classroom. Moreover, the results clearly point to the necessity in using different research procedures to triangulate the validity of research findings in this thesis.

5.14. Major difficulties encountered in students' learning process

(Items 40, 41, 47, 48, 49, *50**, *51, 52, 53, 54**, 55, 56)

Table-5.13

	2nd-year	3rd-year	4th-year	1st-year M.A	2nd-year MA	Total	Items No.
Mean	3.37	3.75	3.36	3.56	3.34	3.44	Item40
Stdev	.94	.99	1.13	.91	1.21	1.06	
Mean	2.94	2.92	2.89	2.74	2.97	2.89	Item41
Stdev	1.06	1.32	1.15	1.07	1.09	1.12	
Mean	3.54	3.46	3.49	3.33	3.53	3.47	Item48
Stdev	1.04	1.14	.97	1.01	1.05	1.01	
Mean	4.29	4.42	4.20	4.15	3.84	4.18	Item49
Stdev	.93	.78	.85	.93	1.11	.92	
Mean	3.83	3.79	3.50	3.33	2.94	3.47	Item50
Stdev	1.10	1.18	1.24	1.11	1.22	1.21	*
Mean	3.74	3.75	3.93	3.26	3.63	3.70	Item51
Stdev	1.01	1.19	1.03	1.12	1.13	1.09	
Mean	3.71	4.04	4.11	3.74	3.62	3.90	Item52
Stdev	1.02	.91	.83	.85	.98	.91	
Mean	3.20	2.88	3.49	2.62	3.22	3.17	Item53
Stdev	1.11	1.08	1.17	.94	1.26	1.16	
Mean	3.03	3.79	3.66	3.36	3.44	3.48	Item54
Stdev	.98	.98	.99	.99	1.05	1.02	*
Mean	3.74	4.21	3.74	3.74	3.69	3.79	Item55
Stdev	.95	.59	.90	.75	.97	.87	
Mean	3.80	4.17	3.59	3.64	3.56	3.70	Item56
Stdev	.80	.76	1.00	.84	1.08	.94	

The findings of *Item 48* indicated that over half of the students surveyed did consider their own learning styles to be rigid and not very efficient, and needed improving. The follow-up interviews with students revealed that they considered their learning styles, to a considerable degree, had been influenced by teachers' teaching styles in the classroom. Their learning experience reinforced their learning habits. The findings of this item are supported by *Item 54,* which shows that the current teaching methods focus too much on grammar and structure but ignore oral English practice. The results of the ANOVA Test show that *Item 54* proves to be significantly different between 2nd-year and 3rd-year students (P<0.014). A possible explanation of these differences is that some teachers who taught 2nd-year English majors have attempted to use different methods in their classes to offer students more opportunities to practise their oral English. Therefore the 2nd-year students remained neutral on *Item 54* whereas the 3rd-year students gave it the highest score.

This finding supports some earlier studies by Western researchers in the related areas. Pintrich and Schunk (1996) point out that teachers and students have reciprocal effects on each other. Teacher classroom instruction affects students' learning orientation (Zubir, 1988 cited in Gow *et al*, 1996), and in turn teacher instruction is affected by the way students respond to classroom activities (Salili, 2001). Linking *Items 40, 41* with *Item 48*, we can see that the problems inherent in students' learning styles are mainly related to memory strategies, that is, while students memorize the vocabulary, they often ignore the context in which these words are used. In most cases, they separated vocabulary from its context. They listed all the new words in a notebook and tried to memorize as many as they could whenever and wherever it was possible (See *Item 41* in Table 5.13 above).

This is not surprising because in China vocabulary books often take the form of providing learners with so-called 'shortcuts'; learning by heart new words in order to pass the various exams, for example, TOFEL, GRE, EMT-4 and EMT-8. The findings of *Item 41* reveal that, in most cases, new words are not learned in a contextual or discourse manner. That is why students find it hard to retrieve these items when they want to use them. The traditional *Intensive Reading* teaching methods reinforce such learning styles (See Chapter 7 for discussion). In terms of vocabulary learning, rote learning, it is true, plays a major role. However, these learning styles are not a merely cultural or psychological trait of Chinese students, but the result of acquired habits in school and the way the target language has been learned and practised outside class.

On *Item 50*, the majority of students thought that there was lack of authentic materials, both audio and visual, in EFL teaching. The ANOVA test showed the significant difference on this item between the 2nd-year MA students and the 2nd-year undergraduates ($P<0.019$). A possible reason for this difference lies in the fact that the 2nd-year MA students had a higher level of exposure to the target language than the 2nd-year undergraduates, and this reflected their differing views from those of other groups.

Item 52 indicates that majority of the respondents think that they have very few opportunities to practise their spoken English in Intensive Reading class. The

findings reveal that the current conventional teaching methods have to be improved in line with students' needs to improve their practical skills of the target language, that is, 'communicative competence' (Canale & Swain, 1980; Canale, 1983).

On *Item 55*, 70% (149) of the students thought the textbooks were not suitable for CLT in English class. In the follow-up interviews, some students said that the textbooks covered little about target cultures, suggesting that more authentic culture information and knowledge should be included. The students clearly indicated that the cultural information or knowledge contained in the text materials fell well short of what they would like. As their English language proficiency improved, they would become more and more interested in target cultures and their curiosity about Western cultures would be aroused. The findings here show that a pedagogical framework of culture learning in EFL syllabus at tertiary level is absolutely necessary in order to meet learners' needs and broaden their horizons - itself a key component in crossing the threshold to 'sociocultural competence' (Savignon, 2002).

5.15. Meta-cognitive strategies: (Items 57, 58, 59, 60, 61, 62, 63, 64)
Table-5.14

	2nd-year	3rd-year	4th-year	1st-year M.A	2nd-year MA	Total	Items No.
Mean	3.63	3.83	3.96	4.03	4.00	3.91	Item57
Stdev	1.00	.82	.93	.78	.95	.91	
Mean	3.03	3.29	3.34	3.62	3.41	3.34	Item58
Stdev	.82	.91	.98	.81	.91	.92	
Mean	3.63	3.38	3.24	3.54	3.31	3.39	Item59
Stdev	.73	.97	1.06	.82	1.03	.96	
Mean	3.34	3.42	3.18	3.54	3.53	3.35	Item60
Stdev	.87	.88	.99	.79	.88	.91	
Mean	3.23	3.38	3.24	3.51	3.37	3.32	Item61
Stdev	.91	.92	1.01	.72	.87	.91	
Mean	3.37	3.58	3.53	3.62	3.75	3.56	Item62
Stdev	1.06	.88	.99	.67	.88	.92	
Mean	3.60	3.58	3.73	3.62	3.81	3.68	Item63
Stdev	.88	.93	1.01	.85	.90	.93	
Mean	3.40	3.12	3.24	3.33	4.47	3.46	Item64
Stdev	1.19	.90	1.08	.87	.91	.99	

The results of these items revealed that MA graduates could make better use of meta-cognitive language learning strategies than undergraduates by making suitable study plans. By linking Item 47 and 59, we can see that the students as a whole group are not consistently goal-pursuant. They have short-term goals rather than long-term ones regarding their English learning which consists mainly of passing up various exams to complete their BA degree. Another reason may be that they are still unclear about perspectives for their future career.

5.16. Students' attitudes towards form-based strategies (Items 65, 68, 69, 71, 73, 74)

Table-5.15

	2nd-year	3rd-year	4th-year	1st-year M.A	2nd-year MA	Total	Items No.
Mean	3.60	3.54	3.31	3.36	3.06	3.36	Item65
Stdev	.91	1.10	1.05	.96	1.16	1.04	
Mean	3.23	3.00	3.09	2.92	2.91	3.05	Item68
Stdev	.97	.98	.93	1.02	1.00	.97	
Mean	3.69	3.83	3.74	3.49	3.56	3.67	Item69
Stdev	.87	.82	.98	1.05	.98	.96	
Mean	2.14	2.33	2.61	2.72	2.72	2.54	Item71
Stdev	.88	1.01	1.07	.79	1.28	1.04	
Mean	3.32	3.46	3.18	3.15	2.97	3.18	Item73
Stdev	1.06	.83	1.02	.90	.93	.97	
Mean	3.06	3.37	3.09	3.36	3.00	3.15	Item74
Stdev	1.33	1.35	1.09	1.01	1.27	1.18	

The findings of the *Item 65* showed that 47.1% (99) of the students were concerned about every detail of the text materials in reading English. This is directly related to the prevalent Chinese traditional teaching methods: teachers going over text materials in a sentence-by-sentence way (See Chapter 7 for further discussion). 21.9% (46) claimed to reject this method of learning English whereas 31% (65) remained neutral (See Appendix B-7 Frequency Table).

This finding is supported by the results *of Item 73*: more students tend to concentrate on every linguistic detail when they are listening to English or doing listening exercises. This finding, in general, is in support of the statement that Chinese students were meticulous learners and intolerant of ambiguity in learning English (Stefani, 1997; Oxford & Anderson, 1995; Samovar & Porter, 1995). This undue

attention to meticulous detail of the English text materials rather than to overall comprehension of the discourse context or gist reflects to a varying degree the weaknesses inherent in traditional teaching methods in English class (See Chapter 7 for discussion).

5.17. Students' attitudes towards function-based strategy (Items 66, 70, 72, 75, 76, 77, 78, 79)

Table-5.16

	2nd-year	3rd-year	4th-year	1st-year M.A	2nd-year M.A.	Total	Items No.
Mean	3.31	3.50	3.49	3.64	3.50	3.49	Item66
Stdev	1.02	1.10	.94	.99	.98	.98	
Mean	3.94	3.75	3.70	3.79	3.50	3.73	Item70
Stdev	.68	.90	.85	.86	.92	.84	
Mean	3.51	3.63	3.40	3.67	3.28	3.48	Item72
Stdev	.98	1.01	1.01	.87	1.14	1.00	
Mean	2.77	2.83	2.86	2.92	3.34	2.93	Item75
Stdev	1.09	1.13	.95	.98	1.04	1.02	
Mean	3.34	3.67	3.99	3.77	3.69	3.76	Item76
Stdev	1.21	1.24	.92	.87	1.03	1.04	
Mean	2.74	2.63	2.49	2.69	2.56	2.60	Item77
Stdev	.98	.92	.97	.89	1.19	.98	
Mean	2.69	2.92	2.79	3.03	2.94	2.85	Item78
Stdev	.96	1.14	1.10	.87	1.11	1.04	
Mean	2.91	2.96	2.70	2.90	2.50	2.77	Item79
Stdev	.92	1.20	1.14	.79	1.02	1.04	

The findings of the *Items 66, 70, 72, 75, 76, 77, 78, and 79* indicated that students were interested in reading newspapers and magazines after class, but they paid inadequate attention to other functional activities of the target language, such as keeping diary or writing letters or emails in English. Their responses to *Items 77 and 78* showed clearly that they took little initiative in practising their productive skills, especially oral English, outside class. This reflects their very low level of exposure to the English-speaking environment which in turn leads to their weakness in communicative competence.

5.18. Students' attitudes towards dependence on L1 (Items 67, 80, 81, 82)

Table-5.17

	2nd-year	3rd-year	4th-year	1st-year M.A	2nd-year M.A.	Total	Items No.
Mean	3.66	2.96	3.48	2.85	3.06	3.27	Item
Stdev	1.19	1.37	1.21	1.16	1.32	1.26	26*
Mean	2.26	2.50	2.42	2.44	2.25	2.38	Item 67
Stdev	.89	1.18	.96	.94	1.02	.98	
Mean	3.11	2.54	2.67	2.62	2.41	2.68	Item 80
Stdev	.96	1.18	1.04	.96	1.27	1.08	
Mean	2.60	2.33	2.39	2.21	2.22	2.36	Item 81
Stdev	1.14	1.24	.96	.95	1.16	1.05	
Mean	3.00	2.33	2.51	2.46	2.50	2.56	Item 82
Stdev	1.11	1.05	1.09	1.19	1.34	1.16	

Items 67, 80, 81, 82 revealed students' attitudes towards dependence on L1. The results showed that the majority of students held negative attitudes towards dependence on L1 in the process of their learning target language. The findings of *Item 26* revealed that significant difference existed among the 5 groups as the 2nd-year undergraduates scored more highly than the other groups ($P<0.015$). This indicated that Chinese EFL learners tended to depend less on L1 in their EFL learning as their English proficiency improved. However, the score of the 4th-year students revealed that they would like their teachers to translate text materials into Chinese in English class because they had to take a national English proficiency test - EMT-8 which contained a section of translation from English into Chinese and vice versa.

5.19. Interim summary

The findings of the quantitative data provide valuable insights into the development of effective teaching and learning of English in classroom-based settings in the Chinese context. These findings can offer a framework for a better understanding of learner needs as well as for the need for innovation in teaching methodology so as to enhance learners' communicative competence. The following is a summary of the key points in the first section of this chapter.

1. The students approached the group-work with positive attitudes and they would like to be active in speaking English while engaged in the *group* activities. They also expressed reservations about asking or raising questions in *class*.

2. Regarding motivation, the students were very interested in learning target cultures and called for innovative teaching methods for target culture courses.

3. While openly welcoming communicative teaching methods, the students as a whole held mildly negative attitudes towards teacher-centred methods. However, the students in this study were not inclined to see all activities emphasizing formal linguistic competence as totally ineffective. Nor were they inclined to reject indiscriminately the traditional way of teaching and learning; they took the competence of teachers and the nature of courses taught into account.

4. The findings also showed that the students in general did not regard themselves as passive learners but their learning styles were reported to be problematic, especially in use of memory strategy and vocabulary learning.

5. Concerning teacher's authority in class, the students made a distinction between *real* respect and *apparent* respect. The real respect is heart-felt admiration for teachers whereas 'apparent or nominal respect' is a matter of formality. This indicates a change in the perceptions of learning and values among the younger generation.

6. Most students seemed to be over-meticulous learners and they tended to concentrate on every detail of text materials in reading English.

7. The students used function-based strategies, but they focused mainly on receptive skills rather than productive skills. This points to, in part, their deficiency in their communicative competence.

To sum up, in judging the findings of this study in relation to the theoretical foundation of the communicative competence model (Canale & Swain, 1980, Canale, 1983), it is obvious that these learners were deficient in major aspects of

communicative competence. They were not content with their current linguistic competence and they found spoken English difficult. They called for a synthesized pedagogy to combine culture learning and English language learning in EFL programmes, which they see as an important step towards enhancing their sociolinguistic competence. The findings also show that undergraduate students are not aware of conscious use of language learning strategies in their learning process. The next section of this thesis will focus on a comparison of quantitative data between student and teacher groups in order to identify where perceptual match and mismatches lie. In other words, to what degree can teachers gauge learners' preferred classroom activities with a view to improving their own teaching practices and enhancing these learners' communicative competence?

5.20. Data comparison: students vs. teachers (Part II)

Having examined the student questionnaire in the first part of this chapter, the second part focuses on discussing a comparison and analysis between the student group and teacher group to establish whether there exists a perceptual match or mismatch between the two groups. In other words, how much can Chinese EFL teachers gauge their students' preferred classroom learning activities? As will be described below, the data analysis will shed valuable insights into helping teachers to gain a better understanding of Chinese EFL learners in terms of improving teachers' pedagogical practices, meeting learners' needs, and developing their communicative competence. The findings show that both groups match in the following areas, as detailed below.

5.21. Areas of correspondence

The results of the comparison between the two groups generally reflect an approximate 41% correspondence between teachers' perceptions of learners' preferred classroom activities (including learners' attitudes towards EFL learning and language learning strategy use) and learners' actual preferences and opinions (See Table-5.18 on page 122).

5.21.1. Working in a small group (Item 1)

Both groups thought that students, to a lesser or greater degree, were interested in working in a small group of from 2 to 4 people in class.

5.21.2. Speaking out in class (Items 5, 7, 75)

Students were interested in speaking English with their peers in a small group rather than with their teacher in class. Both groups matched concerning students' reluctance to 'show off' in class. In other words, students were not active in answering questions or initiating questions to their teacher in English class.

5.21.3. Culture teaching and learning in class (Items 56, 37)

Students were interested in learning the target cultures and they called for an integration of culture teaching and learning into EFL programmes in order to improve their understanding of Western cultures through learning English.

5.21.4. Attitudes towards TCA (Item 18)

Both students and teachers alike preferred student-centred approach (SCA) over teacher-centred approach (TCA) in English class. This finding is supported by their responses to the same question in the open-ended section (See Appendix C-1 for details). However, at the same time both groups considered that, to some extent, the traditional teaching approach was necessary and effective in its own way. They felt that traditional methods should not be totally discarded in the process of adopting CLT.

5.21.5. Non-communicative learning activity in class (Item 20)

The finding of *Item 18* is supported by the results of *Item 20* in which both groups indicated that the traditional teaching methods were still found to be necessary and effective, to a certain extent. This implied that for some knowledge-oriented courses, especially those for advanced students teacher-centeredness was seen more

appropriate in that it was 'time-saving, easy to handle' for teachers, and 'relaxed to follow' and 'effective for exams' for students (see Chapter 6 for discussion).

5.21.6. Dependence on L1 (Items 29, 67)

Both groups acknowledged some degree of dependence on L1 when students had a difficulty in expressing themselves in English, both oral and written.

5.21.7. Students' learning styles (Item 48)

Both teachers and students acknowledged that students' learning styles needed improvement. This result obviously reflected the dissatisfaction from the both groups with the present target language competence that students had acquired after years of formal learning.

5.21.8. Meta-cognitive strategies (Item 59)

The comparison showed a consensus that the students had a short-term goal in mind concerning how to improve their target language skills. For instance, the students planned to take MA qualifying exams, and to obtain certain certificates by taking some English exams (TOEFL or BEC).

5.21.9. Form-based strategies (Item 73)

Both groups disliked over-dependence on L1 through translating text materials into Chinese for comprehension purposes.

5.21.10. Function-based strategies (Items 72, 77)

Both groups acknowledged that in class students were not active in initiating questions, nor answering questions in English. Students did not take the initiative to

practise, especially their spoken English either with their peers or teachers outside the classroom. Both groups thought that the students took initiative in listening to English on radio outside class.

5.21.11. Impact of EMT-4 and EMT-8 on students (Item 53)

Both groups acknowledged that the EMT-4 and EMT-8 tests exerted certain pressure on learners. This inevitably would have an impact on the process of teaching and learning of English which set priorities on passing the tests.

To sum up, the findings described above reflect the consensus of both groups in teaching methods, culture teaching and learning in EFL programmes, language learning strategy use and students' learning styles. Awareness of this perceptual match between the two groups may help teachers meet learners' needs and contribute towards teaching and learning in so far as teachers' attitudes affect their teaching styles and influence what students actually learn. Students' attitudes also affect their classroom behaviours and their learning styles (Pintrich & Schunk, 1996). A perceptual match seems to be a first step towards this end. However, as described below, the issue of perceptual mismatch between the two groups deserves a special reconsideration of pedagogical practices used by Chinese EFL teachers. Kumaravadivelu (1991) points out that the *narrower* the perceptual gap between teacher intention and learner interpretation of classroom learning activities, the *greater* are the chances of achieving desired learning outcomes. (p.98).

5.22. Areas of disparity

Proportionately the significant lack of correspondence (59%) occurs in the areas shown below in Table-5.18. The Mann Whitney U Test results show that of these 23 items with statistical significance, there are 11 items with $P<0.001$, 4 items with $P<0.003$, and 8 items with $P<0.05$, thus indicating significant differences between the two groups concerned (See Appendix B-5 for details). The areas of disparity are discussed in detail below.

The Quantitative data comparison between

the students and the teachers

Table-5.18

Correspondence per area (41%) *Students' attitudes towards*	*16 Items of Correspondence*
Target culture learning in EFL learning	1 out of 3
Function-based strategy in their English study	3 out of 3
Speaking out in the class.	3 out of 3
Working in groups in the open class	1 out of 3
Communicative activities in the class.	1 out of 4
Non-communicative activities in class	1 out of 3
Compensation strategy in their communication	1 out of 3
Social strategy in their English study.	0 out of 2
Dependence on native language	1 out of 1
Meta-cognitive strategies (LLS).	1 out of 4
Difficulties in adopting communicative activities.	3 out of 10
Significant difference per area (59%) *Students' attitudes towards*	*23 Items showing significant differences*
Working in groups in the open class	2 out of 3
Communicative activities in the class.	3 out of 4
Non-communicative activities in class	2 out of 3
Compensation strategy in their communication.	2 out of 3
Social strategy in their English study.	2 out of 2
Learning target cultures in English class	2 out of 3
Meta-cognitive strategies	3 out of 4
Difficulties in adopting communicative activities.	7 out of 10

5. 22.1 Working in small groups in class: Item 3 (P<0.012)

As mentioned above, the students preferred communicative group-work to non-communicative activities in class. The comparison showed that the students expressed much stronger interest in group work (Items 3) than the teachers presumed their students did. This finding revealed the need on the teachers' part to improve their classroom instructions to meet learners' needs. This was especially so in the classroom observation of Shan's class (See Chapter 7 for details). The qualitative data also revealed that the students liked group activities in class, especially when the topics for group discussion or individual presentation were closely related to their college life experience. This experience in turn would boost their confidence, making

them feel that they had 'something solid and meaningful to talk about'. It is worth noting that for freshmen and sophomores, the potential significance of group-work could not be underestimated since this would lay a solid foundation for appropriate learning styles as well as set a good guidance for them to follow. Otherwise, the teacher-centeredness in which Chinese students have been immersed since childhood would resist change, if not correctly guided by teachers in class.

5.22.2. Pre-prepared news reporting or oral presentation in class: Item 4 (P<0.028)

This item showed that the students considered their peers' news reporting or story-telling in English more useful than their teachers thought they did in class. The result revealed that students thought that peer presentation that were well-prepared in advance was viewed more helpful than teacher-dominated talk and textbook-based patter drill exercises in class. It is important to note that through classroom observation in Shan's class, I discovered that when the students gave a news report, the speaker merely *read* the news rather than *talked about* it, not unlike the way students did their oral presentation in Lan's class (See Chapter 7 for details). This may be due to their lack of confidence in using the target language or they were afraid of making errors or what Hofstede termed 'uncertainty avoidance' (1991, 1994) (See Chapter 3 for discussion). In the course of such activities, no interaction or negotiation of meaning took place. It became just a kind of oral exercise and students took turns in *reading* their own *news* to the whole class as a piece of homework. The reason why the students showed stronger interest in this item perhaps revealed the students' misconception of communicative activities. The findings also reflected the misconceptions of CLT on the teachers' part. The teachers tended to think that as long as students were given opportunities to practise their oral English in class, this amounted to communicative language teaching.

5.22.3. Culture teaching and learning in English class: Items 11(P<0.038), Item 23(P<0.032)

Even though both groups came to a consensus that students were very interested in

cultural learning within the EFL programme, it was the students who expressed a much stronger desire for learning about culture than teachers thought their students did. The findings also showed that teachers needed to improve their teaching methods to meet learners' needs in this respect. Although some introductory courses to Western cultures were offered to students, for instance, *Introduction to Western Cultures,* the content of textbook and the way the course was taught were found to be problematic (See Chapter 7 for details). Many teachers saw the teaching of Western culture courses as automatically developing the learners' cross-cultural communicative competence irrespective of how the courses were taught. But both quantitative and qualitative data in this study showed that this assumption could not be made. Students complained about the way the culture course was taught (See Chapter 6 for details). This raises a very important issue of curriculum design and innovation of teaching methodology as well as further improvement of the teachers' own cross-cultural competence.

5.22.4. Student-centred approach (SCA): Item 19 (P<0.016)

The divergence between students and teachers on this item showed students' stronger needs for SCA in English class than teachers presumed. The findings may partially reflect students' dissatisfaction with the prevalent teacher-centred approach in the English classroom and their request for innovation in teaching methodology. This is supported by the students' responses to the similar questions in the open-ended section. 76% of the students surveyed expressed their dissatisfaction with the current teaching methods that their teachers employed in the English class. This was in sharp contrast to only 22% students who rated the current teaching methods positively (See Appendix C-2 for details).

On the other hand, the gap between the two groups revealed the teachers' conservative mindset in that they assumed that their students still felt very comfortable with the traditional methods in class. This was a main reason why they still adhered to teacher-centeredness and prioritised the imparting of knowledge to learners. There were some other reasons, such as the nature of courses that the teachers were teaching (some courses were thought to be more skill-based while

other courses more knowledge-based), and a sense of insecurity that teachers might have in employing new unproven methods in their classes (See Chapter 6 for further discussion).

5.22.5. Watching English videos and films: Item 22 (P<0.000)

On this item students scored much more highly than teachers did, showing the former had much stronger opinions on this. Considering the fact that students have little exposure to target language environment outside the class, 'watching English videos' was also thought to be a good way to combine 'English input' and 'culture information' with 'output', that is, after-film discussion. This was considered valuable when teachers could give extra explanations on the background and difficult language points. The difficulty for teachers seemed to be not only related to the availability of sources of audio-visual materials, but also to the teachers' ability to teach the course effectively. This pointed to the necessity of teamwork with a native English-speaker teacher as an advisor or mentor to help Chinese EFL teachers and students overcome the linguistic difficulties.

5.22.6. Doing unassessed tests and planning exam answers: Item 24 (P<0.000)

A sharp contrast could be found between teachers and students on this item. Students gave it a negative score (2.78) while teachers responded slightly positively (3.31). The finding revealed one weakness in teachers' attitudes: teachers extended teacher-dominated methods and did text-based pattern drills to various classes regardless of students' needs. Teachers took it for granted that preparing students for passing the EMT-4 or EMT-8 tests would be very valuable, assuming that the pass rate of these nation-wide English proficiency tests would reflect indirectly the quality of English teaching both at an individual and institutional level. However, since the preparation class was exam-oriented and grammar-and-structure focused, the students found it useful only to pass these exams rather than to develop their overall practical skills in using the target language. When these tests were behind them, they did not like these learning activities any more.

5.22.7. Thought-provoking questions in English class: Item 25 (P<0.013)

In English classes, students rated text-based communicative activities and thought-provoking questions raised by their teachers much higher than the teachers thought that their students did. This revealed that teachers should refocus their classroom instruction and be aware of the question-making skills which should stimulate learners' interest and sensitise their analytical and problem-solving awareness. In other words, teachers should formulate their questions at the discourse level rather than merely paraphrasing grammatical points (See Chapter 7 for further discussion). Long and Sato (1983) make a distinction between 'display' and 'referential' questions. A 'display' question is a question to which the teacher who asks it already knows the answers, and which is designed to elicit or display particular structures; whereas a 'referential' question is a question to which the teacher does not have a ready answer but seeks information. Only when teachers encourage learners to think, to judge, to infer and to criticise can learners improve their ability to read and to think critically. This might prove to be a tougher and more difficult job for teachers than just asking 'display' questions. Needless to say, in order to change the way the questions are asked, teachers have to take on the challenge of renovating their teaching methodology. The way the lesson is taught can affect the ways the questions are raised and answered. Based on traditional methods of 'Intensive Reading', the only purpose behind teacher's questions is to check learners' comprehension and reproduce the correct form of the structure. This is supported by the classroom observation in Shan's class in this study (See Chapter 7 discussion).

5.22.8. Dependence on L1: Item 26 (P<0.000)

The findings of this item showed that the students' dependence on L1 was for different purposes and much more complex than teachers expected. Students tended to think that the teachers' correct translation might be considered helpful, especially for comprehension and passing exams. For example, the EMT-8 Test contains a part of translation from English into Chinese, and vice versa. However, the teacher

usually paraphrased English text materials in a sentence-by-sentence way, with an emphasis on grammatical points and structure. Teachers often left translation of paragraphs or sentences as homework for students to do after class.

5.22.9. Use of compensation strategy: Item 31 (P<0.007), Item 32 (P<0.002)

The findings showed that when speaking English, learners used more paraphrases and gestures than teachers predicted. The teachers' opinion seemed to derive from their own observations in the classroom rather than from their own within or out-of-class interactive experience with the students. Lack of experience of active interaction and communicative activities seemed to limit teachers' expectations of their students.

5.22.10. Use of social strategy: Item 34 (P<0.000), Item 35 (P<0.001)

On these two items, diverging views were expressed. Teachers assumed that students would practise after class what they had learned in the class or from the textbook. As a Chinese proverb says, 'practice makes perfect'. But the reality turned out to be quite disappointing, though. Most students did not wish to take part in extracurricular activities for practice of their spoken English, as for instance, an English Corner. Their lack of enthusiasm for oral English practice rose, in part, from lack of a real need to communicate in English in their daily life and from little exposure to English-speaking environment outside the classroom. On the other hand, the findings indicated that poor administration or supervision from the English Departmental head or from teachers was also a contributory factor to students' inactivity. Departmental head or staff teachers need to develop a systematic programme to enrich students' after-class activities and offer necessary scaffolding to encourage such a meaningful activity to thrive. One of the main concerns that students had was that they would speak Chinese English (Chinglish) with their peers and no one would correct their own errors. If not corrected, these errors, they thought, would be reinforced and then become a habit in their learning process, and hard to shake off.

5.22.11. Long-term goal and motivation: Item 47[4] (P<0.003)

Concerning this item, an obvious difference between the two groups arose. Students scored more highly than teachers, indicating that students often found themselves to lack a long-term goal and poorly-motivated in their learning process. Teachers, on the other hand, gave the opposite response to this item, presuming that students had their own ambitions and goals for their own future. It would be unimaginable for teachers to think that students would come to the university without a clear goal in mind after a couple of years of study in the university. Yet students complained that some courses they took or had taken were boring. They found some teachers prepared poorly in terms of presentation skills, specialised knowledge and expertise in teaching methodology. They said that was why they found their enthusiasm for the courses and the target language waning. Their interview accounts revealed that they would work hard if they were genuinely interested in a certain course or found it very useful for their present or future needs.

5.22.12. Few opportunities for oral practise in class: Item 49 (P<0.021), Item 52 (P<0.000)

On these items, students obtained much higher scores than teachers, which indicated their negative feelings about teacher-dominance in English class. These were stronger than teachers presumed. The findings showed the need for teachers to provide students with opportunities in class to use English for various purposes.

5.22.13. Lack of authentic English reading and listening materials: Item 50 (P<0.000)

Students thought that there was a shortage of authentic materials, especially audio and visual varieties. Teachers assumed the opposite, believing that the Reading Room and Language Laboratory were good places for learners to acquire an ear for

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[4] *Item 47* is unfavourably phrased.

the language and synthesise the knowledge they had learned. But students thought that the materials in the labs were out of date and, not as interesting or authentic as they would have liked. The findings pointed to the importance of linking modern technology with EFL teaching, for instance, to use audio and video means to teach English in a multi-media classroom. In this way, students could be exposed to more authentic English input in English class for the purpose of enhancing their communicative competence.

5.22.14. Pressure from job market competition: Item 51(P<0.003)

Students were under greater pressure about their prospective employment upon graduation than teachers presumed. This was due to the tight job market in China. This concern also reflected students' commitment to taking various exams aimed at obtaining 'certificates' which they hoped could enhance their chances in getting a job. This was especially so in the case of 4th-year undergraduates who said during the interviews: 'the English courses they had taken in the English class were neither relevant nor useful for their future employment' (FM-1).

5.22.15. Too much emphasis on grammar and structure: Item 54 (P<0.000)

Regarding this item, teachers did not consider the present teaching methods as unduly grammar-structure-centred whereas students did. The students' Likert score (3.52) showed that they thought the present teaching methods were overly grammar-structure-centred. Consequently they found their oral English skills unsatisfactory. Such a perceptual mismatch inevitably led students to be dissatisfied with their learning outcomes. The findings reveal that teachers need to improve their teaching approach in order to meet their students' needs for the development of learners' communicative competence.

5.22.16. Textbook not suitable for communicative activities in class: Item 55 (P<0.003)

Both students and teachers suggested that the textbooks had to be revamped to encompass communication-oriented activities in class. But the students expressed stronger opinions about textbook innovation than did the teacher group. Many students found that the text materials were 'neither authentic nor useful for their future employment', with the result that their interest in such courses fell off. On the other hand, constant rejigging of text materials involved a tremendous amount of extra work for teachers. Some of the teachers are involved in compiling new English textbooks for English majors ostensibly aimed at 'developing students' communicative competence'. It seems that teachers felt the need to revise or renew the textbooks. But the focus should be on how and in what way. They needed to come up with a solution which would dovetail with the new textbooks.

5.22.17. Meta-cognitive language learning strategy: Item 57 (P<0.000), Item 60 (P<0.000), Item 64 (P<0.000)

On these items, there was, again, a divergence between the two groups as their mean values showed (See Appendix B-4 for details). The students scored higher than the teachers, showing that students thought they could make relatively good use of time after class. Teachers, on the other hand, considered that learners did not work hard enough nor show enough commitment to learning English. This might reflect the teachers' own dissatisfaction with students' classroom behaviours, assignment work and linguistic skills. During interviews, some teachers mentioned students' laziness as one of the causes of their [students'] poor communicative competence. However, students complained that the boring lessons in English classes made them lose interest in the courses they took, resulting in a weaker commitment to learning the language. Another possible explanation for the mismatch on these items may be derived from the fact that these activities were more mental than behavioural in nature. Consequently it was not easy for teachers to make an accurate prediction based merely on classroom observations, especially when there was poor communication between teachers and learners at personal level.

Chapter summary

In this chapter, first I have presented an analysis of quantitative data collected through the student questionnaire which consisted of 17 different themes. The analysis of student data shows that most students approached the group-work with positive attitudes and they would like to be more active in speaking English while engaged in group activities. However, they indicated a reluctance to ask or raise questions in front of the whole class. Another important finding is that students preferred SCA over TCA in English class, but they were not inclined to reject indiscriminately the traditional way of teaching and learning. This was because of many factors, such as teacher competence, the nature of courses taught and the ways teachers elicited and raised questions in class, and how learners were encouraged to think, to infer and to judge.

The findings also showed that students in general did not regard themselves as passive learners but their learning styles were reported to be problematic, especially in use of memory strategy and vocabulary learning. When it comes to teacher's authority in class, the analysis showed that students made a distinction between real respect (respect from the bottom of one's heart) and apparent respect (respect at superficial level). Competent EFL teachers with wide knowledge and expertise in choosing appropriate teaching methods can win heart-felt respect from their students. Those teachers whom students consider to be incompetent receive only token respect even though students seldom challenge the teachers in class. This indicates a gradual change in perceptions of learning and values among younger generations.

In relating the findings of student questionnaire to the theoretical framework of communicative competence model (Canale & Swain, 1980; Canale, 1983), it can be seen that learners are not content with major aspects of their communicative competence. They consider themselves to be weak in linguistic competence, sociocultural competence, and discourse competence. Their use of strategic competence also needs improvement. Students indicate a strong desire for a synthesised pedagogy to combine the teaching/learning of target culture and the

English language in EFL programmes, which is seen as an important step towards enhancing their sociolinguistic competence.

In the second part of this chapter, I have presented a comparison of quantitative data between student group and teacher group. The findings show that there is approximately 41% correspondence and about 59% divergence between the two groups. The perceptual mismatch mainly lies in the areas of communicative and non-communicative language learning activities, attitudes towards speaking out in class, towards learning target culture in EFL programmes, and the ways teachers elicited questions in English classes. It is too early to say whether these results would hold true in other third-level learning situations across or outside China. However, the significance of this comparison indicates strongly that teachers' perceptions of learners' preferences for activities as unaided intuitions cannot be fully relied upon when used as an input to classroom management, lesson planning, textbook writing or syllabus design for the purpose of developing Chinese EFL learners' communicative competence. In this sense, they, therefore, need careful support or mediation. Some of this support can come from surveying students' needs for the purpose of a better understanding of learner variables. This is a very important step towards integrating a student-centred approach into the prevalent traditional teaching methods. In addition, the results of this study show the significance of obtaining learners' views on activities that form part of the learning process. For teachers, it is essential to bear in mind that the ultimate goal of EFL teaching is to enhance learners' communicative competence. The results of this study show that the current teaching approach widely used by teachers seemed to be poorly appreciated by students. This is in part why 76% of the students under study expressed their disapproval of the teaching methods used by their teachers in English classes (See Appendix C-2 for details). The findings demonstrate the necessity for teachers to consult learners and involve them in the EFL teaching and design process before effective teaching and learning outcomes can be obtained.

In enhancing Chinese EFL learners' communicative competence, teachers need to have a good understanding of learner variables. Many studies demonstrate that bridging the gap between teachers' and learners' perceptions plays an important role in enabling students to authenticate and thus maximize their classroom experience

(Kumaravadivelu, 1991; Van Lier, 1996; Breen, 1998; Spratt, 1999). As such, Chinese EFL teachers need to base improvement of their classroom practice on a proper understanding of learners' needs.

In the next chapter, I will discuss the qualitative data collected through interviews and open-ended questions on the student and teacher questionnaires which will provide insightful information on the various reasons why both students and teachers answered in the way they did.

Note:

[1]. An English corner

A college English corner is any 'corner' (appropriate place) on a university campus for students to practise their oral English in their spare time. English corners began to be popular in the early 1980s in China because they provided an English-speaking environment to reinforce the oral skills learned in class. Today, English corners exist in all universities in China, but with its function limited to only oral practice.

Chapter 6

Qualitative data analysis: interviews and open-ended questions

Introduction

For this thesis, the findings of the quantitative data, already discussed and analyzed in Chapter 5, are supplemented by qualitative data to be presented in this chapter. Qualitative data were collected from the open-ended sections in the student and teacher questionnaires, and from the interviews conducted with both groups (See Appendix A-2 and A-4 for open-ended questions). The qualitative data mainly concern the informants' attitudes towards teacher-centred and student-centred approaches, and the teaching and learning of culture in English classes. The analysis of the findings from qualitative data is followed by a detailed discussion of the major problems and constraints encountered and perceived by both groups in the process of their EFL learning and teaching at university level.

6.1. Design of open-ended section and interviews

As mentioned in Chapter 4, two methods were applied to complement and validate the quantitative statistical findings. The first method was to collect written responses to the questions in the open-ended section of the questionnaire. The second was to elicit oral responses through interviews. The complementary value of eliciting written responses from the open-ended section of the questionnaire was that they could reveal statements and comments which would help to inform and refine my line of questioning in the interviews. One of the most important aims was to obtain

data that could explain, firstly, why subjects under investigation liked or disliked communicative language teaching and non-communicative language teaching in English class. Secondly, the findings might elucidate the major problems encountered in the process of their learning and teaching of English language.

The open-ended questions were semi-structured rather than completely open. This meant that all respondents were expected to focus their comments on the same questions asked rather than write more freely. The interviews were open and informal. The idea behind the format was to let informants say anything that was left unexpressed in the questionnaire: their feelings, attitudes, experiences, evaluations of different teaching methods and the main problems in their English language learning and teaching process. Their comments served not only as a resource for identifying problems but also as a resource for suggestions and recommendations. Despite the fact that the information provided is usually in the form of very brief comments due to the limited space on the questionnaire, clearly such qualitative data is an invaluable resource as it provides personal perceptions on TCA, SCA, the learning situation and problems encountered.

6.2. The methods used to present and analyse the qualitative data

One major method selected to present the qualitative data was to cite quotations from both student and teacher informants in order to examine both sets of respondents' attitudes to and opinions of the topics under investigation. It is worth noting that emphasis was placed on words and statements that expressed a judgment, as these remarks or comments discussed in Chapter 5, would epitomize the attitudes and perceptions of informants. In this sense, the quotations were used to consolidate the analysis of the quantitative data. The written responses to the open-ended questions and the interview data were analysed and I have placed them into three broad categories:

1. Positive statements
2. Neutral statements
3. Negative statements

1. *Positive category*, as the name indicated, contained statements and comments that showed appreciation of either teacher-centred or student-centred approaches in the EFL classrooms in terms of overt written expressions and an appreciative tone. 2. *Neutral category* brought together statements or expressions which did not seem to explicitly display identifiable negative or positive tones but which stood somewhere between the positive and negative comments. 3. *Negative category* included those expressions that were overtly disapproving or negative.

As mentioned in Chapter 5, the majority of students surveyed expressed their preference for SCA over TCA in English classes, so did teachers (See Appendix C-1 for details). A detailed discussion of these findings follows: Sections 6.3 and 6.4 present students' comments, and Sections 6.5 and 6.6 present teachers' comments.

6.3. The qualitative data presentation and discussion

6.3.1. Students' positive comments on TCA

The major elements to emerge from the analysis of students' positive comments on TCA are:

- *Learning from teachers in class*
- *Established habits of learning*
- *Passing exams*
- *Feeling relaxed in class*
- *Suited to students' introvert personality traits*
- *More efficient use of class hours*

During interviews, students' appreciative comments mainly reflected two common features. The first feature was the students' perceived roles of 'learning knowledge from teachers' in class and a sense of dependence on teachers for 'correct answers'. This has been fostered by the traditional teaching methods in class, as well as by the strong influence of Chinese culture of learning in which they had been immersed (See Chapter 3 for further details). This is supported by the findings of earlier studies

by other researchers, namely that Chinese students cite 'listening to and learning from teacher' as their most frequent activity in class (Littlewood, 2000). The second feature was students' appreciation of lectures given by highly competent teachers. One female MA student interviewee said:

> Teachers are more knowledgeable [than us] and we can learn more from them in TCA. Teachers can teach us something that we could not know otherwise. In addition, teachers can emphasize the key points of text materials, making learning more effective. In TCA we can make a good use of class hours to learn more from teachers. With regard to oral practice, we can do it after class. We come to the classroom to learn from teachers. [FS-1]

But some students viewed TCA effectiveness from the perspective of helping them pass exams:

> I am used to TCA because I have been exposed to it since childhood. In addition, TCA is effective and helpful for passing English tests, especially in the present exam-oriented educational system. Without this, I wouldn't be able to get high marks in my exams. [MS-2]

Many students' written responses to the open-ended section in the questionnaire revealed that they liked TCA because they found themselves much more relaxed during class in comparison with the sort of anxiety they experienced during the student-centred (SC) class.

> In teacher-centred class, I feel relaxed because the teacher covers the text in great detail and this saves us all the time and effort we would need to go through it by ourselves before or after class. [MS-4].

A female student commented in an interview that:

> Most Chinese students are reserved; they don't like to show off in class. TCA is suited to this personality trait even if TCA is boring. [FS-3]

As is evident, the positive attitude of students is illustrated mainly by their perceived obligation to learn from teachers in class. In Chinese, 'go to class' (*ting ke*), literally means 'listen to the teacher'. Therefore it is not surprising that the most frequently cited appreciative comments of TCA are 'learning from teachers in class', reflecting

students' perceived role of 'being students', and their attitudes to 'learning from the teacher' and passing exams. These comments consolidated the results of quantitative data, particularly questionnaire items 20 and 18 regarding TCA popularly used by teachers to deal with text materials in a sentence-by-sentence way. On *Item 20,* 36.2% of the students favoured this traditional way of going over text materials whereas 34.2% were against it. It is worth noting that 29.5% of the students were still uncertain. This could well indicate that these students were accustomed to TCA but at the same time, found TCA boring. *On Item 18,* 27.1% were in favour of TCA in comparison with 40.5% against it. However, about 32.4% of students were indecisive, finding themselves somewhat supporting or disapproving of TCA and SCA at the same time.

6.3.2. Students' negative comments on TCA

The main critical comments listed below validate the findings of the quantitative data. The most frequently cited complaints about current traditional teaching methods included teacher-domination in class and little attention paid to spoken English practice as well as the absence of fostering of learners' critical thinking ability. Negative comments on TCA are listed below.

- *TCA is boring and involves spoon-feeding*
- *Oral practice is ignored*
- *Teachers are incompetent*
- *Text materials are not interesting*
- *Students have little autonomy*
- *There is too much focus on grammatical structure*
- *TCA makes students become lazy and dependent*
- *TCA fails to take account of developing learners' critical thinking ability*

A 2nd-year female undergraduate student made the following remarks in an interview:

> The TCA is used [by teachers] to teach all English reading courses. Even the course of *Introduction to the cultures of Major English Speaking Countries* was

taught in this way. TCA is so boring that I can't help feeling sleepy in the class. That's not way English should be taught and learned. [FS-2]

When commenting on the same topic, a third-year student interviewee explained:

We were very interested in the culture course at the outset of the third semester. However, after taking the culture course for one semester, many students in the class dropped out. In the fourth semester, they did not take this [one-academic year] optional course again. Why? It wasn't that we lost interest in learning about [target] culture but we didn't like the way the course was taught. We thought we might as well read the textbook by ourselves. What is the point in coming to the class? [FS-3]

These comments were confirmed by the classroom observation in Ming's class - 'Introduction to Western Cultures' for the second year undergraduate students (See Chapter 7 for details). In addition, the students' comments revealed that they were very concerned about their own perceived deficiency in critical thinking ability. Many students thought this was a by-product of TCA in China. A 4th-year student commented that:

Teachers follow the textbook very closely and their talk sticks closely to the text with the emphasis on grammatical structures and rhetoric. Thus, we become accustomed to depending on teachers for reading comprehension without tapping our own analytical and critical thinking capability. In other words, I think that TCA cannot develop students' critical-thinking ability, nor bring our potential into full play in English class. The focus of the *Comprehensive reading* or *Advanced reading* courses was on language points, structures or rhetoric, which leaves no room for thinking, judging, or inferring. As a result, our thinking ability is fossilized well beneath our own expectations and beneath the optimum level we should reach as a university student. [FS-4]

Regarding students' laziness or poor commitment to EFL learning as stated by the teacher group, a 3rd-year female student said in an interview that:

To be honest, we don't want to be lazy; we want to acquire knowledge and to feed our minds for our own future. My parents have paid lots of money for my university education and I have to do them proud. But the present teaching methods and testing system don't make me feel very motivated or interested in what I am learning. Teachers are not good at stimulating us to think. [FS-3]

The comments quoted above reveal three important features.

The first is that TCA may turn students into passive recipients. It is not surprising, therefore, that many students answered the open-ended questions by stating that 'the good things about TCA is that we feel very relaxed in class'. But this 'relaxation' comes at the expense of students' individual active initiative to *think*, to *infer* or to *judge,* and above all to *practise* how to use the target language for real communicative purposes.

The second is that teachers' instruction can play a very important role as to how learners behave in class and how well learners are motivated throughout their learning process. Gardener and MacIntyre (1993) argue that language learners' attitudes to the target language group, to the target language, to learning the language and to the language learning situation determine the level of motivation. This in turn leads to various linguistic and non-linguistic outcomes as a result of acquiring language in formal and informal contexts. One of the non-linguistic outcomes is the learners' attitude to the language learning situation. These are determined by many factors such as what and how they learned and how they were taught, including classroom activities, materials and the teacher's presentation. Garder and MacIntyre conclude that 'teachers …clearly have an effect on what is learned and how students react to the experience and non-linguistic outcomes are expected in turn to have direct effects on language attitudes and motivation' (p.9).

Wong-Fillmore (1985) points out that 'if a teacher follows even an unimaginative format … day after day, it soon becomes a kind of scenario which is familiar to the students. Once they know what the routine is, they can follow it and play the roles expected of them' (Wong-Fillmore, 1985: 29 cited in O'Neill, 1991: 300). This kind of 'routine' or 'inertia' in students can affect students in two completely different ways depending on a teacher's guidance and student expectations: one way is that of the active participant, the other the passive recipient. In TCA, teachers' dominance is likely to lead students to passive inertia and this is backed up by the classroom observation in this study (See Chapter 7 for discussion).

The third point, revealed by the students' comments quoted above, shows the necessity of setting up a well-defined staff training program to help teachers to obtain a clear understanding of theories and principles underlying communicative language teaching and to improve their own teaching methodology.

Having analysed both positive and negative comments, the qualitative data also revealed that many students expressed mixed feelings about TCA. The following section moves on to students' neutral comments.

6.3.3. Students' neutral comments on TCA

It is interesting to note that students' neutral comments focus on the following two aspects:

- *Good TCA depends on the knowledge, competence and eloquence of teachers*
- *Effective TCA depends on the nature of the course taught, for instance, whether it is skill-oriented or content-based*

A female 3rd-year student said in an interview that:

> The key point for TCA is whether or not the teacher is competent enough (knowledgeable and fluent). If the teacher is good, knowledgeable, fluent, humorous and understanding, we like it. If he or she isn't, we don't like it. The most important point is whether the teacher is good at imparting knowledge [to us], whether his or her classroom instruction is competent and whether he or she stimulates our intellectual curiosity. [FM-5]

A 4th-year student added:

> It depends very much on the nature of the course taught. Some courses are skill-oriented while some others are content-based. For the latter, TCA obviously is more efficient and time-saving. [MS-7]

A 2nd-year MA student remarked that:

> It is not fair to brand TCA as an ineffective way of teaching English; nor is it right to simply view CLT as a better teaching approach. Both traditional teaching methods and communicative language teaching methods have their own merits. The most important point is to figure out which aspects of both teaching principles suit us in the Chinese context best by combining the pluses

of both approaches. I believe that the most crucial factor is the competence of teacher. If teacher is not competent, no satisfactory teaching and learning outcome will be achieved, regardless of which approach to use. [FS-6]

The students' comments quoted above support the findings of the quantitative data, revealing their discontent with the traditional teaching approach (See Appendix C-2 for details). At the same time, they also indicate that TCA should not be totally discarded. TCA could be useful and effective depending on the nature of the course, and the competence of the teachers. Students' remarks reflect the data collected from classroom observations in this study, which proved that students' negative comments were not groundless. A detailed discussion of this topic will be given in Chapter 7.

6.3.4. Students' comments on SCA

Having examined the students' comments on TCA, this section now examines the students' comments on SCA. As the students' responses to the open-ended questions revealed, 70% of the students liked SCA and 25% disliked it (See Appendix C-1 for details). This showed that the majority of the students preferred communicative over non-communicative language teaching. Their appreciative comments on SCA listed below reflect the students' desire for more oral English practice in class, the development of their communicative competence as well as their critical thinking ability within the EFL programmes.

6.3.5. Students' positive comments on SCA

Students' positive comments on SCA are listed as follows:

- *Oral practice is stressed*
- *SCA encourages us to think on our own feet*
- *SCA helps us to get over shyness*
- *SCA is interesting*

One 3rd-year student interviewee said that:

> [In SCA] we are able to practise our spoken English. SCA can boost our confidence [in speaking English in class] and also helpful in developing our critical thinking faculties. I think that it is a way of overcoming 'mute English' learning. It promotes communication between teacher and students and between students in English class. [FM-7]

Another 2nd-year student commented

> SCA can lead [us] to development of our ability to think and to speak [the target language] and so on. It is interesting and helpful in developing students' potential and stimulating our interest and enthusiasm in the class. Students can make use of class time to practise oral English.

It seemed that the students' positive comments on SCA converged in that they all expressed their strong desire to have more opportunities to improve their oral English and their critical thinking ability. Therefore they welcomed SCA with open arms. However, many students did not seem to have a very clear understanding of the principles underlying SCA, nor were they aware of their roles as learners in SCA class. Their negative comments on SCA demonstrate this point.

6.3.6. Students' negative comments on SCA

As already pointed out, students' negative comments revealed that students did not have a clear understanding of the principles or theories of communicative language teaching. This phenomenon was attributed to their prior experience of so-called student-centeredness in English classes that had led them to a misconception of SCA. (This also reflected the lack of correct understanding of principles underlying the CLT approach on the teachers' part). The findings also revealed that their own perceived role of 'being students' in class contradicts the principles underlying CLA. Their comments reflected their own perceived deficiency in their own linguistic and critical abilities. On the other hand, the student interview accounts indicated that teachers' incompetence in adopting the innovative teaching methods led students to be sceptical about the benefits of SCA. The main critical comments are listed below, and a detailed discussion follows.

- *We benefit little from SCA: it is a game*

- *We have unpleasant past experience*

- *Discussions on the topic are at a superficial level*

- *The teacher is not competent enough*

- *SCA can only make teachers lazy*

- *We lack critical thinking ability and this makes SCA more difficult*

- *The textbooks are not suitable for SCA*

- *SCA creates anxiety in class*

A 4th-year undergraduate said in an interview:

> I don't like SCA because a previous experience I had convinced me that SCA was just a game and I felt we actually benefited very little from this game. Anyway, I find that SCA is interesting in form but not in content since students cannot learn much from each other. In addition, I have to say that the teacher does not know clearly what SCA means. In our English class, the teacher just asked us to come to the front of the class one by one and explained one paragraph in English. She [the teacher] did not fulfil her obligation as a teacher in the class. If we can explain everything, why do we need to come to the class? What is worse, what we know is emphasized in the class, what we don't know is ignored. So I find SCA boring and a waste of time. [FS-9]

Some student interviewees expressed their doubts about SCA because of their stated deficiency in critical thinking ability necessary to carry out a successful group discussion in English class.

> In SCA, when students discuss a topic, they are inclined to go astray and such 'free talk' sometimes may amount to an empty talk. I find it a waste of time. So I don't like SCA. In addition, students don't become aware of the linguistic errors they make when they speak English in group work. We need teachers for guidance, correction and instruction. SCA may be good for some [students] but not good for all. [MS-9]

It is interesting to note that some comments reflected the students' perceived roles of a teacher in class. A 3rd-year male student remarked:

> SCA cannot really show the true value of the teacher in class. We come to class to learn from our teacher, not to talk to our peers. I think TCA is better than SCA in that SCA may make teachers lazy and shirk their obligations in class. [MS-10]

The comments above validate the findings of the quantitative data (Q 42). About 25% of the students surveyed took it for granted that 'the ultimate aim of coming to class was to learn from teachers, and 28.1% were unclear about their roles in class and therefore uncertain about which approach was more effective (See Appendix B-7 for Frequency Table). The students' comments quoted above helped to explain why students came to the above conclusion. The results showed that their misconceptions mainly resulted from their previously negative experience of a so-called student-centred approach in English class.

Moreover, the qualitative data also revealed that many students were sceptical about a teacher's competence and classroom management ability in employing the SCA:

> Teachers are not fully prepared for this innovative method; they cannot give a very rounded and convincing summary of what was talked about by the learners in the class. The organization is not good. The teacher finds it difficult to play a facilitator's role. In this case, we students feel SCA a waste of time unless it is well managed and organized by the teacher in the class, and students are committed to it. Otherwise, many students tend to sit back and just listen to others and not play an active role in the group work. If everyone thinks like this, no real SCA will take place at all. [FS-4]

A female 2nd-year student gave the following critical comments on SCA because she thought SCA made her feel anxious in class:

> I cannot help feeling unsettled in a student-centred class because I am aware that I cannot express myself very well in English in front of my teacher and my classmates. In this case, I feel anxious and I am not interested in SCA. [FS-5]

It seems to her, that answering questions or speaking English in class is one thing, and that answering high-quality questions and speaking good English is another. From her words in the interview, it could be inferred that she had high expectations of her own performance in class which could prompt her in a feeling of inadequacy and anxiety when she tried to speak English in front of her classmates. Therefore she ended up with very limited practice in class in order to avoid 'making a fool of herself'. This typically reflects the Chinese concept of 'face' (Brown & Levinson, 1987; Mao, 1994; Liu, 2002) (See Chapter 3 for detailed discussion).

This shows the necessity for teachers to make explicit to students their respective roles in class and the benefits of learning from one's mistakes. In addition, full attention should be given to the students' emotional well-being as well as to their linguistic performance. A liberal, protective and secure classroom environment needs to be created to motivate students for their integration with the class. Consequently students would feel less vulnerable and less nervous about practising their spoken English in front of their teacher and peers. As will be shown in Chapter 7, the impact of 'face' was very pervasive in the classrooms observed for this study. When engaged in communicative activities such as oral presentations, or information exchange, students felt secure by 'reading' their pre-prepared written note rather than 'talking about' it freely because they did not want to make mistakes or lose face (See Chapter 7 for details).

The comments quoted above help to explain the findings of *Item 19*: why, despite about 53% of the students surveyed being in favour of SCA, about 36% of students were still uncertain and 12% were clearly against SCA (See Appendix C-6 for Student Frequency Table). Having presented the students' positive and negative comments on SCA, the next section focuses on their comments which stand somewhere between the 'positive' and the 'negative'.

6.3.7. Students' neutral comments on SCA

Their neutral comments on SCA seem to reflect the nature of the course taught and the teachers' competence and fluency as mentioned above. A teacher's spoken English ability is very highly valued by students as a critical element in making his or her lecture interesting and informative. The major elements to emerge from students' neutral comments are:

- *The nature of the course taught*
- *The match between the group discussion topics and students' interest and background knowledge*
- *The competence of teachers*

A female MA student said:

It depends on the nature of the courses [taught]. On the other hand it is closely related to how much students know of the topics to be talked about in the class. If students know of something about the topic, they feel confident that they have something to say, at least. Otherwise they prefer TCA. Listening to a teacher is better than having nothing to say or an 'empty talk'. [FS-10]

Another 4th-year student commented

All lessons are teacher-centred here. I cannot say whether I like TCA or SCA. The only criterion is: if the teacher is understanding and knowledgeable, I like it, if not, I don't like it. That is all [FM-11].

The comments quoted above indicate that students feel that teachers need to upgrade their own competence and build up their own expertise before making their classroom instruction more effective.

6.4. Students' comments on the major problems encountered in their learning process

This section moves on to elucidate the major problems encountered by the students in their learning processes. Students' responses revealed their disappointment at their perceived deficiency in their critical thinking ability as a separate issue from their deficiency in language proficiency and inadequate knowledge about western cultures. The problems most frequently cited are listed as follows and each will be discussed below:

- *Poor oral English*
- *The learning of culture*
- *Vocabulary*
- *Lack of critical thinking ability*

A 4th-year student said in an interview:

I can understand very difficult written English texts but I cannot express myself very clearly in simple, colloquial and correct English. I cannot retrieve the linguistic items I have memorised when I want to use them. [FS- 12]

Many students were disappointed at their ability to use the target language for communication purposes. Their disappointment was compounded by their practical experience in August 2002 when they served as volunteer interpreters for an International Conference on Housing held in Tianjin, China. Many 4th-year English majors worked as volunteers for the conference, which they viewed as a good opportunity to practise and 'test' their target language and communicative ability. During the interviews, many of them said that it was through such real-world communication that they realized the 'bookish English' they learned in class could not help them to cope with real communicative situations.

With regard to the learning of culture in English classes, a 3rd-year student commented:

> We don't know much about Western cultures or their social customs. We have learned something about the target cultures but we want to learn more about them. At the same time, we find that we do not know much about our own culture. [MS-10]

The students' comments on culture learning, in fact, backed up the findings of the questionnaire data (Q 36; Q37; Q13). Many respondents expressed their hope that the teaching and learning of culture and English language should be integrated in English class so that these two components could be supplementary to their learning process. As will be shown in Chapter 7, the findings revealed that although the English Department had opened a culture course for students, it is neither sufficient nor systematic in terms of cultural items selected, syllabus design and teaching methodology for the purpose of developing learners' cross-cultural communicative competence. There is a long way to go before students' expectations can be adequately met. Moreover, it is by no means enough just to establish one or two culture courses to introduce some facts and knowledge about Western cultures to students. Without systematic curriculum design and an appropriate teaching approach adopted by teachers in English classes, cultural knowledge or information covered in class could seem to be 'anecdotal and fragmented' in nature, and merely based on the instructor's own perceptions of what is more important and what is not. In this sense, some standard criteria for selecting cultural items and approaches to

culture instruction need to be established and implemented to enhance learners' cultural competence.

Concerning the development of English vocabulary build-up, a 4th-year student remarked:

> I find that building up English vocabulary is very problematic. I think that I have learned by heart a large amount of English vocabulary, but I cannot retrieve them from my memory when I try to use them. [FS-12]

These accounts support the findings of the student quantitative data (*Item 41*, See Section 5.14 in Chapter 5). Many Chinese EFL learners frequently attribute their failure to put their ideas into [correct] English to their small repertoire of English vocabulary which does not provide much of a selection for practical use, especially in oral conversation / communication. Some students even assumed that spoken English was simply a matter of *vocabulary plus grammar plus practice*. To them, a large vocabulary would be a marker of high proficiency in the target language. In other words, a larger vocabulary stock serves as an indicator of being more knowledgeable in English (Wang, 1999). Many learners think that a large repertoire of English vocabulary is a shortcut to improving their English proficiency. It is not unusual for Chinese EFL teachers and native-English-speaking teachers to find that most Chinese students use words in the wrong context. They often use complex words in a context where a simple one will do. One can easily find that 'there are far more books in many Chinese bookstores on learning English vocabulary and guidance for preparing English tests than on current English teaching approaches and methods' (Cortazzi & Jin, 1996: 70).

Consequently, the outcome of such short-cut learning proves unsatisfactory. For instance, one student informant wrote in the open-ended section:

> I can comprehend English texts with a very complex grammar structure but I cannot express myself correctly in colloquial English. I am very worried about it as it makes me feel less confident when I know that I speak 'Chinese

English'[1]. It does worry me. I am about to graduate, but still I do not know what to do about it. [FS-13]

It is true that a large vocabulary may be of great help in making one's ideas clear in English. However, the best and most effective way of building up a sound repertoire of vocabulary that is applicable in one's actual use of the target language is 'by learning words in the context of text, if not context of situation' (Niu, 2001: 11). It is critical for teachers to help students to realize that reading a wide range of up-to-date materials written in authentic English is a good way of facilitating vocabulary building. In addition, teachers should make students aware that the so-called short-cut vocabulary build-up method is very harmful, and that repeated wrong use of words leads to fossilisation, if not identified and corrected either by the teacher or by the students themselves. Teachers should demonstrate the appropriate ways of building up vocabulary in their classroom instruction by focusing on both language form and discourse meaning rather than focusing on over-meticulous unlocking of the meaning of language items in the text as revealed in the classroom observation (See Chapter 7).

Finally, when it comes to the deficiency in learners' critical thinking ability, a 4th-year female student said in an interview:

> Many teachers do not know what we [students] really need. I don't think that I have made much progress in my English learning. To tell you the truth, in comparison with students of other departments, I feel that English majors have an obvious disadvantage. This is especially manifested in the area of critical thinking and problem solving abilities. Another area we have not learned much about is subject-related specialized knowledge apart from knowledge about the English language. Non-English majors have made progress in their English learning and it puts us in a disadvantageous condition for job competition. Since I minor in Law, I have to take some courses in Law School in which my learning experience made me reflect and then compare the way the teachers in English class teach their lessons. I think that TCA is to blame for the deficiencies in our analytical and critical thinking ability (FS-12).

The comments quoted above revealed that students were not satisfied with the progress they made in learning English and the deficiency in their critical thinking

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[1] *Chinese English* here means that Chinese EFL learners speak English words by following Chinese thought patterns.

ability seemed to restrict their active engagement in student-centred learning activities, such as group discussions in English class. As one student wrote:

> We must have SCA not only in form but also in essence. We must be sure that we can benefit from it. At the same time, we need to have something reasonable to talk about in a group discussion. Otherwise, SCA amounts to waste of time. [FS-13]

From a pedagogical perspective, many researchers point out that a student's competence in critical thinking is essential not only to enhance his or her communicative competence, but also to foster his or her individuality as well as general development as a whole person, a person with dignity and insight into the modern human condition (Meyers, 1986; Byram, 1997; Chen, 2000; Gao, 2000; Wen, 2000). It should be noted that learning at universal level is not merely a collection of information or facts to be remembered and then regurgitated on exams, but learners learn in order to 'apply their knowledge towards making a better world' (Jacobs & Farrell, 2001). It is very important for EFL teachers to be aware that English language teaching is also teaching learners another way of looking at the world in tandem with the development of their language abilities as, otherwise, there is no real development of cross-cultural communicative competence on the part of students.

However, as this study revealed, the impact of TCA and the traditional roles of a student and a teacher in class encourage students to depend too much on teachers without thinking independently. As a result, the long-term practice of teacher-centeredness in EFL education 'has actually lessened the opportunities for students to analyse and judge things themselves, and possibly encouraged their laziness in thinking' (Huang, 1996: 249). This would harm students' initiatives and reduce their enthusiasm for study. These comments support the findings of the quantitative data (Q 47), that students did not find themselves well-motivated in their English language learning. As classroom observation revealed, the traditional teaching approach failed to cultivate student spontaneity. Consequently, learners frequently fail when they are faced with the need to use the target language for real communicative purposes as illustrated above. Such a traditional approach has a great impact on the formation of students' study habits. For instance, they learn to focus

their attention on every word instead of on the meaning of the whole text in a holistic manner when they read English. This is confirmed by the findings of quantitative data (*Item 65* and *73,* See Section 5.16 in Chapter 5). As Huang (1996) points out, this would interfere with their reasoning power and impede the cultivation as well as the development of their communicative competence within EFL education (p. 252).

It is obvious that teachers should try to modify the traditional teaching methods in which English text material is covered more at a lexical level than at a discourse level, leading learners to heavy dependence on the teacher for correct answers and explanations. As such, it is worthwhile to cite Candlin's suggestions to illustrate the importance of developing learners' critical and creative thinking ability in class. Candlin (1982) suggests that

> English language teachers can profitably go outside of their English classes and see what happens in the classes of mathematics and natural sciences in which teachers encourage variety on the basis of learners' different backgrounds, aptitudes and interests, and offer them different ways of achieving their objectives while ensuring that there is a basic knowledge that they all have (p. 41).

Obviously this issue is a complex one and further theoretical clarification and appropriate pedagogical strategies in this regard are discussed in Chapter 9.

6.5. Teachers' comments on TCA and SCA

Having presented and discussed students' comments on both TCA and SCA as well as on the major problems encountered in their learning process, this section focuses on teachers' comments on TCA and SCA as well as difficulties involved in adopting SCA in their own classroom instruction. The teachers' responses to the open-ended questions revealed that 61% of them were against TCA compared with 32% in favour. 59% were in favour of SCA with 33% against it (see Appendix C-1 for details). Despite their apparent preference of SCA over TCA, teachers still had misconceptions about communicative language teaching which were reflected in their classroom instruction, and deep concerns about adopting CLT successfully in

their English classes. The major elements to emerge from teachers' comments are listed below. This is followed by discussion.

6.5.1. Teachers' positive comments on TCA

- *Imparting of knowledge to learners*

- *Easy control of the class*

- *Established way of teaching*

- *Time-saving*

- *Students' preference*

- *Mastery of English grammar and structure*

Apart from the claims that TCA was a well-established way of imparting knowledge to learners and an easy way of controlling students and saving time in class, many teachers pointed out that students were accustomed to this teaching style to which they have been exposed since childhood. Moreover, teachers felt that TCA would enable them to make best use of class hours to finish their teaching plan, stress the key points and thus make the outcome of teaching and learning more effective. Equally, students could also make the best use of class hours to obtain knowledge from their teachers. One teacher informant metaphorically described the positive effect of TCA as 'killing more than two birds with one stone'. This was clearly a reflection of their perceived role of the teacher as a knowledge provider and their feelings that the teaching process is a one-way transmission in class from teacher to learners (See Chapter 3 for discussion).

It is useful to reflect at this stage upon the interview data that reveals a belief popularly held by the teachers surveyed, namely teaching *Shao er jing* which means 'teach [the target language or text material] sparsely [in quantity] but in extremely great detail'. This idea is manifest in a number of teachers' interview accounts and comments on teaching methods they have been using in the English class. For instance, a middle-aged male teacher with a Ph.D. in Linguistics said that he viewed reading comprehension as the focus of his classroom instruction. It was his

obligation to improve students' appreciation of the literary value of the text being covered in class. His remarks are quoted below:

> In my class, I focus on helping students command basic skills but also on instructing students how to analyse complicated structures, rhetoric and implied meanings of the texts. In other words, I teach my students how to appreciate the literary value of text materials being learned. I think that it is with this goal that the text materials for intensive reading or advanced English reading should be selected as the term 'Intensive reading' (*Jing Du*) indicates. As you know, *Jing* in Chinese language is equivalent to '*Intensive*', which means doing something in great detail or do it very well. In other words, it is the quality rather than quantity that matters (MT-1).

He also said that:

> The Intensive Reading or traditional teaching methods are far better than other teaching methods such as the communicative method since the latter is only an effective way to facilitate students' listening and speaking skills. Such methods alone can lead to an imbalance in the development of language abilities. In a word, I think the traditional approach is a more effective way of helping students master the ability to conduct literature and linguistic studies. (MT-1)

His remarks revealed his misconceptions of CLT. Some students in his class said in an interview that this teacher seemed to go to extremes spending lots of time explaining obscure grammar points and rhetoric devices, and expounded on less useful [in a sense that is not often used in oral and written form] but difficult words. In his class, the emphasis was placed on memorizing chunks of text rather than on listening and speaking skills, which he thought were beyond his domain of responsibility. One of his students commented:

> Too much focus on meticulous details of the text makes his lesson very boring even if he sounds quite knowledgeable and is well-prepared. (MS-14)

The teachers' comments quoted above are clearly a reflection of their perceived role of the teacher as a knowledge provider and the teaching process as a one-way transmission in class from teacher to learners. Most of the classes observed also reflected the teachers' inveterate belief of 'teaching sparsely but well', and viewing themselves as providers of knowledge. They unquestioningly assumed that the purpose of English reading courses was to feed various pieces of knowledge about English into students' minds, regardless of students' interest or needs, let alone

students' practical ability to use the target language appropriately for real communicative purposes. Undoubtedly, such a teacher-centred method provides little chance for students to take charge of their own learning and consequently would inhibit the improvement of students' communicative competence as well as critical thinking ability.

Some Chinese researchers point out the weakness inherent in such traditional teaching methods. For example, Wang (2001) asserts that the greatest obstacle Chinese students face in understanding an English text is the loss of its overall meaning, that is, only seeing the 'trees rather than the wood'. She points out that although learners have all the meanings of new words and the grammatical rules, they are still at a loss to reach what the writer is trying to get across (Wang, 2001: 55). It can be seen that such a traditional teaching method contributes little to developing learners' ability to see 'both the wood and the trees'.

Moreover, the study also indicated that some teachers surveyed tended to believe that the major difference between the two languages, namely Chinese and English, which posed the greatest difficulty for Chinese students, could lie at the lexical and syntactic level, rather than at the textual level. They contended that greater efforts should be made to give students a solid foundation in the target language, for instance, by focusing on its vocabulary, grammar, idiomatic usages, sentence structure, and so on. As such, the traditional teaching method would be the right teaching approach to fit into the Chinese EFL context. With regard to various kinds of communicative classroom learning activities aimed at facilitating learners' ability to use the target language for real communicative purposes, those teachers argued that 'students can practise these activities after or before class by themselves'.

6.5.2. Teachers' negative comments on TCA

Having discussed teachers' positive comments on TCA, this section moves on to their negative remarks. The major elements to emerge from teachers' negative comments provide a strong critique of this traditional teaching approach:

- *It encourages spoon-feeding and is too exam-oriented*

teachers' experience as L2 or FL learners can inform cognition about teaching and learning which continue to exert an influence on teachers throughout their career (Holt-Reynolds, 1992 cited in Borg, 2003: 81).

The teachers' comments cited above indicate that TCA is likely to lead students to become passive recipients, to varying degrees in class. This assumption is supported by students' written responses: 'the good things about TCA are that we feel very relaxed in class'. The most important point at this stage is that both teachers and students should become aware of the price paid for such 'relaxation'.

It is worth noting that the teachers' neutral comments on TCA and SCA overlapped. Consequently their neutral comments on the both approaches were presented and discussed together in Section 6.5.5 in order to avoid repetition.

6.5.3. Teachers' positive comments on SCA

The major elements to emerge from positive comments are listed below.

- *SCA emphasizes listening and speaking skills*
- *SCA stimulates the learners' interest*
- *SCA cultivates learners' analytical thinking ability*
- *SCA is required in the revised National Curriculum for English majors*

For instance, a teacher mentioned that:

> SCA is interesting and can stimulate learners' potential enthusiasm. Therefore, I think that SCA is a good way for improving learners' language skills, especially spoken English skills. In addition, in an SC class, the atmosphere is much more lively than in a TC class. Students have more time to practise using the target language to communicate. [FT-6].

Another teacher added in an interview that:

> Group activities or interaction can help students realize their own strengths and weaknesses in their learning process. [MT-7]

Some teachers firmly believed that:

> SCA is a good way of cultivating learners' thinking, problem-solving ability, and teamwork. Furthermore the revised national curriculum [for EFL teaching] requires us to teach English language in a communicative way. [MT-8]

Despite teachers' apparently advocating CLT, they still expressed their doubts. They argue that CLT is not easy to be adopted in China because it is too demanding for Chinese teachers of English. This will be discussed in the following section.

6.5.4. Teachers' s negative comments on SCA

The major elements emerging from teachers' negative comments are listed below, followed by discussion:

- *Difficult classroom management*
- *Teachers' lack of confidence in adopting SCA*
- *Students' limited linguistic competence and divided commitment*
- *Students' lack of real needs*
- *Students' lack of critical and analytical abilities*
- *Cultural influence*

Some of these elements have more to do with students while others are more closely related to teachers. For instance, some teachers stressed the challenges facing them in adopting SCA, such as difficulty in classroom management. This inevitably gives them a sense of insecurity. One teacher said in an interview:

> It is hard for teachers to control the class for the purpose of communicative activities. If the class is thrown into chaos, teachers cannot fulfil their teaching schedule [FT-8].

Another teacher added:

> It makes us feel less confident in organizing and managing the class since I do not have enough time to prepare and answer all the questions the students

may ask in class and sometimes I have no idea whether my answers are right or not. Anyway, we are not native speakers of English. [FT-9]

It can be seen from the comments cited above that teachers are not sure of their ability to successfully adopt an SCA in their classes. Some teachers pointed out that students' limited linguistic competence and divided dedication to team work hindered the implementation of SCA in class:

> Students cannot express themselves very well. Advanced-level students may find an SCA interesting and suitable but freshmen and sophomores may not, since they are at the stage of gaining intermediary linguistic competence. When they are asked to do 'interaction', more often than not, they keep quiet or they cannot express themselves appropriately. As such, it is hard to engage them in meaningful group activities. [MT-10]

Another middle-aged female teacher gave an example to illustrate the current situation which contradicts the notion of CLT:

> Many of us [teachers] have such an experience that in an SC classroom, the whole class seemed to be quite lively and dynamic. Students talked and laughed. But next time when you talked to the students, they complained that they benefited little from such activities. If you made students work too hard after or before the class for the purpose of teamwork, they would think that we were not fulfilling our own obligations as a teacher. Above all, students are not interested in learning for the pure purpose of gaining knowledge or ability. They seem to fix their sights on the job market. They are more interested in passing exams to obtain certificates, such as BEC (Cambridge Business English Certificate), computer skills certificate and so on, which they think will improve their chances for getting a job. They also have limited cultural or intercultural awareness. But it seems that they [the students] are not so worried about it since the testing system focuses on language structure rather than on their practical competence of using the language. [FT-11]

Another practical obstacle confronting EFL teachers in China lies in students' lack of real needs to communicate in English, which is reflected in learners' behaviours both inside and outside classroom. A teacher pointed out:

> Lack of real communication needs among students makes it difficult to keep the communicative activities proceeding smoothly, however well intentioned students may be. It takes more time and is of less benefit than a TCA. Learners are learning English in a Chinese EFL context, which is significantly different from L2 environment in which students have

opportunities to use the target language for real communicative purposes outside the classroom. In China, the reverse is true. It is not surprising that students are interested in learning English language for a perceived future use rather than for immediate use. They believe that as long as they have mastered it [the English language], it is theirs, and will be at their disposal later when they need to use it for various purposes. This is, in part, why they are so interested in learning knowledge about the target language rather than the ability to use it. [FM-12]

This reveals why teachers should link EFL teaching with learners' real needs in order to ensure effective outcomes of teaching and learning. Many teachers also thought that students' lack of critical thinking abilities was also very problematic in initiating a meaningful class discussion.

> When students have a class discussion, they tend to touch on only the surface of the topic with few fresh and creative ideas. If it goes on like this, students may find it not helpful and will lose interest in SCA. [MT- 13]

Another teacher added:

> They [the students] do not have much interesting to say in class discussions since they have little exposure to the target culture and the target language. It will do them good if they just concentrate on listening to the teachers and do all the practice after class. Teachers are much more knowledgeable than students. [MT-14]

Last but not least, many teachers mentioned the impact of Chinese traditional Culture on EFL education and on learners' classroom behaviours, which they thought were more resistant to than supportive of the implementation of SCA. One female teacher commented:

> I don' think SCA suits English language teaching and learning in the Chinese EFL context very well. Most Chinese students tend to keep quiet in class. I personally find such silence in class very embarrassing. They do not like to sit in a circle, work in pairs and speak English to each other. They prefer to listen to teachers. In addition, Confucianism teaches Chinese people to be reserved in speech and in manners. All this contradicts the principles underlying student-centred approach. If students do not actively cooperate [with the teacher], how can we engage them in meaningful activities in class? How can we carry out our teaching plan as required by the syllabus? [FM-15]

Regarding the appropriateness and applicability of SCA in the Chinese context, the teacher describes it in a metaphorical way. CLT or SCA is just like 'a piece of

fashionable furniture which looks pleasing in a showroom'. But it may turn out to be unpleasant if it is not compatible with 'the space, interior or other existing materials of a particular living-room'.

It is undeniable that Chinese traditional culture exerts a great influence on the roles for students to play in classrooms. With the influence of the Confucian tradition, Chinese learners see themselves as an inseparable part of the whole class and are concerned to maintain harmony within their group. Therefore, in class they are reluctant to 'stand out' by expressing their views or raising questions, particularly if this might be perceived as expressing public disagreement. However, the greatest challenge confronting Chinese EFL teachers is not only to identify problems, but also to work out practical solutions in order to make EFL teaching and learning more effective.

The comments cited above cast doubts upon the appropriateness, practicality and applicability of CLT in China. However, the survey findings in this study reveal that although student reticence in English class is seen as problematic for teachers in the process of adopting the CLT approach, many teachers fail to identify the real cause of this apparent reticence. The crux lies in identifying the root cause of learners' reticence in English classes rather than arriving at an overgeneralization to attribute their reticence to the cultural and psychological traits on the learners' part. As Cheng (2000) points out: 'overemphasis on the cultural attributes as a cause of language learners' reticence and passivity is groundless and detrimental to cross-culture studies' (p. 440). Stephens (1997) asserts that over-generalizations about culture may have 'a surface appeal, but may not be supported by strong research evidence' (p.123). What then are the causes for the reticence that has been observed and reported by the teacher informants? As students' interview accounts revealed above, one of the root causes may be closely related to the ways the English lessons were taught in English class. This finding is supported by earlier studies. For instance, Cheng (2000) argues that many reticence-related causes are 'situation specific', and teaching methodological practices and language proficiency are the two most common causes (p.441). The classroom observations proved that learners' reticence was indeed closely related to teachers' instruction practice in the classroom (See Chapter 7 for further discussion).

6.5.5. Teachers' neutral comments on SCA and TCA

Having mentioned both positive and negative comments on SCA, this section focuses on teachers' neutral comments. The major elements emerging from neutral comments mainly concern two factors. The first focuses on the nature of different courses, whether it is knowledge/content-based or skill-oriented. The former requires much more teacher-centeredness than the latter. The second argues for combining the good values of the traditional teaching approach with SCA in order to suit the Chinese English language teaching and learning context. The two elements are listed below.

- ***Dependence on the pedagogic nature of each course taught***
- ***Blend of the strengths from both TCA and SCA teaching***

In interviews, some teachers also pointed out the strengths and weaknesses inherent in both the TCA and SCA. Some teachers argued against blindly discarding TCA.

> It is not fair to be blindly in favour of TCA or SCA. It should take into account of the nature of courses taught. Some courses are more suitable to TCA while other courses to SCA. It varies from course to course, from person to person. Some teachers are not welcomed by students not because they use TCA rather than SCA. The key point is that they are not competent enough. [MT-16]

Another teacher said:

> The objective judgement of good or effective teaching in class is based on the students' feedback. If your students are interested in your class, in the content as well as in the way you present it, if you challenge your students with thought-provoking questions, if students think actively in the direction which you show in the lecture, in a word, if your students do not passively accept what you say and just imitate what you do, then I do not think this is the so-called TCA although the class is teacher-centred. [MF-17]

Teachers' comments cited above revealed that they called for a combination of the strengths inherent in both traditional and communicative approaches to suit the nature of different courses being taught as well as the needs of students with different levels of linguistic proficiency. From the remarks quoted above, it can be seen that SCA currently does not produce a desired result. At the same time, there seems to be much

misunderstanding about it on the part of both learners and teachers. Teachers and students should better be made aware that learning and applying a new teaching methodology does not mean embracing it blindly, nor does it mean losing the strengths inherent in the traditional approach to teaching. To encourage more effective teaching in class, a blend of the strengths from the two approaches is possible. This topic will be discussed in further detail in Chapter 8.

6.6. Teachers' comments on the major constraints of adopting SCA in their teaching practice

Further to the teachers' comments of the three categories above, this section centres on teachers' comments on the problems they have encountered or they perceive to be confronted with while they try to employ SCA in their classroom instruction. Some of their comments overlap with those already mentioned above. Due to the limited space of this thesis and also to avoid repetition, the major elements emerging from the teachers' comments are listed below and followed by discussion.

CLT: too demanding for Chinese teachers of English

CLT is too demanding for non-native teachers of English. It makes Chinese EFL teachers feel less confident in organizing and managing the class since they do not have enough time to prepare and answer all the questions students may ask in English class. Sometimes they are not sure whether answers they offer are correct or not. They argue that it is very difficult for non-native speakers to know which forms are appropriate to which context because they have not been trained in such matters. So they conclude that CLT makes too many demands on non-native teachers of English. This unpredictability or demand for good linguistic competence would give teachers a sense of insecurity and lead them to lose confidence.

Poor English Language environment

Great differences exist between the natural English language environment (e.g. L2) and the classroom environment (e.g. FL). The classroom environment is not suitable

for students to simulate real-life situations in which the target language is used and communicative competence is developed. Outside the classroom, they have few opportunities for communicating with native speakers of English to practise their spoken English.

Assessment

As mentioned above, it is hard for non-native teachers of English to tell which is the most appropriate expression to use because of the different social contexts and different ways of expressing the same function in English. It is hard to evaluate fairly and objectively not only student's accuracy but also their fluency. In addition, teachers cannot supervise every group as the communicative activity progresses. Therefore, errors cannot be observed or corrected. Teachers are worried that errors may become reinforced or even fossilized, that is, errors will stay forever with a learner. Actually both teachers and students find it hard to tolerate errors. If errors are not corrected, students might think that the teacher is not able, or knowledgeable enough to detect the error in student' speech. So teachers think that it is teacher's responsibility to correct the errors in class. These factors mean it is still difficult to judge whether the learners' output (oral production) is appropriate or inappropriate, and it is hard to judge whether students are communicating successfully.

Students' limited linguistic competence and weak commitment

Students cannot express themselves well and in this sense it is hard to engage them in interactive activities. When they are asked to 'interact', they tend to keep quiet or they find it difficult to express themselves appropriately. In most cases, they just say what they can rather than what they want to say. This would inevitably lead to students' weak commitment to or even loss of interest in group work.

Limited critical thinking ability

Students have limited critical thinking ability. They share similar views about the outside world (although individual differences exist) and their comments or points of views about the topics in group-work or pair work are quite similar on the surface.

As such, students feel that learning from the teacher is far more effective than learning from peers in class.

Textbooks

Most texts for Comprehensive (Intensive) Reading are extracts from literary works, especially the text materials for junior and senior students. Some are more or less adapted, some are original. These texts are good for analysing subtle meanings of words, the character's psychology, use of rhetorical devices, narrative modes of organization, and so on. They are less suited for CLT in English class. Such content as reading materials might help students to develop their ability to appreciate literary works. However, an obvious disadvantage is that a content dominated by literary works does not reflect the language of day-to-day use, nor can it meet the needs of communicative activities in class. Actually the teachers' comments are supported by the personal experiences of many 4th-year respondents who participated in an international conference in Tianjin as volunteer interpreters as mentioned above in Section 6.4 of this chapter.

Limited formal training

Although CLT is widely promoted in L2 programs, little, in fact, is known about what teachers understand by CLT and how they implement it in English classes in China at tertiary level. Most teachers receive little or limited formal training in how to implement communicative teaching on a regular basis in various skill areas. Some universities have sponsored some short training programs on communicative language teaching in the summer workshops in joint efforts with one or two publishing houses. The real aim of such gatherings focuses more on marketing the textbooks than on academic training. These programs are usually very short (about 3 or 4 days) and focus on classroom teaching techniques for using the new textbook they are marketing rather than on helping teachers to understand systematically the theoretical framework underlying the CLT approach. As a result, many EFL teachers in China are not well informed about recent developments in the field of teaching methodology. Finally many teachers are not well motivated or are reluctant to find time from their daily commitments to prepare themselves for communicative

instruction. Furthermore, CLT is obviously more demanding in terms of classroom management and sociolinguistic competence on teacher's part (such as pair and group work, use of task-based learning and teaching methods, use of authentic materials).

Inadequate attention paid to teaching methodology

Most English language teachers did not take methodology courses when they were university students many years ago. Another reason was the misconception held by the leadership of the English departments: courses such as Literature and Translation or Linguistics are viewed as more important in terms of providing learners with knowledge about the language. However, teaching methodology is regarded as a mere accumulation of teaching experience or mastery of techniques rather than a specific academic subject that deserves thorough theoretical as well as classroom-based study. Teachers' linguistic knowledge and lecturing ability (fluency, pronunciation, humour) are viewed as the cornerstones of good teaching. The departmental heads prioritised linguistic knowledge over pedagogical knowledge. When it comes to annual promotion, publications by faculty staff on linguistics, translation studies and literature carry more weight than teaching performance and areas of TEFL. This is supported by some other studies (cf. Fang & Warschauer, 2004). Moreover, with regard to the evaluation of teachers' teaching performance, the focus is on how well they speak English, how well they demonstrate the language points, how well they use language teaching materials. Innovation of teaching methodology is not on the agenda since it is likely to invite student complaints. Consequently many teachers disregard the need to improve their teaching methods in class.

Teachers' workload

Many teachers surveyed mentioned the adverse impact of a heavy teaching workload, which consists of two parts: the required workload and the actual workload. The former refers to how many class hours one teacher should teach each week. Without finishing the required teaching hours, a teacher cannot expect to

receive his or her full salary. The latter is how many class hours one teacher actually teaches on a weekly basis.

Theoretically, once teachers finish their required workload, they have completed their teaching duty. However, nobody seems to stop at his / her required workload. As the interview data and written responses revealed, almost every teacher actually 'overworks', ranging on average from 50 to 100 percent each week. This situation does not necessarily mean that the colleges are understaffed: it is a process of 'earning extra pay' by doing extra hours of teaching inside or outside college.

Although the past two decades have witnessed rapid social and economic development in China, teachers in China as a whole are still relatively underpaid. In order to supplement their income, many English teachers do a second or even a third extra teaching job. Such a heavy workload constrains teachers from carrying out classroom research, which obviously takes time and energy without bringing them immediate financial rewards. Consequently, few teachers will spend time analysing learners' needs or designing their own syllabi, nor will they collect suitable materials to create communicative tasks and activities. Overall, as a full-time university teacher of English for 20 years, I am well aware that such a heavy workload means the quality of teaching suffers. Teachers frequently lecture to students using much used printed texts and repeating the same language points, which makes their teaching easy and safe but proves to be non-communicative and not very effective.

Economic constraints

For the teachers who desire to develop and use their own materials for communicative activities, there are economic constraints, too. For instance, teachers have to pay for photocopying supplementary handouts for the whole class. In many cases, money needs to be collected from the students. But if the students are reluctant to pay, teachers have to make do without the necessary handouts. University libraries do not contain enough authentic English books, newspapers and magazines for teacher and student use. Overhead projectors, data projectors and computers are not available for teachers in classrooms. The unavailability of resources takes up much of the teachers' energy and time, making teaching preparation a painstaking

process. Consequently, all this discourages teachers from appreciating the deserved value of CLT. It is worth noting that this phenomenon is not unique to English Departments where the empirical survey was conducted but can be found everywhere across institutions at various levels in China.

6.7. Discussion of findings

These comments reveal that EFL education innovation entails reform right across the board, and it does not just require a radical change in teaching methodology. It involves other areas of the EFL education reform, which cover more subtle aspects of education in China, such as, educational philosophies, the testing system, curriculum design, textbook writing, staff training, design and selection of classroom activities, and so on. Without a well-defined theoretical framework and practical suggestions as a guideline, EFL innovation of teaching methodology will not succeed. On the other hand, the major elements listed above also reveal the need for teachers to upgrade their own professional competence and to pursue higher-level classroom-based research. Teachers need to have an opportunity to re-evaluate their beliefs and practices, and become aware of how to avoid dull repetition of the same predictable set of materials, and activities, year in year out. These views may sound too optimistic to some teachers, but as the findings of this study show, there seems no reason to assume that the majority of teachers would not welcome such opportunities along with the reform of EFL teaching in China.

6.8. Interim summary

In general, the informants' comments shed light on the major findings of the quantitative data regarding why both student and teacher groups favoured or disfavoured the traditional teaching approach or the communicative approach, and the possible reasons for the perceived mismatch between the groups as revealed in Chapter 5. The qualitative data supplement and validate the findings of quantitative data in the following ways:

<u>Student group</u>

Students' comments both supplement and validate the findings of many questionnaire items in the quantitative survey (Q48, Q41, Q47. Q18, Q19, Q36, Q37). For instance, students' comments shed light on why they found their learning styles sort of problematic (Q48, Q41). It seems that many Chinese EFL learners mistakenly see a large repertoire of English vocabulary as a shortcut to improving their English proficiency. They learn English vocabulary by heart in an isolated way rather than by learning words in the context of a text or a situation.

The qualitative data also showed that students' poor motivation was closely connected with teachers' classroom instruction practice (Q47, Q18, See Appendix C-2 for further information). This finding is congruent with an earlier study by Garder and MacIntyre (1993). They argue that learner's motivation and attitudes to the language learning situation are determined by such factors as: what and how they learned and how they were taught, including classroom activities, materials and the teacher's presentation, and learners' comments. With regard to the learning and teaching of culture (Q 36, Q37), learners' comments validated their choices on the questionnaire. They expressed a strong desire for a pedagogical integration of culture teaching / learning into English language learning since they found a deficiency in their knowledge about Western cultures. The students' comments on TCA and SCA were most informative and consolidated and validated their choices made in the questionnaire as to why they favoured or disfavoured TCA and SCA. However, it is worth noting that the students did not tend to discard TCA totally, nor embrace SCA without any hesitation, even though they expressed their strong preference of SCA over TCA (Q18, 19). It is very important to point out that an unexpected finding from the qualitative data is the students' repeated complaints about their perceived deficiency in critical thinking competence, which, they believe, prevents them from conducting meaningful interactive learning activities in class as well as from further developing in their future career.

<u>Teacher group</u>

The teachers' comments helped validate and elucidate why they favoured TCA in their classes and why they did not like SCA and vice versa. Their oral and written responses showed that they were more in favour of SCA than TCA and they all realized the importance of culture teaching and learning in EFL education at tertiary level (See Appendix C-3). Their detailed accounts of constraints confronting them in their effort to use communicative teaching methods revealed that the challenge was daunting for Chinese EFL teachers. This also consolidated the opinions of blending the best of TCA and SCA rather than a radical importation of CLT principles wholesale into China. Although many teachers surveyed favoured SCA, and sounded positive about a blend of the traditional and communicative approaches, their views were not reflected in their teaching practice (See Chapter 7 for further discussion).

However, like any other classroom-based EFL research, this qualitative survey still has its weaknesses. For instance, little detailed valuable information was elicited concerning how teachers themselves thought their beliefs about EFL influenced their conceptions of CLT, and to what extent teachers wanted to implement CLT in their own teaching practice. Perhaps, these questions would be closely related to one's own linguistic and intercultural competence which are needed to implement communicative teaching. When asked, some teachers surveyed just gave a short reply that 'it is still in the stage of experiment and I am accumulating knowledge and experience in this regard'. It also seems that there is a tendency for teachers to blame the constraints that are beyond their own control rather than admitting that they have insufficient knowledge of CLT. However, I feel that these weaknesses can be compensated by the findings in the classroom observations, presented and discussed in Chapter 7.

Chapter summary

In this chapter, I have given an account of both students' and teachers' comments on TCA and SCA as well as the major problems and constraints in their process of learning and teaching English. This was followed by relevant discussion and analysis. Details were also given concerning why they liked or disliked TCA or SCA

to shed light on the choices they made in the questionnaires. Finally I have given an account of how this qualitative survey in this study supplemented or validated the findings of the quantitative research. In the next chapter, I will present the findings of classroom observation.

Chapter 7

Classroom observation

Introduction

This chapter presents the procedures used for classroom observation and the teachers' attitudes towards it. Details are given concerning classroom observations of 5 English language teacher participants in the English Department, Nankai University to see whether the generally favourable attitudes held by teachers towards the communicative teaching approach were reflected in their classroom practice. Two of the five participants, Ms. Lan and Ms. Shan are selected for detailed comparison and analysis. Following this, I discuss the four interrelated contributory factors which have led to the discrepancy between what the teachers claimed to do and what they actually did in class. Finally, some pedagogical suggestions are given concerning the improvement of teachers' instructional practice in English class.

7.1. Procedures used for classroom observation

As mentioned in Chapter 4.10, the procedure used for classroom observation was 'semi-structured' in the sense that I focused on the proceedings of the class events as a whole instead of specific activities in the classroom. This enabled me to 'capture more meaningful class events than determining in advance what to look for in the observed context' (Seliger & Shohamy, 1989). In other words, I paid great attention to three dimensions at the procedural level - classroom instruction, practice and interaction as emphasized by Richards and Rodgers (1986). *Instruction* here means the way the teacher delivers the course in the class. *Practice* is defined as the language or language-related activities assigned by teachers for the students to do

during the class. *Interaction* refers to the exchange of information between the teacher and the students or between the students, according to unequal information distribution or the 'information gap' (Richards & Rodgers, 1986). These three dimensions provide guidelines for the following discussion of the participants' teaching behaviours during the class in this study.

When observing the class, I sat at the back of the classroom because all the classes observed were teacher-fronted. In order not to make the teacher feel uncomfortable and at the same time to make the class observation as authentic and natural as possible, I did not tape-record the classroom process. I took notes on the events that were going on in the class (types of practice, types of interactions and class events and so on). Altogether 16 hours of English classes were observed. (See Table-4.5 in Chapter 4 for the details of teacher participants, class hours and the courses observed). Prior to discussion of participants' teaching behaviours, it is worthwhile giving brief background information on teachers' general attitudes towards classroom observation so that readers may have a clear idea as to why the classroom observation proved to be a most sensitive aspect of this study.

7.2. Teachers' attitudes towards classroom observation

Classroom observation proved to be quite unpopular as far as the teachers were concerned. Some teachers, especially senior ones in their early or mid fifties, whom I contacted in person or by telephone, tactfully declined the request, declaring that they would feel quite 'uncomfortable' having their lessons observed. One teacher in his mid 50's who taught the course *Introduction to Cultural Backgrounds for major English-speaking countries* declined bluntly when I approached him with my request to observe his class. The teacher just said very modestly 'this lesson is not very interesting and not worth observing. Please do not waste your time'. I was very surprised to hear that the teacher thought his own lecturing was 'not interesting'. If this was the case, I wondered, what would his students think of his lecture? This seemed to justify Liu's (1997) remarks about the role of observing classes and its implications in the Chinese EFL context. According to Liu (1997), classroom observation was viewed negatively by teachers as it was always regarded as a means

of assessing teaching. No matter what other purposes observation might have, the professional reputation of the observed teacher's 'face' was at stake. (Scollon & Scollon, 1995; Ting-Toomey, 1999).

Their reluctance to accept classroom observation was derived from their deep-rooted misunderstanding of the purpose of the research project and also previous negative experiences. Some teachers thought classroom observation was fruitless, amounted to faultfinding and even counter-productive, since it made the observed teacher feel nervous and threatened and was therefore not representative of a normal lesson. Managing to convince them that I was coming to the class as an individual researcher, not in any official capacity, I finally got five teachers to agree to be observed.

7.3. Teacher participants' teaching behaviours in their classes

A close examination of the data collected through class observations shows remarkable similarities in the types of instructional activities, class practices and teacher-student or student-student 'interactions' observed in all 5 participants' classes. Some striking differences are also revealed between Lan and the other teachers in the way communicative activities were carried out in the class. It is important to note that class practices can be further divided into two categories: text-based and non-text based. The former is invariably non-communicative in the sense that there is no information gap between the speaker and listeners. For instance, in Shan's class, she asked one student to read the paragraph aloud before she went through the text in a traditional sentence-by-sentence way. She sometimes asked the whole class a few questions which were listed on the right-hand side of the textbook or some grammatical questions, including paraphrasing some new words or verbal phrases. For example, when she came across the following sentence in the text:

> ... I did a 30-feet-long *mural* for which I laboriously copied hieroglyphics onto the sheet of brown paper. But no one ever told me what they *stood for?*

She asked the whole class, 'what does the verbal phrase *stand for* mean?' and then asked a male student to give a synonym of the word *mural*. The student answered: *fresco,* but no difference or similarities was explained between the two words.

Non-text-based activities were somewhat communicative although at times they could be non-communicative as well. For instance, in Lan's class, students were divided into groups of 3-4 to discuss the topic 'ethnic minority discrimination' in relation to the text materials. This reflected the communicative nature of the class observed. However, also in Lan's class, when students were required to take turns doing an oral presentation in front of the class, almost all of them just *read* their pre-prepared notes rather than *talked* about the topic freely. There were no questions and answers after each presentation. Their activity was useful only in so far as speakers had to make themselves understood by the whole class. No communicating or exchanging ideas with each other took place.

The teachers' patterns of classroom instruction and class activities are summarized in Table-7.1 and 7.2 respectively. The similarities and differences between what teachers said and actually did in their classes are listed in Appendix D-1.

As can be seen from Table-7.1 and 7.2 below, despite the differences in the types of courses and teaching materials taught, the five participants were extremely similar in the two key aspects of teaching: *instruction* and *practice*. During instruction, they mainly focused on language structure and grammatical points and followed the textbook very closely. Students were under tight control when they did text-based exercises which covered sentence structure, text-related questions and answers. Another common characteristic was that the content of instruction was determined by text materials used in class, reflecting heavy dependence on the teaching materials (See Table 7.1 and 7.2).

Table7.1. Teachers' teaching patterns in the class

Name	Course	Pattern of Teaching Steps followed in class by the teachers
Lan	**Comprehensive Reading** 2nd-year U	1. Asking students to give oral presentation 2. Briefly recapping the main points 3. *Going over the text sentence by sentence* 4. *Doing text-related exercises* 5. Putting students in groups for discussion
Shan	**Comprehensive Reading** 2nd-year U	1. Asking students to give 'news report' 2. English dictation 3. *Going over the text sentence by sentence* 4. *Asking students to paraphrase new words* 5. *Doing text-related exercises*
Ming	**Introduction to Western Cultures** 2nd-year U	1. *Asking student to read a paragraph aloud* 2. *Going over the text sentence by sentence* 3 *explaining new words, cultural information* 4 *Doing text-related exercises by asking or answering questions*
Cai	**International Business Reading** 3rd-year U	1. *Asking students to read a paragraph aloud* 2. *Going over the text sentence by sentence* 3. *Explaining some business terms* 4. Offering some background information
Chang	**Linguistics** 4th-year U	1. Going over the text materials by listing key points and terms 2. *Going over the text materials closely* 3. *Explaining terms and key words*

Notes:

U stands for undergraduate students majored in English language

Italics refer to the similarities among the teachers observed.

Table-7.2.   Types of class events

Name	Classroom Instruction	Class Events	
		Text-based	**Non-text-based**
Lan	*¹Explaining new words in text; demonstrating usage.* Providing cultural information. *Going over a text sentence by sentence.*	Asking students questions listed on the textbook and asking them to paraphrase new words.	**Asking students to discuss a topic in small groups;** Asking students to do a presentation (pre-prepared written speech)
Shan	*Explaining new words in the text; demonstrating usage. Going over the text sentence by sentence.*	Asking students to paraphrase new words in the text.	Asking students to come to the front and give news report (pre-prepared written speech)
Ming	*Explaining* new *words,* places of historical interest in the text *Going over the texts sentence by sentence*	Asking students to answer the text-based questions listed on the textbook.	None
Cai	Explaining the new words and business terms in a text. *Going over the text sentence by sentence*	Asking students to paraphrase new words / terms.	None
Chang	Explaining definitions of linguistics and then referring back to the text materials	Occasionally asking some text-based questions	None

Although different sub-types of practice could be distinguished under both text-based and non-text-based activities, the teachers' classroom practice was characterized by two features when they engaged students in text-based activities. First, the students had to be familiar with the text before they were able to complete the exercises in the class. Second, the classroom activities provided very few opportunities for the students to engage in genuine communication because these activities did not generally require information gaps, nor did they require efforts to work towards the

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¹ Italics in Tables 7.1, 7.2. and 7.3 indicate the similarities of teaching patterns observed in the classes of teacher participants.

communicative goals with the exception of group discussions on a designated topic in Lan's class. Students merely answered the questions based on the text content which had just been closely analysed in the class (See Appendix D-1 for further information).

However, it was worth noting that there existed striking difference between the communicative group discussion in Lan's class and those non-communicative activities in the other four participants' classes. Lan was the only teacher among these participants to engage students in a communicative group discussion on a designated topic relating to the text. Regarding oral practice activities, only Lan and Shan required students, in turns, to go to the front of the class and give an oral presentation. Both Lan's and Shan's classrooms shared common approaches to the way the oral practice was carried out. As was evident in the observation, the real problem was not of the oral practice per se, but the way students did their oral practice. During the presentation each speaker actually *read* his or her pre-prepared written note rather than *talked about* the topic freely. Consequently, there was no interaction between speaker and listeners. No questions and answers were elicited based on the content presented. Everyone took turns, one after another. It was more like students doing individual homework than engaging in communication with peers. Further discussion and analysis of this is continued in the following section.

7.4. Comparison of interaction between Lan's and Shan's classes: communicative plus traditional methods

As mentioned above in 7.1, three dimensions at the procedural level were the focus of classroom observations. The results of observation showed that the instruction style of 5 teacher participants was remarkably similar: a traditional approach in which text content was dealt with very closely with emphasis placed on structure and grammatical points. The following discussion focuses on the other two dimensions: class practice and interaction, which should indicate how well communicative or non-communicative activities were taking place. As shown in Table-7.3 below, the main similarities and discrepancies lay in the ways in which communicative activities were

organized and conducted in the class. Table 7.3 highlights the similarities and differences between Lan and Shan in their teaching styles.

Table 7.3. Similarities and Discrepancies

Teacher	Similarities		Discrepancies	
	Oral practice students	*Interaction T and S*	*Communicative activities*	*Interaction S and S*
Lan	*Reading* Oral presentation	Very Limited	Group discussion on a given topic	Yes
Shan	*Reading* news report	Very Limited	None	None

Note: *S*: standing for students; *T*: standing for Teachers.

7.4.1. Discrepancies

As shown above, the discrepancy between Lan and Shan was that Lan's class was more communicative in nature than Shan's class because Lan engaged her students in the communicative activities via group discussions which seemed to be favoured by students (as shown in Q1, 2, 3, 5 in the questionnaire survey). Students could practise their spoken English by communicating with one another in a group. It was Lan's class which the students liked most. In Lan's class, when students were doing communicative activities (small group discussion on a designated topic), the whole class was divided into 5-6 groups with 3 or 4 students in one group. The students started discussing the topic and some of them looked up new words in the dictionary for their talk. Other students took notes while listening to their peers. It seemed that the discussion went well and students were active in the group work. After the group discussion, one student from each group gave a short summary to the whole class. It was interesting to point out that the report-back speakers from each group *talked about* the summary with only an occasional reference to a written note. This was because they did not have enough time to complete their summary in written form and had to list some key points which they needed to present.

Judging from the spontaneity and fluency of their *free talk,* it seemed that their oral presentation mentioned above in the Section 7.3 would be more communicative if the

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students had done it in this free-style manner rather than *reading* written notes. After the group summary, the teacher finally gave a brief comment by supplementing the topic with some further information. It is worth mentioning that students' summary reports reflected their limited knowledge about the topic under discussion as they had little experience or knowledge of ethnic minority discrimination in China. They mainly talked about the cultural differences among different nationalities in China rather than ethnic minority discrimination. This points to the necessity of selecting a discussion topic that can match the students' understanding and experience of the outside world to ensure a more fruitful group discussion. But in Shan's class, there was no such communicative group work. Students were given opportunities to practise their oral English without genuine interaction either between teacher and students or between students themselves.

7.4.2. Similarities

As shown in Table 7.1, 7.2, and 7.3, the similarities between the two teachers were mainly in the following two aspects: 1. going over the text content in a sentence-by-sentence way (See Section 7.3), and 2. oral practice. Apart from the similar ways both teachers dealt with the text materials, both teachers also showed one common feature in the way they engaged their students in oral English practice in class: teachers had inadequate expectation of their students in terms of their [the students'] classroom behaviours. The students in both classes, when giving oral presentation or news report, *read* the pre-prepared written notes instead of *talking* about the topic spontaneously in front of the class. Consequently no real interaction took place between the teacher and the students or among the students themselves.

Shan's class

In Shan's class, the students were required to take turns to come to the front of the class to tell the whole class 4 pieces of news in English. As revealed in the observation, a student came to the front and began *reading* her pre-prepared note.

The teacher did not see her role as one of guiding her students to *talk about* rather than to *read* their presentation. There was no interaction involved between speaker

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and listeners. The classroom atmosphere was not active and some students paid divided attention to the speaker. While the 'news reporter' was reading, I noticed from my position of seat in the class, a girl sitting in front of me was reading a novel *Gone with the wind,* and two male students on the right side were either looking up new words in an electronic dictionary or doing something else. The teacher, Shan, made corrections every now and then and offered extra information while a student was *reading* her news report.

Lan's class

In Lan's class, the students were asked to give an oral presentation individually on the topic *what makes a good teacher or a good student in the 21st century?* Students had almost a week to prepare a presentation on this topic. In the class students took turns to give a 4-minute oral presentation. Not unlike in Shan's class, the striking feature of this oral practice was that speakers also *read* their pre-prepared written speech rather than *talked* about it. The teacher noted the key points out of each speech and then wrote them down on the blackboard after each individual speaker finished his or her speech.

I observed that, at least half of the speakers had no direct eye contact with the audience and seldom used gestures to enhance her or his speech. A male speaker, with his hands behind his back, just stared at his note while *reading* his presentation. It was amazing to find in this model teacher's class, neither atmosphere nor effort was made to get her students to *talk about* rather than *read* their presentation. After the observation, I discussed this with Lan and asked her for her comment on students' 'reading presentation'. It was clear that she did not consider *reading out* the presentation to be a problem at all. According to Lan, each student's presentation performance was given a mark which would count towards his or her total end of semester mark. Students took it very seriously and spent a lot of time on preparing the topic. Lan explained that her students wanted to do a good presentation in front of the class. Therefore they tended to believe 'reading out' obviously was a safe way to reflect the time and effort they devoted to their preparation. Explicitly asking them not to refer to their notes when they did their oral presentation might have been counter productive, she claimed. They may feel very nervous and would not have

been able to express themselves fluently. Many students would try to memorize their pre-prepared notes and it would be very likely that some of them might forget their 'lines' during their presentation. Students were worried that such a poor performance would not do justice to the work that they had done as part of their presentation. They felt safer referring to their notes. Lan concluded that her students' proficiency in English was not yet good enough and teachers could not expect too much at this stage. 'More haste, less speed'.

Her remarks showed clearly why *she* did not even expect her students to *talk about* rather than *read* the topic in her class. She thought *reading out* would reflect how much effort each of her students put into preparing the topic, and consequently lead to a good performance. It seemed that Lan was not clear of what difference it would make by explaining to students explicitly the beneficial functions of talking freely during the oral practice. Referring back to the summary talk by report-back speakers at the end of group discussion in Lan' class, it can be seen that although students did not speak English very fluently or in other words, they *talked* less fluently than they *read*, their efforts would pay off. Through doing this, students would gradually overcome their nervousness and shyness.

7.5. Comments on Lan's and Shan's classes

As is evident, a complex mix of affective, sociocultural, and educational factors were at work in determining the way students behaved in class, such as fear of negative evaluation (Horwitz *et al*, 1986) by teacher and peers, anxiety, fear of losing face, their lack of self-confidence in their proficiency in English and the habits they had acquired unconsciously over the their school experience. Apart from the cultural influence on language learning and teaching as mentioned in Chapter 3, the following 3 points relating to the students' classroom behaviour and teachers' instruction practice are worth making clear. 1. students' oral presentation assessment, 2. students' anxiety about speaking English, 3. teacher's inadequate feedback

Assessment

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The students were told that the presentation they were required to do would count towards the end of the semester course grade. Students cared about scores very much. They viewed them as a vital part of their credibility vis-à-vis their classmates. Moreover, for students to receive the annual Nankai University Academic Merit Award, the average score of their total course grade is taken into account. It is not surprising that their 'free-talk' style would be negatively affected by their concern about the score they obtained in their oral presentation. They believed that a high score was a reflection of knowledge and ability. Prompted by this belief, students would tend to evaluate the outcome of the presentation solely in terms of the score they got rather than how much communicative work they did in class.

So the students cared more about scores than the communicative nature of the oral practice. They rated the score as a strong indicator of competence and credibility (face) in the eyes of their classmates. This is in contrast to the educational philosophy in the Western countries underlying CLT principles, in which interactive activities were emphasised, fluency was viewed more important than accuracy and 'students are encouraged not only to develop academic competence, but also to demonstrate communicative competence in a social setting in order to do well in school' (Gilmore, 1985: 139 cited in Liu, 2002:512).

Anxiety in relation to speaking English in class

During a free talk after the class, many students mentioned that they would feel very anxious and nervous without referring to notes when they spoke English in front of the whole class. This issue is not new. Earlier studies suggest that anxiety matters to students of all abilities and high language anxiety is related to students' negative concepts of themselves as language learners, and negative expectations for their language learning talents (Bailey, 1983; Horwitz *et al.* 1986; Price 1991). This is especially the case when there is heavy ego-involvement (Bailey 1983; Horwitz *et al.* 1986; Price 1991; Young 1990; MacIntyre & Gardner, 1989, 1994). MacIntyre & Gardner (1994) stress that learner-perceptions are important in the matter of reducing language anxiety, and studies of students' negative correlations between anxiety and output quality indicate that anxious students have more difficulty expressing

themselves and tend to underestimate their level of ability (self-derogation) compared with more relaxed students (self-enhancement) (MacIntyre & Gardner 1994). Anxious students are capable of showing high levels of achievement, given sufficient time to study and practice (MacIntyre & Gardner 1994: 298). It is important for teachers to identify anxious students and any elements of the classroom environment which produce this reaction (Horwitz *et al,* 1986). In addition, teachers should study how learners' anxiety interacts with different teaching methods and personality variables such as learning styles, motivation, and personality types, and what techniques are effective in coping with it. In addition, making explicit to learners the beneficial functions of practice for real communicative purposes could help them to reduce the level of anxiety 'along with their development of EFL language skills' (MacIntyre & Gardner, 1994).

<u>Teacher's inadequate feedback</u>

Another common feature which was identified in both teachers' classes was inadequate feedback by the teachers. Some typical linguistic and lexical errors made by student speakers escaped their attention which could lead to students' fossilization of these errors. For instance, in Lan's class, while reading her written presentation on the topic of 'the qualities of being a good teacher', a female student began her speech with

> *During the journey of my study,* there are some teachers who I respect very much…I dreamed of being a teacher in my childhood because a teacher can *control* a large group of students…But later on I know that to be a teacher is easy, but to be a good teacher is not easy (Italics: my emphasis).

Her speech exposed a typical problem that Chinese students had in learning English - Chinese English or Chinglish as it is often called. Speakers express their ideas in English but with a typical Chinese lexical variation which sounds awkward to native English speakers. In her speech, *during the journey of my study* is a word for word translation from the Chinese which would be in English 'in the course of my English study' or simply 'during the years of my English study'. Yet this escaped the teacher's attention. Uncorrected Chinglish expressions would be fossilized in the

classroom, which is very often the only place Chinese students can be exposed to the target language, especially spoken English. In this study, Chinglish or Chinese English is used to refer to 'English sentences that are grammatically correct but they make either no sense or mean something very different from speakers' intentions' (Shi 1994 cited in Kent, 1999: 198). The main reason why students had this problem was that they used English words but still thought in Chinese - something very difficult to spot because Chinese speakers are influenced by their mother tongue (Shi, 1994 cited in Kent, 1999: 198). Unfortunately, this typical error escaped Lan's attention and was totally ignored.

In addition, none of the speakers said *thank you* at the end of their speech. There was an obvious lack of eye contact, gestures, and facial expressions – the indicators of communication skills in their speech. They were concerned only about *reading* their speech and being understood in class. There was virtually no interaction. No elements of strategic competence were emphasized, or even pointed out in class by either teacher or students. This reflected students' deficiency in communication skills. On the other hand, it also revealed that teachers needed to correct their own misconceptions of communicative language teaching. They should have a clear understanding of the nature and aim of providing students with oral English practice in the class. Karavas-doukas (1996:188) has stressed the significance of correct attitudes and perceptions teachers hold on classroom instruction. He notes that teachers' educational attitudes and theories, although in many cases held unconsciously, would have an effect on their classroom behaviour, and could influence what students actually learn.

7.6. Interim summary

As is evident above, the comparison shows that both teachers adopted the traditional teaching method to deal with the text materials. At the same time, they stressed the importance of students' oral practice in class. However, the striking difference was that Lan's class consisted of two parts: communicative and non-communicative activities. During the communicative activities, students were engaged in communicative group discussions while in Shan's class, there were no such a

communicative aspect of learning activities. As for non-communicative activities, the teacher dealt with the text content in the traditional way.

From my observation, it can be seen that in Lan' class the students were more actively engaged in communicative activities than those in the rest of the classes observed. The students' feedback in Lan's class indicated that they enjoyed the combination of traditional ways of dealing with the text content and communicative group activities in the class because the crossover blend helped them both acquire new language items and be given an opportunity to improve their oral English. Students would feel much safer to speak English in a small group rather than do it in front of the whole class. The results supported the findings of the questionnaire data that the 2nd-year students favoured the traditional way of dealing with the text content (Q20) and at the same time, they liked group work, too (Q1, Q3). They would like to be active in group work but would be afraid of speaking English in front of the whole class (Q5, Q75). When asked to comment on the class, some students in Lan's class remarked that 'we like it' because 'we feel that we have learned something from the teacher and in the meantime, we have practised our own spoken English in the class'.

In Shan's class, on the other hand, the class atmosphere was not lively and students paid scant attention to the 'news-reporter' and to the teacher. The observation showed that Lan had made an effort to include some communicative activities in her instruction and the result was positive based on students' responses. But the other teachers seemed unprepared for change in this direction. It should be noted that even Lan, as a model teacher in the English Department , Nankai University for her effort in initiating CLT in her class, still had much to learn about English language teaching and learning. She needed to revise her views of the roles of being a teacher and a student in her efforts to integrate both traditional and communicative approaches. The way her students *read out* their oral presentation showed that she had not fully understood the implications of interactive communicative work.

Despite the merits and demerits, an obvious problem worth addressing relates to oral practice activities identified in both classes. As mentioned above, the results of classroom observation revealed a deep-seated misconception about CLT on the part of the teachers. Their misplaced expectations of students' oral work led to students'

dependence on *reading* prior-prepared notes as they did their oral presentation. They should have been talking about it or engaging in a spontaneous exchange of ideas among their peers. In fact, this misconception was not an isolated case. In the eyes of many teachers, CLT meant less 'teacher talk' and more 'student talk' regardless of 'nature' and 'spontaneity' of the talk per se. When asked why she did not encourage her students to *talk about* rather than to *read* their presentation in class as mentioned above, Lan replied that 'students lacked confidence for free talk in class. The pre-prepared speech would give students more time to organize their ideas, and therefore would make them think deeply. She claimed that it would lead to accuracy in terms of content and form. Last but not least, she argued that 'reading' would boost their confidence and minimize the number of errors, and thus reflect the real effort students had put into the task. It was obvious that it was the teacher's attitudes that set the scene for the learners' heavy dependence on accuracy rather than fluency.

However, since there was no information gap nor interaction between speaker and listeners, the 'audience' would, in all likelihood, become bored or lose interest or even become distracted while their peers were 'reading' as was shown in the observation. It was hard to deny that a well-prepared presentation would allow students to draw upon their L2 or even L1 lexical, phonological, and structural resources to polish their individual speech with clarity and precision. However, it must be pointed out that by 'reading their notes', the underlying aim of the learning task would be side-stepped and the question of cultivation of their ability to use the language appropriately for real communicative purposes avoided.

It can be seen that both teachers and students were focused more on 'accuracy' than 'fluency'. (Here, 'fluency' does not refer to 'reading fluently', of course, but to overall proficient spoken and spontaneous language). Such a 'reading' practice seemed to be more relevant to the evaluation of their production skills (pronunciation, intonation, and content) than producing comprehensible output through interaction and meaningful exchange of information in the class, even if the topic per se was very interesting.

This highlights the need for teachers to change their deeply-ingrained attitudes and perceptions of the nature of communicative learning activities and their teaching practice. Karavas-doukas (1996) points out that teachers can play a crucial role in determining the implementation of an approach, which, in turn, influences student learning behaviour in class.

Consequently, both teachers and students should be aware that classroom activity of this kind alone was not sufficient for developing learners' communicative competence as there was little interaction or negotiation of meaningful content in its real sense. It should be noted that it would be a completely different scenario if the teachers had explained explicitly to the whole class the beneficial functions of *talking about* their ideas rather than *reading* their written notes during the presentation so that on-the-spot feedback (questions and answers from the teacher and the students) could be exchanged. In so doing, the students' potential would be aroused and brought into play. This phenomenon revealed the teachers' lack of proper understanding of CLT and therefore led them to have low expectation of their students.

Howe (1993) stresses the significance of the teacher's role in influencing learners' classroom behaviours. He asserts that irrespective of cultural traits inherent in learners' learning styles, teachers' expectations of their students are a vital factor in determining students' classroom behaviours. The observation revealed in most of the classes observed for this study, the teachers had inadequate expectations of their students in terms of stimulating students' interest in and enthusiasm for communicative activities.

It can be seen that teachers' perceptions and expectations influenced significantly their classroom teaching, as well as the way students behaved in the class. In our study, neither the teacher nor the students considered this fact as a problem. The common conception was that the painstaking accumulation of incremental language items alone would equip learners to use the language in the future. 'Practice makes perfect' and 'strenuous effort would lead automatically to success in the end', as the Chinese proverbs have it.

On the learners' part, it was interesting to note that the above *reading-not-talking* presentation also revealed that the students were subjected to what Hofstede (1991) terms 'high degree of uncertainty avoidance' which is characterized by avoiding taking risks in the classroom for fear of 'making errors or losing face' (See Chapter 3 for discussion). If, however, the teachers could think differently and make explicit to the students value of 'free talking', the students would feel more confident and be equipped to engage in communicative interaction. Then the classroom could become the lively and cooperative environment in which students were encouraged to participate. Such a strategy requires enormous effort from both teachers and students alike for the communicative approach to work. This assumption is supported by the students' positive responses to Q3 and Q5 regarding small group activities in this study (See Chapter 5 for details).

7.7. General discussion of classroom observation

As shown above, Lan's class was relatively communicative in nature while the classes of the other 4 participants were not. My classroom observation brought to light the evident weaknesses of their teaching methods. This finding contradicted the teachers' positive responses to the communicative approach in the questionnaire survey. However, it is encouraging to note that there is light at the end of this communicative teaching tunnel. My observation of Lan's class revealed that the combination of both traditional and communicative approach could be more effective in offering learners more opportunities to speak English and engaging them in communicative activities. The following sections (7.7.1. and 7.7.2) focus on the teaching methods used by the teacher participants as revealed in their classes. The Section 7.8 addresses the new hope in the current situation of combining CLT with the traditional approach in China. Section 7.9 focuses on the analysis of mismatch between what teachers claimed to be or to do and what they actually did in class.

7.7.1. Traditional methods in reading class: not seeing the wood for the trees

My classroom observation revealed that the way in which the teachers dealt with the text materials was problematic. They used a traditional grammar-translation method

in which the teachers explained in detail the word's meaning and usage, sentence formation, and English grammar. This method failed to promote extensive reading skills, thus hindering students from ever reading fluently (Li, 1984) because, in Dzau's (1990) words, 'students were taught to focus on each word in a text and to examine the text carefully for any unknown grammatical phenomenon' (p. 83). Using this method, they would often 'miss the thread of the argument, the relationship between parts of a text and the text's main idea' (ibid.). The exclusive use of such methods would result in English reading courses that are mere extension of supplementary exercises for vocabulary building and grammar learning. Consequently the logical meaning and cultural content inherent in the text would be lost 'in a jumble of words and structures' (Zhang, 2003:51).

If Chinese students' reading skills remain poor, their listening and speaking skills are usually weaker, and their writing skills are the weakest because they do not use the target language for real communicative purposes (Fang & Warschauer, 2004: 302). The findings in this study support this. Many 3rd-year and 4th-year students in this study frequently complained about what they saw as their own weakness in critical thinking competence (See Chapter 6 for details). It should be noted that the different components of communicative competence are interrelated and the development of one competence will affect that of another (Savignon, 2002).

In spite of teachers' positive responses to communicative approach in the questionnaire survey, the classroom observation showed that the teachers mainly focused on the traditional teaching methods. This reflects the Chinese traditional notion of foreign language learning which involves a progression from a quantitative accumulation of knowledge to the final qualitative improvement. Dzau (1990) points out that the Chinese traditional value of learning suggests that memorizing the target language's vocabulary and studying its grammar will automatically foster fluency, flexibility and appropriate use of language. It is believed that creativity will flow naturally in time, from discipline to proficiency in rote memorization, there is no need for the teacher to encourage fluency per se (Fang & Warschauer, 2004).

As is evident in the survey findings, this traditional teaching method is a root cause of students' dependence on teachers and the holding up of their lack of critical

thinking competence. It teaches learners to see 'only the trees, not the wood' in reading an English text.

7.7.2. Bottom-up and top-down information processing in reading English

Rumelhart (1980) points out that a reading text only provides directions for readers as to how they should retrieve or construct meaning from their own previously acquired knowledge and this previously acquired knowledge structure is called schema theory. According to this, comprehending words, sentences and entire texts involves more than just relying on one's linguistic theory. Efficient comprehension requires the ability to relate the textual materials to one's own knowledge (ibid.). Clark and Silberstein (1977) point out that there exist two information processing approaches, namely, bottom-up processing and top-down processing. Bottom-up processing is triggered by the incoming data and is also called data-driven because the data enters the system through the best-fitting, bottom level schemata. It focuses learners on the individual components of spoken and written message, that is, the phonetics, graphemes, individual words and grammatical elements which need to be comprehended in order to understand these messages (Nunan, 1991). Top-down processing takes place as the system makes general predictions based on higher level, i.e. general schema, which means background knowledge in reading comprehension (Clark & Silberstein 1977: 136). 'It focuses learners on macro-features of text such as the writer's or speaker's purpose, the topic of the message, the overall structure of the text and so on' (Nunan 1991: 4).

Wang (2001) points out that the traditional teaching method of covering the text in a sentence-by-sentence manner is a focus on bottom-up processing strategy at the expense of seeking the macro-features of the text covered. It tends to rely too much on bottom-up processing on individual words and analysing sentence structure. It ignores the importance of applying top-down processing for the overall view of the text. This omission can hinder the development of good reading skills by failing to furnish the necessary background information and by leaving dormant any critical or analytical thought processes.

Needless to say, readers must understand the individual parts of the text as part of grasping the overall meaning of the text materials. But early studies report that top-down thinking is crucial in processing the information. For instance, Nuttal (1983, 1996) suggests that in practice, 'effective readers continually adopt a top-down approach to predict the probable theme and then move to the bottom-up approach to check their assumption by reading details. They are 'two simultaneous and complementary ways of processing a text' (Chia, 2001). This implies that in teaching reading, 'teachers should instruct students to start their reading by using a top-down approach and later switch between the two approaches, as each kind of interpretation supports the other.' (Chia, 2001). In other words, teachers should help students to see both 'the wood and the trees' in English reading class.

Following a bottom-up processing approach, teachers view reading as a mechanical process, and tend to concentrate on the surface-level features of reading rather than the whole unit of discourse. There is no doubt, that surface and cohesive elements are important markers of meaning. However, if considered as ends in themselves and not in relation to more holistic or global markers of organization in the discourse, they will not lead to efficient production and interpretation of a text. This is supported by the students' interview accounts in that students considered this bottom-up approach used by their teachers in teaching English reading as a cause of their poor critical thinking ability (See Chapter 6 for details).

On the other hand, as the classroom observation revealed, most of the comprehension questions and practice exercises are designed at the lexical or grammatical level while skills for obtaining logical meaning are seldom taught in a systematic way. Consequently, students may be able to identify a large number of words in isolation and explain their grammatical functions, but they are unable to assign appropriate meaning to these words with regard to how they are used properly in context. This is supported by the findings of questionnaire data (Q 41). When asked whether students used new words to make a sentence so as to remember new vocabulary more effectively in a context, only 29.4% gave a positive response while 43.3% answered negatively. 28% of the students remained uncertain, indicating that they were not aware of the importance of such memory strategy (See Chapter 5 for discussion). The habit of vocabulary building was reinforced by the traditional teaching approach.

It is not surprising that students frequently complained that their own sense of logical relationships was very weak and they often felt at a loss when asked to answer 'why' or 'how' questions which obviously require logical reasoning or inference from the context in a holistic manner rather than just literal information from the text. Therefore, innovative teaching methodology which helps students comprehend overall textual meaning, over and above lexical and grammatical meaning, is what is required. 'Innovative' here means moving beyond the traditional way of teaching English reading towards some sort of communicative-oriented group discussions in class by picking up a text-related topic.

Following this line of reasoning, we can see that the words and sentences are reliable landmarks but they do not constitute the total picture. A text is a communicative occurrence involving textuality (Halliday & Hasan, 1976), without which the text does not stand up from a communicative perspective. Halliday and Hasan (1976) note that:

> A text is best regarded as a semantic unit: a unit not of form but of meaning. Thus it is related to a clause or sentence not by size but by realization, the coding of one symbolic system in another. A text does not consist of sentences; it is realized by, or encoded in, sentences (p. 2).

According to Halliday and Hasan (1976), the basic glue of a text is cohesion which concerns the ways in which surface components of the text are constituted or the relationship of one linguistic item to another in a text. These components cohere with one another by various grammatical dependences. Obviously, this dependence operates at surface level of the text and constitutes major signals for sorting out meanings and uses. However, the surface text alone is not enough. There must be interaction between cohesion and other standards of textuality to make communication efficient (Savignon, 1983). Another standard is coherence which concerns ideas within a text and the relation of all sentences or utterances in a text to a single 'global proposition' (Savignon, 1983: 39). Global proposition here refers to the structure of concepts and relations underlying the surface text. Savignon stresses that the establishment of a global meaning for a whole passage is an integral part of both expression and interpretation and makes possible the understanding of the individual sentences or utterances included in a text (Savignon, 1983: 39). A text

does not make sense by itself, but rather by the interaction of text-presented knowledge with readers' stored knowledge of the world. Thus, awareness of the notions of both cohesion and coherence would help students realize the underlying meaning of a passage and improve their reading efficiency.

7.8. Positive scenario: a light at the end of the tunnel

In spite of the shortcomings mentioned above, the findings of classroom observation suggest a positive outcome. For instance, Lan's efforts to integrate CLT into her teaching, although underdeveloped, is a positive contribution to methodological innovation and contributes much towards a long-term process of educational reform. My classroom observation revealed that Lan had two distinct components in her instruction: the first was traditional teaching aspect, and the second was the communicative aspect. It was the communicative aspect that made her class different from the other 4 teacher participants.

However, the traditional methods she used left a weak residue which reinforced a bad reading habit as mentioned above in the Section 7.6.1. This raises other questions: how do teachers evolve from a grammar-oriented classroom to a communicative one? What CLT activities most support language learning from a teacher's perspective in the existing EFL situations in China? How would teachers clarify the role of grammar in CLT? All these questions deserve further research in the future.

It is hoped that favourable feedback in Lan's class together with the praises she had received for her innovative efforts, would encourage other faculty staff to increase their commitment to methodological innovation. She shows how communicative methods can be integrated into existing teaching practice. In addition, to diffuse such a reform more broadly, the college administrators will need to introduce greater incentives by providing faculty staff with adequate in-service training programmes at home and abroad, and helping teachers to pursue a deeper understanding of CLT. The future development of CLT depends on 'correcting teachers' misconceptions of the communicative approach' (Thompson, 1996). This will significantly advance

their own professional competence. In order to help more teachers and students realize and accept the deserved values of methodological innovation, administrators should also encourage teachers and learners to express and discuss their own beliefs about language teaching and learning so that they can extend and deepen their knowledge about CLT (Fox, 1993).

7.9. Analysis of the mismatch between what teachers claimed to do and what they actually did in English classes

As mentioned above, my classroom observation also illustrates a mismatch between the teachers' positive responses to communicative approach in the questionnaire survey and their actual teaching practice in their classes. A careful examination of teacher participants' teaching behaviours and their explanations sheds light on the factors causing this gap (See Appendix D-1). There are four interrelated contributory factors that lead to the discrepancy between what most teachers said and what they actually did in class. They are discussed below.

7.9.1. Ignorance of learners' needs

Firstly, the findings of the classroom observation revealed that despite teachers' general positive attitudes towards a student-centred approach, most teachers do not have a clear idea of what their students want to do with English, either in class or in the future. This is backed up by the findings in this study that the teachers have merely gauged 49% of their students preferred classroom activities and language learning strategy use (See Chapter 5 for details). Moreover, teachers are not certain about how to achieve the objectives of SCA in their classroom instruction. Their ignorance of students' needs leads to vagueness of teaching goals, which in turn makes it inevitable that teachers rely heavily or solely on designated textbook materials to achieve the course objectives. This can result in teachers' slowness to innovate and a persistent failure to create a classroom environment conducive to learners' active participation in communicative activities. Ross (1993) argues that 'hesitant teachers see the text as their most reliable model for correct language use. Such a position is defensible primarily because their role is to reproduce in their

students the knowledge in which they themselves have been grounded' (p.108). The gap between what most teachers claimed to be doing and what they actually did in class supported the findings of an earlier study that many teachers trained in a traditional way find that it is a painful step to adjust themselves to different innovative teaching methods, and are usually unprepared when difficulties crop up. They often give up and resort to using conventional methods in their teaching (Chen, 1996: 7).

As shown in the classroom observation, this leads to the substantial amount of time spent on going over the text sentence by sentence and doing text-based exercises and activities that are mostly teacher-controlled and non-communicative in nature. Although they claimed to be in support of and adopted some features of SCA or CLT, most of them actually still use the traditional approach.

7.9.2. Traditional role of the teacher

Secondly, the heavy dependence on the text materials inevitably places the teacher in the position of 'knowledge provider'. The Chinese teacher's perceived obligation as a transmitter of received knowledge may help us understand why the act of learning English for millions of Chinese students and teachers is basically the detailed study of textbook materials.

Such a role as a knowledge provider fits well with traditional Chinese views on teaching and the teacher-student relationship, which is lubricated by respect and hierarchy. 'The teacher is viewed as a knowledge provider and students as the receivers of knowledge, and the teaching as a process of transmitting knowledge from teacher to students.' (Wu & Fang, 2002: 156). One might also call this the 'empty vessel' view of learning. This reflects the tradition of language teaching in China which has been characterized by 'teacher-centeredness, structure-based instruction and drill repetition' (Sun & Cheng, 2002: 75). With such a tradition it is not surprising that teachers surveyed have their own version or interpretation of CLT. Li (1997) reports that many Chinese teachers understand CLT as merely a concentration on listening and speaking or language games to attract students' attention. Some think that CLT is merely a method for teaching spoken English but

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not reading and writing. Other researchers point out that it is more difficult to persuade teachers than students in China to accept CLT (Anderson, 1993; Burnaby & Sun, 1989).

Although the teachers observed formally agreed with the idea that the teacher should play the role of facilitator in a communicative class, judging from their instructional behaviours, it was clear that the teachers were much more comfortable with their role as the dominant figure in class. It seems that they do not have a clear idea of how to integrate CLT into traditional language teaching or vice versa. As Maley (1982) points out:

> It is a sad observation that many teachers who exercise rigid control do so [TCA] from a sense of insecurity. They are worried about their inability to operate in a situation where everything is not in their control. This is a natural enough fear but one which experience usually proves unjustified when they try a more relaxed approach. It is a fear of the unknown more than anything else (p. 47).

Following this line of reasoning, teachers treat the classroom as the venue for imparting to students linguistic items as specified in the designated teaching materials. The role of teachers as 'knowledge provider' is further strengthened by the existing assessment system which emphasizes knowledge about the target language rather than ability to use it for a communicative purpose (Wu & Fang, 2002). As one teacher interviewee said, 'the current teaching trends are essentially unchanged. Most teachers are teaching the old way even if they use a new textbook'.

7.9.3. Misconception of CLT

Thirdly, although the CLT approach is widely recognized and promoted by the revised curriculum at tertiary level in China (English Division, 2000:13), little is actually known about what teachers understand by CLT and how to implement it in the classroom. Regardless of the rich theoretical base for CLT, 'different interpretations and variations exist at the level of design and procedure (Richards & Rogers 1986). As a result, many Chinese EFL teachers have become very confused. The results of this survey revealed that some teachers equated CLT with the teaching of spoken English. Others regarded CLT simply as a teaching method that did not

require grammar teaching. Many teachers simply view CLT as increasing student talk time and decreasing teacher talk time in class as shown in Shan's and Lan's classes. This reflected that the fact that although teachers expressed their favourable attitudes towards the communicative approach, very few classes under observation are actually communicative in nature. Teachers have a partial knowledge of CLT and their beliefs about language teaching and learning are based on their own EFL learning and teaching experience. Johnson (1994) points out that the prior beliefs based on formal language learning experiences were so powerful that teachers could not alter their beliefs without explicit alternative instructional practices (p. 451). This reveals that teachers' misconceptions must be corrected before the communicative approach can be applied in its real sense in class.

On the other hand, many teachers do not know how to set about improving their teaching and consequently cannot modify their own teaching style, nor incorporate related communicative activities in their class. The inevitable result is that they omit the communicative activities suggested in the textbooks and use the time saved for text-based pattern drill exercises or teaching supplementary materials which are not communicative-oriented in nature. For instance, in Shan's class, students were given a dictation in which the teacher read a short passage four times at a tempo much slower than normal speed.

7.9.4. Teaching culture in English class

Last but not least, a comparison between teachers' views on culture teaching and learning and the teaching behaviour during the Culture course showed clear discrepancies between what was said and what was done (See Appendix C-3). The traditional method of going over the text in a sentence-by-sentence way dominated the culture course as Ming's class revealed. The teaching and learning outcome of this course was not satisfactory as the interview data revealed that many student informants complained about the way the course was delivered.

My classroom observation showed that the culture teaching in the EFL domain amounted to treating foreign cultures as a collection of knowledge items. The teacher merely provided learners with a great deal of cultural information. In response to the

call for culture teaching and learning in EFL programmes, some target culture introduction courses are offered for English majors in many English departments as an optional course for English majors at university level. However, due to the deep-rooted traditional teaching methods prevalent in English language classrooms, these culture courses follow almost exactly the same teaching methods as used in the 'intensive reading' class. The usual process of the teaching was merely text-reading, explaining grammar, structure, language points, and translation of terms, names and places whereas more meaningful methods, such as comparison and contrast from an intercultural perspective, class discussion, and interaction between teachers and students, were seldom attempted. The traditional teaching methods employed by the teacher in the culture courses also downplayed the effectiveness of the teaching of culture regardless of the hours instructed or new courses introduced into the EFL programmes.

As Cao (1998) recounts, one of the main conventions in foreign language teaching in Chinese tertiary institutions is that culture teaching is done solely as imparting knowledge or facts. As long as learners get to know the facts, they are assumed to be equipped with competence for intercultural communications. This is reflected in Ming's culture class. It seems that teachers tend to think if culture courses are offered in the EFL programmes, Chinese EFL learners' crosscultural ability will be increased along with their EFL linguistic development. Needless to say, such a point of view is very misleading in the process of EFL teaching and learning.

Some Chinese EFL researchers propose a different approach to culture teaching in English class. Zhang (2000) suggests a task-based approach to teaching culture. Unlike the knowledge-transmission methods, this approach encourages an interactional, experiential learning concerned with the learners' own interest, and cultural knowledge is considered as 'the ability to organise thought, to interpret facts and act on them appropriately' (Zhang, 2000). Learners will be provided with the opportunities, instead of mere facts, to explore new ideas and new knowledge for themselves, and consequently they will learn more effectively and enthusiastically.

The task-based learning and teaching views cultures as something always in the making, and being dynamic. Teacher should give sufficient consideration to

teaching learners how cultural assimilation and differences have been formed and how cultural conflicts have occurred and have been dealt with in real situation. Such a comparative method would encourage students to reflect upon their own culture, and at the same time to discover new knowledge about another. Therefore it would be a useful and necessary means towards understanding a new culture, which will finally help learners enhance their communicative competence.

Some Western researchers note the importance of integrating culture and language learning and contend that language set in a meaningful communicative environment is discourse and not an artificial construct (Widdowson, 1978; Snow *et al*, 1989). Learners who are taught to treat language learning and content learning as independent processes need to be constantly reminded that without real meaning language functions and structures are likely to be learned as abstractions with little conceptual or cognitive value. Content provides a motivational basis for language learning. When learners find content interesting and informative they will have a strong desire to learn. 'Language then will be learned because it provides access to content' (Xiao *et al* 1996). A closer examination of this issue reveals three main sub-factors that have contributed to this situation in China.

Teachers' competence

As revealed in Ming's class, the teaches' own levels of intercultural sensitivity and competence cast doubt on the effectiveness and quality of the teaching of culture in EFL programmes. Given the lack of adequate intercultural competence and expertise required in the teaching of culture, the desired aim can be hardly achieved. This reveals the necessity that EFL teachers themselves should become interculturally sensitive and at the same time improve their own understanding and practice of teaching methodology. This also shows the urgency and necessity to set up a systematic staff training program with a clear theoretical and pedagogical guideline for teaching culture in English classroom. As shown in interview accounts, given the situation, it is not surprising that students feel that in culture class the aim of developing learners' cultural awareness is subordinated to improving language knowledge and cultural information. Cultivation of sociocultural competence is

ignored and just left open to individual interest rather than being incorporated as an integral part of the English language teaching and learning.

Textbooks

The selection of socio-cultural items for culture learning in EFL is still problematic as revealed in the classroom observation. The culture textbooks were more concerned about presenting facts and history and gave insufficient consideration to help teachers to teach learners such knowledge and skills as how cultural assimilation and differences had been formed and how cultural conflicts had occurred and had been dealt with in real situation. In China, there are a few cultural textbooks that introduce, in general, the cultures of major English speaking countries and these books are widely used by EFL teachers for their teaching of culture courses. I have carefully read two culture textbooks widely used by English departments at university level in China, including Nankai University. The content of these culture textbooks revealed much simplification and many stereotypes. The compilers probably are not consciously aware of this in the process of compilation. Furthermore, rarely are the sources of information or the background of the authors given in the textbooks, hence, the reader does not know whether the cultural information is from a cultural insider or outsider. For most Chinese students who have no direct exposure to the target cultures or the outside world, they are very likely to conceptualise the information contained in the textbooks as authoritative information or knowledge. It is not unlikely that they would have an impression: Englishmen are [all] conservative and Americans are [all] materialistic. Obviously, it is very simplistic and stereotyped to come to such a conclusion. Appendices D-2 and D-3 contain an example of two passages from two widely used culture textbooks which reveal stereotypical description of British and American cultures (See Appendix D-2 and D-3 for details).

The testing system in China

In two nation-wide English proficiency tests for English-majors at university level, namely, EMT-4 and EMT-8, culture does not have an explicit place as the tests focus on the knowledge about the target language. This undoubtedly discourages the

teaching and learning of culture studies. Wang (1999) points out that many teachers in China adopt a 'teach-whatever-is-tested' attitude and learners also learn 'whatever-is-tested'. Therefore, Wang calls for the inclusion of testing of cultural competence in these tests because 'it would be the major means to attract the attention from teachers and students (p.15).

Moreover, the lack of proper and effective teaching of culture in class is reflected in the topics that students chose for their graduation dissertations. I have examined the undergraduates' graduation theses which were submitted as required for BA degree in the English Department, Nankai University. The small number of cultural topics chosen by English majors, after almost four years of formal EFL learning is very revealing. For two academic years (2001 & 2002) alone, among 153 fmal-year English majors who graduated in the year of 2001, there were only 5 students (3.3%) who chose cultural topics for their dissertation. The following year, 2002, sees no major improvement: 7 (4.8%) out of 145 students. In other words, among the total of 298 students, only 12 students chose to write about cultural topics, or 4% of the total. However, even those students who chose cultural topics just gave overall descriptions or comments without a comprehensive comparison and contrast, nor any theoretical framework cited or reviewed. This phenomenon was not congruent with the findings of the questionnaire data that students expressed their strong desire to learn about Western cultures and peoples.

From a pedagogical perspective, it can be seen there is a long way to go before the teaching and learning of culture can be integrated not just *added* into the EFL programmes for English majors at university level since it requires radical innovation both in curriculum design and in teaching methodology. Further research effort is needed in this area to seek the proper integration of culture teaching into English language education.

7.10. Further discussion

My classroom observation shows that despite the shortcomings exposed in Lan's class, she tried strenuously to integrate the communicative components of CLT into her instruction. As for the rest of teachers observed in this study, it is clear that they

still mainly adhere to the traditional approach. The gap between what they claimed to be doing and what they actually did reflects not only their misconceptions about CLT, but also manifests the various challenges confronting them in adopting CLT in their English classes (See Chapter 6 for discussion). To integrate CLT into their teaching practice requires teachers to adopt attitudes in their classes which may contradict their established beliefs, educational philosophies, and classroom instruction practice. As revealed in Lan's class, neither the traditional nor the communicative approach will, on its own, be the panacea for the problem of EFL education at tertiary level. An appropriate integration of the strengths from both CLT and TCA, namely, an eclectic model, would, however, go a long way towards addressing the problems. This eclectic model will be discussed in detail in Chapter 8.

As far as teaching methodology is concerned, the English Department under study contains both a traditional approach and a communicative component. The former far outweighs the latter because very few teachers have successfully adapted the communicative component into their teacher-centred classes - Lan being the exception. The observation of Lan's class shows that she is trying to adapt the communicative methodology to traditional classes but she needs to take the process much further. As revealed in her class, she gave students more time to practise their spoken English but there was no real interaction between speaker and listeners. She undertook text analysis in a very traditional way with emphasis on structure and on language points (See Appendix D-1 for further information). The striking difference in Lan's class was that, after text analysis, she attempted to reorganize the teaching procedure and obtained a shift of focus. That is, she converted the lesson used for text analysis into communicative group discussion in which the text material was used only as the background for this activity and the teacher receded somewhat. The teacher's role became one of helping the students complete the task and monitor the process of the activity by providing some necessary scaffolding.

Her experiment proves that proper integration of communicative and traditional methods can improve teaching and learning outcomes. On the other hand, it also shows the persistent influence of traditional language teaching as shown by the way she undertook the text analysis. It has to be noted that grammar and vocabulary should be taught only when necessary since the English majors students have learned

English at least for 8 to 10 years before being enrolled into the university, and they have covered extensive grammatical points. Teachers did not have to analyse a reading text sentence by sentence because it made an English class very dull. As revealed in the classroom observation, the atmosphere in Lan's class changed after students started participating in their own group activities. The progression from non-communicative to communicative learning activities marked a distinct turning point in terms of stimulating students' interest, and engaging them in meaningful activities. The atmosphere in traditional class was dull, but in communicative class it was interesting and challenging.

For the rest of teachers observed, the weight of traditional language teaching preconceptions is still heavy. In their class, students were given more time than before for oral practice but the teachers still concentrated on grammar and discrete language points although they used new textbooks. This clearly indicates that the adoption of a communicative view of language is more important than using a new textbook or introducing new teaching techniques. If teachers do not change their attitudes vis-à-vis EFL teaching, the CLT approach will pass them by. Introducing new methods for classroom activities is helpful but not sufficient. Adapting approaches should start from the beginning of curriculum design and should address the accumulated, educational beliefs of the teachers and the actual needs and preferences of students. Moreover, adaptation of teaching methodology will be more effective and welcomed by students if the theory of learning and teaching from which the communicative language teaching methodology is derived is reviewed and shared among teachers and students. If both the teacher and the students are more aware of the beneficial functions of interaction through communication with peers in class, they would see the value in *talking about* rather than *reading out* their oral presentations.

Chapter Summary

In this chapter, I have given an account of classroom observations of five teacher participants and showed their similarities and discrepancies in terms of their classroom instruction pattern. A detailed comparison has been made between two teachers, Lan and Shan, in terms of the teaching methods they used in their classes

respectively. Following this, I also have discussed the four interrelated contributory factors that have led to the discrepancy between what the teachers claimed to do and what they actually did in their classes. In the next chapter, I will discuss how to integrate CLT into traditional teaching methods in order to make the communicative language teaching more appropriate for the Chinese EFL context.

Chapter 8

General discussion of the survey findings in this study: an eclectic approach

Introduction

This chapter proposes a possible solution to one of the major issues in the findings arising from this study: the disappointment the students experienced concerning their level of communicative competence, which was related to the old-fashioned traditional teaching approach in the English language classes. A synthesis is proposed which combines elements of the communicative language teaching approach with the elements of traditional Chinese language teaching methods. I discuss the rationale for this eclectic approach and then outline how it would apply to the classroom instruction focusing on both the English language form and its meaning, and classroom progression. I also suggest a pedagogical model for teaching the comprehensive reading course using an eclectic approach. Finally I present the challenges in adopting this approach in China.

8.1. The rationale for an eclectic approach to EFL education in China

An eclectic approach here means the combination of strengths from both the CLT approach and traditional Chinese teaching practices which have proven useful and effective in the past. The eclectic approach also includes the ideas proposed in Context Approach (Bax, 2003). The context in which EFL learning and teaching takes places is a crucial factor in the success or failure of learners because contextual

factors hugely influence learners' ability to effectively learn a foreign language (Bax, 2003, see Section 2.3 in Chapter 2 for details).

As shown in the previous chapters, the survey findings reveal that although both the students and teachers in this study are inclined to see classroom activities emphasizing the real use of the target language as more effective than those emphasizing formal grammatical competence, they tend not to totally abandon the traditional approach in favour of CLT. Moreover, the notions underpinning CLT are incompatible with the Chinese EFL context. These findings reflect the reality that no single approach can cover all aspects of English teaching and learning. In the case of CLT, various challenges confronting Chinese EFL teachers and students in their attempts to use CLT have to be taken into account and a synthesis of both approaches should be created to suit the Chinese context. Given the fundamental challenges and sociocultural differences as described in previous chapters, it is not desirable, and can be even counter-productive, to sweep away traditional practices and put CLT in their place. After all, a methodology is only effective to the extent that 'teachers and students are willing to accept and implement it with good faith' (Hu, 2002: 102b), and whether CLT is accepted or not is largely determined by 'the set of values and beliefs that teachers and students have been socialized into' (ibid).

As described in Chapter 2, CLT is a pedagogy of foreign origin, some of its tenets and practices are incompatible with those found in the Chinese culture of learning. However, this does not mean that CLT has nothing to contribute to EFL education in the Chinese context. It makes sense to look at those features of CLT that are not at odds with the Chinese culture of learning. For instance, some of the pedagogical practices underpinning CLT, such as collaborative learning, cultivation of socio-linguistic competence, use of authentic teaching materials, and language learning strategy training, are in tune with many aspects of the Chinese culture of learning which emphasizes collective orientation, socially appropriate behaviours and concern for the right way of doing things. Therefore these features can be integrated into the prevalent Chinese pedagogical practices without threatening deep-rooted cultural belief systems. For such a beneficial integration to happen in China, it is necessary for Chinese EFL researchers and teachers to take an eclectic approach and make

'well-informed pedagogical choices grounded in an understanding of socio-cultural influences' (Hu, 2002b).

Some earlier studies show that the key issue of innovation in EFL teaching methodology in China is not to totally discard the traditional approach, but to improve it (Harvey, 1985; Anderson, 1993; Rao, 1996; 2002; Wei, 1997; Wang, 1999; Han, 2001; Hu, 2002b). However, these studies largely focus on EFL teaching for general purposes, that is, for non-English major students at college level. Given the substantial differences in many aspects of EFL teaching between English-majors and non-majors as described in Chapter 1, the pedagogical practices suggested in the above studies emphasize teaching techniques over socio-cultural and cognitive aspects of English teaching and learning - a key component of communicative competence model (Canale & Swain, 1980; Canale, 1983).

This study reveals that many students and teachers still find teacher-centeredness effective in one way or another, depending on the nature of the course and the competence of teachers concerned. Given the students' needs, the demands of society and the fact that English reading course is still prescribed as a language lesson based on a text, it is desirable to synthesize CLT with the prevalent traditional teaching practices, and conduct the Intensive Reading (IR) or Comprehensive Reading (CR) course within a textual discourse and a communicative orientation.

Wei (1997: 86) argues that the question is not to abandon the IR teaching method, but how to use the method effectively and creatively. He claims that through the IR method, the teacher may deliberately display a problem to stimulate the students' desire to deal with problems by themselves and to encourage students to develop a good command of useful phrases and expression. 'It is in the IR class that an initial strong grammatical foundation is laid down, upon which ever increasing degrees of fluency in English and general communicative competence may be developed' (P. 82).

Actually what he calls for is a modified version of English language teaching practice which includes some components of CLT. Harvey (1985), based on his experience of teaching Chinese college students in China, finds the constructive side of grammar instruction and learning in class. He asserts that:

Chinese English language teaching methods cannot simply be dismissed as 'primitive, old fashioned or misguided'. There are a number of obvious historical, pedagogical and psychological reasons for them. What might be called 'traditional' methods and skills are not fundamentally or necessarily unworkable alongside modern EFL teaching methods. The idea that the two are mutually exclusive is absurd. EFL in China needs Western experience and expertise, not Western dogma. A balanced approach and the use of existing potential both have a fundamental part to play in the development of language teaching in China (Harvey, 1985: 186).

The findings in this study support the above claims that the real issue is not to abandon the traditional approach, but to improve and modernize it. In other words, to reconcile it with CLT in such a way that both approaches complement each other. O'Neill (1991) draws our attention to the characteristics of English language lessons that worked well using either TCA or SCA. He emphasizes that 'the critical skills teachers need are to use their discretion to judge and select which of the two types of approaches is most likely to yield fruitful results with a particular class at a particular time' (P. 290) so that the two approaches are complementary to each other.

However, in reality, while trying something innovative in the classroom, it is quite hard for teachers, even the so-called best teachers, to really know what works or does not work for students at first. 'All they can do is sharpen their intuitions and instincts, and try out various new ideas, but not abandon too quickly the things that seem to have worked well in the past' (O'Neill, 1991: 290). Some Western L2 researchers also call for an integration of communicative methodology with traditional methodologies in a highly principled way (Sampson, 1984; Pennycook, 1989; Holliday, 1994; Larseen-Freeman, 1999; Pica, 2000). Pica (2000) stresses the importance of learning English for the purpose of communication, and of instructing linguistic forms and rules through reading and listening to meaningful and comprehensible input. Pica points out that the assumption of 'acquiring a language not only for the purpose of communication but also through communication' does not apply to all aspects of language learning, particularly those involving complex grammar rules or subtle socio-linguistic and pragmatic strategies (p.5). Pica argues that when attention is focused solely on the communication of a message, learners are drawn almost exclusively to the meaning and comprehensibility of input, and only secondarily to the structure and forms that shape the input. Such experiences

can 'weaken opportunities for learners to notice how L2/FL structure relates to the meanings of messages they encode, how social norms are observed and maintained linguistically.

Research has shown consistently that the most effective instruction is that in which both meaningful communication and form are addressed (Brock *et al*, 1986; Harley, 1989; Lightbown & Spada, 1990; White, 1990, 1991; Lightbown *et al*, 1991 cited in Pica, 2000: 8). Moreover, much has been written about the necessity and importance of choosing the right teaching methodology to suit a particular situation or context since English teaching methodologies are not culturally-free nor culturally transferable without proper adaptation (Sampson, 1984; Pennycook, 1989; Holliday, 1994; Huang 1996; Larsen-Freeman, 1999). Huang (1996), a Chinese EFL researcher asserts:

> Evaluation of a particular method depends on many factors, such as language and learning theories, teaching techniques, syllabus design and teacher and learner's roles. One factor that is often easily ignored is that of context. A method that can be considered beneficial in one context may not be so in another. Furthermore, alternative approaches can be found for teaching different language skills (p.11).

Some Western researchers also support this view. For instance, Bax (2003) stresses that although CLT has served a useful function in the L2 profession, particularly as a corrective to shortcomings in previous methodologies, CLT has always neglected one key aspect of language teaching, namely the context in which it takes place. Bax further suggests that the first priority is the learning context, and the first step is to identify key aspects of that *context* before deciding what and how to teach in any given class. According to Bax, the *context* refers to the teacher's understanding of individual students and their learning needs, wants, styles, and strategies as well as the course-book, local conditions, the classroom culture, school culture, national culture and so on.

Taking account of all these factors given as far as possible in each situation, the teacher will be able to identify a suitable approach and language focus. The decision will depend on the 'context analysis'. It may be that an emphasis on grammar is useful to start with, or an emphasis on oral communication. It may be that lexis will

come first. It may be that group-work is suitable, or a more formal lecture mode. The approach will probably be eclectic, in order to meet different learner needs. In congruence with the above pro-integration point of views from both Chinese and Western researchers mentioned above, the findings in this study show that, in order to ensure effective English language teaching and learning outcomes, neither the traditional nor the pure CLT approach can be adopted without adequate modification to suit the present EFL teaching situations in China at tertiary level.

Given the situation described above, China needs to combine CLT with the traditional approach. Only in this way can EFL students in China benefit from the combined strengths of the two approaches. Any teaching methodology has its own reasons to exist. Everything depends on the specific situations - the 'context' in Bax's term, where the methods are used and popularised. It is up to the teacher and learner variables to determine which methods, textbooks, and teaching styles suit them and will fit in with the stated pedagogical goals. In a word, both TCA and SCA have to be adjusted to suit the Chinese EFL context.

The proposed eclectic model, shown below in Figure 8-1, combines the strengths of the traditional approach, CLT and the context approach, and treats the Chinese EFL context as the most important starting point for establishing a suitable approach to ensure effective outcomes of EFL teaching in China. This approach does not negate the view that language is for communication, but it questions the assumed universal applicability of CLT. As is evident from the discussion above, at present this proposed eclectic model may offer a more realistic framework for EFL education in the Chinese context than merely rejecting or embracing CLT in a wholesale manner.

8.2. Adequate attention given to balancing form and meaning

Having outlined the rationale for an eclectic approach, this section now examines an important aspect of a synthesized approach: balancing form and meaning. Actually this is one of the major areas in which CLT and the traditional approach diverge.

It is evident from this study that teachers and students believe that explicit instruction in grammar and structure is needed, although many students and teachers

feel too much focus placed on the grammar or language points makes the teaching boring and predictable (See Chapter 5 for details). Savignon (1991) points out that in L2 or EFL development, communication cannot take place in the absence of structure or grammar, because grammar is 'a set of shared assumptions about how language works along with a willingness of participants to cooperate in the negotiation of meaning' (p. 268). Widdowson (1990) also notes the importance of adequate attention to form in L2 development. He argues that the whole point of language pedagogy is that it is a way of short-circuiting the slow process of 'natural language acquisition' and can make arrangements for learning to happen more easily and more efficiently than it does in 'natural surroundings' (P. 162). Other researchers observe that the benefits of explicit attention to language form and structure will prevent learners from fossilizing undesired forms in their learning process (Lightbrown, 1991; Lightbrown & Spada, 1990; Long, 1991).

In balancing form and meaning, 'the traditional approach and the communicative approach are not mutually exclusive' (Harvey, 1985:186). The real problem is how the traditional method can work well along with modern EFL teaching in the Chinese educational context. For instance, CLT focuses on meaning and fluency, whereas the traditional approach emphasizes form and structure. However, it would not be detrimental to Chinese EFL learners if teacher explained some grammatical points to enhance their understanding of the link of meaning to the structure. Harvey (1985) reminds us that understanding the grammatical framework of a language is extremely important for L2/EFL learners.

However, teachers should not place undue emphasis on grammar and structure, which can prevent learners from understanding the text material at a holistic and discursive level. Grammar is a tool or resource to be used in the comprehension and creation of oral and written discourse, rather than 'rules to be learned as an end in itself' (Rao, 1996). In addition, the real purpose of adequate grammatical explanation should be aimed at teaching students how grammar rules function, and thus showing students how they can ultimately use such rules for real communicative purposes. Excessive emphasis on grammar analysis as revealed in my classroom observations in this study could detract from developing the students' reasoning power and lead

them to forming a habit of delving too deeply into the minutiae in their learning (See Chapter 7 for discussion). This impedes the cultivation of their communicative competence and has a negative effect on development of their critical thinking ability.

Grammar teaching in English class should not be taught as an end in itself, but always with reference to meaning, social factors, discourse or a combination of these factors (Celce-Murcia & Hilles, 1988). It is worth noting that teachers should be sensitive to the needs and learning styles of the students and make explicit to students the beneficial functions of integrating the communicative components with the traditional approach. This inevitably requires teachers to adopt appropriate pedagogical strategies for a classroom progression in which both form and meaning is balanced (See Figure 8-1 below).

8.3. Synthesising the progression of classroom activities

In adopting an eclectic approach, teachers need to adopt appropriate pedagogical practices to ensure a smooth progression of classroom activities in which both form and meaning are properly dealt with. The aim is to combine communicative components with the explicit instruction of form and structure. For such a smooth classroom progression to happen in the Chinese context, there needs to be general pedagogical guidelines for Chinese EFL teachers to follow. This kind of complex synthesis cannot be left to teachers' intuition or to trial and error in their classroom instruction.
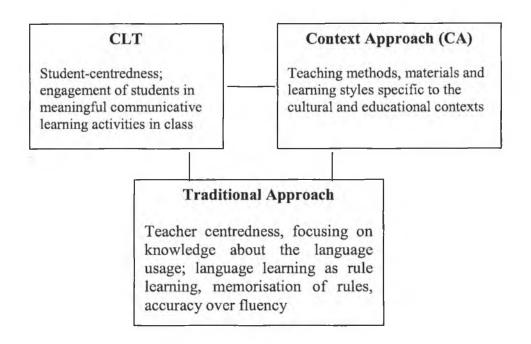
L2 and EFL researchers have proposed different types of integration concerning classroom progression for the purpose of combining communicative and traditional methods. Some suggest a progression from communicative to formal instruction (Brumfit, 1978; Ellis, 1982) while some others suggest a progression from formal classroom instruction to communicative activities (Celce-Murcia & Hilles, 1988; Zhang, 1997; Nunn,1999), from the activities of skills-getting to skills-using (Rivers & Temperley, 1987), and from text-based mechanical patter drills to free communication (Paulston & Bruder, 1976; Rao, 1999; Ji, 2003). Littlewood (1984) takes a more flexible stance and suggests that the sequence of progression of

classroom learning activities is interchangeable rather than a fixed pattern and it is up to the teacher to decide - based on such factors as the learners, the specific content of the text materials and the kinds of activities.
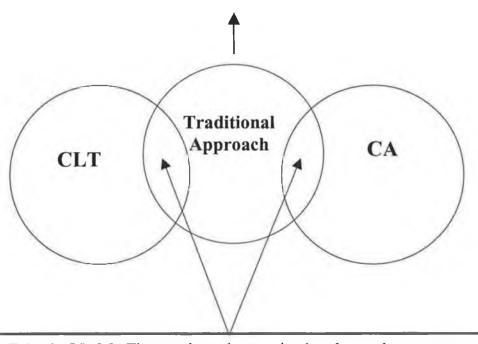
Moreover, as revealed in Lan's class, teachers have an almost free choice in deciding how many communicative activities they engage students in doing. Their decisions in this area are often made on the basis of their own professional competence, classroom management expertise and the knowledge and information they possess about the topics or learning tasks concerned. For instance, as Lan was able to speak very fluent English and had participated in staff training programmes, she was confident about combining communicative components into her instruction. Therefore she spent more time on communicative activities than other teachers who may feel less confident. In this sense, it is very hard to specify how much time or to what exact degree an English lesson should be spent on both traditional and communicative methods. It depends on the content of lesson, the teacher and the students concerned. However, one thing is certain that the communicative components should be an integral part of the teaching process. Taylor (1983) asserts that students' needs and the dynamics of particular classes become major factors in deciding what to teach and how to teach it. Above all, the teaching methods adopted by teachers in class should vary significantly in accordance with the context in which teachers find themselves working (Sano *et al*, 1984; Bax 2003).

In order to make such classroom progression manageable for teachers, I would suggest a model for teaching Comprehensive English Reading course - the dominant English reading course for English majors. This model was originally proposed by Zhang (1997) to deal with new materials in Intensive Reading class. But Zhang focused more on the procedures of learners' reading comprehension, namely, pre-reading and post-reading, than a smooth progression that can synthesize both form and meaning during and after reading stage in English class. Therefore I have modified and refined Zhang's 'pre-reading and post-reading' model by adding to it the while-reading stage and text-based task learning and teaching that emphasize both communicative aspects and explicit instruction of language form and structure in order to achieve a designated purpose.

Figure 8.1   The Eclectic Model: A Theoretical Synthesis

CLT	**Context Approach (CA)**
Student-centredness; engagement of students in meaningful communicative learning activities in class	Teaching methods, materials and learning styles specific to the cultural and educational contexts

Traditional Approach

Teacher centredness, focusing on knowledge about the language usage; language learning as rule learning, memorisation of rules, accuracy over fluency

An Eclectic Model: synthesis

Eclectic Model: The overlapped areas in the above chart represent the notions of an eclectic model. This synthesised model focuses on cultivating learners' communicative competence by emphasising the instruction of both language form and its use, including structures, functions, notions and situations. Teaching methodology should be **suitable** to the Chinese EFL context.

Based on the model in Figure 8-1 above, this eclectic model for teaching Comprehensive Reading course consists of three stages that can be used in classroom teaching to cover both form and meaning (See Figure-8.2 below).
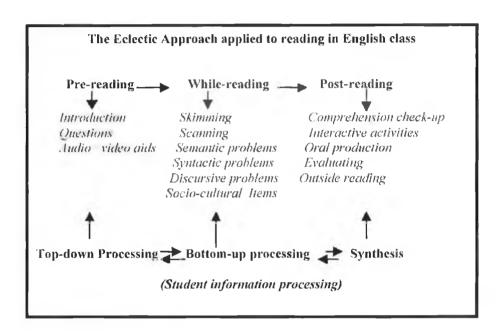
Figure 8.2. An Eclectic Model applied to Teaching English Reading

The Eclectic Approach applied to reading in English class

Pre-reading ⟶ While-reading ⟶ Post-reading

Introduction	*Skimming*	*Comprehension check-up*
Questions	*Scanning*	*Interactive activities*
Audio video aids	*Semantic problems*	*Oral production*
	Syntactic problems	*Evaluating*
	Discursive problems	*Outside reading*
	Socio-cultural Items	

Top-down Processing ⇄ Bottom-up processing ⇄ Synthesis

(Student information processing)

It is important to point out that language teaching is an organic process including reading at the syntactical level (bottom-up stage) and reading at the textual and discursive level (top-down stage) as mentioned in Chapter 7. The top-down stage is more significant in language teaching because it is this stage that enables the progression of a synthesized approach to take place. This stage requires the teacher to make adjustments in his or her teaching practice to stimulate learners to think, to speak, to predict, to judge and to analyse. The activities listed in Figure 8.2 do not necessarily mean that all of them are to be used in each lesson. It varies depending on the content of a text, the development of students' linguistic competence, the teacher's competence and individual teaching style. It should be noted this model is different from the Chinese traditional practices as revealed in the classroom observations in which the teachers treated new words, phrases and sentence structure

patterns as discrete language points and elaborated upon them over-meticulously while the gist of the text was usually overlooked.

The proposed eclectic model, on the contrary, is aimed at helping teachers overcome this weakness. Perhaps once Chinese teachers and learners see the benefits of this new model, they might be more interested in trying it, and then even refine it. This can be inferred by the findings in this study that both the traditional approach and CLT were considered to be effective in English classes given by competent teachers (See Chapters 5, 6 & 7). Therefore, in this eclectic approach, the prevalent Chinese methods of teaching comprehensive reading courses are the starting point and CLT and Context Approach (CA) are used to complement them. The purpose for such a synthesis is to cultivate learners' communicative competence. It should be noted that an eclectic approach needs to be based on a multifaceted view of communicative activities in class. It should also seek to incorporate student input into the learning process. In some cases, it is appropriate to focus on assigned tasks and small group learning. In others, a whole class format is best. In still others, a combination is appropriate. Therefore it varies with different variables such as learners' English proficiency level and knowledge about the topic under discussion, the content of text materials, teachers' competence in target language, teaching styles and classroom management skills. In short, it depends on a particular context (Bax, 2003). The following section presents a model of teaching the comprehensive reading course using an eclectic approach.

The choice of the Comprehensive [English] Reading class to demonstrate the effectiveness of the eclectic model proposed in this Chapter arises from the following considerations:

First, the Comprehensive Reading Lesson is the backbone of the course scheme in the curriculum for both English majors and non-majors. As the word 'comprehensive' indicates, the 'Comprehensive Reading' lesson is supposed to combine multiple language skills in this course in contrast to its predecessor 'Intensive Reading'. ('Intensive' indicates paying a large amount of attention to a small amount of action i.e. reading text materials). In other words, the emphasis is placed not only on grammatical structure and vocabulary, but also on speaking and writing skills and

intercultural awareness. Other courses, however, are more restricted to specific aspects of EFL learning (e.g. Listening, Translating).

Second, another factor underlying the importance of this course is the fact that English majors have to *pass* EMT-4 and have to *take* EMT-8 in order to achieve a Bachelor's Degree in the EFL undergraduate programme, and the final examination tests of the Comprehensive Reading course contain items most similar to those in EMT-4 and EMT-8: a). Structure, b). Vocabulary, c). Cloze test, d). Writing, e). Reading comprehension, f). Listening, g). Speaking. (The last two items 'Listening and Speaking' at the moment are only confined to EMT-4). This consolidates the role and importance of Comprehensive Reading in the minds of both students and teachers.

Third, for the first 2 years of the undergraduate program for English majors, the Comprehensive Reading course takes up about 57% of the total of 1,100 -1,160 class hours designed for English skill-based courses (English Division, 2000) so more time is spent studying this course than any other course giving it a huge importance for students alike.

8.4. Pre-reading stage

Pre-reading or previewing activities begin with questions to be initiated by a teacher. The teacher will start the lesson with thought-provoking questions rather than ask these questions by the end of each lesson to test learners' understanding of the text. These questions should be aimed at helping students better understand the meaning and structure of a text, to relate students' reading activity to their prior knowledge and experience, increase their interest in the subject to be read and enable them to read 'with a purpose'. Questions beginning with *When, Where, Who,* and *What* can prompt students to look for specific information from the reading material while those with *Why* and *How* can help them to probe more deeply into the information they are to read. In addition, such activities can help students predict or make some 'educated' guesses about what is in the text and thus activate effective top-down

processing for reading comprehension (Chia, 2001). Based on the stimuli in a text, such as the title, photographs, illustrations, or subtitles, pre-reading questions can be used to encourage students to make predictions about the content of the text, and help students better understand the passage they are going to read. At this stage, teachers should be aware of what to ask and how to ask. Nuttall (1983, 1996) classifies classroom questions into six types:

1. *Questions of literal comprehension*: those whose answers are directly and explicitly expressed in the text. They can often be answered in the words of the text.

2. *Questions involving reorganization or reinterpretation*: those requiring students either to reinterpret literal information or to obtain it from various parts of the text and put it together in a new way, using elementary inferring.

3. *Questions of inference*: those obliging students to consider what is implied but not explicitly stated.

4. *Questions of evaluation:* those asking for a considered judgement about the text in terms of what the writer is trying to do and how far s/he has achieved it.

5. *Questions of personal response*: those whose answers depend least on the writer but record reader's reaction to the text.

6. *Questions concerned with how writers say what they mean*: those intending to give students strategies for dealing with a text in general (Pp. 132-133).

Nuttall's classification can help teachers raise appropriate questions which help students understand local and global meaning of a text as well as how these meanings are expressed. For example, in teaching a text entitled *International Trade*, teachers can assign students the following questions before they read the text: What are the reasons for international trade? Why is it impossible for any nation to be self-sufficient? What countries are mentioned in the text (if any)? Why does the writer mention these countries? What is visible trade? What is invisible trade?

To answer these questions, students have to deal with the text as an organic whole, sorting out messages and selecting and reorganizing those that they judge to be the

most relevant and important to the questions they are going to answer. Here the passive reading process of input becomes an active process of output. Furthermore, teachers should not have preconceived rigid notions about 'correct' answers to their questions. They should allow student input to be genuine, and possibly, unpredictable.

8.5. While-Reading Stage

While-reading stage consists of reading a text twice, each for a specific purpose. The first reading concerns two important speeding techniques, namely, skimming and scanning. The training of these skills is of particular importance because these skills are not only indispensable for EFL learners but also 'in the process skimming and scanning, students' schemata can be activated' (Xiang & Wang, 1999). Skimming facilitates text process by initiating students into the gist and organization of the text; scanning is helpful for seeking specific information for the pre-reading questions mentioned above.

The second reading is a problem-solving process. The problems to be solved in this process of reading may include such dimensions as 1. lexical and syntactic, 2. discourse, 3. sociocultural (See Figure 8-2). These dimensions are discussed in detail below.

1. Lexical and syntactic problems

While reading silently, students will come across new grammatical and structural units, teachers give students an opportunity to pick out their problems including any linguistic problems or syntactic problems which cause comprehension difficulties (e.g. long sentences, new structures or expressions typical of a particular writer's style). Teachers then ask students to raise their difficulties and try to interpret them according to the context. This can be done either individually or in pairs. Then these problems are pooled and collected together. Teachers can ask students to discuss these listed problems in pairs or in a small group in order to elicit various replies or check how much learners understand these units. At this stage, the main methodological point is that learners would be doing the problem raising, discovery and comprehension rather than the teacher covering the text in a sentence-by-

sentence manner and providing answers to every single language point which may not directly affect the learner.

Following this problem raising stage, teachers can synthesize these language problems and isolate major specific elements of linguistic units for detailed explanations from the point of view of either grammar or stylistics, or both. Teachers provide students with examples to illustrate the usage and ask students to make sentences with the new vocabulary or grammatical items. Activities at this stage may include presenting different types of drills, and students can do the exercises in pairs or in a small group. Through repeated practice, students will be able to go beyond the stage of memorization of structures towards using them in different situations.

2. Discourse Analysis

Discourse analysis is carried out on two aspects: 1). how an idea is developed (such as topic sentence and support, cause and effect, comparison and contrast, generalizations and specifics, cohesion and coherence); 2). how one idea leads to another (introduction, development, and conclusion). At this stage, questioning (mentioned above in pre-reading stage), analytical, inductive and deductive methods are used to maximize the students' opportunities to practise their analytical and critical thinking skills, in which the students are found themselves to be deficient in this study. (See Chapter 9 for further discussion).

3. Sociocultural items

Cultural background knowledge is also provided in this stage, which can help students to gain a better comprehension of the text content by minimizing cultural interference, and 'build new culture-specific schemata that will be available to EFL students outside the classroom' (Carrell *et al*, 1989: 89). It will be especially beneficial if teachers are able to compare and contrast between the culture of the target language and that of the mother tongue. This will help make the students more culturally sensitive when they read on their own.

As is evident above, this is in a striking contrast to what happened in those classes observed in this study: the teachers paraphrased almost every language point of the text which they thought might be difficult to the students. Hence, teachers gave the students so much 'help' that it became a crutch that the students could not do without.

That is, the students were led to formulating word-by-word reading habits while some aspects of learning leading to discourse competences are ignored.

This while-reading stage also emphasizes the learners' need for explicit structural and grammatical presentation and reading comprehension. The meaning of a text is embodied in the language form. Given the fact that the EMT-4 and the EMT-8 are two major nation-wide English tests for English majors at tertiary level in China, both the teachers and students are aware of the importance of explicit structural presentation in English class. Consequently, explicit grammar and structural instruction still remains an important part of EFL teaching in class. However, the crucial point is not to spoon-feed students as occurred in the classroom observations.

As revealed in the classroom observation, most of the questions asked by teachers merely required an automatic response (e.g. paraphrasing new words). There was little opportunity for the students to engage in personal problem-solving discussion which can act as an important condition to enhance learning except in Lan's class. Candlin (1982) stresses that [language] learning is a matter of managing problems. One way for teachers to encourage learning in learners is to consistently confront them with problems rather than attempt to remove problems in advance' (p. 39).

8.6. Post-reading stage

This stage concerns post-reading analysis and checks students' comprehension, consolidates their language skills and engages the students in communicative group activities. This stage includes students' answers to the pre-reading questions, and further questions raised by teachers at this post-reading stage to check students' understanding of the text, for instance, text-based questions of inference, questions of evaluation, questions of personal response and so on. Take the above-mentioned 'International Trade' as an example, after reading the passage, teachers can ask the students a question of evaluation: 'what does this writer contribute to your understanding of International Trade?' Teachers need to be aware that questions of this kind are the most sophisticated of all because it requires the students not merely to respond, but to analyse their response and discover the objective reasons for it, as well as measuring it against the presumed intention of the writer. To answer the question, the students cannot ignore the textual evidence but their responses essentially involve them with the writer. Teachers need to ask the students to explain

why the text makes them feel as they do. Teachers need to ensure that students' responses are based on correct understanding of the text.

Evaluative questions are also important with narrative and descriptive texts, in which the writer may tell a story or recount an event and then leave it to the readers to figure out for them the message the writer intends to convey. Urquhart & Weir (1998) claim that 'reading ability must go beyond *pure* language skills and includes readers' pragmatic skills to interpret the text in terms of their knowledge and experience of the world' (p. 34, my emphasis). In this sense, after students read the text, they need to interpret the meaning, to respond to the textual ideas and evaluate the effectiveness of the text. Teachers should be aware that, while the meaning of the text is emphasised, the issues of how the meaning is produced, in what language form, and how students respond to the meaning and how they evaluate effectiveness of the text, should be also given adequate attention.

The post-reading activities can be carried out in small groups or in pairs. Teachers should make sure that a discussion differs from a 'question and answer' session in that students should be encouraged to express their own (different) opinions on the same topic. At this stage, the emphasis is on learners' ability to use target language for communication and exchange of ideas. Their responses should be incorporated, in an identifiable fashion, into the learning process. Candlin (1982) observes that efficient learning is not an isolated but a socialized activity where learners are engaged in discussion with others and within themselves. 'Language learning depends on this internal and external negotiation and debate' (p. 38). This inevitably leads to another important question regarding learners' critical thinking abilities necessary to carry out meaningful group discussions on a given topic. As revealed in this study, students' perceived lack of critical thinking competence confined their group discussion to a surface level rather than in an in-depth manner. This is a very important issue and it is particularly addressed in Chapter 9. We believe that unless this issue is properly dealt with, the outcome of an eclectic approach would be comprised and learners' communicative competence would be underdeveloped.

To initiate and then to guide the discussion, teachers need to set forth topics to arouse students' interest and to assign students a learning task or a text-based task - what is known as 'task-based' learning and teaching (Willis, 1996). Willis points out that

task-based learning combines the best insights from CLT with an organized focus on language form (Willis, 1996: 1). She defines task as activity where the target language is used by the learner for a communicative purpose in order to achieve an outcome (p. 23). Text-based tasks require learners to process the text for meaning in order to achieve the goals of the task. This will involve reading, listening or viewing with some kind of communicative purpose and may well involve talking about the text and perhaps writing notes (p. 68). Text-based tasks should aim to encourage efficient reading strategies, focusing initially on retrieval of sufficient relevant meaning for the purpose of the task. Willis (1996) observes that:

> Task-based learning entails both holistic processing, that is, gaining an overall impression, picking up detailed linguistic clues - a combination of what are commonly called 'top-down' and 'bottom-up' processes (p. 75).

This would minimise students' dependence on teachers for 'all the right answers' as revealed in the classroom observation. On the contrary, each task to be completed by students is a step on the road to learner independence. Teachers can ask students to predict or attempt to reconstruct the content on the basis of given clues from part of the text without having read, heard, or seen the whole.

For instance, teachers can ask students to predict problem solution and story endings by using a text with a situation-problem-solution-evaluating pattern, namely, let students read / hear /watch only parts of a text which give the situation and problem(s). Then teachers ask students to work in pair or in a group to work out a couple of alternative solutions of their own, then evaluate another pair's or group's solutions. When they have presented their best solutions to each other during a report phase, the class can be asked to predict which solutions are mentioned in the original text. They finally read /hear /watch the whole piece and compare and evaluate (Willis, 1996: 77).

By using a sequential text, teachers can give students most of the text information and ask them to write an ending, or give an ending, and ask them to write the beginning. Teachers can scaffold students by giving them a few carefully chosen words from the text. In doing this, it is important to note that teachers should make sure that students do not feel they have failed if they predict something entirely different from the original text. No doubt, this would help students improve their ability to make judgements on what they read, to express their own opinions and to

grasp the structure of a text. In a word, learners' analytical, creative and critical thinking ability together with their communicative competence will improve

These activities and tasks may cover inference, practical reasoning, negotiation of meaning, problem solving and information transfer, and they may be carried out in a number of ways: group-work, pair work, individual work and role play. They must become a regular part of a language programme. In many cases, a condition and an active atmosphere need to be created for the performance of these tasks and activities.

To sum up, it has to be pointed out that if teachers know how to make good use of pre-reading and while-reading stages to raise questions, offer background information, to solve problems concerning lexical, syntactic, discourse and sociocultural aspects, this will help learners initiate post-reading discussions. Students may be interested in what they are doing and their attention would be attracted since these activities will create a vivid classroom atmosphere and enrich their prior knowledge. What is more, it helps them to link their existing knowledge to the text and directs them into a much deeper understanding. As mentioned above, the pre-reading questions are helpful in that they help learners to make a prediction and enable them to decide what they look for (either the global meaning of the text or the necessary facts and details). The while-reading stage is problem-solving and it helps students overcome the difficulties which may hinder their correct comprehension of the text. Post-reading is of great help in that it directs them into a much deeper understanding of the text and encourages learners to use their own analytical and critical thinking skills. In addition, communicative group activities can be organized to achieve meaningful goals assigned to different groups based on the text content, thus enhancing interaction in the classroom between teacher and students as well as between students themselves.

The striking difference between the above suggested procedure and the traditional teaching or study scheme of *preview, practice and review* (*yuxi, lianxi* and *fuxi*) is that the new procedure can remove some of the boredom involved in the teaching and learning process and integrate communicative components into EFL classrooms. At present, what happens in English class is that students are asked to prepare (*yuxi*) each lesson in advance, then go over it in class (*lianxi*) and then review it again later

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(*fuxi*). This naturally leads to a certain lack of interest since by the time students arrive in class, they have covered the text anyway, so they simply have to undergo a repetition of what they already 'know'. Actually, as some student interviewees acknowledged in this study, by and large, they came to know that teachers would go over texts in such meticulous detail in class that they just looked up some new words in a dictionary rather than reviewed the text carefully before class. They knew that the teacher would tell them everything in class. It is not surprising that the students in this study found their English classes dull because these classes had almost 'no discourse, no language use, but only display of language usage as sentence or text (Widdowson, 1983 cite in Wei, 1996: 56). In other words, the students were not really challenged, intellectually or pedagogically.

8.7. Challenges involved in the integration process

The model proposed above is not without challenges for Chinese EFL teachers. The biggest challenge lies in the introduction of the communicative components, especially the post-reading communicative activities.

The first challenge is that teachers need to make a conceptual shift concerning the nature of EFL teaching and learning, the roles of the teacher and the students in class. Teachers need to consider the adoption of things that may be in conflict with their own beliefs and values concerning EFL education. In this sense, a sound in-service staff training program is urgently needed to introduce teachers to genuine communicative activities in English class.

The second challenge is to balance explicit grammar instruction and communicative procedure. Pica (1994) cautions us that in attempts to upgrade the importance of group activities for meaningful EFL use, teachers need to be aware not to downgrade the contributions of exercises which focus on grammar rules. However, in the Chinese context, as shown in the classroom observations the reverse is true: too much emphasis is placed on grammar while little interaction is initiated in an effective manner (See Chapter 6 for details). An important issue here is how to teach grammar in a communicative class, in other words, how teachers can help make grammar teaching or learning serve as a means to the final achievement of

communicative competence. For Chinese EFL learners, the classroom is the sole formal context for target language learning, outside which meaningful spoken interaction may not be available. Teachers need to place emphasis on 'the need for a balance in the classroom between explicit grammar instruction and more inductive, communicative procedures. Such an approach to methodology can provide interesting and highly favourable results' (Montgomery & Eisenstein, 1986 cited in Pica, 1994: 65). In addition, Pica further quotes Montgomery & Eisenstein (1986) as saying that 'the strongest gains in grammar learning were shown not among learners who attended coursework in grammar instruction, but by those who participated in both a grammar-based course and a course which included L2 communication experiences ranging from classroom discussion and community trips' (cited in Pica, 1994: 67).

The communicative competence model (Canale & Swain 1980, Canale, 1983) views grammatical competence as a basis because a sound knowledge of grammar helps to improve other skills. Grammar helps language learners to understand the target language. 'Grammar plays a very supportive role and we can say that it is a shortcut to language acquisition' (Alexander, 2000 cited in Song, 2001: 55). Stern (1992) asserts that 'language learning, besides other things, does involve paying attention to, and eventually mastering the formal features of the second language'. (p. 143). It should be pointed out that drawing attention to grammar does not negate communicative language teaching. Instead, the focus should be placed on how to integrate and make the best out of different approaches mentioned above. It is misleading to think that grammar mistakes do not matter at all if they do not impede communication in class. While an accurate transmission of ideas is essential for successful communication, 'the necessary grammatical knowledge gives students the corrective and the yardstick to monitor and measure their own performance' (Song, 2001:55). Moreover, sound explanations about the language can help students develop a proper way of thinking in the target language. In other words, it can help reduce the errors arising out of the interference of L1 in English language learning. Some studies indicate that for Chinese English-language learners, 51% of the errors are identified in relation with the learners' native language interference whereas for Spanish English-language learners the proportion is just 3% (Ellis, 1986: 29 cited in Su & Zhuang, 1996: 52).

Having outlined the importance of grammar instruction in EFL teaching, I would like to suggest the following principles concerning proper treatment of grammar in EFL teaching at university level.

1. Since college students have already learned basic grammar at elementary and secondary level, but have not learned enough to improve learning and monitor their performance, teachers should not just present language phenomena in a meticulously detailed way or in an isolated manner as revealed in the classroom observations for this study. On the contrary, grammar teaching should be reorganized in such a way that it expands upon text contents, and explores the use of the language in meaningful contexts so as to improve learners' ability to use the language for communicative purposes. In so doing, teachers can help bring grammar teaching closer to the reality of language use rather than keeping it in the realm of isolated linguistic items. Actually this is congruent with both the pre-reading, while-reading and post-reading stages of the English reading class as mentioned above.

2. In class, when unknown language phenomena occur, teachers should explain and work on them *with* students as suggested above (Section 8.5). Deficiencies in grammatical knowledge are usually exposed in students' speaking and writing. Teachers' corrective feedback is necessary and teachers should be able to tell where their weaknesses lie and take remedial measures.

3. In class, teachers need to pay attention to the gradual and cyclical development of learners' grammatical competence which is mainly 'a gradual process of familiarization and accommodation' (Song, 2001: 56). As such, learned items have to be systematically recycled through a variety of communicative activities and increased exposure to the target language before they are internalised.

4. The notion of fluency over accuracy underpinning CLT in the communicative activities advocates that teachers will not interrupt a student for minor mistakes that do not hinder communication. However, this does not mean an outright refusal to correct mistakes. Teachers should be analytical in treating students'

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mistakes, especially oral mistakes, and guide students sensitively out of their errors. Judicious error correction is needed to help learners to gain the knowledge to monitor their own performance, thus contributing to learners' language skills. Teachers may decide to note the occurrence or reoccurrence of an error and communicate to the students at a later date, for example.

5. To adopt the above-proposed eclectic model, teachers need to be competent and proficient in target language, and they also need to make explicit to students the beneficial functions of this approach. Teachers should not confine themselves merely to the textbook. In English class, textbooks should be re-created for effective use (Tsai, 2004). Inevitably, a textbook, however well designed, has inherent limitations. O'Neil (1982) asserts that no textbook can expect to appeal to all teachers or learners at a particular level (p.108). He notes the significance of English language teacher's creativity in enhancing the textbook's function. 'The most important work in a class may start with the textbook but end outside it, in improvisation and adaptation, in spontaneous interaction in the class, and development from that interaction' (O'Neill, 1982:110). This reflects the communicative feature of the post-reading stage of the eclectic approach. Moreover, the teachers' initiative in selecting or developing their own materials and providing learners with a range of communicative tasks should be encouraged. These text materials should meet learners' needs since research proves that learners learn fast when learning materials are relevant to their daily life or future use (Zhang, 2004).

In short, the above guidelines are especially applicable to the EFL teaching for English major students at undergraduate level since they have already learned English for about eight to ten years before enrolling in a university or college. This means that they had been exposed to almost all aspects of the grammar rules. Given this fact, perhaps an effective way is to engage learners in communicative task-based activities in order to activate all those language items stored in their minds rather than concentrate on the minutiae of language points in a sentence-by-sentence manner as revealed in the classroom observation in this study (See Chapter 7).

Chapter summary

In this chapter, I have outlined the rationale for an eclectic approach in order to make CLT suit EFL teaching in China at tertiary level. I discussed the issue of balancing form and meaning while using such an eclectic approach. A pedagogical model for the pedagogical synthesis is presented in order to integrate communicative components into the traditional Chinese teaching practices in English class. The proposed eclectic model treats the prevalent Chinese methods of teaching the comprehensive reading course as a starting point for the synthesis, and the communicative components of CLT and CA are used to complement what the traditional teaching methods leave out - namely the dynamic of real communication. I suggest that such a synthesis can contribute to cultivating learners' communicative competence. Finally, I have outlined an analysis of possible challenges inherent in any attempt to adopt an eclectic approach in EFL class. It is obvious that more effort is needed to examine in greater detail more questions in the related area. For example, to what extent do teachers think they can implement communicative aspects of CLT in their own instruction? How would teachers evolve from the traditional classroom to a communicative classroom? What communicative activities would best support language learning from both teachers' and students' perspective? How can teachers clarify the role of explicit instruction of grammar in the process of integrating communicative components into the traditional approach? Such considerations point to the direction for possible future research.

Chapter 9

Cultivating Critical Thinking Ability in EFL Education

Introduction

From discussions in previous chapters, we can see that students' critical thinking abilities play a critical role in enabling them to engage in a fruitful communicative activity. However, students' perceived deficiency in their critical thinking ability may cast doubt on the effective outcomes of the proposed eclectic model in the previous chapter. Therefore, this chapter focuses on the second issue arising from the two main findings in this study: the question of how to develop EFL learners' critical competence in EFL education. This chapter first presents the rationale for critical thinking instruction in Chinese EFL programmes by drawing on various theoretical concepts. Then a model of critical thinking instruction in the EFL classroom is proposed. Finally discussed are the cultural dimension of critical thinking instruction, and the relationship between critical thinking competence and the other components of the communicative competence model.

9.1. Critical thinking

Critical thinking is an important element of the sociocultural component of communicative competence, as critical thinking obviously plays a central role in analysing, evaluating and appreciating one's own and others' cultural practices, hence, enhancing one's intercultural sensibility (Savignon, 2002; Gao, 2001; Wen, 2000; Byram, 1997). Its importance is also one of the two main findings arising from this study on enhancing Chinese EFL learners' communicative competence.

The definition of critical thinking competence is complex and researchers define the term from different perspectives. The term 'involves overcoming not only intellectual and cultural barriers but also psychological barriers' (Che, 2002: 84). Paul (1992) states 'critical thinking, in contrast to rote memorization or simple information recall, has as its goal, the stimulation of analytical and evaluative processes of the mind' (p. 8). Moore and Parker (1989) define critical thinking as 'the careful and deliberate determination of whether to accept, reject, or suspend judgment about a claim' (p.3). They also consider that critical thinking involves several skills or abilities, including the ability to listen and read carefully, to evaluate arguments, to look for and find hidden assumptions, and to trace the consequences of a claim. Similarly, Cederblom and Paulsen (1991) define critical thinking as a collection of procedures that enable one to make decisions concerning what to believe, an ability that they contrast with passive reading or listening and mere disagreement (p.1).

Thomson (1999) describes the following three abilities as 'important aspects of critical thinking': 1. the ability to understand and evaluate arguments, 2. the ability to make well-reasoned decisions, 3. the tendency to be fair-minded (p.2). She also claims that there are certain distinct skills involved in the assessment of arguments and in good decision-making skills such as recognizing reasons, conclusions, and unstated assumptions, drawing conclusions, appraising evidence, and analysing words, phrases, and concepts.

Ruggiero (1998) reminds us of two main types of application of critical thinking skills: critical thinking serves to 'make a decision about what action will best solve the problem or what belief about the issue is most reasonable, and then evaluating and refining that solution or belief ' (p.157). As is evident, although definitions of critical thinking diverge, nearly all emphasize the ability and tendency to 'gather, evaluate, and use information effectively' (Beyer, 1985).

9.2. Critical thinking competence of English-Major students: the *status quo* in China

As revealed in the findings of this study, the overall scenario in China is not

encouraging as far as critical thinking ability is concerned, particularly in EFL education. People seem to harbour the illusion that university-level critical thinking instruction falls solely into the realm of philosophy departments. EFL teachers do not have to concern themselves with the instruction of critical thinking skills in class. Thus, critical thinking ability was not officially included into the EFL pedagogy until the revised national curriculum of English language education for English majors at tertiary level (English Division 2000: 13). Wen (2000) a senior Chinese EFL researcher, points out:

> EFL teaching [at various levels] in the Chinese context has placed much emphasis on developing students' basic linguistic skills by imitating intonation and pronunciation, reciting chunks of a good English passage and memorizing words and pattern drills. What is ignored in EFL teaching is the fostering of students' critical thinking and problem-solving ability. (p.178).

The findings of this study support her argument. This study reveals that even if the majority of students expressed their preference of SCA over TCA, they voiced their deep concerns about the 'inner emptiness' of their talk in group discussion or in pair work which inevitably hindered the proceeding of meaningful communicative learning activities in class. This is partly due to the fact that students find it hard to make critical or analytical comments on a given topic, which, in turn, is closely related to learners' deficiency in critical thinking ability. In an interview, a fourth-year interviewee made the following comments on this issue:

> In group discussions, we find it hard to provide challenging or new ideas, especially when we find the topic unfamiliar to us. It seems that we are quite weak in making the critical comments necessary to carry teamwork to a successful conclusion. We have to acknowledge that we have to feed our minds with critical thinking skills. Otherwise, our enthusiasm for the SCA will dwindle, or even worse, it could exert a negative impact on our future career [FS-15].

It can be said that in China, critical thinking is not an important part of the curriculum or standard teaching methodology, especially in the EFL programme where the dominant pedagogical model is traditionally teacher-centred. Students are not, in general, encouraged to challenge their teachers on what they teach. This is well reflected in most of the lessons observed in this study. The lack of critical thinking is also manifested in EFL students' academic writing. Li (2002) has

examined a large number of 4th-year English major students' dissertation theses in China and discovered students' deficiencies in critical thinking in the EFL program.

According to Li (2002), students' graduation thesis should reflect not only their academic achievements, but also reveal teaching outcomes. However, Li finds that certain thesis problems constantly recur. Apart from limitations in linguistic competence, students seem to show a lack of analytical, critical and creative thinking ability required to complete their academic dissertation. Li identifies students' poor critical thinking ability exhibited in their dissertations through problems in academic writing. This is connected with poor narrative and descriptive modes which themselves directly require analytical and critical comment, including analysis, synthesis, argumentation and evaluation of sources and ideas (Li, 2002: 38). Persuasiveness in academic writing is connected to critical thinking because 'writers must predict their audience's needs, and therefore both anticipate counter-arguments and question their own assumptions' (Ramage & Bean, 1999). However, as this study reveals, Chinese EFL majors at university level are found incompetent in critical thinking abilities.

9.3. Root causes of deficiency in critical thinking

The cause of Chinese EFL majors' lack of critical thinking is multi-faceted and can be traced back to pre-university schooling. Its impact on the development of learners' communicative competence in EFL education is substantial.

First, for students at primary and secondary level, what has sustained a pedagogical curriculum has been the national university entrance exam system. Indeed, for primary and secondary schooling, so much of the educational system in China centres around this one exam that it exerts enormous pressure on the life of every Chinese student. The national exam will determine a student's future position in society. Students at primary and secondary levels spend most of their time preparing for it as their performance at it will affect the rest of their lives. The exam overshadows all their learning and students have little time for disagreement, or for debate in the teacher-centred classroom. An education focused almost exclusively on

the national college-entrance exam does little to promote or encourage critical thinking.

Second, at university level, in principle there should be much more opportunity for instruction based on critical thinking as required by the revised EFL curriculum for English majors (English Division, 2000). However, in practice, it hardly figures. Li (2002) points out:

> For English majors, English language is taught and learned just as a kind of skill. Teachers mainly focus on providing students with language skills rather than treating it [the target language] as a discipline of both skills and knowledge as you would do other academic subjects. English is just learned as *wai yu* (foreign language) rather than *wai wen* (foreign language + foreign culture). Despite the fact that almost all of foreign language universities or colleges in China, in the past few years, have renamed their institutions from *'foreign language* universities or colleges' to *'foreign studies* universities or colleges', they have not improved much in their pedagogy nor curriculum (p. 38).

As is evident from the above quotation, urgent changes need to be introduced. Early research on psychological schemata (a person's prior knowledge) suggests that performance in thinking tasks is related to a person's familiarity with the topic at hand (Glaser, 1984; Franklin, 1985; Carrell, 1987). Other researchers also support this and claim that a learner's familiarity with subject matter plays an important role in his or her performance on thinking tasks (Kennedy *et al*, 1991). This is significant when one considers the nature of EFL education at university level in China, which for a long time has focused on learning the English language as a separate discipline, without including other fields of the social sciences.

Third, in many cases, the textbooks for the first two years of the undergraduate program for English majors cover humorous stories and popular science, thus providing students with limited access to ideas or in-depth topics which are susceptible to applying analytical and critical thinking skills. As Wen (2000) argues, even in the oral English class, the topics are by no means thought-provoking. It is not uncommon to find topics such as 'what would you do if you had a million dollars? What are you going to do for the incoming summer / winter vacation? What gift(s)

do you plan to give your friend at his or her birthday party? These topics are good for learners to practise their spoken English, but they present no challenge to the students' critical thinking and do not enhance the level of communicative competence.

Fourth, the majority of university EFL teachers in China, who have themselves been educated by a system that does not encourage critical thinking, have little or limited experience or training in using it in their English classes. This is because, among other things, 'many teachers themselves are not very clear about what the term critical thinking ability implies' (Wen, 2000: 178). This is manifested in the teaching methods they employed for their classroom instruction - which are still dominated by the traditional teacher-centeredness. Text materials are dealt with in a sentence-by-sentence way, and often impede learners from understanding the text at a discourse level. Mohanan (1997) reminds us:

> The traditional framework of [EFL] education that most of us rely on does not provide for critical understanding, and hence does not facilitate critical thinking.... Students are not in a position to critically evaluate the knowledge presented to them. All they can do is accept or trust what is handed down to them, a situation that is hardly conducive to the practice of critical thinking.

So it is not surprising that many teachers do not attach importance to developing their students' critical thinking skills in their courses because conventional teaching methods have ignored this aspect.

Fifth, ideological conformity has also played a role in this down-playing of critical thinking skills. Commenting on the EFL teaching in China, a Chinese applied linguist, Mao (1996: 16-17) points out that in China the social reality seems to demand an overwhelmingly high degree of ideological conformity, from literary practitioners, professionals, teachers and students. For many years, anything that seemed to challenge dominant political discourse was either marginalized or silenced. This has had a devastating impact on social attitudes and academic behaviours. It is worth noting that although the present ideological climate seems more favourable towards certain kinds of cultural pluralism and academic individualism, teachers still find it hard to 'adopt a new approach, academic diversity or a genuine flexibility for themselves or towards students' (p. 16). This is because

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'ideological conformity, which has been practised for such a long time, has cast a long shadow and still inhibits people's behaviours' (p.17).

Confucian morality has also contributed to perpetuating more rigid approaches. A hierarchy of power distribution is reflected in the classroom and in the relations between teachers and students. Respect for authority and power relations in class have left their mark and students would not be used to challenging their teachers.
This is also reflected in students' learning styles. For instance, Mao (1996) remarked that Chinese students were taught to accept authority and that most students were too shy to challenge teachers or books.

Finally, there is the legacy of methodological conservatism which adversely affects the development of learners' critical thinking skills. Traditionally students' needs and individuality are either decided for them, or simply ignored by teachers. The teacher sets the rhythm of the whole class and students are expected to take notes or copy the correct answers from the blackboard. This, of course, leaves students little space to question the teacher. Students who have been trained this way also expect to be 'informed of facts which can be committed to memory' (Mao, 1996).

In short, critical thinking in students has not been encouraged in EFL programmes. The nature of Chinese EFL learners' lack of critical thinking is intricate and involves many variables which need to be dealt with in a systematic way in order to enhance overall level of their communicative competence.

9.4. A new hope in the situation: social changes under way

Things are beginning to change in China, although slowly. There are several developments which would lead us to expect critical thinking to become a more visible part of education in China. First, there is, within Chinese society, a top-down reform underway in EFL education, typified by the publishing of the revised national curriculum for English language education for English majors at university level (English Division, 2000). The new curriculum clearly requires that English majors need to develop their intercultural communicative competence and also their critical

thinking abilities within their EFL education. The curriculum goals are stated as the following: (cf. English Division, 2000: 1-14).

1. Students will increase their use of analytical, critical and creative thinking skills in English, including analysis, synthesis, evaluation and appreciation.

2. Students will be able to evaluate their own and others' language experience and ideas

3. Students will be able to produce correct [English] language and to express their own ideas and feelings in English.

4. Students will develop their own intercultural communicative competence.

In addition, the former Chinese vice Premier Li Lanqing has made it clear that EFL education, particularly, must undergo further reform since it has a very important role to play in China's modernization drive of the 21st century (Pang *et al*, 2002: 202). Moreover, the past 25 years have witnessed extraordinarily rapid social and economic change in China, accompanied by an unprecedented enthusiasm for learning English. Therefore, there is a growing demand for college graduates with not only a good command of English but also critical thinking abilities.

More and more academic links either at institutional or at governmental level have been agreed between China and Western countries. For instance, from 1997 to 2001 about 500 Chinese researchers and university teachers in the field of social sciences benefited from the EU-China Higher Education Cooperation Programme. This program is still underway and continues to benefit many Chinese academic professionals.

Moreover, each year a growing number of Chinese college teachers and students travel abroad to receive what they see as 'a higher quality academic degree'. This is especially true of those seeking postgraduate degrees in Western countries. At present in China, a degree from a foreign university, especially from Western countries, is considered to be of greater value than one from even a top Chinese university. For this reason, faculty positions at universities in China are increasingly being given to those who have completed their postgraduate studies abroad. One can

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assume that during their time abroad, researchers and postgraduates personally experience critical thinking pedagogy as practised in Western educational systems. When they return to China and begin teaching at their home institutions, the educational philosophy that they have experienced abroad will affect their teaching styles. They may thus become 'missionaries' for the cause of critical thinking instruction in EFL field.

9.5. Rationale for incorporating the notion of critical thinking into English language education at university level in China

The findings of this study reveal the necessity of fostering Chinese learners' critical thinking abilities in EFL education at tertiary level. This will in turn enhance Chinese EFL students' overall communicative competence. Many L2/EFL researchers have advocated theoretical concepts and strategies for this area of L2/EFL education (Cf. Byram, 1989, 1997, 1999; Chamot, 1995; Mohanan, 1997; Davidson, 1998; Chen, 1999; Van der Wal, 1999; Littlewood, 2000; Stapleton, 2001; Che, 2002; Gao, 2001; Savignon, 2002).

From the perspective of this thesis, this chapter focuses on three theoretical concepts which might serve to establish the inclusion of critical thinking instruction in EFL education in China and enhance Chinese EFL learners' communicative competence at university level. Three concepts are as follows: 1. Byram's (1997) 'critical cultural awareness education' which is defined in terms of objectives for developing learners' intercultural competence as an 'intercultural speaker' in L2 or FL education (Byram, 1997: 53); 2. Savignon's sociocultural competence (2002: 9-10); 3. Gao's (2001) general notion of critical competence. The following is a detailed discussion of these concepts.

9.5.1. Critical cultural awareness

Byram (1997) advocates the notion of critical cultural awareness which 'entails a learner's evaluating critically and on the basis of explicit criteria perspectives,

practices and products in one's own and other cultures and countries' (p. 53). The objectives for EFL or L2 learners are to:

1. Identify and interpret explicit or implicit values in documents and events in one's own and other cultures;
2. Make an evaluative analysis of the documents and events which refers to an explicit perspective and criteria;
3. Interact and mediate in intercultural exchanges in accordance with explicit criteria, negotiating where necessary a degree of acceptance of them by drawing upon one's knowledge, skills and attitudes (Byram, 1997: 53).

In fact, the core emphasis Byram makes here is that the EFL or L2 learner 'brings to the experiences of their own and other cultures a rational and explicit standpoint from which to evaluate'. Byram further comments on the positive role of EFL or L2 teacher in the process of this development, 'they [teachers] can encourage them [learners] to make the basis for their judgments explicit, and expect them to be consistent in their judgments of their own society as well as others' (Byram, 1997: 54). He further points out that

> FLT [education] is therefore concerned with communication but this has to be understood as more than the exchange of information and sending of messages, which has dominated communicative language teaching in recent years. Even the exchange of information is dependent upon understanding how what one says or writes will be perceived and interpreted in another cultural context; it depends on the ability to decentre and take up the perspective of the listener or readers. But successful 'communication' is not judged solely in terms of the efficiency of information exchange. It is focused on establishing and maintaining relationships. In this sense, the efficacy of communication depends upon using language to demonstrate one's willingness to relate (Byram, 1997: 3).
>
> ...
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> It is important for [EFL or L2] learners to be able to see similarities and difference [between two cultures] and to establish a relationship between their own and other systems, rather than imitate a native-speaker (Byram, 1997: 14).

Byram also refers to Christensen (1993) and Geertz (1975) as saying:

> FLT [education] should not attempt to just provide representations of other

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cultures, but should concentrate on equipping learners with the means of accessing and analysing any cultural practices and meanings they encounter, whatever their status in a society (Byram, 1997: 19).

As is evident, these arguments contrast strongly with the teaching method in the culture course I observed in Ming's class, in which the teacher focused on providing the students with information about the target culture whereas learners' ability to analyse, synthesize, evaluate and critique is neglected (See Chapter 7 for discussion). Byram (1997) asserts that it is possible and desirable to combine the following two approaches in teaching culture, that is:

1. providing learners with representations of other cultures, and
2. providing learners with *critical tools and developing their critical understanding of their own and other cultures and societies* (p. 19, my own emphasis).

These two approaches should form an integral part of the EFL curriculum for English majors in China. Without such approaches Chinese EFL learners will not be able to enhance their overall level of communicative competence.

Byram (1997) further points out the advantage of providing learners with critical tools to develop their critical understanding of their own and other cultures. They are:

1. To prepare learners for encounters with cultural practices which have not been presented to them [in class], and, especially in the case of [English] as lingua franca, [which] cannot be anticipated (e.g. cross-cultural communication in which English is used as a common language between non-native speakers).
2. Through learning methods of analysis, learners can also be encouraged to identify the new ways in which particular cultural practices and beliefs maintain the social position and power of particular groups. The analysis can become critical as well as comparative, turning learners' attention back on their own practices, beliefs and social identities. (p.20)

The quotation cited above is largely pertinent when we take into account the current *lingua franca* status of English in the world, which 'encompasses local and international contexts as settings of [English] language use involving native - nonnative and nonnative - nonnative discourse participants' (Alptekin, 2002: 57). In this context, much communication in English increasingly involves non-native speaker - non-native speaker interactions whose cultural practices are most likely not presented to EFL students in their English and culture classes, nor anticipated. As such, good critical thinking competence will help EFL learners to communicate effectively with others, and to understand other cultures with general empathy and openness. Wada (1999) claims that although learning about various cultures is important, it is impossible [for EFL learners] to learn about them all. Therefore, the pragmatic goal of international understanding through learning English is to develop non-biased attitudes, and cross-cultural communication skills rather than mere factual knowledge about world cultures (cited in Kubota, 2002:22). In this sense, critical thinking competence plays a crucial role in establishing non-biased attitudes towards 'cultural otherness'.

9.5.2. Socio-cultural competence: cultural flexibility

Socio-cultural competence is the second integral strand in developing Chinese EFL majors' critical thinking ability and overall communicative competence. By broadening the view of what Canale & Swain (1980) identified as sociolinguistic competence, Savignon (2002) advocates the notion of 'socio-cultural competence'. She extends it well beyond linguistic forms and treats it 'as an interdisciplinary field of inquiry having to do with the social rules of language use' (Savignon, 2002: 9). She points out that socio-cultural competence requires 'an understanding of the social context in which language is used: the roles of the participants, the information they share, and the function of the interaction' (ibid.). She asserts that L2 or EFL learners in multicultural communication should be 'sensitive not only to the cultural meanings attached to the language itself, but also to social conventions concerning language use', such things as taking turns, appropriateness of content, nonverbal language, and tone. This is because 'these conventions influence how messages are interpreted' (p. 10). She emphasizes that for L2 or EFL learners, in addition to cultural knowledge,

cultural sensitivity is essential.

> Just knowing something about the culture of an English-speaking country will not suffice. What must be learned is a general empathy and openness toward other cultures, which might be subsumed under the term 'cultural flexibility', or 'cultural awareness' (Savignon, 2002:10).

Therefore, sociocultural competence includes 'a willingness to engage in the active negotiation of meaning along with a willingness to suspend judgment and take into consideration the possibility of cultural differences in conventions of use' (Savignon, 2002:10). Given the context, critical thinking obviously plays a central role in this cognitive process and contributes to analysis, evaluation and appreciation of one's own and others' cultural practices. A combination of sociocultural competence and critical thinking abilities, if properly applied in the EFL programmes, would therefore enhances Chinese EFL learners' overall communicative competence.

9.5.3. Critical competence

Gao (2001), an authoritative Chinese EFL scholar, claims that critical competence is important for EFL learners to master in learning foreign cultures since it is 'the ability to exercise good control over cultural information' (p.159). It is necessary for 'the effective processing of cultural information and for the kind of processing which leads to a more rounded personality' (ibid.). In other words, EFL education at university level should be also aimed at leading to a personal development. A good command of critical thinking ability, while not guaranteeing personal development, is a necessary condition for such development. To be in real command of the knowledge required for critical thinking competence, a learner has to exercise judgment and go beyond the specifics to see 'both the trees and the wood'. Gao (2001) points out that critical competence consists of the following components:

1. Comprehending competence: enabling a learner to understand a culture with both cognitive insight and affective empathy. This entails the ability to obtain cultural information from available resources, to build a cultural environment consciously and determinedly. This is related with questions such as what a certain thing 'A' is; what 'A' is made of; why 'A' is 'A'; and how 'A' is associated

with 'B' and 'C'.

2. Evaluating competence: enabling one to assess available information with a critical mind. This involves comparison of new information with known information, and is often related to questions such as in what way 'A' is congruent with, complementary or contradictory to 'B', etc.

3. Incorporating competence: enabling one to integrate new information with known information, and combine them in one's own mental schemes so that they will guide behaviour. This is often related to questions such as how 'A' and 'B' can be combined, and under what conditions; what one should choose to follow and how one should behave to attain a given objective in a certain context (Cf. Gao, 2001: 158-159).

In reality, these above three components of critical competence are interrelated and complementary. Only when these three elements, along with the other components of the concept of communicative competence, come into play in a subtle manner, will a positive learning result ensure. Clearly, critical competence will enhance Chinese learners' overall communicative competence through EFL education.

The theoretical concepts cited above clearly show the significant roles that critical thinking plays in L2 or EFL learners' development of cultural awareness and sociocultural competence, both of which will facilitate the overall advancement of communicative competence. However, it should be pointed out that the above theoretical concepts focus on the significant roles of critical thinking in culture learning and teaching rather than in normal English language courses. The following sections focus on how to teach and assess critical thinking in English classes. Here inevitably a question arises: whether critical thinking can be taught in class.

9.6. Is critical thinking teachable?

Given the Chinese cultural context as described in Chapter 2, the question has to be asked whether critical thinking is teachable. Mohanan (1997) asserts teaching critical thinking should mean helping one acquire the ability to think critically, or helping

one improve the ability to think critically. If teachers can help their students learn to paint, sing, dance or play chess, they can also help students develop or improve the ability to think critically (Mohanan, 1997).

There is empirical evidence that teaching learners to improve their critical thinking skills has positive effects that are transferable to a wide variety of situations (Halpern, 1996; Lazere, 1987; Gettings, 1999).

According to Halpern:

> Substantial evidence concludes that it is possible to use education to improve the [learners'] ability to think critically, especially when instruction is specifically designed to encourage the transfer of these skills to different situations and different domains of knowledge. In fact, it is difficult to identify any aspect of critical thinking that could not be taught and learned (Halpern, 1996: 8).

Lazere (1987) cites Dumke (1980) as stating the purpose of critical thinking instruction at university level:

> Instruction in critical thinking is to be designed to achieve an understanding of the relationship of language to logic, which should lead to the ability to analyse, criticize, and advocate ideas, to reason inductively and deductively (Dumke, 1980 cited in Lazere, 1987).

Gettings (1999) summarizes the significance of instruction in critical thinking as follows:

> Rather than being good or bad thinking, it would be more accurate to say that critical thinking training teaches [learners] questioning or behavioural strategies that can be applied to understanding and responding appropriately to a complex situation or problem. As such, learning 'critical thinking' does not make one 'think better' but to understand something more deeply or solve problems more successfully (P.148).

Following this line of reasoning, it is clear that critical thinking is teachable, but it is by no means enough if an EFL curriculum devotes to critical thinking one or two lectures, or even a whole module, but ignores it in the remaining modules. In other words, critical thinking should be incorporated into the Chinese EFL curriculum design and become an integral part of the EFL programmes. Only then will critical thinking, as part of sociocultural competence, enhance Chinese EFL learners' overall

level of communicative competence. This naturally leads to another important question: how can one teach critical thinking in EFL programmes at tertiary level in China?

9.7. How can one teach critical thinking in the EFL programme?

Teaching critical thinking in the Chinese context will prove challenging for both cultural and educational reasons as described in Section 9.3 of this chapter. Researchers have written much about the strategies of critical thinking instruction from different perspectives. I find the instructional principles proposed by Chamot (1995) most relevant and useful for EFL education in China. Chamot (1995) identifies five instructional guidelines that provide L2 or EFL students with the opportunity to demonstrate and develop their critical thinking. These teaching principles can provide the framework for developing the concept of critical thinking in the English language classroom aimed at enhancing Chinese EFL learners' communicative competence. Chamot's principles are also congruent with the eclectic model discussed in Chapter 7. Chamot's five instructional principles are outlined below.

1. Recognizing and building on students' prior knowledge

Learning theories tell us that we learn by making links between information and what we have already known (Glaser, 1984; Franklin, 1985; Carrell, 1987; Kennedy *et al*, 1991). Students need to be reminded that they already know much that can be related to what they are now learning in English. Their prior knowledge is a valuable tool for helping them learn new things. Teachers can ensure students' prior knowledge is elicited through discussion, brainstorming, semantic mapping and similar activities.

2. Providing meaningful learning tasks

When teachers ask students to think in English, teachers must be sure that students have access to ideas and topics worth thinking about. The learning activities that

need to be arranged in class must be *challenging*, whether they are assigned by the teacher, developed collaboratively, or chosen individually.

3. Engaging in interactive teaching and learning

Chamot (1995:1) refers to interactive teaching as instructional practice involving ongoing dialogues and inquiries, in which knowledge is shared and constructed rather than transmitted one way from teachers to learners. Teaching should be collaborative, in which students and teachers work together to discover, create and expand their understanding and skills rather than focusing on knowledge transmission from teacher to students in TC class.

4. Focusing on learning processes and strategies

Teachers need to encourage learners' development of meta-cognitive awareness by asking students to describe their thoughts, explain how they found an answer, and share their own techniques for learning. Teachers can also help learners become aware of the learning strategies that can help them learn more efficiently. Learning strategy instruction needs to be explicit so that learners can be consciously aware of which strategies work best for them for different kinds of learning tasks. (Such instruction is inadequately practised in China at present as revealed by the findings in this study).

5. Helping students evaluate their own thinking

In addition to teacher's assessment, teachers need to provide their students with structure and time for their self-evaluation. Upon completing a learning task, learners need to reflect on their accomplishments, ponder any problems they encountered, reflect on how they were solved and assess the effectiveness of the strategies used. This can be done individually, and teachers can ask learners to record their self-evaluations in journals or learning logs; or they can be asked to complete checklists or answer open-ended questions. Chamot (1995) claims that these types of self-evaluation activities help students to understand themselves better, and when

collected and reviewed over time, such activities also help provide students with a picture of their own growth, that is, the overall development of their critical thinking.

Meyer (1986: 54) argues that teaching the skills and attitudes of critical thinking inevitably necessitates rethinking the role of the teacher as lecturer and reconsidering the amount of time spent on teaching content as opposed to the amount of time spent on teaching a process of thought. Meyer (1986) also suggests that rather than ending one's teaching with questions, teachers might do better to begin each teaching with a question. Good questions can generate a real discussion and encourage students in the formation of judgements (Pp. 59-60). In addition, teaching beginning with questions creates an atmosphere of anticipation and inquiry. As described in Chapter 8, asking students questions before the beginning of a lecture gives students opportunities to offer their own hypotheses before teachers present theirs.

Meyer further reminds us that teachers should exemplify by creating the foundation for a framework of analysis in class. This is not to suggest that teachers spoon-feed their students by over-simplifying, but simply that they take time to structure the information they present. This is very important because only when students see some order or sense in things, are they more likely to be able to recall information and apply what they have learned.

9.8. Content-based teaching in the EFL class

In addition to the above instructional principles, another area that promotes critical thinking is content-based EFL teaching. In line with the requirements of the revised curriculum of English language teaching for English majors at college level (English Division, 2000), content-based courses in EFL programme need to be instructed with a purpose of fostering students' critical thinking competence rather than providing students merely with bits of different subjects, but students end up with learning nothing in detail. Content-based teaching is defined as 'the concurrent teaching of academic subject matter and second (foreign) language skills' (Brinton *et al*, 1989: 2).

A content-based programme seems to speak most directly to learners' background knowledge as well as interests. Byrnes (1991) points out the following advantages of content-based approach in L2 / EL teaching in the classroom-based setting.

> Comprehension is more readily associated with content knowledge than it is with linguistic knowledge. By providing very rich input for learners, on more than a linguistic level, one can enhance learners' ability to produce appropriate output as well (p.364).

O'Malley and Chamot (1990) contend that a content-based approach which emphasizes learning styles and strategies aims to make the learner become aware of the process of learning and empower them for success (O'Malley & Chamot, 1990). In addition, learners will be aware of processing textual meaning and at the same time exploiting and gaining insights from linguistics. Evidently, this whole process will contribute to the mutual enhancement of their conceptual as well as linguistic competence if the particular suitability of content-based instruction is employed in the English language classroom.

Teaching English via using a meaningful content invites the teaching of critical-thinking skills. One of the many advantages of content-based language programs is that 'this approach brings some of the important and interesting content topics from different subject areas into the language classroom' (Reid, 1998). To make content-based teaching effective, Chinese teachers have a valuable role to play in adopting an innovative teaching approach for their classroom instruction in order to enhance Chinese EFL learners' communicative competence. In this instance, there is no conflict between this approach and the Chinese cultural and educational goals.

9.9. How to assess critical thinking

The introduction of critical thinking into the EFL curriculum in China will also require the introduction of assessment criteria. There are, however, no universally standard criteria in assessment of learners' critical thinking ability in L2 or EFL education.

Some researchers assert that critical thinking is transferable across subjects (Ennis, 1998; Siegel, 1990,1997). 'There are readily identifiable reasoning skills which do not refer to any specific subject matter, which apply to diverse situations, and which are in fact the sort of skills which courses in critical thinking seek to develop' (Siegel, 1990: 77). However, 'there are no universally standard criteria in assessment of learners' critical thinking ability in L2 or EFL education' (Stapleton, 2001: 514). Stapleton (2001) reminds us that although critical thinking has received a great deal of attention in L2 and EFL education, there has been little textual analysis and few scoring guides for testing critical thinking quality in written [or oral] discourse (P. 514). Though some critical thinking tests exist, they tend to be test specific, with criteria laid out that pertain to the content of the test itself (Davidson & Dunham, 1997), such as the Ennis-Weir Test of Critical Thinking (Ennis & Weir, 1985) involving a fictitious letter written to a newspaper listing reasons why parking should be made illegal on a certain street. Test-takers respond to the letter with reasoning that either refutes or supports the letter's arguments. But this model itself is test specific, directly referring to the logic used by the letter writer in the parking example (Stapleton, 2001). Other tests (McPeck, 1990) are designed to measure critical thinking ability, but they are often limited to multiple-choice instruments that do not allow any probing of the reasoning behind the examinee's answers (Davidson & Dunham, 1997). Therefore, these tests have no wider applicability. Establishing an appropriate assessment standard would be a critical concern in the Chinese EFL programmes.

In an attempt to address the lack of adequate critical thinking assessment in EFL teaching, I suggest a model proposed by Stapleton (2001: 515-519). His model actually offers a scheme that can be used in assessing any EFL learners' discursive writing. Chinese teachers can use this model to identify key elements of critical thinking displayed in the students' writing [or oral presentation] by assessing each paper or speech for 5 major components. Stapleton (2001) aptly summarizes this model as follows:

1.   number of arguments,
2.   extent of evidence,
3.   recognition of opposing arguments

4.   corresponding refutations

5.   number of fallacies (Stapleton, 2001)

These elements will now be examined in detail

1. Argument

Teachers first evaluate and tally the number of arguments in each paper in order to determine whether student-writers have reached a conclusion about the issues because their conclusions indicate the presence of arguments. Although it is expected that most students will either agree or disagree with a controversial topic, a definitive conclusion is not considered necessary: Stapleton also stresses that one can remain undecided and still be a good critical thinker, provided he or she offers balanced reasons and evidence for one's indecision. To identify conclusions, teachers look for claim markers such as 'I think' or 'in my opinion'. Arguments can be taken to be claims supported by reasons; unsupported claims are merely opinions (Browne & Keeley, 1994). If the reason supporting a claim is deemed inadequate, then the argument is considered flawed. Similarly, if an essay simply restates an argument from a given topic, case study or the passage using the same reasons, this will not be taken as an argument because 'critical thinking entails going beyond what has already been stated' (Browne & Keeley, 1994), to discover, develop, and clarify an argument and the thinking process involved (Ramage & Bean, 1999). Identification of arguments can be based on semantic structures and linguistic elements that typically signal the presence of reasons, such as 'because' or 'for that reason.' On the occasions in which student writers only imply their position without stating it explicitly, Stapleton refers to Crammond (1998) as saying that teachers can made judgments about the writers' intent by inferring arguments based on knowledge of reasoning structures that may not be explicitly linked by conjunctive devices. Arguments with implied claims or conclusions can be considered valid provided they are supported by valid reasons.

2. Evidence.

Teachers can evaluate and count each piece of evidence in support of a reason. In order to establish the legitimacy of an argument, some sort of proof is required as support (Browne & Keeley, 1994). This can come in many forms, including personal experience, research studies, statistics, citing authorities, analogies, pointing out consequences, and precisely defining words (Browne & Keeley, 1994; Leki, 1995; Ramage & Bean, 1999). Although these sources of evidence vary in strength, their existence in any argument points to a student writer's understanding that arguments must be supported with evidence of some sort.

3. Recognition of opposition.

Teachers can look for student writers' recognition of the multisided nature of the issues in question. They can evaluate and count each time an opposing view is recognized, as well as each time a writer goes on to refute the opposition. Browne & Keeley (1994, 2004:10) speak of a 'weak' and 'strong sense' of critical thinking. 'Weak sense' critical thinking is described as a method of 'resisting and annihilating opinions and a reasoning which is different from yours', whereas 'strong sense' critical thinking 'requires us to apply critical questions to all claims, including our own' (p. 10). Both Leki (1995) and Ramage & Bean (1999) stress the importance of analysing both sides of an issue. Accordingly, students will be given credit for recognizing opposing views and refuting their reasoning as well as challenging their support. The recognition of other or opposite viewpoints can be identified through the presence of specific structures such as, 'Some people claim that..., It is said that . . . however' etc.

4. Fallacies

'Fallacies' refer to the different types of errors in reasoning, in other words, arguments are flawed. Ramage and Bean (1999) identify three broad types of fallacies in relation to critical thinking and argumentative writing texts based on appeals to 1. pathos (e.g. emotional misdirection), 2. ethos (e.g. attacking the character of the opponent), and 3. logos (e.g. hasty generalization on the basis of too little evidence) (Pp. 239-244).

4.1. Fallacies of pathos characterize flaws in the relationship between what is argued and the audience, one example being emotional misdirection.

4.2. Fallacies of Ethos characterize flaws in the relationship between the argument and the character of those involved in the argument, one example being attacking the character of the opponent.

4.3. Fallacies of Logos characterize flaws in the relationship between the claim (an assertion in response to a problem) and the reasons or evidence in an argument - one example being hasty generalization on the basis of too little evidence.

Teachers can note and count these fallacies by name. However, Stapleton (2001) warns that this process of assessing arguments as fallacious is rife with difficulties. A lack of shared assumptions and values among individual teachers can result in one person judging an argument as completely logical whereas another finds it fallacious. Nevertheless, even while one person's fallacy can be another's logical argument, at some point a decision must be made about whether a reason supports a conclusion. If teachers find that the gap between reasons and conclusions is too wide and unconvincing, they can score a writer's attempt at constructing an argument as a fallacy.

9.10. Comments on this model

Advantage

This model can be used to assess critical thinking in relation to the relevant EFL academic skills, such as writing, oral presentations, or practical problem solving. In addition, in this integrated approach, it is easy for a lecturer to assess the degree to which the learner has processed relevant content knowledge. It is a practical approach, which uses clearly defined and tangible assessment items (*e.*g. an essay, a presentation, etc.). It is quite operational. Therefore, it is suitable for use in the Chinese EFL context as it sets measurable goals.

<u>Disadvantages</u>

This model is not without its disadvantages: for instance, for EFL students, their lack of skills in other academic activities (writing, presentation and communication skills) may obscure the learner's actual skills as a critical thinker. Assessment through other media - such as presentation skills - depends to a degree on skill levels in other tasks, which may confound the assessment of critical thinking ability in its own right (Van der Wal, 1999).

On the part of teachers, isolating such reasoning elements in the texts of Chinese EFL learners' writing is a daunting and time-consuming task. This is especially so when attention has to be paid to both content and structure. As such, this is demanding for EFL teachers in terms of their skills in critical thinking competence, language proficiency and a broad range of knowledge in specialized areas. Moreover, because of the subjectivity involved in evaluating the elements of critical thinking, sometimes two examiners are needed to score student writers' papers to ensure reliability.

In addition, Stapleton's (2001) study appears to prove that familiarity with a topic enhances the number of arguments and the amount of evidence each student- writer advances; it does not appear to reveal the quality involved, that is, to what degree familiarity with the content could help each student-writer to improve his or her logical thinking and to avoid fallacies (p.521). This remains a problem to overcome given the intricacy of the notion of critical thinking. Obviously further research in this area is required to improve this assessment scheme of critical thinking ability for English major students at university level.

Van der Wal (1999) tells us that the most useful approach to assessing critical thinking skills would be assessment strategies which would give the learner meta-cognition of how he or she engages with the subject material and with the learning process. At the same time such strategies would enable the integration of cognitive skills with other core skills such as writing skills, presentation skills, research skills, and the use of appropriate technologies, with the purpose of developing 'intelligent thinkers' (Russell, cited in Halpern, 1996: 25). Clearly such an approach will help

Chinese EFL students to develop their critical thinking skills and enhance their overall level of 'communicative competence' (Canale & Swain, 1980; Canale, 1983).

9.11. The relationship between critical thinking competence and other components of the communicative competence model

As mentioned above, critical thinking is a core component of sociocultual competence which enables Chinese EFL students to meet the everyday personal, social and academic demands of a rapidly changing society. Chinese EFL students require regular practice in producing and evaluating ideas during their learning, especially in culture and content-based courses. Of course, this competence functions along with their use of the other components of the communicative competence model, namely grammatical competence, discourse competence, sociolinguistic competence and strategic competence (Canale & Swain, 1980; Canale, 1983). It is not enough for Chinese EFL learners just to possess a large body of knowledge, be it cultural or linguistic, literary or whatever. If they want to succeed, they must be able to apply such knowledge to the challenge of the situation they are in - classroom interactive activities, social occasions or future jobs.

We must bear in mind that knowledge about target cultures or foreign cultures can hardly be handed over to, or deposited in, learners' minds. Critical thinking competence requires learners to learn to know. This depends mainly on the learners' ability to abstract knowledge from the information provided. In addition, critical thinking competence could help develop learners' ability to gain new knowledge, including foreign cultures, by themselves. Widdowson (1990) points out that what makes the L2/EFL learning experience rather more difficult for learners is their lack of schematic knowledge or socially acquired knowledge which native speakers share. The learners' ability to gain knowledge independently is crucial in the current situations in China where EFL learners tend to depend on their teachers for 'correct answers'. Fostering critical thinking competence will, as Piaget has noted, contribute to the development of learners' sociocultural competence because the improved ability to think critically can facilitate the learning process from 'the known to the unknown' (Piaget, 1970 cited in Chen, 1999: 238).

Robinson (1985:23) tells us that in the process of learning culture, the known knowledge refers to learners' own preferred method of inputting information, unknown knowledge indicates the target culture's preferred mode of presenting material (p.23). When gaining knowledge about foreign cultures, critical thinking competence can help Chinese EFL learners to employ their existing knowledge about the home culture to interact with new cultural input. Corson (1989) reminds us that the mere possession of knowledge about a foreign culture does not equate to an understanding of it. 'Only knowledge obtained with critical thinking can help learners 'remedy misunderstandings, or override certain cognitive biases that perpetuate the perception of apparent [cultural] differences' (Robinson, 1985: 62). This process clearly contributes to the development of learners' intercultural sensibility, an important part of sociocultural competence for Chinese EFL students at tertiary level.

The process of critical thinking can also help learners adopt a more flexible attitude towards 'unconventional ways' of doing things unlike those who only know their own tradition but never think about alternatives (Bentahila & Davies, 1989). This attitude 'helps students to know not only other cultures but also their own culture' (Chen, 1998: 244). Moreover, Gao (2001: 191) points out that the fostering of critical thinking competence can enhance the development of Chinese learners' linguistic competence, especially at the higher stages of EFL learning and this can be reflected in learners' reading, writing and speaking abilities. Chaffee (1985) and Hammond (1989) also remind us of the importance of promoting critical thinking within the context of improving linguistic skills. According to Chaffee (1985), it is crucial to develop students' reading, writing, listening, and speaking abilities along with their ability to think critically. These abilities are interrelated like communicative competence itself, and how well we do with one is directly related to how well we do with the other (Chaffee, 1985: 244). Therefore, the development of critical thinking ability will clearly enhance Chinese EFL learners' communicative competence.

Savignon (2002) points out that although the relative importance of the various components of communicative competence depends on the overall level of communicative competence, each is essential as all the components are interrelated. They cannot be developed or measured in isolation. Rather, when an increase occurs in one area, that component interacts with other components to produce a

corresponding increase in overall communicative competence. Whatever the relative importance of the various components at any given level of overall proficiency, it is important to keep in mind the interactive nature of their relationship - the whole of communicative competence is always something other than the simple sum of its parts (Savignon, 1983: 46) as illustrated in the Bucket Model in Chapter 2

Finally, if we do not accept that a college education is merely for employment purpose, we have to acknowledge that it is also about learning to learn, think on one's own and in collaboration with others, about producing competent persons in terms of individual development, and about contributing to society. A student's existing competencies can be exploited and expanded for the purpose of developing creativity and change. In this sense, it is important to note that the inclusion of critical thinking competence can help students develop a critical awareness or a critical spirit, that is, 'a probing inquisitiveness, a keenness of mind and a dedication to reason' (Facione, 1998:7). Facione claims that a main purpose, if not *the* main purpose, of the collegiate experience, is to achieve a 'liberal education', which is about learning to learn, to think for oneself, on one's own and in collaboration with others.

> Liberal education leads us away from naïve acceptance of authority.... It culminates in principled reflective judgment. Learning critical thinking, cultivating the critical spirit, is not just a means to this end, it is part of the goal itself (Facione, 1998: 11-12).

To this end, an understanding of the methods, principles, theories, and ways of achieving knowledge which are proper to the different intellectual realms is needed (Facione, 1998: 12).

9.12. Critical thinking culture and Chinese EFL Education

The idea that critical thinking will improve one's linguistic skills and one's ability to judge, to infer, to reason and to persuade others seems to be culturally specific. Some researchers point out that since not all cultures value critical thinking to the same extent, and in those cultures where it is not highly valued, critical thinking is unlikely to enhance one's command of the language or one's ability to command others through language (Atkinson, 1997). Indeed, the idea that critical thinking will improve one's linguistic skills and one's ability to persuade others seems to be

culturally specific. Atkinson (1997) casts doubt on the prospects of success for teaching critical thinking in the ESL or EFL classroom by mentioning the lack of empirical confirmation of the transferability of critical thinking skills in this regard. Atkinson argues that because critical thinking is a culturally specific social practice, and one that many Asian cultures do not endorse, L2 and EFL educators ought to be very cautious about using it in the classroom (p.72). However, some other researchers disagree and refer to the encouraging results of how L2 or EFL teachers have been able to bring critical thinking approaches to their own teaching situations in Asian ESL / EFL contexts (Siegel: 1989; Davidson 1998: 122; Stapleton, 2001;).

Tamthai (2000) characterizes what is involved in the teaching of critical thinking, and his characterization is very much in keeping with the foregoing remarks. He claims that teaching critical thinking is a matter of teaching students how to carefully consider conclusions drawn from evidence, how to derive various consequences of such conclusions, and how to explore and weigh alternatives to those conclusions (p.191).

Ruminski & Hanks (1995) advocate that teachers should have a clear concept of critical thinking for the purpose of teaching and evaluation. Ennis (1996 cited in Davidson, 1998: 121) also argues that the problem for educators is really one of *how* and *when* to introduce critical thinking, not *whether or not* critical thinking has value for people belonging to other cultures. Davidson (1998) claims that in spite of the fact that many societies discourage criticism in some contexts, such as religious and political spheres, this does not mean that critical thinking is entirely absent from these societies:

> Even if one grants the point that critical thinking is less practised in cultures that value silence, imitation, submission, and conformity, this fact does not preclude the teaching of critical thinking to members of these cultures. Part of the English teacher's task is to prepare learners to interact with native speakers who value explicit comment, intelligent criticism, and intellectual assertion. In short, critical thinking appears to be something more *universally relevant* than just a social practice. If some cultures differ in their present ability to appropriate the tools of critical thinking, it is probably only a difference in the degree to which critical thinking is to be tolerated in certain spheres of life. (Davidson, 1998: 122, my emphasis).

Although Atkinson makes a valuable appraisal of whether it is appropriate to bring critical thinking instruction into the English language classroom in various cultural contexts, from the above quotations, it can be seen that Atkinson's concerns are misplaced. If critical thinking really is a culturally based concept, as Atkinson insists it is, then the ESL/EFL classroom would seem to be one of the most *appropriate* places for critical thinking instruction (Sower & Johnson, 1999, my emphasis). For learning a language is not merely a matter or learning a vocabulary plus a set of grammatical rules. Learning a foreign language is very much a matter of learning another culture, and another way of looking at the world (Byram, 1989; 1997) and in this sense 'learning the ways in which members of the target culture think, reason, and act' (McGuire, 1999). Indeed, one of the most common mistakes that Chinese EFL learners are prone to make lies in translating into the target language, word-for-word the things that they tend to express in their native language. This inevitably leads to error and communication failure far more often than it leads to communication success.

Having examined the theoretical foundations for critical thinking instruction in English class, I would like to make the point that if critical thinking is closely associated with the modes of self-expression which prevail in major English-speaking cultures, then EFL students need to be taught critical thinking skills while they are learning English, especially at university level. Whitehead (1967) says that 'the real fruits of [higher] education are the thought processes that result from the study of a discipline, not the information accumulated' (cited in Meyer, 1986: 2). Meyer (1986) also points out that one of the primary aims of college education is to move students 'from a self-centred universe, based on limited personal experiences and concrete realities, to a richer, more abstract, realm where a multiplicity of values, visions and verities exist' (p. 27). Students cannot learn to think critically 'until they can at least momentarily, set aside their own visions of the truth and reflect on alternatives (ibid.).

Much of what I have discussed here about critical thinking instruction in EFL education shows that critical thinking is a vital part of sociocultural competence and would lead to the enhancement of Chinese EFL learners' overall level of communicative competence. As revealed in this study, the development of learners'

critical thinking ability is an effective way for students to overcome the superficiality of classroom discussion on a given topic. Only when students feel that they have something solid to say, and know how to say it, will they be able to engage in meaningful group activities with their peers, thus making a contribution to their communicative competence development.

It can be seen that the eclectic model described in Chapter 8 and critical thinking pedagogy are inter-related and complementary to each other. The implementation of one approach entails enhancement of the other. However, mere adoption of an eclectic approach in English class does not guarantee the development of learners' critical thinking skills, nor their communicative competence. In a similar way, students' inadequate level of critical thinking competence will make it difficult to achieve the outcomes presented by the eclectic model in Chapter 8. This is because the eclectic model requires students' engagement in interactive activities in which they are expected to make logical and critical judgments on the text content they have read, watched or heard. Here, a more important point is to develop students' autonomy and attitude as a critical thinker, that is, to evaluate their own opinions and to ask questions about their beliefs and judgments. Only in this way can Chinese EFL students' communicative competence be developed.

Teachers need to pay adequate attention to the cognitive aspects of learners' disposition towards critical thinking. Teachers also need to encourage their students and make connections between what they have learned in class and their own experience; to follow an extended line of thought through a series of questions raised by teachers, to form judgments, to be attuned to scepticism; and to be perceptive to the relativity of viewpoints.

To sum up, the overall development of Chinese EFL learners' communicative competence cannot happen when teachers *deposit* knowledge in the heads of their students without engaging their critical thinking abilities. In this sense, both the eclectic model proposed in Chapter 8 and the critical thinking pedagogy described in this chapter need to be used in combination to maximize their desired outcomes - enhancing Chinese EFL learners' communicative competence. This is because a student's critical thinking ability as a component of sociocultural competence, is

essential not only to the fostering of individuality in the student but also to his or her general development as a whole person, a person with dignity and insight into modern human condition (Meyer, 1986; Byram, 1997; Chen, 1999; Gettings,1999; Van der Wal, 1999; Gao, 2000; Wen, 2000).

Chapter Summary

In this chapter, I have given an account of definitions of critical thinking and the current state of critical thinking abilities displayed by Chinese EFL learners at tertiary level. A detailed description was given of the various factors contributing to Chinese EFL learners' perceived low level of critical thinking ability. I have also discussed some encouraging social and pedagogical changes that may help critical thinking instruction to become an integral part of an EFL programme at tertiary level in China. I have referred to three theoretical frameworks concerning the importance of critical thinking instruction. I also addressed the issues of how to teach and assess critical thinking in the EFL programme. Finally I have discussed the relationships between critical thinking ability and the components of communicative competence model, and the controversial topic of cultural influence inherent in the process of critical thinking instruction in the Chinese classroom context.

Chapter 10

Implications and conclusion

Introduction

As stated in Chapter 2, CLT research has contributed much to L2 or EFL theory and to language teaching methodology. In this thesis, I have explored Chinese EFL student and teacher attitudes towards CLT and the traditional teaching approach, and the stumbling blocks involved in enhancing Chinese EFL major students' communicative competence. All this is based on the findings of the data collected through both quantitative and qualitative survey procedures described in Chapter 4. I contend that many of the principles underpinning CLT are in conflict with the Chinese culture of learning and its educational philosophies. Based on the survey findings in this study, I emphasize the necessity of teaching critical thinking for English majors in the EFL programmes at tertiary level in China. From a methodological perspective, I propose an eclectic approach which synthesizes communicative components of CLT with the Chinese traditional approach in order to fill the lacunae in the latter. This compromise combines the strengths of the CLT, the context approach and traditional approach to suit the current Chinese EFL context. Moreover, I suggest a pedagogical strategy for the teaching of critical thinking in English language classes based on the qualitative data findings of this study. In this final chapter, I point out the implications of this study and offer some suggestions for further research before making some concluding remarks.

10.1. Teacher training

The findings in this study reveal that a systematic teacher training programme has to be developed for Chinese EFL teachers to update their knowledge of modern EFL

theories, the principles underpinning CLT and the pedagogical strategies for critical thinking instruction in English classes. Paine (1995) reminds us that teacher education is the 'mother tool' which forms the crucial pieces in the building of society. Although teacher education has received increasing attention in China, especially at tertiary level, the question still remains about how to develop these programmes and models of teacher development in an effective way in the Chinese context.

This study reveals the necessity of establishing standard in-service teacher training programmes not only to familiarize Chinese tertiary-level English teachers with the principles underlying CLT, but also with the purpose of devising pedagogical strategies for critical thinking instruction. Such programmes should address the following issues:

First, a teacher-training programme should be aimed at clarifying the rationale for an eclectic approach, which synthesizes the communicative with the traditional approaches. A methodology can only be effective when teachers are willing to accept and implement it. Littlewood (1984) argues that only after the rationale is explained to a teacher, can he or she select the right pedagogical practices from his or her repertoire and deploy them appropriately. Teacher trainers and teachers themselves should examine Chinese pedagogical contexts and decide which aspects can be incorporated and which rejected. In teacher-training programmes, there should be a partnership between teacher-trainers and teachers to address the challenge of the constraints of the Chinese education system and the needs of pedagogical creativity. Meanwhile, teachers need to be guided in their exploration of CLT as to how they can apply a synthesized approach to their own classroom instruction. However, teachers should not be misled into thinking that teacher training is merely a collection of new classroom tricks for organizing some communicative activities in class. Communicative teaching should be understood in a rounded, holistic way and one which combines communicative principles with traditional Chinese pedagogy.

Second, Chinese EFL teachers should be guided and encouraged to be 'reflective practitioners' (Richards & Lockhart, 1994), that is, constantly reflect upon their own teaching practice. Such reflection is a great source of information to assist teachers to

better understand their underlying pedagogical perspectives and improve their own instructional practice (ibid.). The findings in this study show that the Chinese teachers' practice contrasts markedly with their theoretical and pedagogical knowledge. Their reluctance to pedagogical innovation often results from their own learning experience and perceptions of teaching and their own sense of 'insecurity' regarding attempting the unstructured unknown in class. Teacher training programmes need to help Chinese EFL teachers to judge pedagogical innovations on the basis of their usability and practicality. If innovations are relevant and applicable to teachers' specific situations, they are likely to bring about changes in their own classrooms. Fullan (1991) reminds us of the confusion inherent in pre-packaged training or one-shot workshops: 'most forms of in-service training are not designed to provide the ongoing, interactive, cumulative learning necessary to develop new conceptions, skills, and behaviour' (p.85). Enhancing Chinese EFL learners' communicative competence requires long-term commitment on the part of teachers and teacher trainers.

Third, teacher training should help teachers to develop the notion of 'teachers as researchers', to encourage teachers to engage in classroom-based research and apply aptly their research findings to their teaching practices. In addition, teacher training also needs to make teachers aware that effective teachers are not just knowledge transmitters but facilitators who assist the development of learners' independent learning through the asking of questions, open discussion of ideas, and, above all, critical thinking. Teachers have an important role to play in this process. An effective teacher is one who adjusts his or her teaching so as to engage students in the active process of constructing and challenging knowledge, rather than allow the continuance of passive / receptive and dependent behaviours. Effective teaching should result in a qualitative change in student thinking (Pratt *et al,* 1999). A very important point here is that students are to be able to think differently, not just know more, at the end of teaching. (Pratt *et al,* 1999). Learning should be understood to be a process of acquiring information, discovering new insights, and developing analytical and critical thinking. This process needs to be facilitated by actively engaging students in discussion, application and a critique of the subject or content under instruction.

Fourth, teacher-training programmes need to design a systematic pedagogy to train Chinese EFL teachers to teach culture courses in a cross-cultural and comparative way. It is not enough to teach Chinese and Western cultures separately by providing learners with mere cultural information as the classroom observations revealed in this study (See Chapter 7 for discussion). To describe the nature of teaching the courses of cultural comparison, we may compare it to a nuclear fusion which can only take place with the adequate encountering of high temperature and high pressure. In the case of culture learning and teaching, this is also true. Teaching culture in a cross-cultural and comparative way is to create conditions of 'high temperature' and 'high pressure' for an adequate cross-cultural awareness which can finally lead to communicative competence development and an internal change of Chinese EFL learners.

Given the fact that many Chinese EFL teachers lack adequate cross-cultural competence, either practical or theoretical, native English-speakers could usefully be invited to lecture on culture courses along with Chinese EFL teachers so that the latter may learn from their western counterparts. My home university, for example, like many other comprehensive universities in China, has not been able to take full advantage of the university's human resources for culture education because of the boundaries and barriers between different departments and subjects of study. There is lack of pedagogical collaboration between the English Department and other humanities departments. English major students have to pay extra tuition fees for each credit course they take in other departments even though they meet the required criteria of the university within the EFL undergraduate programme at the onset of the 5th semester. Given the current situation, it would be helpful to invite teachers from other departments to teach EFL students courses of cultural comparison. Based on my own lecturing experience in DCU, Ireland, these cultural comparative courses do not need to be given by one lecturer alone for a whole semester or even for a full academic year. Instead, these courses can be taught by a team of lecturers including Chinese EFL teachers, foreign teachers, and Chinese teachers in other academic disciplines. It is no harm if some sessions of the module are taught in Chinese as long as the course content is in a consistent framework, which provides learners with different cross-cultural theories and concepts, and creates an environment for

learners to ponder on these theories and the content, and then evaluate them critically.

Finally, teacher training also needs to improve the cross-cultural awareness of Chinese EFL textbook writers or compilers in the process of selecting and organizing cultural items, designing classroom tasks and linking critical thinking instruction to text content. In China, especially at tertiary level, most EFL textbooks for English majors are compiled by EFL teachers (apart from those imported from native English-speaking countries). In the Chinese EFL context, good language teaching, to a considerable extent, virtually depends on good English textbooks.

As non-native teachers of English, most Chinese EFL teachers are not very confident about their command of English. Therefore, they require not only excellent course books but also good supplementary source materials. English textbooks need to contain functional, linguistic and culturally related topics for learners to ponder and practise. For instance, when learning the patter drill 'asking for information' or conversation opener at a party or on a social occasion, textbooks need to be organized in such a way that teachers can discuss a cultural value component 'privacy'. Then a cluster of similar communicative components are grouped together under the notional unit of *privacy* for students to reflect on and practise. In this way, English textbooks can bring together a string of cross-cultural components, and help teachers to avoid introducing culture in a fragmental and anecdotal manner. With regard to critical thinking instruction, textbooks that deal with evidence, alternative conclusions and argumentation would help students to analyse, judge, and thus develop their critical thinking. The first step towards this goal is to introduce into textbooks not only 'the conclusions accepted in the academic community, but also the evidence and argumentation that demonstrate the credibility or lack of credibility of these conclusions and their alternatives (Mohanan, 1997). We can say that teachers as textbook writers have a crucial role to play in a development of Chinese EFL learners' critical thinking skills as a fuel filter into enhancing learners' communicative competence.

10. 2. Organisational culture and its implications for administrators

In order to bring teachers' potential into full play, it is imperative that departmental leaders take the initiative of encouraging EFL staff to explore a healthy organizational culture which operates in their own institutions. School or departmental leaders are decision makers of pedagogical procedures and strategies in a particular English department or school. They should take the lead in creating a learning-enriched organizational environment, in which exploration of teacher perceptions of what they do and why they do it holds promise for understanding of the nature of EFL teaching and learning at university level.

This study reveals that many teachers continue their routine practices, despite their claims that they were eager to learn fresh approaches and keen to incorporate CLT. Many earlier studies also show that difficulties exist in promoting pedagogical innovations in EFL contexts, including teacher or learner resistance, learning and teaching context (Dam & Galbrielsen 1988; Anderson 1993; Nunan 1993; Rao, 1996; Li 1998; Sato & Kleinsasser 1999). However, more rare is the EFL research which records difficulties within the context of the 'technical culture' in various English departments or institutions, which examines the impact of school culture on teachers' beliefs and practices (Kleinsasser, 1993). Kleinsasser points out a strong correlation between school context and teaching performance. Many variables such as collaboration among staff, goal setting, cohesiveness, administration, curriculum design and teacher in-service training interrelate to create a particular school culture that is either 'learning-enriched' or 'non-learning-enriched'. The more the school environment or institutional culture encourages collegiality, collaboration and communication, the more teacher learning opportunities and enthusiasm for pedagogical innovation there are (Kleinsasser, 1993). Freeman and Johnson (1998) assert that research on teacher education should focus more directly on the school context, the teacher (experience, knowledge and beliefs), and teaching practices. Unfortunately 'little research has been done within this tripartite framework' (Sato: 2002: 75). It is clear that further research in this area is needed.

10.3. Curriculum design

In the revised national curriculum of tertiary-level English teaching for English majors, though the cultural dimension and element of critical thinking exist, a close review of the curriculum shows that neither culture course instruction nor the teaching of critical thinking competence has been treated adequately in the syllabus. Only a few fragmentary statements can be found. There should be more attention directed towards the teaching of foreign cultures and critical thinking, which need to be explicitly addressed in terms of the materials to be selected and teaching strategies to be used in class. This is significant because cultural instruction plays a decisive role in achieving the goal of the EFL programme (Liu 2003) and critical thinking competence is an integral part of sociocultural competence as described in Chapter 9. Both components will contribute to the overall development of Chinese EFL learners' communicative competence. The teaching of foreign culture, critical thinking and English language are interrelated and complementary. In the English syllabi, there ought to be more space for description and concrete guidelines about the pedagogical strategies for teaching culture, critical competence and a synthesized teaching approach.

The curriculum should clearly specify that in the educational process, the development of critical skills and the acquisition of knowledge overlap. The integration of critical thinking skills into EFL curricula should take the following points into consideration:

1. A pedagogical framework is required for relating critical thinking to culture and language learning in EFL programmes.
2. Teaching and grading criteria require development for use as the basis for a shift of emphasis in classroom instruction from the current teacher-centred and memory-based mode to one, which can actively engage students in meaningful learning activities in small groups or in pairs, so 'forcing' students to think their way through course material.

3.   A general critical thinking course can be developed in collaboration with a humanities department. This can serve as a general core course for all students and will combine interdisciplinary issues and general critical thinking skills.

With regard to the model of fostering 'mixed talents' based on the current TEFL situation in China at tertiary level (See Chapter 2 for discussion), this model of English plus specialized knowledge is potentially useful. However, this interdisciplinary model falls short at present in China, as teachers are not trained to teach various content courses through English as the model requires. Given the interdisciplinary nature of teaching content-based courses in English programmes, one of the major constraints is whether EFL teachers are competent in terms of both English (including methods to be used in class) and specialized knowledge to teach these content-based courses. If not properly handled, this syllabus will divert learners' efforts and energy away from developing their English skills with the result that fostering communicative competence becomes a secondary goal or even neglected. Dudley-Evans & St. John, (1996) caution us that such an interdisciplinary nature is both a stimulating and challenging demand for teachers (cited in Pang *et al*, 2002: 204). Cheng (2002) directly addresses the problem. He points out that the teaching of Business English, English plus Journalism, Law and Mass Media and so on, in China within the framework of EFL at tertiary level is still at the stage of an intuition- or experienced-led academic activity. The findings of this study show that more research is necessary to investigate the nature of business English with its corresponding teaching pedagogy in the Chinese context. This interdisciplinary model needs careful consideration in the context of English majors at tertiary level rather than merely cobbling together a programme of the two disciplines. Obviously an integrated and synthesized approach is needed.

Cheng (2002: 264) argues that we should be cautious in our attempts at using an English department for training 'versatile talents' through 'English plus X model', as English departmental staff are not qualified to teach economics, business, law or journalism [in English]. The findings of this study confirm Cheng's (2002) remarks. Cheng (2002) also argues that 'the teaching of these [specialized content-courses] in an English department could compromise its integrity and its own work, in its own academic discipline'.

To sum up, English language education for English majors should concentrate on developing learners' language skills and communicative competence as a core goal. To receive specialist training from other departments such as International Business or Law, English departments in the Chinese context need to collaborate with the teachers in other relevant departments for this purpose. Above all, EFL programmes should open up to English studies. This means the study of English-speaking peoples and cultures in general, including literature, linguistics, and translation studies (Cheng, 2002).

10.4. Implications for native English-speaker teachers

The results of this study have implications for native English-speaker teachers teaching in China in terms of classroom practice, syllabus and material design, as well as for native English-speaker teachers who teach Chinese students in a multicultural classroom outside China. Recent years have witnessed an increasing number of Chinese students coming to Ireland to advance their English skills at various language schools or study for advanced degrees. As revealed by the pilot survey in this study, Chinese learners' learning styles are conditioned by their own culture and are quite different from what their English-speaking teachers would expect or appreciate (Xiao, 2002). Little knowledge about intercultural sensitivity as well as the culture-based teaching and learning styles can lead to a mismatch of expectations and perceptions between teachers and learners in a multicultural classroom.

The findings in this study suggest that mutual awareness of the different cultures of learning as well as a mutual sensitivity for cross-cultural understanding is required. Students have to develop a sense of cultural sensitivity to reflect upon their own learning styles and a strategy to enable efficient learning. Teachers also need to develop awareness of their students' home culture in order to enhance mutual understanding and efficient teaching. Prospective expatriate teachers teaching English in China or native English- speaker teachers teaching Chinese students in their home countries, need to be aware of cultural differences inherent in teaching

methodology and need to have a good understanding of the disparities involved in teaching and learning conditions in EFL and L2 context. This involves explicitly noting the differences in learning and teaching through open discussion of the mutual expectations that teachers and Chinese students have. Foreign teachers should note that the communicative methods which are effective in the teaching of ESL in their home countries cannot necessarily transfer to other contexts without modification or adaptation.

Moreover, in light of the challenge of developing Chinese EFL learners' sociocultural competence, foreign teachers should also describe in detail what competence in English really entails and explain strategic rules for achieving it and avoiding communication breakdown in the case of Chinese EFL learners. In addition, expatriate specialists involved in Chinese EFL teacher training programmes need to be aware of a major sociocultural gap in terms of different expectations which can affect in-service training programmes in China. For many Chinese EFL training organizers, teacher training means English language improvement in contrast to Western L2 or EFL specialists who emphasize the development of EFL methodologies (Maley, 1982, 1984; Anderson, 1993). Since in many cases, native English-speaker specialists are involved in the in-service teacher training programmes in or outside China, a solution needs to encompass both Chinese EFL teachers' expectations and Western trainers' aims. A more flexible approach will combine the two aims: both Chinese and Western expectations.

Anderson (1993) reminds us that expatriate teachers must be very sensitive to traditional Chinese methods and the needs of teachers and students and understand the limitations and constraints of Chinese learners and teachers (p. 479). From the perspective of introducing CLT into China at tertiary level, attempts by expatriate teachers to help Chinese EFL teachers to incorporate communicative components into the traditional approach will be most welcome. Li (1999) argues that the resolution to the problem, lies in the establishment of mutual understanding so that common interests are to be found and shared, sources of problems identified, cultural differences understood and respected, otherness transcended, and learning maximally enhanced.

10.5. Questions for further research

The findings in this study raise questions and issues for further research. Studies to examine or refine the pedagogical advantages of an eclectic approach as described in Chapter 8, would enhance understanding of the process of such a synthesis, and thus contribute to cultivating Chinese EFL learners' communicative competence. In Chapter 9, we argue for the inclusion of the teaching of critical thinking skills in the EFL curriculum for English majors. This also raises questions and issues for further discussion. For instance, how can teachers' language use, including questioning and structuring, stimulate students to think critically? To what extent does critical thinking occur in English major students through EFL teaching? To what degree is critical thinking influenced by familiarity with content in English class? An adequate assessment measure for critical thinking instruction also needs to be developed.

10.6. Conclusion

The research for this thesis was prompted by my personal professional experience as a university teacher of English as well as my dissatisfaction with the current outcomes of EFL teaching and learning at university level in China. These reflections come at the critical time for China. With the breathtakingly rapid economic and social changes over the past two decades, EFL education, especially at university level, in some ways, comes to be seen as the catalyst of the country's modernization drive and indeed, the rebirth of the Chinese nation.

There are ever-growing demands for bilingual university graduates with good communicative competence. What happens within the teaching and learning of English is therefore of paramount significance. Engaging in systematic data collection and employing rigorous data analysis techniques is required to answer specific research questions in this field. This study, by adopting such an approach, differs from traditional and non-empirical EFL research which merely 'reports

personal experience in following new teaching methods, new textbooks, or new curriculum' in China (Hu, 2002b).

In this thesis, I have set about examining how to enhance Chinese EFL learners' communicative competence. Communicative competence is multifaceted as Canale and Swain's (1980) and Canale's (1983) theoretical model with its four components makes clear (See Chapter 2 for details). Chinese EFL learners' communicative competence at present cannot be fully understood without reference to both Chinese culture and the current state of English language pedagogy at tertiary level in the Chinese context. On a cultural level, it is clear that the following aspects of Chinese culture affect EFL teaching and learning:

1.	The Chinese culture of learning and pedagogy.
2.	Role of teachers in class.
3.	Role of students in class.
4.	Traditional attitudes towards learning.
5.	The concept of 'face'.
6.	The notion of 'good teachers' held by Chinese students.

As is evident in this study, the issue of attitudes and beliefs held by Chinese students and teachers is a complex one as is that of classroom behaviours, teaching methods and the application of CLT in the Chinese context. How these notions subtly interact is also difficult to define. What this thesis shows is that CLT and traditional Chinese culture of learning are in potential conflict in several important respects. They embody different philosophies about the nature of teaching and learning. They diverge in their assumptions about the respective roles and responsibilities of teachers and students. They reward different qualities in students (independence and individuality of CLT vs. receptiveness and conformity in the Chinese culture of learning) and value different classroom activities (communicative activities vs. teacher dominance). Given these fundamental sociocultural differences, it may be counter-productive to attempt to sweep away traditional practices and simply adopt CLT in their place. This is because a pedagogy which is effective and appropriate must take account of the social and cultural context and cannot assume that its tenets are universally applicable.

The fact that the principles and practices underpinning CLT are incompatible with those found in the Chinese culture of learning, however, does not mean that CLT has nothing to contribute to EFL teaching in China. It certainly makes sense to look at those aspects of CLT which are not inimical to the Chinese culture of learning and try to exploit them and integrate them into Chinese pedagogical practices. To this end, teachers and students need to take a cautiously eclectic approach as suggested in this thesis and make well-informed pedagogical choices that are grounded in an understanding of socio-cultural influences. From the findings, it is evident that these aspects of English language pedagogy require refinement in order to enhance Chinese EFL learners' communicative competence. Problems that emerge are listed as below:

1. Traditional Chinese teaching / learning styles

The traditional teacher-centred methods emphasise the bottom-up information processing in reading English by focusing on a meticulous analysis in a textbook-based approach involving a systematic unlocking of the meaning of each fragment of language. Consequently students are led to concentrate on individual language items at the expense of grasping the overall meaning at a discursive level. Personal interpretations are not promoted or valued. Care and certainty are favoured above quantity and experimentation, which, in Chinese, is expressed as *Shao er jing* [learning sparingly but in meticulous detail].

2. The traditional role of Teacher

Teachers expect their students to absorb rather than construct and they see as their roles imparting knowledge to the students in class.

3. The roles of students

Many students still think that the main purpose of going to class is to 'learn from the teacher'. Correct behaviour in class is to listen attentively.

4. Ignorance of learners' needs:

Most teachers do not have a clear understanding of what their students want to do with English, either in class or in the future. The findings in this study show that the teachers have merely assumed 49% of their students' preferred classroom activities and language learning strategies. The findings prove that it is not valid for teachers to base instructional practices mainly on their own unaided intuitions. They need to have a better understanding of their students.

5. Misconception of CLT

The results of this survey reveal that many teachers equated CLT with the teaching of spoken English. Others regarded CLT simply as a teaching method that did not require grammar teaching. Many teachers simply viewed CLT as increasing student talk time and decreasing teacher talk time in class

6.Teaching culture in English class

The traditional teaching method of going over the text sentence-by-sentence still dominates the culture course, as Ming's class revealed. The teaching and learning outcome of this course was not satisfactory as the interview data revealed that many of the student informants complained about the way the course was delivered. Teaching here consisted of text-reading, explaining grammar, structure, language points, and translation of terms, names and places whereas more meaningful methods, such as comparison and contrast from an intercultural perspective, class discussion, and interaction between teachers and students, were seldom attempted.

7. Teachers' competence

Teachers' own levels of intercultural sensitivity and competence undermine the effectiveness and quality of the teaching of culture in EFL programmes.

8. Textbooks

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Some culture textbooks widely used by English departments at university level in China consist of many aspects of simplification and stereotypes which over-simplify the notion of intercultural exchange (See Appendix D-2 for textbook samples).

9. Deficiency in critical thinking ability

The English majors' perceived deficiency in critical thinking ability has prevented them from meaningful engagement in a small group discussion. This may also have a negative impact on their future career. It is also a serious obstacle to the development of Chinese EFL learners' communicative competence. From the findings, it is clear that teachers need to teach critical thinking skills in their classes.

This study also shows that the teaching of critical thinking is practically absent in the EFL classrooms because it does not figure in teacher training programmes. This issue of critical thinking instruction in EFL programmes is important, because critical thinking, as we have shown in Chapter 9, is a vital component of sociocultural competence and the necessary starting point in true communicative competence. Critical thinking pedagogy should thus become an identifiable part of the EFL educational system in China.

The eclectic model suggested in Chapter 9 can be seen as a first attempt towards cultivating Chinese English majors' communicative competence including critical thinking ability in the EFL programmes. However, further research is needed so as to refine the model and prepare Chinese EFL majors to meet more effectively the challenges of the 21st century.

As this thesis has shown, pedagogical innovations in the EFL education make considerable demands on those in front of English classes - the Chinese EFL teachers. Every educational system has an element of self-perpetuating inertia; and China is no exception. Attempts to adopt CLT in the Chinese context where authentic resources are limited, teachers' workload is heavy, and radical changes are viewed with suspicion, would demand of teachers an extraordinary level of expertise, together with much sustained energy and enthusiasm. As revealed in this study, we can expect that the future of EFL and communicative teaching in China is bright, but

it will need to acknowledge the investment required to train Chinese EFL teachers so that teachers and students can become aware of their respective roles. Furthermore, it is not only teachers' professional language-specific preparation that needs to be addressed, but also curriculum design, textbook writing and testing systems.

Western teaching methodologies which claim to be universally valid and therefore dismiss the importance of the local context are unlikely to be successful on their own. As this thesis reveals, a major EFL pedagogical shift of sustained consequence can be achieved only through a culturally responsive reform. Any successful application of a communicative approach to English teaching in China for the purpose of enhancing learners' communicative competence needs to be premised on a careful analysis of the Chinese classroom context. As described in this thesis, there are many factors that impinge on the way Chinese EFL teachers teach English. Obviously these factors need to be addressed before communicative teaching can be properly and successfully adopted in China. It is hoped that this thesis provides not only pedagogical models of practical application for EFL teaching in China at tertiary level, but also a clear presentation of the various challenges confronting EFL education for English major students and teachers.

This study also implies the need for coordinated research between teachers and researchers at various levels so that university teachers' experience and expertise can be fed into pre-college EFL teaching. Cooperation in research between Chinese teachers and their foreign counterparts should be strengthened so as to exploit the positive aspects of both and promote international professional exchanges.

This thesis also argues that efforts have to be made to improve all of the major components of EFL education rather than artificially dealing with one aspect in isolation. In other words, a revamped curriculum, an updated syllabus, new textbooks, revised tests, and more research, all will modify considerably the edifice of EFL education in China. There is a clear need for solid research that can objectively and comprehensively assess the benefits and potential problems of the proposed changes. While the importance of teaching about the target culture in EFL programmes is recognized, care has to be taken in order not to present foreign values and beliefs as universal truths to be embraced without discrimination. At the same

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time, the teaching of home culture has to be emphasized, too. In short, this thesis contends that an eclectic approach and inclusion of critical thinking instruction in EFL reform will go a long way towards addressing some of these issues.

There is also an apparent need for upgrading the professional competence of Chinese EFL teachers at university level. It is obvious that without qualified teachers, no matter how good the curriculum, syllabuses, textbooks and English tests are, the development of EFL teaching will be hampered and the enhancement of Chinese EFL learners' communicative competence compromised. Tremendous efforts and resources are needed to improve EFL teaching in these areas in China. Progress has been made in the EFL reform, but much remains to be done: no less than China's future and that of enriching pedagogical practice depend on it.

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Appendix A-1

Questionnaire for a pilot study

(English version)

Questionnaire for Chinese Students learning English in the American College Dublin (ACD) and Dublin City University Language Services (DCULS) Ireland, May 2002

1. In English class, I like to participate in group work with 2-4 people, e.g. English dialogues, group discussion, role play.
2. In group work, I like committing myself to achieving our common goal with my peers.
3. When working in a group, I like to help keep the atmosphere friendly and harmonious.
4. In group work, I do not like to 'stand out' by voicing my opinions or asking questions.
5. Sometimes I feel nervous answering a question in class because I am afraid of being wrong.
6. In class or in group activities, I like to prepare what I want to say in English mentally before I speak.
7. I work especially hard when my own success will benefit me and other people (e.g. my family or my relatives).
8. In English class, I like a teacher-centred teaching method employed by teachers.
9. In English class, I like a student-centred teaching method employed by teachers.
10. In English class, I like to do simulation test exercises and listen to my teacher' explanations.
11. In class I see the teacher as somebody whose authority should not be questioned.
12. I see knowledge as something that the teacher should pass on to me rather than something that I should discover myself.
13. I expect my teacher rather than myself to be responsible for evaluating how much I have learnt.
14. I like to be active and to speak English when I am working in a group.
15. I have enough confidence in improving my English to my desired level within 1 or 2 years in Ireland.
16. I like to take part in a group-work with foreign students in a multicultural class, e.g. classroom discussion, role-play.

17. I like to take part in a group-work with Chinese students in class, e.g. classroom discussion, role-play.
18. I like to study English in a class with 6-8 persons.
19. I like to study English in a class with Chinese learners only rather than in a multicultural class.
20. When my peer answers questions in class, I murmur the answer to myself.
21. Apart from finishing assignment assigned by teachers, I have my own study plan.
22. I plan my schedule to ensure that I will have enough time to study English.
23. I have clear goals for improving my English.
24. I think about my progress in learning English so as to find out my own strengths and weaknesses in this regard.
25. I assess my own learning strategies to find out my weaknesses and the ways to overcome them.
26. I use different learning strategies for different learning activities in my English study.
27. I select and read the English language text materials that match my own current English level.
28. I think about my own personality so as to find out my strengths and weaknesses with regard to English language learning.
29. In reading English, I try to understand every single word.
30. I like to read English newspapers, magazines and novels outside of class.
31. I read aloud the text materials outside of class.
32. I try to analyse the grammar and structure of the sentence when I cannot understand the text.
33. I recite large chunks of good English text materials.
34. I often listen to English radio broadcast or tapes outside of class.
35. I intend to understand every single word when I listen to English.
36. When I come across a new word in listening to English, I intend to remember its pronunciation and look it up in the dictionary afterwards.
37. I like to answer questions in English in English class.
38. I often see English films, DVDs or watch TV programs outside of class.
39. I like to speak English with my peers or teachers outside of the classroom..
40. I talk to myself in English outside of class.
41. I often keep a diary, take notes or write letters or emails in English.

Appendix A-2

Questionnaire for English Majors at Nankai University, China

(English version) September 2002

This questionnaire is designed for research purposes only and is done on an anonymous basis. All the information will be kept confidential. Answer the following questions in terms of how much you agree or disagree with them. Do not answer how you think you should be, or what other people do. There are no right or wrong answers to these statements. Work as quickly as you can without being careless. This usually takes about 20-25 minutes to complete.

grade_____age_____gender_____undergraduate____postgraduate_____

Please write the response (1, 2, 3, 4, or 5) in the bracket at the end of each statement, which tells how much you agree or disagree with the statement.

1. Strongly disagree
2. Disagree
3. Neutral
4. Agree
5. Strongly agree

1. In English class, I like to participate in group work with 2-4 people, e.g. English dialogues, group discussion, role play.
2. In group work, I like committing myself to achieving our common goal with my peers.
3. I like my teacher to divide the whole class into several small groups in which we do teacher-directed group work.
4. In English class, I like listening to my peers give English oral presentations of interesting stories or information that are well-prepared outside of class.
5. In group work, I like to ask and answer questions in English.
6. When working in a group, I like to help keep the atmosphere friendly and harmonious.
7. In group work, I do not like to 'stand out' by voicing my opinions or asking questions.
8. Sometimes I feel nervous answering a question in class because I am afraid of being wrong.
9. In class or in group activities, I like to prepare what I want to say in English mentally before I speak.
10. I work especially hard when my own success will benefit me and other people (e.g. my family or my relatives).
11. In English class, I like to learn about Western cultures including their way of life, social customs, etc.

12. I like learning English.
13. I am interested in the cultures of major English-speaking nations.
14. I learn English because I want to know about the economic, social, political and technological developments in other countries of the world.
15. I learn English because I want to find a good job.
16. I want to be enrolled in the Master degree program.
17. I want to go abroad for advanced study or work.
18. In English class, I like a teacher-centred teaching method employed by teachers.
19. In English class, I like a student-centred teaching method employed by teachers.
20. In the English Intensive Reading class, I like my teacher to deal with the text materials in a sentence-by-sentence way.
21. In English class, I like teacher-guided and text-related discussions on such topics as population problems, my favourite books, films, or how to be a better learner of English.
22. In English class, I like to watch English language films or videos, and then discuss them in groups with teacher' facilitation and guidance.
23. I learn a lot about western cultures from my English classes.
24. In English class, I like to do simulation test exercises and listen to my teacher' explanations.
25. In English class, I like my teacher to ask students text-based and thought-provoking questions to keep the lesson interesting in order that students have chances to practise their spoken English.
26. In English class, I like my teacher to translate some difficult paragraphs of text materials into Chinese to enhance my comprehension and translation skills.

27. * *Do you like a teacher-centred teaching method in English class?*
    Yes   No   Please state your reasons why you like or do not like it.

28. * *Do you like a student-centred teaching method in English class?*
    Yes   No   Please state your reasons why you like or do not like it.

29. If I cannot think of a word during a conversation in English, I depend on my native language to explain it.
30. I try to relax myself whenever I am feeling afraid of using English, especially oral English.
31. When I can't think of a word during a conversation in English, I use gestures.
32. When I can't think of a word during a conversation in English, I use a word or phrase that means the same thing.
33. I have at least one peer with whom I often practise English.
34. I like to participate in extra-curricular activities in which I can practise my oral English, e.g. English corner.
35. I like after-class activities in which I can practise my English writing skills, e.g. drama group and newspaper group.
36. My knowledge about Western culture(s) mainly comes from English classroom teaching and learning.
37. I like to read English language text materials which cover Western cultures.

38. I encourage myself to speak English even when I am afraid of making a mistake.
39. I give myself a reward or treat when I do well in English. For example, I reward myself by going to a restaurant, etc.
40. I remember new words by thinking of relationships between what I already know and new things I learn in English.
41. I use new words in a sentence so I can remember them well.
42. I link its Chinese meaning to a new word to help me remember the word in English.
43. I expect my teacher rather than myself to be responsible for evaluating how much I have learnt.
44. In class I see the teacher as somebody whose authority should not be questioned.
45. I see knowledge, as something that the teacher should pass on to me rather than something that I should discover myself.
46. In English class, the teaching method used by the teacher is very important to students' English study.

The following statements (47-56) consist of some of difficulties confronting Chinese learners of English at tertiary level in adopting communicative activities. Do you think they might be difficulties for you in using communicative activities in China? What is your opinion?

47. I do not have a clear long-term aim of learning English, and lack motivation.
48. My learning styles are too rigid and inflexible.
49. I have few opportunities to practise my English.
50. There is a lack of authentic English materials, audio and visual.
51. The idea of finding a good job after graduation from the university exerts heavy pressure on me.
52. We lack chances to speak English in class.
53. EMT-4 (English Major Test-4) and EMT-8 exert heavy pressures on me.
54. Teachers place too much stress on the structure, grammar and reading comprehension in English class.
55. The English language textbooks are not compatible with the requirements of the student-centred approach in English class.
56. We have little knowledge or information about Western cultures.

The following consists of language learning strategies involved in EFL learning process. Please answer in terms of how well the statement describes you.

57. Apart from finishing assignment assigned by teachers, I have my own study plan.
58. I plan my schedule so I will have enough time to study English.
59. I have clear goals for improving my English.
60. I think about my progress in learning English so as to find out my own strengths and weaknesses in this regard.
61. I assess my own learning strategies to find out my weaknesses and the ways to overcome them.
62. I use different learning strategies for different learning activities in my English study.

63. I select and read the English language text materials that match my own current English level.
64. I think about my own personality so as to find out my strengths and weaknesses with regard to English language learning.
65. In reading English, I try to understand every single word.
66. I like to read English newspapers, magazines and novels after class.
67. I translate the English text materials into Chinese to enhance my comprehension.
68. I read aloud the text materials after class.
69. I try to analyse the grammar and structure of the sentence when I cannot understand the text.
70. I try to guess the meaning when I cannot understand the sentence.
71. I recite large chunks of good English text materials.
72. I often listen to English language radio broadcast or tapes.
73. I intend to understand every single word when I listen to English.
74. When I come cross a new word while listening to English, I intend to remember its pronunciation and look it up in the dictionary afterwards.
75. I like to answer questions in English in class.
76. I often see English language films, DVDs or watch TV programs after class.
77. I like to speak English with my peers or teachers outside the classroom..
78. I talk to myself in English outside of the class.
79. I often keep a diary, take notes or write letters in English.
80. I prepare what I want to say in Chinese before I speak it in English.
81. While listening to English, I intend to remember the meaning in Chinese to enhance my understanding.
82. I intend to prepare what I want to write in Chinese before writing it in English.

The following open-ended questions consist of several aspects of EFL teaching and learning. Which aspects do you think need the most improvement in order to upgrade English language teaching quality at tertiary level? Please answer in the order of importance.

83*.   <1> Teaching methodology, <2> learning styles, <3> textbook materials, <4> testing system, <5> syllabus design, <6> In-service teacher training, <7> after-class activities in which oral English is practiced,   <8> English speaking environment around.

84*.   Of the five basic skills in English language learning, that is, listening, speaking, reading, writing and translating. which skills do you think you need the most improvement now? Please specify in the order of importance.

85*.   Are you content with the current teaching methods used by your teachers of English in English class? Please explain.

86*.   What are the major problems confronting you in learning English so far?

Appendix A-3

Categorisation of the items of the student questionnaire

1. Students' attitudes towards working in group in class
   Question items: 1, 2, 3, 4,
2. Students' attitudes towards speaking out in class
   Question items: 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 7,
3. Students' function-based learning strategy
   Question items 77, 78.
4. Students' nature of motivation:
   Question items: 10, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 47,
5. Students' attitudes a towards teacher-centred method in English class
   Question item: 18,
6. Students' attitudes towards a student-centred method in English class
   Question item: 19,
7. Students' attitudes towards communicative activities in class
   Question items: 21, 22, 25,
8. Students' attitudes towards non-communicative activities in class
   Question items: 20, 24, 42,
9. Students' attitudes towards learning target culture in EFL programme Question items: 11, 23, 36, 37,
10. Compensation strategies:
    Question items: 29. 31. 32
11. Social strategies:
    Question items: 33, 34, 35,
12. Students' attitudes towards authority in open class
    Question items: 43, 44, 45, 46,
13. Major difficulties encountered in students' learning process
    Question items: 40, 41, 48, 49, 50, 51, 52, 53, 54, 55, 56,
14. Meta-cognitive strategies
    Question items: 57, 58, 59, 60, 61, 62, 63, 64,
15. Form-based strategies:
    Question items: 65, 68, 69, 71, 73, 74,
16. Function-based strategies
    Question items: 66. 70. 72. 75. 76. 77. 78. 79.
17. Students' attitudes towards dependence on L1
    Question items: 26, 67, 80, 81, 82.

Appendix A-4

Questionnaire for teachers of English Majors

(English version) September 2002

This questionnaire is designed for academic research purpose only and is done on an anonymous basis. All the information will be kept confidential. Answer in terms of how well the statement describes **your students** except the six questions in the open-ended section. Do not answer how you think you (your students) should be, or what other people do. There are no right or wrong answers to these statements. Work as quickly as you can without being careless. This usually takes about 20 minutes to complete.

Please write the response (1, 2, 3, 4, or 5) in the bracket at the end of each statement, based on your judgement.

> 1 = Strongly disagree
> 2 = Disagree
> 3 = Neutral
> 4 = Agree
> 5 = Strongly Agree

Note: *No.3: Neutral*, by 'neutral', it means you feel that you somewhat agree and somewhat disagree about the statement.

In English class] I think that _____.

1. Students like to participate in group work with 2-4 people, e.g. English dialogues, group discussion, role play.
2. Students like my teacher to divide the whole class into several small groups in which we do teacher-directed group work.
3. Students like listening to my peers give English oral presentations of interesting stories or information that are well-prepared outside of class.
4. In group work, students like to ask and answer questions in English.
5. In group work, students do not like to 'stand out' by voicing my opinions or asking questions.
6. Students like to learn about Western cultures including their way of life, social customs, etc.
7. Students like a teacher-centred teaching method employed by teachers.
8. Students like a student-centred teaching method employed by teachers.
9. In the English Intensive Reading class, students like my teacher to deal with the text materials in a sentence-by-sentence way.
10. Students like to watch English language films or videos, and then discuss them in groups with teacher' facilitation and guidance.
11. Students learn a lot about western cultures from my English classes.
12. Students like to do simulation test exercises and listen to my teacher' explanations.

13. Students like my teacher to ask students text-based and thought-provoking questions to keep the lesson interesting in order that students have chances to practise their spoken English.
14. Students like my teacher to translate some difficult paragraphs of text materials into Chinese to enhance my comprehension and translation skills.
15. If students cannot think of a word during a conversation in English, students depend on Chinese to explain it.
16. When students can't think of a word during a conversation in English, they use gestures.
17. When students can't think of a word during a conversation in English, students use a word or phrase that means the same thing.
18. Students like to participate in extra-curricular activities in which they can practise their oral English, e.g. English corner.
19. Students like after-class activities in which they can practise their English writing skills, e.g. drama group and newspaper group.
20. Students like to read English language text materials which cover Western cultures.

The following statements (47-56) consist of some of difficulties confronting Chinese learners of English at tertiary level in adopting communicative activities. Do you think they might be difficulties for your students? Please answer in terms of how well the statement describes your student.

21. Students do not have a clear long-term aim of learning English, and lack motivation.
22. Their learning styles are too rigid and inflexible.
23. Students have few opportunities to practise my English in English class
24. There is a lack of authentic English materials, audio and visual.
25. The facilities of the language lab are inadequate.
26. Students lack chances to speak English in class.
27. EMT-4 (English Major Test-4) and EMT-8 exert heavy pressures on students.
28. Teachers place too much stress on the structure, grammar and reading comprehension in English class.
29. The English language textbooks are not compatible with the requirements of the student-centred approach in English class.
30. Students have little knowledge or information about Western cultures.

*The following consists of language learning strategies involved in EFL learning process. Please answer in terms of how well the statement describes **your students**.*

31. Apart from finishing assignment assigned by teachers, students have their own study plans.

32. Students have clear goals for improving their English.
33. Students think about their own progress in learning English so as to find out their strengths and weaknesses in this regard.
34. Students think about their own personality traits so as to find out their strengths and weaknesses with regard to English language learning.

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35. Students translate the English text materials into Chinese to enhance their comprehension.
36. Students often listen to English language radio broadcast.
37. Students often listen to English recorded tapes.
38. Students like to answer questions in English in class.
39. Students like to speak English with my peers or teachers outside the classroom.

Open-ended Questions

Please give your own opinions of the following questions as detailed as you can.

1*. Do you like a teacher-centred teaching method in English class?
        Yes   No
        Please state your reasons why you like or do not like it. _____

2*. Do you like a student-centred teaching method in English class?
        Yes   No
        Please state your reasons why you like or do not like it.

3*. As learning a foreign is learning its culture at the same time, much effort needs to be done to integrate the teaching and the learning of foreign cultures into EFL programs.
        Yes   No

4*. Textbook content needs to be renewed in order to serve the communicative language teaching methods in English class .
        Yes   No
Comments:

5*. Students often keep quiet in English class, I think that communicative teaching methods are hard to achieve a satisfactory outcome.
        Yes   No

6*. Which aspects of the following items do you think need to upgrade most in order to improve the outcomes of English language teaching in China? <1> Teaching methodology, <2> learning styles, <3> textbook materials, <4> testing system, <5> syllabus design, <6> In-service teacher training, <7> after-class activities in which oral English is practiced, <8> English speaking environment? Please write down the number in the order of importance.

Appendix B-1

The Mean Value and Standard deviation of Student
Questionnaire data (N = 210)

Item 1	3.98 .88	Item21	3.98 .95	Item43	2.81 .99	Item63	3.68 .93
Item2	4.36 .74	Item22	4.13 .90	Item44	2.26 .90	Item64	3.46 .99
Item3	3.90 .95	Item23	3.61 .98	Item45	1.91 .82	Item65	3.36 1.04
Item4	3.74 1.13	Item24	2.71 1.17	Item46	4.11 .98	Item66	3.49 .98
Item5	3.80 1.03	Item25	4.19 .85	Item47	3.41 1.13	Item67	2.38 .98
Item6	4.49 .71	Item26	3.27 1.26	Item48	3.47 1.01	Item68	3.05 .97
Item7	2.99 1.10	Item29	2.97 1.11	Item49	4.18 .92	Item69	3.67 .96
Item8	3.38 1.14	Item30	3.51 1.02	Item50	3.47 1.21	Item70	3.73 .84
Item9	3.60 1.04	Item31	3.25 1.05	Item51	3.70 1.09	Item71	2.54 1.04
Item10	4.31 .88	Item32	3.89 .87	Item52	3.90 .91	Item72	3.48 1.00
Item11	4.56 .66	Item33	2.43 1.23	Item53	3.17 1.16	Item73	3.18 .97
Item12	4.21 .92	Item34	2.78 1.20	Item54	3.48 1.02	Item74	3.15 1.18
Item13	4.29 .87	Item35	2.90 1.12	Item55	3.79 .87	Item75	2.93 1.02
Item14	4.06 .93	Item36	2.99 1.10	Item56	3.70 .94	Item76	3.76 1.04
Item15	4.48 .92	Item37	4.30 .82s	Item57	3.91 .91	Item77	2.60 .98
Item16	3.97 1.39	Item38	3.73 1.00	Item58	3.34 .92	Item78	2.85 1.04
Item17	3.25 1.29	Item39	2.91 1.21	Item59	3.39 .96	Item79	2.77 1.04
Item18	2.80 1.15	Item40	3.44 1.06	Item60	3.35 .91	Item80	2.68 1.08
Item19	3.56 .97	Item41	2.89 1.12	Item61	3.32 .91	Item81	2.36 1.05
Item20	3.04 1.22	Item42	2.63 1.18	Item62	3.56 .92	Item82	2.56 1.16

Appendix B-2

16 Items showing significant differences by the One-Way ANOVA Test Across 5 student sub-groups

N = 210	df	F-value	ANOVA Sig. P < 0. 05
Q Item 1	4	3.235	0.013
Q Item 5	4	2.829	0.026
Q Item 8	4	4.475	0.002
Q Item 18	4	3.514	0.008
Q Item 20	4	3.513	0.008
Q Item 24	4	4.152	0.003
Q Item 26	4	3.176	0.015
Q Item 29	4	5.344	0.000
Q Item 33	4	2.688	0.032
Q Item 42	4	3.306	0.012
Q Item 50	4	3.005	0.019
Q Item 50	4	3.005	0.019
Q Item 54	4	3.210	0.014
Q Item 54	4	3.210	0.014

Note: The number of questionnaire items in this table corresponds with their ordinal order in the student questionnaire.

Appendix B-3

The ANOVA Post Hoc Test between student sub-groups

Item	Significant difference Between sub-groups		Sig. $P<0.05$
01	2nd year G	4th year U	0.005
08	2nd year G	4th year U	0.017
18	2nd year G	4th year U	0.025
20	2nd year G	2nd year U	0.005
	1st year G	2nd year U	0.033
24	2ud year U	1st year G	0.022
	2ud year U	2nd year G	0.003
	2ud year U	3rd year U	0.038
29	2ud year U	4th year U	0.006
	2ud year U	1st year G	0.000
	2ud year U	2nd year G	0.004
33	2ud year U	4th year U	0.029
42	4th year U	2nd year G	0.011
50	2ud year U	2nd year G	0.020
54	2nd year U	3rd year U	0.034
	2nd year U	4th yeaer U	0.017

Note: The number of questionnaire items in this table corresponds with their ordinal order in the student questionnaire.

Appendix B-4

A comparison of Mean Value and standard deviation between student and teacher groups

Item	Mean S / T	Standard Dev. S / T	Item	Mean S / T	Standard Dev. S / T
01	3.95 / 3.70	0.90 / 0.93	47	3.42 / 2.93*	1.14 / 1.01
03	3.89 / 3.55*	0.95 / 0.91	48	3.48 / 3.29	1.02 / 0.84
04	3.72 / 3.45*	1.13 / 0.90	49	4.24 / 3.80*	0.87 / 1.12
05	3.79 / 4.08	1.04 / 0.99	50	3.55 / 2.75*	1.19 / 1.25
07	3.00 / 3.06	1.13 / 1.08	51	3.74 / 3.40*	1.08 / 0.94
11	4.57 / 4.38*	0.65 / 0.64	52	3.96 / 3.22*	0.88 / 1.02
18	2.85 / 3.12	1.16 / 1.01	53	3.18 / 3.46	1.15 / 1.01
19	3.53 / 3.03*	0.97 / 1.12	54	3.52 / 2.58*	1.01 / 1.10
20	3.07 / 3.19	1.24 / 1.11	55	3.81 / 3.51*	0.85 / 0.96
22	4.15 / 3.55*	0.86 / 1.25	56	3.74 / 3.49	0.91 / 0.98
23	3.63 / 3.90**	0.97 / 1.04	57	3.89 / 3.12*	0.92 / 0.84
24	2.78 / 3.36**	1.17 / 0.90	59	3.39 / 3.16	0.96 / 0.90
25	4.20 / 3.94*	0.84 / 0.75	60	3.32 / 2.81*	0.91 / 0.66
26	3.33 / 2.93*	1.25 / 0.89	64	3.21 / 2.67*	1.03 / 0.64
29	3.02 / 3.02	1.13 / 1.01	67	2.39 / 2.41	0.98 / 1.10
31	3.27 / 2.80*	1.05 / 1.06	72	3.50 / 3.58	0.99 / 0.87
32	3.88 / 3.57*	0.85 / 0.68	73	3.50 / 3.57	0.99 / 0.77
34	2.78 / 3.54**	1.19 / 0.85	75	2.89 / 2.86	1.01 / 0.95
35	2.90 / 3.54**	1.12 / 0.88	77	2.57 / 2.40	0.97 / 1.12
37	4.33 / 4.28	0.81 / 0.78			

Note: The number of questionnaire items in this table resembles their ordinal order in the student questionnaire.

Items with * indicate the students' score was higher than that of teachers.

Items with * * indicate the teachers' score was higher than that of students.

Appendix B-5

Mann-Whitney *U* Test between students and teachers
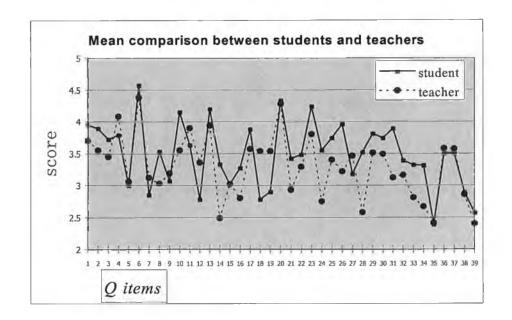
(P < 0.05)

Item No.	Mann-Whitney	Z	Sig. (2-tailed)
03	4107.000	-2.514	0.012 *
04	4240.500	-2.191	0.028 *
11	4369.500	-2.133	0.033 *
19	4155.000	-2.407	0.016 *
22	3539.000	-3.798	0.000 ****
23	4267.000	-2.147	0.032 *
24	3589.500	-3.582	0.000 ****
25	4151.000	-2.479	0.013 *
26	3461.500	-3.847	0.000 ****
31	4023.000	-2.675	0.007 **
32	3887.500	-3.054	0.002 ***
34	3435.000	-3.919	0.000 ****
35	3721.000	-3.319	0.001 ****
47	3875.000	-3.007	0.003 ***
49	4221.500	-2.314	0.021 *
50	3582.000	-3.613	0.000 ****
51	3900.500	-2.955	0.003 ***
52	3258.000	-4.452	0.000 ****
54	2994.000	-4.903	0.000 ****
55	3918.500	-2.989	0.003 ***
57	2647.500	-5.731	0.000 ****
60	3432.500	-4.041	0.000 ****
64	3349.500	-4.150	0.000 ****

Note: **** $P \leqslant 0.001$; *** $P \leqslant 0.003$; ** $P < 0.008$; * $P < 0.05$.

Item numbers in this table resembles their original order of the ordinal numbers in the student questionnaire.

Appendix B-6.

A comparison of Mean value between students and teachers

Mean comparison between students and teachers

Appendix B-7 (N = 210)
Frequency Table of Student Questionnaire (No. 1-14)

1	Frequency	Percent
2	13	6.2
3	44	21
4	87	41.4
5	66	31.4
Total	210	100

2	Frequency	Percent
2	4	1.9
3	21	10
4	81	38.6
5	104	49.5
Total	210	100

3	Frequency	Percent
1	2	1
2	14	6.7
3	51	24.3
4	78	37.1
5	65	31
Total	210	100

4	Frequency	Percent
1	4	1.9
2	33	15.7
3	44	21
4	61	29
5	68	32
Total	210	100

5	Frequency	Percent
1	2	1
2	25	11.9
3	49	23.3
4	70	33.3
5	64	30.5
Total	210	100

6	Frequency	Percent
2	6	2.9
3	8	3.8
4	74	35.2
5	122	58.1
Total	210	100

7	Frequency	Percent
1	16	7.6
2	58	27.6
3	69	32.9
4	46	21.9
5	21	10
Total	210	100

8	Frequency	Percent
1	14	6.7
2	32	15.2
3	63	30
4	63	30
5	38	18.1
Total	210	100

9	Frequency	Percent
1	5	2.4
2	30	14.3
3	51	24.3
4	82	39
5	42	20
Total	210	100

10	Frequency	Percent
1	5	2.4
2	1	0.5
3	26	12.4
4	70	33.3
5	108	51.4
Total	210	100

11	Frequency	Percent
2	2	1
3	13	6.2
4	61	29
5	134	63.8
Total	210	100

12	Frequency	Percent
1	2	1
2	9	4.3
3	32	15.2
4	67	31.9
5	100	47.6
Total	210	100

13	Frequency	Percent
1	2	1
2	9	4.3
3	18	8.6
4	79	37.6
5	102	48.6
Total	210	100

14	Frequency	Percent
1	1	0.5
2	11	5.2
3	45	21.4
4	71	33.8
5	82	39
Total	210	100

Appendix B-7

Frequency Table of Student Questionnaire (No. 15-26)

15	Frequency	Percent		21	Frequency	Percent
1	5	2.4		1	6	2.9
2	5	2.4		2	6	2.9
3	18	8.6		3	42	20
4	38	18.1		4	88	41.9
5	144	68.6		5	68	32.4
Total	210	100		Total	210	100
16	**Frequency**	**Percent**		**22**	**Frequency**	**Percent**
1	22	10.5		1	2.	1
2	16	7.6		2	10	4.8
3	25	11.9		3	30	14.3
4	31	14.8		4	84	40
5	116	55.2		5	84	40
Total	210	100		Total	210	100
17	**Frequency**	**Percent**		**23**	**Frequency**	**Percent**
1	19	9		1	1	0.5
2	47	22.4		2	28	13.3
3	56	26.7		3	66	31.4
4	39	18.6		4	71	33.8
5	49	23.3		5	44	21
Total	210	100		Total	210	100
18	**Frequency**	**Percent**		**24**	**Frequency**	**Percent**
1	31	14.8		1	37	17.6
2	54	25.7		2	57	27.1
3	68	32.4		3	58	27.6
4	40	19		4	45	21.4
5	17	8.1		5	13	6.2
Total	210	100		Total	210	100
19	**Frequency**	**Percent**		**25**	**Frequency**	**Percent**
1	6	2.9		1	1	0.5
2	18	8.6		2	9	4.3
3	75	35.7		3	27	12.9
4	75	35.7		4	86	41
5	36	17.1		5	87	41.4
Total	210	100		Total	210	100
20	**Frequency**	**Percent**		**26**	**Frequency**	**Percent**
1	25	11.9		1	21	10
2	47	22.4		2	40	19
3	62	29.5		3	53	25.2
4	47	22.4		4	54	25.7
5	29	13.8		5	42	20
Total	210	100		Total	210	100

Appendix B-7

Frequency Table of Student Questionnaire (No. 29-40)

29	Frequency	Percent
1	24	11.4
2	43	20.5
3	76	36.2
4	49	23.3
5	18	8.6
Total	210	100

30	Frequency	Percent
1	7	3.3
2	26	12.4
3	65	31
4	77	36.7
5	35	16.7
Total	210	100

31	Frequency	Percent
1	13	6.2
2	35	16.7
3	70	33.3
4	71	33.8
5	21	10
Total	210	100

32	Frequency	Percent
1	2	1
2	10	4.8
3	49	23.3
4	97	46.2
5	52	24.8
Total	210	100

33	Frequency	Percent
1	53	25.2
2	74	35.2
3	40	19
4	25	11.9
5	18	8.6
Total	210	100

34	Frequency	Percent
1	27	12.9
2	77	36.7
3	44	21
4	40	19
5	22	10.5
Total	210	100

35	Frequency	Percent
1	17	8.1
2	72	34.3
3	58	27.6
4	42	20
5	21	10
Total	210	100

36	Frequency	Percent
1	17	8.1
2	62	29.5
3	53	25.2
4	63	30
5	15	7.1
Total	210	100

37	Frequency	Percent
1	2	1
2	6	2.9
3	18	8.6
4	85	40.5
5	99	47.1
Total	210	100

38	Frequency	Percent
1	5	2.4
2	18	8.6
3	56	26.7
4	81	38.6
5	50	23.8
Total	210	100

39	Frequency	Percent
1	25	11.9
2	63	30
3	53	25.2
4	43	20.5
5	26	12.4
Total	210	100

40	Frequency	Percent
1	8	3.8
2	29	13.8
3	73	34.8
4	62	29.5
5	38	18.1
Total	210	100

Appendix B-7

Frequency Table of Student Questionnaire (No. 41-52)

41	Frequency	Percent
1	16	7.6
2	75	35.7
3	58	27.6
4	39	18.6
5	22	10.5
Total	210	100

42	Frequency	Percent
1	44	21
2	55	26.2
3	59	28.1
4	39	18.6
5	13	6.2
Total	210	100

43	Frequency	Percent
1	13	6.2
2	79	37.6
3	60	28.6
4	50	23.8
5	8	3.8
Total	210	100

44	Frequency	Percent
1	41	19.5
2	96	45.7
3	51	24.3
4	21	10
5	1	0.5
Total	210	100

45	Frequency	Percent
1	63	30
2	118	56.2
3	17	8.1
4	9	4.3
5	3	1.4
Total	210	100

46	Frequency	Percent
1	6	2.9
2	13	6.2
3	15	7.1
4	94	44.8
5	82	39
Total	210	100

47	Frequency	Percent
1	10	4.8
2	46	21.9
3	32	15.2
4	91	43.3
5	31	14.8
Total	210	100

48	Frequency	Percent
1	3	1.4
2	45	21.4
3	39	18.6
4	96	45.7
5	27	12.9
Total	210	100

49	Frequency	Percent
1	2	1
2	16	7.6
3	13	6.2
4	91	43.3
5	88	41.9
Total	210	100

50	Frequency	Percent
1	49	4.3
2	54	25.7
3	21	10
4	81	38.6
5	45	21.4
Total	210	100

51	Frequency	Percent
1	6	2.9
2	32	15.2
3	33	15.7
4	86	41
5	53	25.2
Total	210	100

52	Frequency	Percent
1	1	0.5
2	22	10.5
3	27	12.9
4	108	51.4
5	52	24.8
Total	210	100

Appendix B-7

Frequency Table of Student Questionnaire (No. 53-64)

53	Frequency	Percent
1	12	5.7
2	60	28.6
3	49	23.3
4	59	28.1
5	30	14.3
Total	210	100

54	Frequency	Percent
1	3	1.4
2	41	19.5
3	50	23.8
4	84	40
5	32	15.2
Total	210	100

55	Frequency	Percent
1	3	1.4
2	15	7.1
3	43	20.5
4	112	53.3
5	37	17.6
Total	210	100

56	Frequency	Percent
1	2	1
2	30	14.3
3	32	15.2
4	112	53.3
5	34	16.2
Total	210	100

57	Frequency	Percent
1	1	0.5
2	16	7.6
3	43	20.5
4	91	43.3
5	59	28.1
Total	210	100

58	Frequency	Percent
1	4	1.9
2	33	15.7
3	79	37.6
4	75	35.7
5	19	9
Total	210	100

59	Frequency	Percent
1	5	2.4
2	34	16.2
3	68	32.4
4	81	38.6
5	22	10.5
Total	210	100

60	Frequency	Percent
1	5	2.4
2	31	14.8
3	76	36.2
4	81	38.6
5	17	8.1
Total	210	100

61	Frequency	Percent
1	5	2.4
2	31	14.8
3	83	39.5
4	73	34.8
5	18	8.6
Total	210	100

62	Frequency	Percent
1	3	1.4
2	29	13.8
3	51	24.3
4	102	48.6
5	25	11.9
Total	210	100

63	Frequency	Percent
1	2	1
2	24	11.4
3	50	23.8
4	97	46.2
5	37	17.6
Total	210	100

64	Frequency	Percent
1	6	2.9
2	45	21.4
3	60	28.6
4	73	34.8
5	25	11.9
Total	1	0.5
	210	100

Appendix B-7

Frequency Table of Student Questionnaire (No. 65-76)

65	Frequency	Percent		71	Frequency	Percent
1	7	3.3		1	32	15.2
2	39	18.6		2	81	38.6
3	65	31.0		3	55	26.2
4	70	33.3		4	36	17.1
5	29	13.8		5	6	2.9
Total	210	100		Total	210	100
66	**Frequency**	**Percent**		**72**	**Frequency**	**Percent**
1	4	1.9		1	7	3.3
2	29	13.8		2	27	12.9
3	71	33.8		3	66	31.4
4	72	34.3		4	79	37.6
5	34	16.2		5	31	14.8
Total	210	100		Total	210	100
67	**Frequency**	**Percent**		**73**	**Frequency**	**Percent**
1	39	18.6		1	6	2.9
2	83	39.5		2	49	23.3
3	62	29.5		3	72	34.3
4	21	10		4	67	31.9
5	5	2.4		5	16	7.6
Total	210	100		Total	210	100
68	**Frequency**	**Percent**		**74**	**Frequency**	**Percent**
1	8	3.8		1	17	8.1
2	55	26.2		2	52	24.8
3	80	38.1		3	51	24.3
4	53	25.2		4	62	2935
5	14	6.7		5	28	13.3
Total	210	100		Total	210	100
69	**Frequency**	**Percent**		**75**	**Frequency**	**Percent**
1	5	2.4		1	16	7.6
2	20	9.5		2	54	25.7
3	52	24.8		3	84	40
4	96	45.7		4	41	19.5
5	37	17.6		5	15	7.1
Total	210	100		Total	210	100
70	**Frequency**	**Percent**		**76**	**Frequency**	**Percent**
1	3	1.4		1	5	2.4
2	13	6.2		2	21	10
3	53	25.2		3	51	24.3
4	109	51.9		4	76	36.2
5	32	15.2		5	57	27.1
Total	210	100		Total	210	100

Appendix B-7

Frequency Table of Student Questionnaire (77-82)

77	Frequency	Percent
1	25	11.9
2	79	37.6
3	69	32.9
4	30	14.3
5	7	3.3
Total	210	100

78	Frequency	Percent
1	19	9
2	58	27.6
3	84	40
4	33	15.7
5	16	7.6
Total	210	100

79	Frequency	Percent
1	25	11.9
2	56	26.7
3	82	39
4	36	17.1
5	11	5.2
Total	210	100

80	Frequency	Percent
1	33	15.7
2	56	26.7
3	77	36.7
4	33	15.7
5	11	5.2
Total	210	100

81	Frequency	Percent
1	46	21.9
2	82	39
3	50	23.8
4	25	11.9
5	7	3.3
Total	210	100

82	Frequency	Percent
1	43	20.5
2	65	31
3	54	25.7
4	38	18.1
5	9	4.3
Total	1	0.5

Appendix C-1

Comparison of attitudes towards TCA and SCA between teachers and students

Teacher N = 50 Student N = 210		TCA	SCA
Teacher	YES	32%	59%
	NO	61%	33%
Student	YES	31%	70%
	NO	58%	25%

TCA: Teacher-centred approach

SCA: Student-centred approach

Appendix C-2

Students' opinions about the current teaching methods used by teachers in English classes

Current English Teaching method in English class	Students N = 210	
Like	46	22%
Dislike	160	76%

Appendix C-3

Teacher's responses to the open-ended questions in the questionnaire

1. Do you like a teacher-centred teaching method in English class?
   Yes   No
   Please state your reasons why you like or do not like it. _____

2. Do you like a student-centred teaching method in English class?
   Yes   No
       Please state your reasons why you like or do not like it.

3. Learning a foreign language means learning a foreign culture and both language and culture teaching should be integrated in TEFL program.
   Yes   No.

4. The English textbooks should have to be revised in order to suit CLT approach in the classroom-based setting.
   Yes   No.

5. In the English class students often keep quite and it is hard to adopt student-centred approach in the classroom.

   Yes   No.

6   <1> Teaching methodology, <2> learning styles, <3> textbook materials, <4> testing system, <5> syllabus design, <6> In-service teacher training, <7> after-class activities in which oral English is practiced, <8> English speaking environment? (Please write the number in the order of priority)

Teacher's attitudes towards open-ended questions

Items No.		1	2	3	4	5	6*
Total	*Yes*	32%	59%	96%	94%	49%	See
N=50	*No*	61%	33%	4%	6%	51%	Below

Teachers' responses to Question 6*

The answers are listed in the order of priority rated by the teachers:

1. In-service teacher training
2. Teaching methodology
3. English speaking environment
4. Textbook materials
5. Learning styles
6. After-class activities
7. Testing system
8. Syllabus design

Appendix D-1

Similarities / differences between teachers' instructional practices and their explanations

	Similarities and Differences in teaching practice	Participants' Explanations
Lan	*Focus of instruction mainly on language forms and content of texts[1].* *Students under tight control in doing text-based activities* Students read their oral presentation rather than talking about it **Communicative activities in groups or in pairs on a designated topic[2].**	Students expected to learn more from teacher Pre-prepared written speech would to accuracy and high-quality homework. Students' proficiency in English was not good enough. Students didn't want to make errors. Students liked working in a small group in my class.
Shan	*Focus of instruction mainly on language forms and content of texts* *Students under tight control doing non-communicative text-based activities* *Students read their news report rather than talking about it* No interaction between teacher and students took place	The aims and objectives of the course was prescribed and had to be followed via the textbook. Students were now given more time than before in class to practise oral English 'Teaching sparsely but well' (*shao er jing*): Oral English class teacher should be responsible for students' oral English ability, not me. Students' proficiency in English was too weak for successful communicative activities in class

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[1] *Italics* in this appendix indicates the similarities in teaching methods used among the teachers observed.

[2] **Bold** font in this appendix refers to the difference in teaching methods used between Lan and the other four teacher participants in this study.

Ming	*Focus of instruction mainly on language forms and content of texts* *Students under tight control* *No interaction between teacher and students took place*	Class time was limited, students could do cultural comparisons after class. The aim of this course was to provide students with information. Textbook was the main source teachers could rely on to finish the prescribed job in class. Students' knowledge about Western culture was inadequate for cultural comparison and contrast in class.
Cai	*Focus of instruction mainly on language forms and content of texts* *Students under tight control* *No interaction between teacher and students took place*	Students kept quiet in class, making it hard to engage them in communicative activities. Students did not seem to like SCA. My teaching would be evaluated on how much students had learned about the content of the texts and their knowledge of business terms. Students' knowledge of the content was too limited for meaningful group discussions in class.
Chang	*Focus of instruction mainly on content of texts* *No interaction between teacher and students took place*	The nature of this course was to provide knowledge of the content rather than acquisitions of skills. The objective of the course was designed to impart specific knowledge to students.

Appendix D-2

British Reserve

Sir Eric helped himself to bacon and eggs. Hester poured out his coffee, and they sat down at the breakfast table. Sir Eirc unfolded *The Times,* Hester opened her letters. Once Hester asked her husband if he wanted any more coffee. Otherwise they did not talk.

At 8:30 am Sir Eric looked at his watch.

'Well, I must be off, dear.'

He kissed Hester on the check and his man-servant drove him to the station. The platform was full of middle-aged men wearing dark suits and carrying umbrellas. Like Sir Eric, they all had neatly folded newspapers under their arms, either The Times or the Telegraph. A few were wearing bowler hats.

They hardly greeted each other, though most of them knew one another, at least by sight. They did not shake hands.

The train came in, and they all got into first-class compartments. As soon as Sir Eric sat down, he unfolded his *Times*. So did the five other men who were with him. The two walls of newspaper which stretched across the compartment were not lowered until the train approached Waterloo an hour later. Not a word was spoken.

The return journey at 5:15 p.m. was no different, except that Sir Eric and his dark-suited companions were now reading evening newspaper.

Source:

He, Tian, 2001. *yingyu xuexi beijing zhishi [Cultural background for English study: Britain and Australia]* 3rd edition. Beijing: Beijing University Press. Pp. 21-22.

Appendix D-3

Are Americans Materialistic?

Americans have one of the highest standards of living in the world. Because they spend so much money for goods and services, Americans are often accused of being materialistic, of valuing above all else money and the things it can buy. Of course, advertising encourages people to keep buying things far beyond what they need. Sometimes purchases are made in order to 'keep up with the Joneses', to show friends that one can afford a bigger house or a fancier car. Expensive possessions are symbols of the owner's financial success. In the mid 19th century, the American author Henry David Thoreau advised his readers, 'simplify your needs!' But 20th-century Americans have moved in the opposite direction. Now just as Thoreau predicted, many find that their possessions own them. They must work hard to make enough money to pay for and maintain the house, car, TV, stereo, computer, and many other things they consider necessities.

In defence of the materialistic American, one expert on American culture points out, '… however eager we are to make money, we are just as eager to give it away. Any … disaster finds American writing checks to relieve distress…Generosity and materialism run side by side.'

Source:

Meng Ji-you. 2001. *yingyu xuexi beijing zhishi [Cultural background for English study: America and Canada]* 3rd edition. Beijing: Beijing University Press. Page 129 -130.