LEARNING AND INSTRUCTIONAL EXPERIENCES OF ENGLISH AS A FOREIGN LANGUAGE IN CONTEMPORARY CHINA

A PERSPECTIVE STUDY CONDUCTED IN THE FOREIGN LANGUAGES DEPARTMENT OF A CHINESE UNIVERSITY

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By

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Abstract

This study investigated the learning and teaching experiences of English students and teachers in China. The participants were forty-two students of English in second, third and fourth year at the university level, and thirteen teachers teaching diverse English courses. Two open-ended questionnaire surveys followed by in-depth discussion questions were given to ascertain the participants' attitudes toward the English instruction they had experienced. The survey results showed that the students felt weak in speaking and writing skills, especially speaking. Their sense of incompetence in communication skills brought unpleasant experiences. Students preferred to have more participation in foreign language learning, and to use the target language as a medium for knowledge enrichment rather than an end. The study also showed that the English instruction prevailing in practice tended to make the students passive in learning and ignorant of learning strategies and learning autonomy. Teachers were frustrated with the evaluation devices, limited resources, and inaccessibility of up-to-date pedagogical research information and guidance. The study suggests that teachers' professional development and a pedagogy that meets natural ways of learning are two key issues in further improvement of English education in China.

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Chapter One

Introduction

The English language curriculum in China has changed a great deal in the past few decades in terms of content, pedagogy and assessment implemented, and learning outcomes achieved (Ting, 1987; Yang, 1991; Shih, 1996; Adamson and Morris, 1997). However, among the observed progressive changes of the curriculum, I, as a teacher of English, notice an unbalanced development of language skills of the students and see a need for an increase in the amount and quality of interaction in instructional practice. This thesis investigates the learning and teaching experiences of three sample groups of students and one sample group of teachers to see if their personal experience corresponds with my observation. The purpose of this study is to arrive at more definitive judgements as to where the weak areas in the development of language skills are and how we can modify them.

The thesis comprises six chapters. Chapter one gives a brief introduction to the English curriculum currently practiced in China, and the motive, purpose and significance of the study. Chapter two is devoted to a review of the related literature on psychological development, second language acquisition, research findings on English language teaching in China, and curriculum inquiry. These areas all inform the proposed study and will guide its process from conception to completion. In chapter

three, an introduction to the methodology and design of the study is presented. The fourth chapter analyses the data gathered and presents survey findings. Chapter five focuses on the discussion of several key issues synthesized from the data analysis in chapter four. The discussion is conducted within the theoretical framework developed in the literature review. The final chapter of the thesis draws conclusions from the study and presents several recommendations for future modifications in English teaching in China.

In this chapter, a brief introduction to some major components of the English curriculum in current China is given. The chapter also describes how the idea of the study was formed, and states the purpose, research questions, significance, and limitations of the study.

English Teaching and Learning in Contemporary China

English language teaching is big business in China. It is included in curricula as a compulsory subject starting from junior high to post graduate education. Moreover, in recent years, some elementary schools, mostly in metropolitan areas, have experimented with providing English programs. They did this even though English is not a required subject in the syllabus issued by the State Education Commission, the agency of the national government that exercises broad administrative and legal power in the conduct of education. In addition to the formal educational system, social organizations or private educational businesses operate numerous long-term and short-term English training classes for the young and adults to meet various needs. In fact,

some sources contend that there are more Chinese currently studying English than there are Americans. Estimates range as high as 250 million Chinese students of English (McBee, 1985). It is safe to say that, with the further implementation of the open-door policy advocated by the Chinese government, the number of Chinese people learning English in the 90s must have increased. Since English language teaching and learning is conducted on such a large scale in China, it is obviously an important matter to study.

Nevertheless, English teaching and learning in China is too big a topic for a master's thesis. The focus here, therefore, will concentrate on methods of classroom instruction in the formal educational system at the secondary and tertiary levels as seen by the selected groups of students and instructors. The time span is the last ten years. A brief review of some major elements that are related to the curriculum and pedagogy in practice is presented in the following section to situate the study in context.

Policy Making

In China, the State Education Commission (SEdC) administers educational policy decisions, conducts research and planning, sets curricula, prepares standard textbooks and teaching guidelines, and draws up national examinations. English language teaching follows the syllabus issued by the Foreign Languages Teaching Division (FLTD), a subordinate division of SEdC responsible for the routine administration of foreign language teaching in the educational system. Textbooks are compiled by Chinese and overseas educational experts under the organization and supervision of FLTD, and published by the People's Education Press (PEP) and a few prestigious

publishing houses. Generally speaking, education in China is centralized. However, policy decision making is significantly influenced by the views of experts in linguistics and language pedagogy, and also by feedback from grassroots teachers on existing curriculum and pilot experiments.

Objectives

English learners in the formal educational system of China are classified roughly into three groups: secondary school students, English majors, and non-English majors. English majors refer to students of English in colleges and universities. Non-English majors refer to college students of disciplines other than English. English courses are taken by these students as a requirement for the completion of their programs. Each of these groups has its special syllabus. The syllabi currently implemented in schools and colleges are *Yingyu jiaoxue dagang* (English syllabus for secondary schools) published by People's Education Press in 1993, *Daxue Yingyu jiaoxue dagang* (English syllabus for non-English major college students) published by Beijing Higher Education Press in 1988, *Gaodeng xuexiao Yingyu zhuanye jichu jieduan Yingyu jiaoxue dagang* (English syllabus for English majors at the basic stage) published by Shanghai Foreign Languages Education Publishing House in 1989, and *Gaodeng xuexiao Yingyu zhuanye gaonianji Yingyu jiaoxue dagang* (English syllabus for English majors at the advanced stage) published by Foreign Languages Teaching and Research Publishing House, Beijing, in 1990.

English syllabuses are constantly revised and issued for secondary schools, English

majors, and non-English majors respectively to better satisfy varying social requirements and to meet learners' changing needs. Different from any predecessors, the most recently revised syllabuses promote multi-fold objectives for ELT (English language teaching). In addition to a continuous focus on an overall strict training of essential linguistic skills like pronunciation, intonation, sentence structure, word formation and grammar, there is an emphasis on turning the language skills acquired into the capacity of using the language for the purpose of communication. The learning of English is also expanded to include aspects of foreign cultures so as to strengthen international understanding and interaction. Moreover, the program is required to foster the development of students' logical thought and independent working ability, to arouse their interest in study, to foster good learning habits and correct learning methods, to enrich the students' social and cultural knowledge, to increase their sensitivity to cultural differences, and to lay a solid foundation for further study and future work (Shan, 1993; Adamson and Morris, 1997).

Textbooks

At present, the most widely used textbooks are *Junior English for China* (JEFC) (textbook series for secondary schools) written collaboratively by Chinese and British textbook writers and published by PEP in 1990-1992, *College English, revised edition* (for English majors at the basic stage) compiled by Hu Wenzhong, Zhu Yu, Ma Yuanxi, Li He and published by Foreign Languages Teaching and Research Publishing House in 1992, *Advanced English* (for English majors at the advanced stage) compiled by Zhang

Hanxi, Wang Lili, Mei Renyi, Wu Bin, Chen Lin, Zhang Guanlin and published by Commerce Press, Beijing, in 1981, and *College English* (textbook series for non-English majors) compiled by a joint committee representing Fudan University, Beijing University, East China Normal University, People's University of China, Wuhan University and Nanjing University, and published by Shanghai Foreign Languages Education Press in 1990.

Compared with the earlier standard textbooks, some changes in orientation and contents are observed. Many features of earlier textbooks such as phonetics, vocabulary, grammar, syntax, pattern drills, translation, detailed reading, a large amount of rote memory work, and plenty of written exercises are still retained throughout the series or volumes. Some new elements, however, like role play, group discussion, activities and so on, which are associated with contemporary communicative approaches to language teaching, are incorporated with an intention of shifting from an exclusive focus on linguistic knowledge used in the grammar-translation approach in earlier textbooks to a blended approach that helps students achieve the beginnings of communicative competence in specific social and cultural contexts. Another important change is seen in the choice of texts. Instead of favoring the classical literature and translated works from the mother tongue language as texts used to, more original materials written by contemporary writers of English-speaking countries about their cultures, societies, and peoples are used in the textbooks. This reflects a desire to foster international understanding and providing students with the knowledge that they can use in their future practical work.

Teaching Methodology

Although methodologies used in English language classrooms vary from one teacher to another, on the whole the classroom is teacher-centered, textbook-centered, and examination-oriented. Teachers play a dominant role in the classroom. They analyze the text, sum up and interpret language points for students to memorize. Classroom instruction is largely limited to the content of the textbook. Classroom activities are mainly interpretation of and drilling on linguistic knowledge. Students are more prepared for examinations than for language application. Teaching resources other than textbooks are rarely used. Lewin and Wang (1990) observe:

> Teaching and learning in schools is dominated by traditional pedagogical techniques which depend heavily on chalk and talk . . . Much teaching takes place following national textbooks page by page and teachers repeat the material in the books. The principal activities of students in the classroom are listening, taking down notes and reading the textbook. Active involvement, designing, exploring, problem-solving, collecting evidence and experimentation are rare events (p. 171).

Evaluation

National unified examinations are used as the dominant criterion for the evaluation of curriculum effectiveness. Three nationwide official examinations are administered annually. The Matriculation English Test (MET) is the college entrance examination for selecting college students. The College English Test (CET), which is divided into band four and band six, is designed to assess the English proficiency of non-English major students at college level and postgraduate level. The Test for English Majors (TEM),

divided into level four (a basic stage) and level eight (an advanced stage), is used to assess the English knowledge and ability of college students majoring in English language.

Since the examinations are officially administered, they receive great attention and have considerable impact on English teaching in schools and colleges. The examination results and passing rates are used as statistics representing the quality of English teaching of any particular school, college or even geographical district. They, therefore, become a major concern of teaching staff, school administration, and provincial administration. Teachers feel pressured by the annual verdict from outside authorities, and exhaust students with a large amount of testing materials. Some college administrations set up rules that students must pass the relevant national examinations before they are eligible for graduation. The immediate benefit of doing so is presumed to be twofold: to stimulate learning motivation, and to upgrade the colleges' spots in the ranking list of the national examinations. Consequently, the examinations become the critical determinant of pedagogical approach in English language classrooms.

Statement of the Problem

English language teaching in China has been progressively changing and improving (Ting, 1987; Yang, 1991; Shih, 1996; Adamson and Morris, 1997). However, after teaching English in a secondary school and two universities for many years, I still notice some weak areas in our classroom instruction. For example, teachers tend to regard the detailed explanation of and repeated drills on language points as the

core tasks of language class. Teachers often place much more emphasis on linguistic knowledge such as grammatical accuracy, vocabulary, and syntactic analysis at the expense of communicative skills like listening, speaking, reading and writing of the target language in classroom instruction. Students tend to be seen but not heard in classrooms. Rote learning, mechanical imitation and grammatical analysis mainly dominate language study. Examinations are officially administered as the main measurement device of learning outcomes and teaching effectiveness. The concern of this thesis is that students of English trained with the current pedagogy demonstrate an unbalanced ability of language knowledge and language skills. Usually their speaking and writing abilities fall behind, in some cases far behind, their knowledge of grammar and vocabulary. Based on my experience and observation as a language teacher, I find that more often than not their performance in real situation communication does not match the competence they demonstrate in a language test. Consequently, many are found not readily prepared as proficient communicators with native speakers upon graduation.

However, are my observations nothing but personal bias? Are they shared by other teachers? What do students feel about the instruction they receive? Intrigued by these questions, I decided to do a qualitative study to investigate what a sampling of students and teachers think of the current English teaching they have experienced.

Purpose of the Study and Research Questions

The purpose of the study is to examine the learning and teaching experiences of

several groups of students and one group of teachers in order to identify possible areas for improvement in English teaching; to contribute to research on ELT in China with the intention of promoting further innovation of English teaching and learning practice; to propose some practical and tentative suggestions elicited from the study for classroom practitioners and policy makers who wish to make changes in this field. Thus, the study is designed to answer three key questions:

1) How do the teachers and students feel about the English teaching?

2) Do they feel that English teaching needs improvement?

3) In their view, how can the English instruction be made more effective?

Significance of the Study

The thesis has practical significance in several ways. First of all, the study is conducted in the context of increasing concern in China with the quality of education. Since the late 70s, the Chinese government and educational leaders have announced a commitment to the reform of Chinese education at all levels in order to make it more adaptable to the new market economy and more effective in the realization of the four modernizations (the modernization of industry, agriculture, science and technology, and national defense). Among the steps already taken has been an increased emphasis on educational research in each discipline so as to better understand the current status of education and pinpoint existing problems. In this context, the results of my study will be useful to stimulate discussion of the curriculum and to add information about English teaching in particular by indicating areas of satisfaction and dissatisfaction as

perceived by various groups of students and teachers.

Second, while there is much literature dealing with different aspects of the English language curriculum in modern China, little literature has been found reporting students' perceptions of the English teaching with which they spend so many years. The present study is meant to explore this area with the specific purpose of finding out whether or not our students are satisfied with the English education they have received, and where and how they think improvements should be made for future practice. My hope is that the voices of the students may help us clarify the areas that deserve more attention, and add something to whatever has been achieved so far in ELT research in China.

Third, in addition to the investigation of learners' reflections on English teaching, a group of teachers' attitudes and opinions about the instruction are also investigated. The data collected from one more source allows comparison and contrast between teachers' and students' experiences, and enhances the accuracy and reliability of the study.

Fourth, this study examines English teaching by looking at how it fits ways of learning as elaborated by researchers in psychological development and second language acquisition. It provides one more different way of looking at the issues that have been discussed by some researchers on English teaching in China.

Fifth, the study is based on surveys comprising open-ended questions and in-depth discussions through letter exchange. This methodology is believed to produce qualitative data enabling authentic reconstruction of the students and teachers' perceptions of English instruction. Moreover, this methodology is innovative and has

not been seen in the research literature on English teaching in China.

Last, but not least in terms of importance, the thesis has practical value. It draws up suggestions that may help improve our *status quo* of classroom practice and students' learning outcomes.

Limitations of the Study

This study may have some foreseeable limitations. First of all, my interpretation of the data is a reconstruction and might not be 100 percent accurate.

Secondly, the surveys are conducted in one department. Thus, the findings only illuminate a small part of the whole picture of ELT in China. Further research on a wider and larger scale is suggested.

Thirdly, the study is done from overseas which restricts direct contact between the researcher and respondents. The complexity of doing the study from a distance makes it infeasible to conduct other forms of surveys that might be compensatory. Thus, the interpretation is exclusively based on textual analysis of the data collected from the open-ended questions and the follow-up discussions via letters. Concerns beyond those listed in the questionnaires are not identified.

In the following chapter, the research literature regarding psychological development, second language acquisition, English teaching in China and curriculum inquiry is visited so that a theoretical framework can be established to guide the proposed study.

Chapter Two

Selected Review of the Literature

Seen as a potential way of increasing cognitive growth and knowledge construction, classroom interaction has been a primary focus in educational literature for more than two decades (Hertz-Lazarowitz, Kirkus and Miller, 1992). In fact, few people involved in education would claim unfamiliarity with the idea. However, a review of the related literature is necessary for offering a theoretical perspective from which interaction is seen to be the very essence of educational activity. The literature review first looks at the historically important findings of psychological research in the 20s and 30s, which Hertz-Lazarowitz, Kirkus and Miller (1992) believe lay the theoretical basis for the social constructivist view of learning. Following this, recent research results related to second language acquisition (SLA) in particular are discussed. Next, views of Chinese scholars and foreign researchers about the English teaching currently practiced in China are presented. Finally, some theory of curriculum inquiry is examined to explain why I decided to focus on the investigation of students' and teachers' personal perspectives of English as a foreign language teaching in China.

Psychological Development

Before the 1920s, psychology was confronting a crisis (Claparède, 1959).

Psychoanalysts were in extreme confusion in their attempts to analyze psychological development. They endeavored to explain children's progress as either an increase of new knowledge or the correction of certain errors. Regarding the child's mental development as a problem of quantity brought great frustration to the study of mind development (Claparède, 1959). Piaget's theory of constructive development offered the world a completely new interpretation of the child's mind and is viewed as a revolution (Vygotsky, 1986) that has "kindled a light which will help to disperse much of the obscurity which formerly baffled the student of child logic" (Claparède, 1959, p. xi).

Fundamental Structure of the Child's Intelligence

According to Piaget, children have an innate capacity to adapt to external stimuli. Even an infant is not a black box or empty vessel, but, in fact, has certain capacities to employ cognitive and behavioral strategies which are simple at first and later become more differentiated (Sturm and Jorg, 1981). Ginsburg and Opper (1969) pull together the several definitions of intelligence offered by Piaget and enable us to see that intelligence is a continuous process that involves biological adaptation, equilibrium between the individual and the environment, gradual evolution and mental activity. This process consists of two components: assimilation and accommodation. Assimilation describes the process of absorbing environmental stimuli into existing cognitive structures. Accommodation describes the individual's adjustment to the external environment. For Piaget, assimilation and accommodation were inseparable.

He described intelligence as representing a balance between assimilation and accommodation. Piaget believed that intelligence is a particular instance of biological adaptation that allows the individual to interact effectively with the environment at a psychological level. Thus, knowledge is not given to a passive observer; rather, knowledge of reality must be discovered and constructed by the activity of the child.

Based on experiments with children at different ages, Piaget (1959) recognized that children of various ages have different ways of thinking, in other words, different psychological structures. He was convinced that intellectual development is an evolution through qualitatively different stages of thought, and that development is age-specific. Another way of saying this is that as the individual progresses through the life span, the psychological structure will change from one age level to another. For example, the thought processes of a seven-year-old child differ from those of an adult reflecting on the same kind of situation. The reason is that the particular way in which a person adapts and organizes these processes depends also on learning history.

Hertz-Lazarowitz, Kirkus and Miller (1992) explain Piaget's theory of development as incorporating two types of factors that are necessary for the formation and attainment of increasingly complex stages of cognitive ability. One type is internal factors, which refer to the child's maturational level and intrinsic needs for equilibrium. The other type is external factors that are the social transmission of knowledge and environmental experiences. The internal factors interact and work in concert with the external factors to influence intelligence development. Claparéde (1959) analogized Piaget's description of the child's mind as "woven on two different

looms, which are as if one were placed above the other" (p. xii). The lower plane, during the first years of the child's life, is the work crystallized by him/herself around his or her desires and wants. The upper plane is built up little by little by the social environment, which presses more and more upon the child as time goes on. The element overloaded on the upper plane falls to the lower plane and mixes with what is already there (Claparéde, 1959).

Piaget's new vision of child development is discussed in diverse disciplines including education (Inhelder, 1969). Ginsburg and Opper (1969) sum up several implications for education, thus for classroom instruction, deriving from Piaget's theory. The most important one of all is that children have the innate tendency to learn things actively, and manipulation is a prerequisite for higher development. Educators should know that the child is more apt to modify his or her cognitive structure through collaborative action than through direct instruction. Children learn best from concrete activities while verbal instruction to impart knowledge produces only superficial learning results. By promoting activities that are qualitatively and quantitatively appropriate for the children in the classroom, the teacher can exploit the child's potential for learning, and permit him or her to evolve. Therefore, the teacher's major task should be to provide the child with a wide variety of potentially interesting materials on which she or he may act. What the student needs is an opportunity to learn. The student needs to be given a rich environment. The student needs a teacher who is sensitive to his or her needs, who can help when there is a need, and who has faith in his or her capacity to learn.

Contemporarily, the Russian psychologist Lev Vygotsky (1978, 1981, 1986) proposed his alternative insights into the development of thought processes. Like Piaget, Vygotsky agreed that a child's development is a series of qualitative changes that cannot be viewed as merely an expanding repertoire of skills and ideas. Both Piaget and Vygotsky believed that children are active in their acquisition of knowledge. Instead of seeing the child as a passive participant, a vessel waiting to be filled with knowledge, Vygotsky and Piaget both stressed the active intellectual efforts that children make in order to learn (Bodrova and Leong, 1996). Unlike Piaget, however, Vygotsky emphasized the role of the cultural context in child development and viewed social interaction as an integral part of the learning process. While Piaget believed that teaching should be adjusted to the existing cognitive abilities of a child that cannot be changed by the learning itself, Vygotsky, in contrast, believed that the relationship between learning and development is more complex, and learning can lead to development. He also stressed that teaching should always be aimed at the child's emerging skills, not at the existing ones. Moreover, in Vygotsky's theory, language plays a major role in cognitive development and forms the very core of the child's mental functions rather than a by-product of intellectual development as Piaget perceived (Bodrova and Leong, 1996). Vygotsky's emphasis on the social and cultural nature of knowledge construction has added a further important dimension to cognitive theory that is now beginning to have an influence on classroom practice (Wells, 1995).

The Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD)

Vygotsky (1978) identified a distance between a child's independent performance and assisted performance. Independent performance refers to the child's actual developmental level as determined by independent problem solving. Assisted performance means the maximum of potential development that the child can reach through problem solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable or experienced people. This distance is described in his words as the zone of proximal development (ZPD). Bodrova and Leong (1996) explain that Vygotsky used the word "zone" because he did not conceive of development as a point on a scale, but a continuum of behaviors or degrees of maturation that occurs in a zone bounded by independent performance (or lower) level and assisted performance (or higher) level. Between maximally assisted performance and independent performance lie varying degrees of partially assisted performances. By describing the zone as "proximal," Vygotsky meant that the zone is limited to those behaviours that are closest to emergence at any given time.

The zone of proximal development is not static, but dynamic and constantly changing (Bodrova and Leong, 1996). What a child does with assistance today may become what the child does independently tomorrow. Thus, as the child's thinking shifts to a higher level and deals with more difficult tasks, a new level of assisted performance emerges. The ZPD not only varies at different times in a child's development process, but also varies for different children. Some children need all possible assistance while others need much less for a big leap forward in development.

Meanwhile, the size of ZPD in one area may be different from that in another even for the same child. For example, a child may have trouble telling apart music notes, but experience great confidence in mathematical formulas.

Assisted performance is the maximum level at which a child can perform today and should fall within the child's ZPD. When it exceeds the child's ZPD, the child ignores it or learns it incorrectly. Thus, desirable learning cannot be achieved. It is within the ZPD that teaching should occur. "Instruction is good," Vygotsky (1934) wrote, "only when it proceeds ahead of development; [then it] awakens and rouses to life an entire set of functions which are in the stage of maturing, which lie in the zone of proximal development" (p. 222).

Psychological Tools and Mediation

Vygotsky insisted on the qualitative distinction of higher mental processes such as voluntary verbal thought, logical memory and selective attention from the lower or natural processes of memory, attention and intelligence (Kozulin, 1990). Instead of regarding higher mental development as a simple extension of a natural process originating in human biology, the higher mental process is described by Vygotsky (1978) as a function of socially meaningful activity through the use of language. He elaborated:

> The specifically human capacity for language enables children to provide for auxiliary tools in the solution of difficult tasks, to overcome impulsive action, to plan a solution to a problem prior to its execution, and to master their own behavior. Signs and words serve children first and foremost as a means of social contact with other people. The cognitive and

> communicative functions of language then become the basis of a new and superior form of activity in children, distinguishing them from animals (pp.28-29).

Vygotsky emphasized the generative aspect of socially meaningful activity by means of language. His position that higher mental functions are developed through this kind of activity is theoretically significant. The traditional rationalist formula, from thought to action, is thus reversed and becomes from action to thought. Development is no longer regarded as the unfolding or maturation of preexisting "ideas"; on the contrary, it is the formation of such ideas-- out of what originally was not an idea-- in the course of socially meaningful activity (Kozulin, 1990).

According to Vygotsky (1960), any higher mental function is processed twice through mediation. It first appears on the social plane as an interpsychological category (between individuals), and then on the psychological plane as an intrapsychological (within the individual) category. The source of mediation is psychological tools. Vygotsky (1981) defined the psychological tool by comparing it with the instrumental (or technical) tool. He said:

> The most essential feature distinguishing the psychological tool from the technical tool is that it directs the mind and behavior whereas the technical tool, which is also inserted as an intermediate link between human activity and the external object, is directed toward producing one or another set of changes in the object itself (p. 140).

While instrumental tools are aimed at the control over processes in nature, psychological tools master natural forms of individual behavior and cognition. In other words, psychological tools refer to artificial, symbolic and cultural systems such as

language, braille for the blind, dactylology for the deaf and so on. With their operation, Vygotsky (1978) believed, humans go "beyond the limits of the psychological functions given to them by nature" and proceed to "a new culturally-elaborated organization of their behavior" (p. 39).

Vygotsky's concept that the higher mental functions rely on the mediation of behavior by psychological tools as means of social interaction and communication denies the possibility of total control through external or internal forces (Daniels, 1996). In other words, the individual and society are mutually interdependent. Each creates and is created by the other (Wells and Chang-Wells, 1992).

The significance of Piagetian and Vygotskian theories is the suggestion that learning is an active and constructive process. Learning occurs most effectively with high degrees of learner involvement. Furthermore, learning is social and is negotiated, practiced, integrated and refined with the assistance of external factors by using psychological tools. Their theories provide a framework for understanding learning and teaching. They give educators a new perspective and helpful insight about children's growth and development. The theories change the way psychologists think about development and the way educators work with young children (Leong, 1996). The views that children are born active learners and that it is the natural tendency of children to grow and learn through social interaction are widely acknowledged among modern researchers. After Vygotsky, countless research works confirm that social construction plays an important role in knowledge development and cognitive growth. Wells (1995) states

> The most effective learning takes place when the learner, faced with a question or problem arising from an inquiry to which he or she is committed, is helped to master the relevant cultural resources in order to construct a solution. Procedures and knowledge, which are thus initially co-constructed in interaction with others, are then internalized and reconstructed to become a unique personal resource that is used for further, and often creative, problem solving, both alone and in collaboration with others (p. 233).

He continues

> The preeminent 'tool' used to mediate the achievement of the goals of both social and individual action is linguistic discourse. Experienced first interactively, in planning, enacting, and reflecting on the goals of joint activity, the relevant patterns of social discourse are gradually internalized and transformed to become the medium for the inner dialogue of thought and, when reexternalized, for the more formal modes of extended spoken and written communication (p.233).

Many researchers such as Hertz-Lazarowitz, Kirkus and Miller (1992), McCarthey and McMahon (1992), Bershon (1992), Gall (1992), and Wells (1995) share the belief that understanding cooperative interaction within educational contexts will not only help children achieve educational goals but also create more long-term benefits for humankind. Learning as a process of cognitive activities is seen by Long (1990) as a global nature among most human beings. He assumes that children and adults' learning processes should be generally similar. Brookfield (1990) recommends social discussion in learning as the adult educational method "par excellence," for it encourages active and participatory learning.

Research on Second Language Acquisition (SLA)

The theory of mind development as a dynamic and social constructive process is clearly consistent with SLA research findings and emphasis on interaction as a central

component of students' academic development (Cummins, 1994). Taylor (1983) notes that successful language learning occurs in student-centered environments in which learners are encouraged to communicate through meaningful, task-oriented activities. Fathman and Kessler (1993) state that there is substantial evidence that the more "comprehensible input" (Krashen, 1982) language learners receive and the more opportunities they have for "comprehensible output" (Swain, 1985), the faster they learn.

Comprehensible Input and the Affective Filter

"Comprehensible input" is a term coined and popularized by Krashen (Allwright and Bailey, 1991). By comprehensible input he means that the language to which second language learners are exposed should be slightly more advanced than the learner's current level of comfortable understanding yet still comprehensible. He formulates this type of input as "i + 1", where "i" stands for the current language level of the learner, and the "+1" means the input is challenging but manageable with effort (Krashen, 1982, 1985). According to him, comprehensible input makes sense to the learner and promotes second language acquisition. Like the ZPD of Vygotsky, Krashen's formulation of the i+1 concept also emphasizes the distance between actual language development (represented by i) and potential language development (represented by i+1). Krashen suggests that the input must be comprehensible and near the student's actual level of development (i), but at the same time it must stretch to concepts and structures that the student has not yet acquired (i+1).

According to Krashen (1981, 1982, 1985), comprehensible input doesn't necessarily guarantee acquisition unless the acquirer's "affective filter" is "low" and ready to fully utilize the comprehensible input for language acquisition. In other words, successful language acquisition is also strongly related to attitudinal factors like motivation, self-confidence, anxiety and so on. People vary with respect to the strength or level of their affective variables. Krashen (1982) comments:

> Those whose attitudes are not optimal for language acquisition will not only tend to seek less input, but they will also have a high or strong Affective Filter-even if they understand the message, the input will not reach that part of the brain responsible for language acquisition, or the language acquisition device. Those with attitudes more conducive to second language acquisition will not only seek and obtain more input, they will also have a lower or weaker filter. They will be more open to the input, and it will strike 'deeper' (p.31).

Hence, the affective filter can prevent active process. When the acquirer is unmotivated, lacking self-confidence, or anxious, the affective filter is up. In contrast, when the acquirer is confident and interested, the filter is automatically down. Krashen (1985) argues:

> People acquire second language only if they obtain comprehensible input and if their affective filters are low enough to allow the input 'in'. When the filter is 'down' and appropriate comprehensible input is presented (and comprehended), acquisition is inevitable. It is, in fact, unavoidable and cannot be prevented-- the language 'mental organ' will function just as automatically as any other organ (p. 4).

Within Krashen's framework, learning effectiveness occurs when the focus of instruction is on meaning rather than form, when the language input from the instructor is pitched slightly higher than the learner's language level and corresponds with the

learner's intentions and understanding, and when the environment is relatively anxiety-free.

Interaction in Second Language Acquisition

While Krashen focuses on comprehensible input, Ferguson (1975), Long (1981, 1983), and Hatch (1983), in contrast, emphasize the primacy of interaction and its role in producing comprehensible input.

Both Ferguson (1975) and Hatch (1983) found that in the interest of communication, speakers are likely to make substantial modification and adjustment in both form and content of what they say for the sake of learners. They use strategies like exaggeration, repetition, rephrasing, simplification, expansion, gesture and so on to help learners' understanding. Long (1981) suggests that "while input to NNS (nonnative speakers) unquestionably is modified on occasion in various ways, it is modifications in interaction that are observed more consistently" (p. 275). By their attempts to understand and to be understood, learners and speakers "negotiate" the content and form of the messages with the learners indicating to the speakers when adjustments are needed. Long (1983) draws up three most important processes of input interaction: comprehension checks (the query to see if the interlocutors understand what was said, e.g., "Do you understand?"), confirmation checks (the query to see if he or she has the correct understanding of the interlocutor's meaning, e.g., "Do you mean . . . ?"), and clarification checks (a request for further information about something that is not understood previously, e.g., "I don't understand exactly"). It is

often through gestures, the context itself and interactive negotiations that the new concepts become internalized. According to Long, interaction between the informer and the informed is needed and, in fact, functions as a prerequisite for comprehensible input and, ultimately, language acquisition. Thus, Long's idea of the sequence of events involved in language acquisition (negotiation, comprehensible input and acquisition) differs from Krashen's conception that "Comprehensible input is responsible for progress in language acquisition" (1982, p.61). The important implication of Long's finding is that it is the interactive work required to negotiate meaning that spurs language acquisition, rather than comprehensible input alone as Krashen states.

Long's perspective that learners need more than mere acceptance of comprehensible input is confirmed and made explicit by Swain (1985) with her findings from French immersion programmes in Canada that comprehensible output is needed to gain grammatical competence (Allwright and Bailey, 1991). Based on the data collected from French immersion programs and comparison with native speakers at the same age, Swain (1985) found that after seven years of comprehensible input, immersion students are still not equivalent to native speakers in terms of grammatical performance although doing quite well in other respects. Her research concludes that native-like performance does not automatically happen just because considerable comprehensible input is provided. She argues that in addition to input that makes sense to the learner, comprehensible output is also a necessary mechanism of second language acquisition.

Swain suggests that in the process of negotiating comprehensible input, learners'

attention be on the content rather than the form, in other words, on the semantic meaning rather than the syntactic structure. Only after the meaning is negotiated to a communicative consensus, is the learner free to pay attention to the means of expression, or the form of the message being conveyed. Thus, if we say comprehensible input is necessary for semantic understanding, then comprehensible output is imperative for syntactic understanding and mastery. What the immersion students miss is the opportunity to practice constructing messages that encode their own communicative intentions in the language.

Contrary to Krashen's viewpoint that output is only the sign of language acquisition and that the role of output is to generate more comprehensible input (1981), Swain argues that the roles of output in second language acquisition are independent of comprehensible input. She (1985, 1993, and 1995) insists that producing language serves second language acquisition in two ways: to enhance language fluency, and to promote language accuracy. Swain names three functions of output as potential ways of enhancing accuracy. First, the activity of producing output may prompt second language learners to consciously recognize some of their linguistic problems, generate new knowledge and consolidate their existing knowledge. It requires learners to notice the gap between what they want to say and what they can say. The second function of output activity is hypothesis testing. That is, through producing language, the learners can test their hypotheses about how the language works. Third, when the learners reflect upon their own target language use, their output serves a metalinguistic function that enables them to control and internalize linguistic knowledge. Like

comprehensible input, comprehensible output is reached through negotiation between the speaker and the learner.

Kumaravadivelu (1994) states that Swain's finding that production, as opposed to comprehension, forces learners to pay attention to language form, to the relationship between form and meaning, and to the overall means of communication strengthens the conceptions of researchers like Long (1981 and 1983). Swain's work further illustrates "what enables learners to move beyond their current receptive and expressive capacities are opportunities to modify and restructure their interaction with their interlocutors until mutual comprehension is reached" (Kumaravadivelu, 1994, p. 34). Allwright and Bailey (1991) contend that Swain explicitly spells out Long's conception as "language acquisition can perhaps best be seen, not as the outcome of an encounter with comprehensible input *per se*, but as the direct outcome of the work involved in the negotiation process itself" (p. 122).

The theory that second language acquisition is attained through dialogue and requires much practice to perfect is supported by many researchers including Rogoff (1990), Wells and Chang-Wells (1992), Chamot and O'Malley (1993), Lantolf (1993), Rivers (1994), Pica, Young and Doughty (1994), to name only a few. The rich research literature brings significant implications to language classrooms that teachers must provide as many opportunities as possible for meaningful interaction in both comprehension and production. Only when teachers do this can students learn the language most effectively.

Pedagogical Arguments for Group Work in SLA

Similarly, small-group work that encourages interaction has been recommended in the second language classroom by methodologists for some years (Long and Porter, 1985; Fathman and Kessler, 1993). The sound pedagogical arguments for the negotiation work possible in group activity make it an attractive alternative to the teacher-led instructional mode. Long and Porter (1985) offer five pedagogical arguments for the use of group work in second language learning and demonstrate that all their arguments are richly supported by prior research findings. Their arguments are: 1) Group work increases the quantity of language practice opportunities; 2) Group work improves the quality of student talk; 3) Group work facilitates individual instruction; 4) Group work creates a positive affective climate in the classroom; and 5) Group work increases learning motivation.

Long and Porter state that the lack of enough practice of the target language is one of the main reasons for low achievement by language learners. In a teacher-centered classroom, they point out that the teacher does most of the talking. The learners, on the contrary, have only an average of thirty seconds per student per period to speak in a fifty-minute lesson (1985, p. 208). Group work, although it cannot solve this problem entirely, can certainly help to increase the total individual practice time. For instance, if the situation that one student talks while all the rest listen can be replaced by groups of three working together, the time available for each student to produce comprehensible output will be multiplied.

According to Long and Porter, group work can also improve the quality of student

talk. In a teacher-centered classroom, the conversation is highly conventionalized. Teachers ask questions that usually have only one correct answer. Students' attention is on how to produce correct answers rather than on communication. In contrast, when working with groups, students focus on information exchange. They are engaged in real communication that requires more thought and discourse skills like presenting, requesting, suggesting, inferring, generalizing, clarifying, summarizing, agreeing and disagreeing. All these will enrich students' knowledge, and at the same time develop their communicative skills.

Long and Porter point out the universal practice that students are placed in classes solely on the basis of chronological age or scores on certain tests regardless of the individual differences which are inevitably present among the students. In fact, any experienced teacher will find that students of the same class differ from one another in many aspects such as linguistic competence, personality, attitude, aptitude, motivation, interests, cognitive style, prior learning experience, and even learning needs. In an ideal classroom, these differences would all be addressed. While this might pose too great a challenge in a teacher-centered classroom, group work, once again, can help. Groups of students can work simultaneously on different materials in different ways that suit individual needs. While admittedly not all individual differences can be handled, a degree of individualization of instruction becomes possible in group work.

In Long and Porter's view, many students feel stressed when called upon to speak in front of the whole class with the teacher expecting a prompt and accurate answer. Small groups, in contrast, provide a relatively intimate setting and supportive

environment in which speakers often feel secure and willing to think aloud. Long and Porter believe that group work motivates classroom learners since the learners are more actively engaged in a learning process which is conducted in a positive affective climate and a way that meets individual needs. Moreover, all learners experience more opportunities of practice which facilitate both language fluency and accuracy.

Research results consistently demonstrate the benefits of cooperative learning through inquiry and interaction with peers in small groups (Johnson and Johnson, 1989; Brandt, 1991; Slavin, 1991; Heath, 1992; Kessler, 1992; Freeman, 1992; and Nunan, 1992). However, some researchers (Olsen and Kagan, 1992; Davidson and Worsham, 1992) also point out that not all group work is necessarily effective. Several key attributes to successful group work are observed as the following: skilful group formation, careful structuring of the tasks or learning activities suitable for group work, a positive interdependence and extensive interaction among team members, social skills among members necessary for the group to work effectively, and individual learners' responsibility and accountability to the group. Fathman and Kessler (1993) conclude that when the major principles of successful group cooperation are observed, "Cooperative learning can be an effective classroom management approach for helping students develop social skills, gain a better knowledge of concepts, improve problem solving abilities, and become more proficient in language and communication" (p.134).

Communication in English Teaching of China

In terms of policy making, objectives, content, and pedagogical approaches,

Chinese scholars and foreign researchers identify several historical periods since 1949 in the English curriculum practised in the formal educational system (Ford, 1988; Zhao, 1990; Sun, 1991; Sui, 1992; Adamson and Morris, 1997). It seems clear from the research literature that since the 70s the curriculum has been demonstrating a decline in reliance on traditional grammar-translation pedagogy and a shift to combine it with communicative pedagogy. Consequently, some developing trends are observed. For example, the English levels of students entering universities are improving (Agelasto, 1992), and more practical courses (for example, newspaper reading, advanced listening and speaking for English majors, and listening and writing for non-English majors that could give usable skills for after graduation) have become available in the curriculum at the tertiary level. However, many researchers perceive areas requiring further improvement (Price, 1979; Ford, 1988; Zhao, 1990; Yang, 1991; Sun, 1991; Campbell and Zhao, 1993; Shih, 1996; and Zheng, 1996). The problem areas identified include low learning motivation (Ford, 1988), lack of communicative activities in classrooms and insufficient communicative competence of students (Ford, 1988; Zhao, 1990; Campbell and Zhao, 1993; Zheng, 1996), lack of qualified teachers for communicative pedagogy (Ford, 1988; Yang, 1991; Campbell and Zhao, 1993; Zheng, 1996), insufficient decision making by teachers as a result of the centralized educational system (Campbell and Zhao, 1993), the existence of a gap between research and practice (Campbell and Zhao, 1993), and the mismatch between effort exerted and learning outcomes obtained (Price, 1979; Campbell and Zhao, 1993).

Some researchers (Campbell and Zhao, 1993) are particularly critical of the

teaching methodology prevailing in foreign language classrooms and worry about the students' communicative skills. Campbell, a visiting professor at Sichuan International Studies University in China, and Zhao (1993), an English teacher at the same university, comment that

> English language classrooms in China continue to be dominated by a blend of the audio-lingual method of instruction with its endless and mind-numbing repetitive drills and the traditional teacher-centered grammar translation method. During their 6-10 years of English language instruction, students spend a large portion of their time listening to explanations of the structure of the language and engaging in dull and decontextualized pattern drills. English language becomes a tedious course to pass, not a tool for communication (p.4).

Therefore, "Even the most diligent students with the most responsible teachers often cannot communicate effectively with the target population after ten years of studying of English" (p. 4).

A similar observation was made by another researcher, Ford, during his stay in a teachers' college in Beijing from the year 1984 to 1985. Ford (1988) recalled,

> . . . I was struck most by the inefficiency I saw. Teachers and students spent an enormous amount of time on materials and activities that did not seem to be well organized or thoughtfully presented with a clear objective in mind. Certain basic skills in reading and grammar got an inordinate amount of attention while speaking, writing and more advanced analytical skills were virtually ignored. And all of this took place in an environment which was about as far removed from real communication as one could get. Despite these problems, students were learning English. There were clear differences in the proficiency of first and fourth year students which can be attributed to the instruction they received. Yet, I kept thinking about how much more students might have learned if they had had better trained teachers and a more effective curriculum (pp. 172-173).

The weaknesses of the foreign language teaching become more evident as China's

contact with the outside world increases. Nevertheless, researchers (Ting, 1987; Ford, 1988; Campbell and Zhao, 1993) realize that changes in this context are not easy and cannot be expected to take place overnight because of the deeply ingrained traditional philosophy.

Ting (1987) sums up the problem with ELT in China as three centerednesses: teacher-centeredness, textbook-centeredness and grammar-centeredness. Confucianism, according to Ting, is the root of the three centerednesses (p.53). Confucian doctrine advocates *ke ji fu li* which means "restraining one's ego and observing the supreme order of rituals" (Ting, 1987, p. 50). In other words, people should be aware of their own place in society and behave properly. Authorities and masters are revered and obeyed. Classics are believed to embody the highest values and laws of the universe. The respect of classics and authorities in Confucianism is transferred to foreign language classrooms as textbook-centeredness and teacher-centeredness. Both teachers and students tend to regard the textbook as the embodiment of knowledge that can be explained and somehow put inside the students' heads. Since they are supposed to be ever-correct, teachers hesitate to try anything in class that is beyond the textbook and prefer to use what is printed in the text and approved by authority. Students should not question and challenge teachers, but accept and remember what is taught. The third centeredness is caused by the notion that language is governed by grammatical rules just as the universe is governed by sacred laws as described in the classics. Hence every phenomenon in language must come to grammar for its final judgment. Consequently, foreign language learning becomes an extending

of vocabulary and mastery of grammar instead of learning how to use the language.

Confucianism has influenced China for thousands of years and its values still persist. Ting (1987) believes that "With all the legacies of traditional thinking, foreign language teaching in China will not change overnight; difficulties and obstacles should never be underestimated. But change is inevitable. The Confucian tradition dies hard, yet it is dying" (p. 60).

I found, while searching the literature on English teaching in China, that many articles are anecdotal accounts of personal opinions based on individual teaching experiences such as Zhao (1990), Sun (1991), Yang (1991), Agelasto (1992), Campbell and Zhao (1993), and Zheng (1996) as reviewed in this study. There has been a paucity of systematic research into this field.

Curriculum Inquiry

Curriculum inquiry is defined by Goodlad (1979) as the study of curriculum practice in all its aspects. He maintains that curriculum inquiry embraces five domains: the ideological, the formal, the perceived, the operational, and the experiential. The ideological domain refers to the scholarly work that defines the best way for education based on founded knowledge. Inquiry in this domain examines textbooks, workbooks, teachers' guides and the like. The formal domain refers to the expectations, values and interest of society and of those concerned people outside the classroom, such as government leaders and education officials. Inquiry in this domain analyzes the social-political issues embedded in the curriculum and looks at goals, content and so on. The

perceived domain refers to the beliefs, attitudes, and values of persons like teachers and parents. Their perceptions about schooling may differ widely from the officially approved one and may generate changes and curriculum revision. The operational refers to what actually happens in the classroom. What is going on in the classroom and what the teacher perceives the curriculum to be may be quite different. The experiential domain refers to the learning experience of students.

Goodlad points out that, while it is possible to concentrate on the study of any one particular curriculum phenomenon, a comprehensive inquiry necessarily encompasses all five. Curriculum planning needs the involvement of decision making from diverse levels--societal (controlling agencies), institutional (technical-professional staff), instructional (teachers), and experiential (students). Hence differing data sources must be brought into play in the search for tenable answers and solutions. The position that each of the curriculum facets has to be given due attention if we are to assess its effectiveness within the context of the particular institutions involved and to make reasonable curriculum proposals is supported by other researchers such as Barrow (1985) and Brown (1995).

In reality, however, Goodlad observed that "we know little about what any given group of students has been exposed to over twelve to thirteen years of schooling, let alone how they feel about it" and that "the most neglected data source in making curriculum decision is the experience of the students who are at the viewing and receiving end of all these complex processes" (p. 37). Tyler and Goodlad (1979) state that "the study of curriculum practice is markedly deficient if it stops short of analysis

of the personal or experiential domain" (p. 206). They argue that "students are not simply the receptacles for or recipients of a process that ends with instruction" and "how they think and feel and react is of fundamental importance" (p. 206).

The similar opinions are also reflected in other research works. In a systematic review of "students' experience of the curriculum," Erickson and Shultz (1992) note, "Neither in conceptual work, nor in empirical research, nor in the conventional wisdom and discourse of practice does the subjective experience of students as they are engaged in learning figure in any central way" (p.466). They continue, "In sum, virtually no research has been done that places student experience at the center of attention" (p. 467). Schubert and Schubert (1981) maintain, "We must come to know how students view their worlds if we want to teach them" (p. 249).

This is also true of English language teaching in China. Our students are engaged in English learning for six to ten years, or even longer for some, but we seldom inquire about their personal experiences. Neither do we often think of how our teaching colleagues feel about the profession.

Summary of the Literature Review

From the literature review we see that development of human intelligence is a process that actively engages with external stimuli. The development of intelligence is social in nature, and can be maximized by means of interpersonal communication. Education achieves most when it guides social interaction in the zone of proximal development that leads to gradual internalization of knowledge. Second language

acquisition is a dynamic process involving dual tasks: comprehension and production. Efficient language skill development requires plenty of active social construction with teachers or student peers in both language comprehension and language production processes. According to researchers, English teaching in China does not lead to an all-round development of language acquisition and hence needs change. The literature review also reveals that we are not adequately informed of how learners see the teaching they receive.

Contributions of the Study

This study is different from other research works seen in the literature on English teaching in China in several ways. First, the methodology is unique. The study used open-ended questionnaires followed by letter correspondence for baseline information collection and focussed exploration on salient issues emerging from the questionnaires. This approach enables an in-depth discussion to take place despite the distance between the researcher and subjects. In addition, the methodology guarantees a capture of issues of common concern among English students and teachers, and allows enough room for extended discussion on key issues. Compared with the anecdotal type of research work such as that reviewed earlier, this study appears to be more powerful and convincing. The multiple sources of information and the two-step qualitative data analysis enhance the reliability and authenticity of the study.

Second, this study focussed on the investigation of students' and teachers' experiences and perceptions of English teaching, an area which is little explored in the

research literature in Chinese or English. The study brings learners' and instructors' voices into the curriculum discussion.

Third, in this study, the English teaching practised in contemporary China was examined within the framework of humans' ways of learning. This approach has not been seen in the existing literature on ELT in China. The new perspective to look at the pedagogy, together with the methodology and the focus on learners' and teachers' experiences, adds a powerful argument to the increasing appeal for further innovation in the English instruction.

Fourth, this study has practical value. It ends with practical suggestions for both policy makers and classroom practitioners.

The following chapter is a detailed description of the design and methodology of the study.

Chapter Three

Design and Methodology of the Study

The purpose of the study is to investigate how students and teachers feel about the English teaching implemented in present day China so that weak areas can be clarified and suggestions for improvement can be reached. A teacher survey and a student survey were conducted to fulfil this purpose. In this chapter, the methodology and rationale used in the surveys are presented. The survey site, subjects, data collection and data analysis are described in detail.

Methodology and Rationale

In this study, interactive methods (LeCompte and Preissle, 1993; Denzin and Lincoln, 1994; Palys, 1997) were used for data collection. To be more exact, the data were collected through "person-to-person exchange of information" (Palys, 1997, p. 144) between the researcher and the participants through "questioning participants and eliciting data from them" (Goetz and LeCompte, 1984, p.109). The two specific techniques adopted were mail-out questionnaires (see appendices B and C) and follow-up discussion letters (see appendices D and E). While the former technique was common within the literature, the latter, a letter addressed to individuals for extended responses, was my own idea encouraged by my thesis supervisor and based on

necessity and feasibility. The questionnaires were used for the purpose of gathering baseline information, and the follow-up discussion letters contained focussed questions on the issues that appeared with high frequency and seemed to be common experiences among the survey subjects. The purpose of sending follow-up discussion letters was to initiate extended and focussed reflections on the salient issues that had been synthesized from the baseline information. The questionnaires and follow-up discussion letters were composed for students and teachers respectively. These two techniques were chosen for this study because they enabled us to hear the respondents' opinions in their own words and allowed better representation of the authentic, original voices captured in the setting. Moreover, they were most feasible with the overseas distance and limited funds.

Forty-two students and seventeen teachers were chosen as survey participants. For various reasons, four teachers could not take part in the survey. The teacher survey and student survey were conducted separately. The data from the student sources and the teacher sources were first analyzed separately, and then integrated. Data analysis was conducted through two procedures: preliminary analysis and interpretation of data. In the first procedure, the data are objectively presented with the purpose of telling "what it is." In addition, data from other existing studies are sometimes used for more illustration, and my own comments are inserted every now and then to provide necessary background information for the benefit of readers. The main techniques used in the initial analysis are: noting patterns--the assembly or reconstruction of the data in a meaningful or comprehensible fashion (Huberman and Miles, 1994; Palys, 1997),

enumerating--frequency counting (LeCompte and Preissle, 1993; Palys, 1997), comparing and contrasting--identification of similarities and differences either within the same data unit or between different data units (Jorgensen, 1989; LeCompte and Preissle, 1993; Palys, 1997). The second process, interpretation of the data, provides a focussed discussion on certain issues synthesized from the preceding data analysis process. The purpose is to tell "what it all means" and to address the research questions formulated in the introduction chapter. Comparable data from other studies are used for comparison and contrast. The discussion of the issues is integrated with the theoretical framework presented in the literature review. In short, this is the section of analytic induction--a dialectic of theory and data (Jorgensen, 1989; Palys, 1997) that leads to tentative suggestions for future practice.

The rationale underlying the choice of the methodology for this study are as follows: First, examination of learning and teaching experiences needs an in-depth inquiry, which is hard to achieve with quantitative methods alone. Open-ended questions and elaborative "talks" in the form of follow-up letters allow space for informants to tell their thoughts and explain themselves in ways that would not be possible in a quantitative study consisting of negative or positive categories, classifications, or numerical scales.

Second, as part of curriculum decision-making components, learning experience and teaching experience should both be considered among other components when we promote a change or improvement (Goodlad, 1979; Schubert and Schubert, 1981; Barrow, 1985; Erickson and Schultz, 1992; Brown, 1995).

Third, classroom contexts vary, and so do teachers' and learners' expectations and experiences in any specific circumstances. Thus, inquiries of learning experience and teaching experience of any particular group are perceived as beneficial to the establishment of a comprehensive understanding of the curriculum in general.

Fourth, the design of the study allows triangulation through multiple-source data collection: students of different years, teachers teaching different English courses and students, open-ended questionnaires, and follow-up talks.

Finally, the study is conducted from outside China. The distance makes the methodology most feasible.

Development of Research Questions and Survey Questions

As introduced in the preceding chapters, the purpose of this study is to examine learning and teaching experiences in English language classes in China and to provide tentative suggestions based on the study for future improvement. The focus is on classroom instruction. To fulfill this purpose, the study looks at: 1) how the participating teachers and students feel about the English teaching, 2) whether or not the teaching approaches in general need change or innovation, 3) how the survey subjects think the instruction can be made more effective.

The survey questions (see appendices, B, C, D, and E) were designed to elicit responses to the research questions described above. The general guidelines for formulating these questions are as follows: First, the questions should be brief and concise so as to avoid ambiguity. This seems extremely important for this study because

my absence from the survey field prevented personal explanation. Second, the questions should be interesting and relevant to the informants' own concerns so as to stimulate satisfactory cooperation. Third, the questions should sound conversational so that the subjects feel like talking because they are talking to someone caring and willing to listen. Fourth, the questions should be open-ended to allow enough room for elaboration.

Site, Subjects and Data Collection

Site

The Foreign Languages Department of a medical university in southwest China was chosen as the setting for the study. The university to which the Foreign Languages Department belongs is fairly well known in the country with a long history of more than eighty years and several prestigious medical specialties. It is widely recognized in southwest China as the leading medical university. The quality of English language teaching on campus here is socially acknowledged and statistically proven by the annual official examinations of English language as one of the two top universities in southwest China.

The Foreign Languages Department has a faculty of sixty-five staff members working in eight department administrative offices and four teaching sections respectively. The four teaching sections are English Major Teaching Section, Non-English Major Teaching Section, Short-term Training Section, and Second Foreign Language and Postgraduate of Non-English Major Teaching Section. The department

deals with four types of students: English students, medical students, potential candidates for overseas studies, and university faculty and staff in short-term foreign language training programs. This department was selected for the proposed surveys because of its accessibility and my familiarity with the programs after I had worked there as an English teacher for five years. The surveys were conducted in the spring semester of 1998. The whole process took three months.

Subjects

Forty-two English major students and seventeen English teachers were chosen as the survey subjects. The reason for having these students rather than English students of other disciplines as survey participants was that classes of English majors were usually small, containing about twenty students in each class. Compared with English classes of non-English majors, which usually had fifty to sixty students in one classroom, the administration would be less complicated if the survey was conducted in small sized classes. Additionally, students majoring in English were assumed to have more interest in the discussion of English pedagogy.

There were three groups of student subjects. All the students in Class 96, twenty-two altogether, formed Student Group One. They were second year students. Student Group Two and Student Group Three each comprised ten English majors randomly chosen from the junior class and the senior class respectively. Among the student subjects, ten were males and thirty-two were females. They came from fifteen cities and regions of China with an average age of twenty-two. The student subjects were all

registered in a four-year program leading to a Bachelor of Arts degree. They would work as English teachers or translators in medical institutions, hospitals, or administrations after their completion of the program. The response rate from the students was 100 percent.

Thirteen teachers working in the English Major Teaching Section and four section heads were invited for the teacher survey. Four of them couldn't participate due to absence or illness at the time of the survey. The participation rate was 76.5 percent. These teachers were chosen because most of them were experienced teachers teaching diverse English courses from year one to year four. According to the personal information provided, their average teaching experience was sixteen years and a half ranging from five years to thirty-one years. The courses these teachers taught were: advanced interpretation and speech, intensive reading, extensive reading, listening comprehension, English for trade and commerce, English and American literature, teaching methodology, advanced English, English composition, college English, translation, English newspaper reading, US survey, TOEFL (Test of English as a Foreign Language) training and so on. Four of them had a master's degree in either education or English literature, and nine of them had a Bachelor of Arts degree. Eight of them had experience studying or doing research in an overseas university on government-sponsored programs.

Data Collection

A consent letter (see appendix A) was sent to the subjects first to obtain their

agreement to participate in the surveys. The letter also informed them of the research topic, purpose and methods. They were told that my interest was in English teaching and learning in general. In other words, the study was not about any particular course or teacher. Rather, they would be asked to discuss their general experiences of English teaching in schools and universities as a whole. Thus, the teachers wouldn't have an uneasy feeling of being evaluated, and the students wouldn't worry about hurting the teachers' feelings if some responses were negative. Moreover, a broader range of English programs could be covered in this way. For this reason, there was no need to conduct the surveys anonymously. Instead, respondents were asked to provide some general information about themselves. The personal information provided reference information, enabled the follow-up dialogues, and facilitated some meaningful data interpretation afterwards.

Due to possible overlaps, the respondents didn't have to answer each question. They could skip some questions, and focus on those where they had more to say. They were also given permission to use Chinese if they wished to do so in order to express their meaning more explicitly and to avoid misunderstanding. The data provided in Chinese were translated by myself and this was indicated wherever they were quoted. With the generous cooperation of the class teacher, half an hour in class was scheduled for Student Group One to do the open-ended questions. Another half an hour in class was arranged for the same group to allow group discussion on the topics raised in the follow-up letter. After the discussion, the students wrote their responses to the questions and the class teacher forwarded them to me. The data collection was distinctively

divided into two processes: questionnaires for basic information, and focussed discussion for extended exploration. The data from the students and the data from the teachers were collected at different times albeit within the same semester.

Immediately after consent of voluntary participation was obtained, two sets of questionnaires comprising fifteen open-ended questions each were issued to the three sample groups of students and one sample group of teachers. Student Group One was the core group for student data collection which took part in both processes of data collection while the other two student groups were only involved in the baseline data collection activity, namely the questionnaire survey. The reason for choosing Student Group One only to participate in the follow-up discussion was the availability of class time for this group, which could guarantee a high response rate, and discussions of quality. After the baseline data were collected from the three student groups and the teacher group, topics that demonstrated shared experiences among many respondents were identified. Then the follow-up letters, which were designed to initiate further explanations and elaboration on the identified issues, were sent to Student Group One and the Teacher Group. The students who had demonstrated similar concerns in the questionnaire survey were called together to form mini groups for focussed discussion. Each mini group worked collaboratively on a couple of designated topics, and then wrote one paragraph for each topic as a report of their discussion. For the Teacher Group, each teacher was required to elaborate in detail one or two perceptions they had expressed in their responses to the questionnaire. Data from the student groups and the teacher group were collected separately and kept in separate files.

Data Analysis

This study was based on qualitative research methodology. Techniques such as noting pattern, enumerating, comparing, contrasting, and analytic induction were implemented in the data analysis. The analysis was divided into two processes: manipulating data and interpreting data.

Preliminary Analysis

This part of the data analysis forms the first two sections of chapter four. The analysis started with the student survey, and then focussed on the teacher survey. First of all, the answers to the same question or related questions were pulled together and dealt with as one unit. Then the data were read and reread until a pattern emerged. The most striking thing/s observed in each unit was/were presented objectively as survey finding/s. Techniques like counting, noting patterns were used. Other techniques such as comparing and contrasting were also used every now and then within or across units whenever an association or linkage had been noticed or hypothesized in the process of analysis. The data obtained from the follow-up letters were mainly used for the purpose of illustration and elaboration. Some published results of related studies were used for confirmation. Comments based on my own knowledge or experience were inserted to provide readers with necessary background information to facilitate understanding of Chinese culture for non-Chinese readers.

Slightly different from the way of dealing with the student data, the teachers'

answers were categorized into four major themes and handled accordingly: frustration and concerns, professional development, teaching methodology, and learning outcomes. Again, comparison and contrast were used for possible similarities and differences between the data from the student source and the teacher source. This part of the data analysis was basically an objective description of what was seen from the data.

Further Interpretation of the Data

LeCompte and Preissle (1993) emphasize that data analysis based on qualitative research methodology involves more than simple reporting of facts. The purpose of qualitative researchers, for example, is to tell what the results mean by reassembling and integrating them with existing knowledge (p.263, p.266, p. 267 and p.278). This is also the purpose of this study. Although the initial analysis presented in chapter four helps us see what the data were, it is never the end product of this study. Chapter five gives a further discussion on five key issues synthesized from the preliminary data analysis. It compares and contrasts the survey findings with comparable data from other studies, integrates the results with the theoretical framework chosen for this study, specifies what the data really mean, and points out implications for teaching practice.

In the next chapter, we will see data presentations.

Chapter Four

Survey Findings

In this chapter, the data collected from the student survey, the teacher survey, and the follow-up letters are initially analyzed and findings are presented. Section one deals with the data from the student groups. Section two focuses on the teacher group. In the first section, the analysis goes through the questions in the order they appeared on the questionnaire. In some cases, however, related questions are pulled together and analyzed as single units. In contrast with the fifteen open-ended questions in the student survey, those in the teacher survey are more focussed and, therefore, are categorized into four themes: 1) frustrations and major concerns of English teachers, 2) professional development, 3) teaching methodology, and 4) learning outcomes. Accordingly, the analysis in the second section is also conducted in four divisions based on these themes. Reflections that are most typical and representative among the respondents are presented as survey findings. Excerpts from the surveys and follow-up talks are used for illustrations.

Student Survey

Question 1 How long have you been learning English?

The students' answers to survey question number one showed that they had nine

years' of English learning experience on average. This is congruent with the fact that in China the English program starts from the first year of secondary school education in most high schools, especially those in urban and metropolitan areas.

Question 2 Do you enjoy English language learning? What are your feelings about English language learning?

The data showed that most students (64 percent) enjoyed English language learning. Among the other 36 percent, many said they sometimes enjoyed the learning but sometimes not. The extended student responses generated by the follow-up letter demonstrated that, in fact, the students' feelings towards English learning were unstable and constantly fluctuated from positive (e.g., interesting) to negative (e.g., boring). Usually, when students were aware of a sense of achievement and recognized progress in language skills or enrichment of knowledge through using the target language, they enjoyed the learning. But when they felt that too much effort was made for little achievement, they felt tired and found English learning difficult and boring. As a student reported

> When I try to do something but I fail, I don't enjoy it. For example, I try to memorize one word many times, but I cannot remember it. Sometimes when I read an article, but I cannot understand it because of many words that I don't know, I do not enjoy it. When I know of something that I didn't know before through reading, and when I learn something that I could not do well before, I enjoy it.

Another student said:

> When I was a middle school student, I loved English very much. Whenever I had time, I would read or write in English. But since [after] I became an

> English major (college student majoring in English), I found English sometimes boring. I lack necessary words. I always feel I have no improvement in reading, writing, listening or speaking. Sometimes I feel my English is poorer than ever.

The contrasting and nonlinear feelings are actually very typical among foreign language learners. Students may feel satisfied with their progress one day, and the next they may feel that their language proficiency has not improved. The reference point they use in general is immediate success or failure in language management, for instance, being able to carry on a conversation or not, being able to read in the target language in a comfortable way or not. Manageability or awareness of making progress is a great drive for foreign language learning. The experience of achievement and progress in target language abilities or academic studies through the use of the language can intensify learning interest, and make learning experience enjoyable. Conversely, the lack of a sense of language or academic development strangles learning motivation and leads to unpleasant learning experiences.

As a matter of fact, progress in second language learning itself is not linear. Sometimes learners may find less progress or even no progress is made even though the same amount of effort has been exerted. Plateaus are common experiences of second language learners. If correct guidance is given to students to understand and to deal with plateau problems, students may be kept away from being disappointed too soon and learning interest may be sustained.

Question 3 ***Are you satisfied with the English language teaching you have***

received? Why or why not?

Eighty-two percent of the respondents said "No" to this survey question. The reasons mentioned for their lack of satisfaction were that teaching methodology was rigid and boring (13 counts), they didn't learn practical skills (5 counts), lack of chances to practice speaking English (3 counts), and textbooks were dull and out of date (3 counts). Nine students didn't bother giving any reasons despite the fact that they were sure the English teaching didn't bring them satisfaction.

One student complained

> To be frank, I don't like the present teaching pattern [model]. It requires [shuts] us within the classroom to study the boring text one sentence by one sentence thoroughly and to crowd [stuff] the annoying grammar items into our minds. No pictures and no sound [audiovisual facilities]. Even listening course does no better job than others and cannot arouse our interest . . . Many people have no interests in it [learning English]. It is not their fault. It is, partly, the teaching pattern that makes many people wander about [stop] at the entrance to the world of that language. For language teaching, the teacher should make his students feel like it by all means and not to oblige them to recite. He should change [make] his teaching methods flexible, too.

Another student described her learning experience in secondary school as

> Our teachers put too much focus on training our grammar, not our sense of language . . . At that time, learning English is [was] only for examination of entering university. We improved our English marks by doing exercises. And we had no opportunity to speak English at all.

Some students were concerned about insufficient training in practical language skills, especially speaking skills. One student responded, "We do not learn practical skills in English class. This is a fact you can see many students who have passed TOEFL or GRE (Graduate Record Examination) still cannot communicate with native

speakers freely." In fact, 85.7 percent of the students indicated here and there throughout the survey that weak oral communicative ability worried them most and was their major concern.

Textbooks were also the subjects of complaint. In a jointly written response, two students wrote,

> The content is out of date. We need some newly [written] articles or information about nowadays society. The arrangement of the textbook is not suitable. We need some new forms of exercises to arouse the interest of the students to participate in discussion. And we need to know more about the background of the articles in order to understand better and deeper. The texts are too long and too difficult to understand. The vocabularies are not commonly used.

It was apparent that the English pedagogy, textbooks and evaluation in practice did not match the learners' needs. The English program the students felt they needed was one that had practicality as a main feature and facilitated future professional performance by enabling students to develop proficiency and competence in communicative skills. The strong appeal for an immediate change in the English education was highlighted by the following comment of a second year student,

> I like learning English. As we know, the most important thing for learning English is to use it in reality. I mean, we should learn vivid and living English, not dull and fixed English rules only from books. There are so many English exams in China. I have to focus on preparing for those exams. Though I am a diligent student and often get good scores in exams, I have problem even to express myself in speaking English. When I meet a native speaker, I always feel nervous. Sometimes, I do not know which topics we should talk about. Sometimes, I cannot follow their talk. I cannot transfer English knowledge in books to conversation. I think in Chinese, then do translation before I speak. Though I know this kind of using English is very bad, I find hard to change the habit and the way I use English. Many friends of mine also have the same problem.

Question 4 ***Describe your feelings when using English in conversation.***

Question 5 ***Is there a tendency to fall back to "mother-tongue" communication? If so, why do you think this happens?*** (Question 4 and 5 are analyzed together.)

The students' feelings varied with individual English performance ability and success or failure in any particular communication episode. Following were some typical quotations from the data. One student stated, "It is fantastic when you can speak it out without thinking [with ease]." Another echoed, "When I can express myself clearly and freely, I feel happy. When I cannot, I feel fairly annoyed." Another student said, "I feel nervous in oral communication with others. If I speak English improperly, I will feel more nervous. Therefore, I do not dare to speak English." The words students used to describe their feelings ranged from challenged, delighted, confident, interested, proud, nice and good to difficult, nervous, dull, awkward, embarrassed and useless.

Again, an association between successful language management (or awareness of learning progress) and enjoyable experience was noticed. In fact, thirteen students reported that successful communication episodes established pleasant feelings and generated more learning interest. In contrast, awkward communication performance or awareness of prior mistakes, as reported by twenty-seven students, increased learning anxieties, strained performers' nerves, and further weakened their language behavior. Students in the latter case, more often than not, resorted to silence for security or avoidance of further embarrassment.

It was also noticeable that many students (57 percent) found it hard to express

themselves clearly in English. The data showed that one year or two years more learning experience of college students didn't make much difference in terms of relieving this problem. The percentages of students in different years reporting that they were unable to express themselves as they wished were: 59 percent for Class 96 (eight years of English learning on average), 50 percent for Class 95 (nine years of English learning on average), and 60 percent for Class 94 (the graduating class with an average of ten years of English learning experience). Although the survey didn't ask for the reasons for the perceived incompetence in language performance, some respondents did mention a few: insufficient vocabulary (10 counts), unable to find proper words or expressions in communication (9), accented pronunciation and nonnative like intonation (3), uncertainty of linguistic rules (3), and unsure of appropriate topics and ways of communicating (2). In addition to limited vocabulary (an analysis of vocabulary issues in particular can be seen on pp.63-64), linguistic and cultural uncertainty, which was natural and unavoidable in foreign language learning, also brought the students discomfort that was not experienced in their first language communication. It hindered the target language communication and made the students feel disabled in foreign language performance. The fear of failure in English communication became a psychological stress to the English learners. The stress partially explained the phenomenon revealed by the data that in target language communication with peers, many students (73.8 percent) had a strong tendency to skip back to mother-tongue communication. Obviously, most students did not handle linguistic and cultural uncertainty the way an effective language learner should. The

uncertainty made the students less inclined to take risks and seriously hampered foreign language acquisition.

Question 6 ***From your own experience, is there a way of learning English that is more effective than others?***

Seventeen (40.48 percent) students answered "Yes." Fourteen (35.7 percent) answered "No." Six students skipped this question. Five felt unsure. The effective ways of learning English suggested were: more reading and listening (8), memorizing words and expressions (5), more practice (2), visiting an English-speaking country (2), creating language environment (2), nurturing learning interest (1), and imitation (1).

An interesting phenomenon I noticed here was that although weak speaking skills stood out in the data as the major concern in their English learning, many more students chose "more reading and listening" as the effective way of learning English rather than more practice of speaking. I even had more counts of "memorizing words" as an effective way of learning than that of "speaking more." The implication was that the students, having been influenced by knowledge transmission pedagogy for so long a time, regarded language learning as a process of knowledge accumulation which could be achieved by a large amount of reading, listening, and even large size of vocabulary. Therefore, the more effective way of learning a language was seen as to read more, listen more and memorize more. The students failed to see the other important process in language acquisition--production practice. Again, if the way of second language acquisition was introduced in class, and the dual task of successful language learning

was emphasized and implemented in instruction, the students would be greatly benefited.

Question 7 Have you ever had an English teacher whose way of teaching impresses/impressed you particularly? If the answer is "Yes," please describe how he or she teaches/taught.

To this question, sixteen students (38 percent) answered "Yes." Eighteen (42.85 percent) answered "No." Eight (19 percent) didn't answer. Although the question didn't specify any particular educational level, the data reflected a common tendency of retrospecting to secondary school teachers. Following are some descriptions of teachers who left special impressions with their students.

> You know, not all the materials in the textbooks are very useful. Sometimes it is very boring and time wasting to read a whole long text, which is difficult to understand, and lacks attraction. What my teacher did was to summarize the important things related to the text such as grammatical points, fixed usage or expression, prepositions *etceteras*. All of these are very brief and systematic. So it's very clear when I open my notebook that what I should learn from the text and how I could grasp [master] them.

Apparently, the teacher described here impressed the student and left pleasant memories with the student because the teacher met the student's immediate needs in learning. The teacher well understood that secondary school students had a heavy learning task. Other subjects like mathematics, physics and chemistry required more time and attention from students than subjects like foreign language despite the fact that English was also a subject to be tested in the college entrance examination. In order to

prepare students for the exam with as little time as possible, responsible teachers usually did the same thing as in the description above. Actually, this kind of teacher was very typical in secondary schools. They were realistic to help students with heavy learning loads. Some side effects, however, were produced by this teaching approach.

First of all, language learning became a process of linguistic summarizing and memorizing. Of course, this method "simplified" and "systemized" the learning of linguistic facts, which were fundamental for examination purposes, but on the other hand, it overlooked other important aspects of language learning. The language was segregated from the text, and summed up as points which were listed in the student's "notebook" so that the student knew "what should be learnt from the text" when she opened the notebook. This kind of method undermined the development of the learner's language performance ability and brought no positive effect in the long run although it might solve the immediate problem of students--passing exams.

Second, this methodology was antithetical to the active role learners should play in a foreign language learning class. The teacher digested everything for the students and made everything ready for students to memorize. The result of the baby-feeding style of teaching was that the students learnt only facts rather than strategies. Once the baby feeding was not available, the students would be at a loss as to what to learn, and how to learn.

Some other respondents reported affection and encouragement as impressive. One student recalled,

When I first learnt English, I did not like it. But now, I become an English

> lover. You may ask why such change happens on [to] me. It really has something to do with the English teacher I had in the middle school. My middle school English teacher always encouraged me to have confidence in learning English. She did all she could to help those who did not like English. She tried to teach something interesting in class, which can raise our interest, curiosity in English. She has [had] a kind of thoughtfulness to his [toward her] students.

Hypothesizing that students with satisfactory learning experiences knew better about effective ways of learning, I looked at their responses to the survey question "From your own experience, is there a way of learning English that is more effective than others?" However, the hypothesis was not proved.

Question 8 Name some activities you like most in English language class.

The activities the students liked most in English language classes were: student presentations (15), discussion (15), debating (8), conversation (6), watching English movies (2), telling stories (2), role playing (2), and speech contests (2). One student particularly mentioned a Sino-America cultural exchange program he had joined in high school.

> I once had an experiment [was in an experimental program] when I was in senior high in the summer vacation. Some American guys came to Tianjin. They were not much older than us [we were], so we became friends soon. What is more, they brought us a fresh way to learn English, which we had never heard [of]. This way can be described as in a comfortable, flexible and relax-able [relaxed] condition to learn English with fun. We learnt 'ice breaker,' a way [game] to break a deathly silence, and scatter gofies (?), a kind of competitive vocabulary quiz. What is more, we learn so many American idioms and useful conversational skills. Young as we were, we still worked as 'little interpreter' to help them when we went to the downtown at that time. I remembered so clearly that during that summer vacation I really learned a lot of idiomatic American English.

The data implied that students liked active involvement in the foreign language learning process, which was based on meaningful content and action. They liked to use the language as a means of communication rather than an end.

Question 9 ***Do you believe that there is a direct relationship between teaching method and learning outcome?***

Question 10 ***Do you think there is a better way of teaching English?*** (These two questions are analyzed together.)

Thirty-three students (78.57 percent) thought there was a direct relationship between teaching method and learning outcomes. Thirty-one students (73.8 percent) believed that there was a better way of teaching English. The data suggested that there should be immediate innovation and changes in the existing ways of foreign language teaching since it was so closely related to students' learning outcomes. Suggestions given by the students on how to improve instruction can be seen on page 64 and 65 in the analysis of question number thirteen.

Question 11 ***Are you satisfied and happy with the progress you have made in English language skills?***

Question 12 ***Can you identify certain English language skills that are comparatively weaker than the others? If the answer is "yes," what are they? Can you tell the reason or reasons for the lack of progress?*** (Question 11 and 12 are

analyzed together.)

Thirty students (71.42 percent) were not satisfied with the language skills they had achieved. However, only twenty of them specified the particular language skills that were perceived as comparatively weaker than the rest. They were speaking (8), writing (5), listening (3), reading speed (2), translation (1), and pronunciation (1).

The other ten students didn't answer question twelve. Considering the fact that the consent letter allowed respondents to omit answering questions that were perceived as overlapping, I double checked their responses to other questions for any indication of less satisfactory skills. The search proved worthwhile and I did find that thirty-six students (85.7 percent) expressed concerns about their English speaking skills. They felt nervous when speaking English and embarrassed when they could not find appropriate words or expressions to express themselves. A fourth year student, who would graduate two or three months after the survey, thought that the most important goal of learning English was to communicate and use it. Nevertheless, "Even [although] we have learned English for ten years, we still do not feel competent in communication." The two major reasons reported as affecting the progress in speaking were insufficient chances to practice in class (13) and limited vocabulary (10).

Limited vocabulary was also reported in the teachers' survey as an essential factor affecting students' language abilities. A teacher commented,

> From my teaching experience and contact with students, I found that vocabulary is most important in English learning. Increasing vocabulary is an effective means to improve their communicative abilities. Vocabulary is the basic component of language. The limitation of vocabulary affects our students' language abilities and this is reflected in two ways: Poor

> understanding and ineffective communication. When reading, they read slowly because there are too many unknown words. Some sentences are misunderstood or cannot be understood. When listening, they do not have quick feedback. This is also the result of insufficient vocabulary. In speaking, writing and translation, no proper words can be found to express thoughts, and miscommunications are made due to the use of inappropriate words. In addition to the limited words students possess, phrasal verbs and idioms make the learning more frustrating. Phrasal verbs have different meanings when context changes. This makes English more difficult to learn. Vocabulary is a big issue and should be explored and solved (translation).

In fact, two-second year students, after consulting with their peers, reported that their vocabulary was about 5,000 words. The students' estimation was modest. According to *Gaodeng xuexiao Yingyu zhuanye jichu jieduan Yingyu jiaoxue dagang* (English syllabus for English majors at the basic stage, 1989), second year students majoring in English should have a vocabulary of 6000. Is this size not big enough for basic oral communication?

Question 13 Do you believe that there is a need for improvement in English language teaching in China? Where and how can we improve it?

I got an almost unanimous response to this question. Thirty-nine students (92.86 percent) believed that there was a need for improvement in English language teaching in China. The suggestions for improvement covered a wide range. However, I noticed a focus in several specific areas. First, students (10) appealed for more participation in language classrooms. As they wrote, "Let us students speak more, communicate more in English," "Let students participate as widely as possible." They believed firmly that "Oral English must be improved." Second, some students (5) saw the need for a change

in textbooks. They wrote, "We need to improve teaching materials. They are out of date." "The textbooks and listening materials should be insteaded [replaced] by new and modern books." And "Provide more reference books." Third, some students (4) suggested that pedagogical innovation should start early from secondary schools with comments like "Of course, there is [an] urgent need to improve English language teaching in China," "especially English teaching in junior and senior high schools. The purpose of English teaching should not be to pass examinations. Some literature (as opposed to linguistics) should be introduced to students and spoken English should be practiced much more. Teachers' pronunciation should be standardized. It is better to be [have] more lectures about culture and some interesting things." They believed, "in middle school, teachers should pay more attention to pronunciation and listening," "put [pay] more attention to listening, speaking and understanding." English teaching in colleges, however, also required improvement in the views of the students. A fourth year student suggested that college teachers should think about the following: "How can a college student make much progress by having only four English classes per week (time allocation for students majoring in specialties other than English) and how can an English major speak idiomatic English without much opportunity to talk with native speakers?"

Question 14 Is learning English of your own choice? If you could, would you switch to another subject instead of English?

Sixteen students (against 26) said that learning English was not their own choice.

There are two major reasons that cause the phenomenon that quite a number of students get enrolled in a program that is not their own preference. First, in China, education is of utmost importance in one's life, not only for the individual him/herself, but also for the family. Sending a child to college is regarded as something glorifying the family and ancestors. Hence there is a lot of parental involvement in children's education. Decisions like choosing a career or specialty to pursue often represent the parents' intentions. For some students, they choose the program in order to please their parents and to fulfill their families' expectations.

The second reason pertinent to the phenomenon is that sometimes universities pick candidates. Generally speaking, students select universities. But sometimes when a university spots some students as suitable candidates for a particular program, they may talk with the students and get them into the "unanticipated program." Things happen such as that, due to diverse reasons, not all students in this situation are guaranteed a "negotiation" talk before the acceptance notice is issued. Since the university entrance examination is so competitive and stressful, many students choose to compromise rather than retake the exam. However, I hesitate to use these two reasons to account for the fairly common intention among English students of shifting to other programs as the data showed (22 out of 42).

Compared with the answers to the survey question "Do you enjoy English language learning," I had an interesting finding which could ease the nerves of English teaching practitioners. I noticed that seventeen students out of the twenty-two who claimed a wish to change to other programs actually enjoyed learning English. The reason they

wanted to take up another program was not that they wanted to give up learning English, but as one student said "I would choose another subject, but at the same time I will [would] also try my best to learn English." Another student explained his "disloyalty" to English learning as "because I want to use this language tool to learn something more." The preference of using a foreign language as a medium to facilitate general academic and social success was echoed by another student when she said, "English gives me more chance to enrich my knowledge." One student was even thinking of taking up another foreign language in addition to English.

What I see here is the implication that students are not satisfied with learning English as an end in itself. They want to use English as a tool for wider academic and personal growth.

Question 15 Do you have and always stick to a self-made plan of learning English? Why or why not?

Twenty-eight students (65.71 percent) did not make plans for their own studies. Reasons given were no time, do as teachers say, hard to implement. Eight students said they had plans. Reasons for making plans were very general: push oneself to learn English actively, or benefit a lot. Several students said sometimes they had plans but found it difficult to put them into practice. One typical explanation was "We have time to make a plan, but we do not have time to carry it out. We do not have enough time because we are busy doing exercises in workbooks, checking new words, and reciting [memorizing] new words. When we want to learn something else, we do not have

enough time."

Hypothesizing that the eight students who made study plans for themselves were influenced by the instruction and guidance of impressive English teachers they had before, and that the learning autonomy led to an enjoyable learning experience, I compared the responses of the eight students to question two (Do you enjoy English language learning? What are your feelings about English language learning?) and question seven (Have you ever had an English teacher whose way of teaching impresses/impressed you particularly?), but no connection was found.

Teacher Survey

Major Concerns and Frustrations of English Teachers

Question 2 ***What do you enjoy most in your job?***

Question 3 ***What physical limitations do you have in your teaching (e.g., large classes, teaching loads, etc.)?***

Question 4 ***What are your major concerns with regard to English teaching?***

Question 5 ***What frustrates you most in your teaching job? Have you ever thought of quitting the job? Why or why not?***

The data showed that the major concerns of English teachers with regards to their teaching were the imbalance of teachers' effort and students' outcome (7), and the pressure of the 100 percent passing rate in the national examinations (2)--the policy made by many universities that all students must pass national English examinations before graduation. As one teacher wrote, "Students' learning ability and outcome are

not improved [as] much as expected though great effort has been put [made]." Another teacher echoed, "[I] spent much time but received little results" (translation). Some teachers believed the reason for the mismatch between teachers' effort and students' learning outcome was low learning motivation and the passive role students played in language learning. Several teachers maintained that the passive attitude of students in learning was "formed in their studies in the past primary and middle school training."

The two teachers who were teaching the classes for the national examinations (TEM and CET) named the pressure of the 100 percent passing rate as their top concern. A brief introduction to TEM and CET was given in chapter one of this study. Like many other universities, the medical university set up a policy that each of its students must pass TEM or CET before graduation. This administrative decision became an enormous stress to both teachers and students, especially those working in the years where the exams were taken. The factors that contributed to the toughness of reaching the 100 percent goal, according to the teachers who participated in this study, were "large classes and great difference between students' English levels," and "to enlarge students' knowledge within such a short time and so many things to prepare for TEM." Hence, a teacher stated that her greatest wish was to be allowed "not to teach for passing examinations." The mandatory success in national examinations also brought unpleasant learning experiences to students. At the inquiry whether or not she was satisfied with the English education she had received, a sophomore student responded, "not very [much] satisfied, at least not now. Because we are now mainly trained to pass Band 4 (a level in the exams)."

Most teachers (9 out of 13) made complaints of the poor working conditions and named them their number one frustration. The classrooms in this department were shabby and furnished with unmovable desks and chairs arranged in rows facing the blackboard. Teachers complained that the physical arrangement of classroom furniture made it hard to move around and conduct any kind of language learning activity. Moreover, no class had a fixed classroom to go to. Hence, any classroom decoration that might help create a language learning atmosphere was out of question. The effectiveness of classroom instruction was also restrained and affected by the lack of necessary teaching facilities such as slides, overhead projectors, VCRs, *etceteras*. In fact, almost nothing was available for English teachers except chalk and chalkboards. Insufficient reference resources also posed a big problem. Due to the shortage of funds, the medical university library preferred to allocate money to medical resources rather than resource books for English teachers. No wonder one teacher said her biggest frustration was that there was nowhere to obtain necessary teaching resources. And another found it ironic to be "not well informed about what is going on in the field of English teaching" while working in a fairly well known academic institution. The consequence of the poverty in teaching resources and guidance materials was that teachers often felt short of support. Hence, they were found hesitant to try anything new. They preferred to stick to what was already laid out in textbooks or taught before.

The second biggest frustration teachers confronted (7) was the low pay they received for their work. These teachers thought their pay was unreasonably low as compared with that of other occupations. One middle-aged teacher expressed her stress

of having to look for extra work to do in addition to teaching in order to pull the family through. The fact that teachers in China are underpaid can be confirmed by other studies. For example, in 1993, the Higher Education Department of the Sichuan Education Commission conducted a survey involving three hundred and sixty-seven English teachers teaching non-English majors in twenty colleges and universities in Sichuan Province (Li, Ren, Liu, and Xiao, 1993). The survey drew up some statistics for the average monthly income per person in teacher families. It demonstrated that only 10.1 percent of teacher families had one hundred and fifty Chinese yuan or above for each family member. 36.78 percent of teacher families made from one hundred to one hundred and forty-nine Chinese yuan for each person to consume for one month. 51.5 percent of teacher families earned less than ninety yuan every month for each family member (p.16). This means that the vast majority of teachers have to worry about how to make enough money to keep the family going if two hundred yuan is the minimum monthly income for each family member for a fairly comfortable life. Other frustrations reported were heavy teaching load (4), subject discrimination (2), and institutional bureaucratic inefficiency (1).

Since this study couldn't explore the issue of the heavy teaching loads further due to time constraints, I'd like to look at the survey report of Li, Ren, Liu, and Xiao (1993) again. Their report showed that 70.3 percent of the teachers investigated cited too much work as a problem for English teachers (p.8). The average teaching load was 9.6 hours per week (p. 8), 1.6 hours more than was required by the State Education Commission (p. 16). Long hours of class preparation, assignment checks, family responsibilities, and

administrative meetings (32.43 percent of the teachers had administrative responsibilities) kept teachers busy day and night. They found that 65 percent of the teachers had visited the cinema fewer than three times in the past three years (p. 16). Their findings elaborated and confirmed the data of this study that a fair number of English teachers were frustrated with heavy teaching loads or, to be more exact, workloads.

Although the teachers had frustrations and complaints, most of them (83.33 percent) expressed that they had never thought of quitting the job because the job brought them enjoyable moments and made them love teaching. The teachers reported that when they were with students, exchanging ideas with students, getting full cooperation from students, seeing students making progress towards proficiency in speaking and writing English, they enjoyed most and saw best the value of being teachers.

Professional Development

Question 6 ***Do you agree that teaching is a profession that needs constant development? Please explain.***

Question 7 ***In your opinion, what conditions should be provided and guaranteed for teachers' professional development?***

Question 13 ***Have you ever discussed or workshopped the English curriculum with colleagues?***

Question 14 ***Have you attended any in-service programs/workshops since you started teaching? If the answer is "Yes," then how many and what are they?***

All the teachers agreed that teaching was a profession that needed constant development. Teachers, like other professionals, had to constantly update their knowledge and ways of teaching so as to meet the changing needs of society and keep pace with the time of "knowledge explosion." The teachers believed that certain conditions were imperative priorities for their professional development. First, good libraries, guidance books, access to computers, and regular in-service training programs or workshops were needed. Second, enough income and reduced teaching loads to enable teachers to focus on teaching, reading and research should be guaranteed. "Above all," a teacher summarized, "the state must pay due attention to education and grant enough budget for teaching facilities and teachers' income." Another teacher perceived that the important thing was to make the "authorities think your teaching job is important."

When the teachers were asked whether or not they workshopped with colleagues about the curriculum, an obvious division in responses was observed. Those who had administrative responsibilities in addition to their teaching jobs reported a high frequency of discussion with people concerned about the curriculum for the purpose of improving it and meeting "course needs and market needs." In contrast, teachers who were free from administration made comments like "hardly any chance to do that (discussing about the curriculum) though I like it."

This is a phenomenon common in educational institutions in China. People become used to the tacit conception that curriculum decisions are something leaders should worry about. Teachers are only executors of what has been set up and determined by

leaders. This situation is well reflected by a prevailing saying among teachers that "You be your leaders, I teach my book" (a word for word translation from Chinese). The consequence is that leaders complain that teachers do not care much about curriculum issues, whereas teachers feel devalued for thinking that their voices are not heard or will not make any difference. Ten teachers out of the thirteen investigated reported that they had attended long-term or short -term training programs. Short-term programs in this study mainly refer to workshops teachers participate in while doing the normal teaching and administrative routines. The contents of workshops these teachers attended varied from English writing, Sino-western culture comparison, psychology, fast reading skills, teaching methodology, American culture, American modern poetry, western media to computers and their applications in education. Long-term programs in this study mean those taking more than one year and done off the campus. Usually, the participants get permission for a temporary leave to complete the program. Nine teachers took part in different long-term training programs either in or outside China. The average frequency of attending a professional training program either long-term or short-term was once every seven years per person.

In fact, the whole picture of English teachers' professional development training is less optimal than it appears here. As introduced in chapter three, the sample group chosen for this study comprised teachers from the English major teaching section and administrative heads at the section level or department level. First of all, English major teaching sections usually receive a larger quota for professional training than non-English major teaching sections because teaching students majoring in English is

assumed to be more challenging, and requires teachers to be more competent in language skills and teaching methodologies. Consequently, these teachers are given more chances for in-service professional training than their counterparts teaching non-English major students. Second, this university is the biggest medical university in southwest China, and, generally speaking, it can get more funding from the government and provide more opportunities for its faculty and staff to upgrade professional qualifications. Third, teachers working in universities have more chances to renew their occupational repertoire than those teaching in secondary schools do. Therefore, research that covers a larger and wider range for a more accurate reflection of English teachers' professional development training is recommended.

Teaching Methodology

Question 9 ***Do you believe that there is a direct relationship between teaching method and learning outcomes?***

Question 10 ***What teaching method(s) do you use? Why did you choose this (these) method(s)?***

Question 11 ***Are there any specific activities you like to use in class? What are they?***

Question 12 ***Do you believe that there is a need for improvement in English language teaching? How can it be improved?***

All the teachers believed that there was a direct relationship between teaching method and learning outcomes. Here are a few typical quotations: "The use of good

method may bring about desirable learning results." "No doubt. Teachers' knowledge is an important factor, and teaching method is equally another." A professor commented

> Yes, the relationship between them (teaching and learning) is very direct and tight. I think that no matter how high a teacher's academic level is, if he or she has not a correct teaching approach or effective method, the teacher cannot gain large-scale achievement although a few talents (good students) may be produced (translation).

The data showed that there were two teaching pedagogies that were mainly used by the teachers: the communicative approach and grammar analysis. The teachers agreed that these two approaches and a combination of the two were suitable for English classrooms in China. Most teachers contended that their pedagogy was a blend of the two. They constantly adjusted the proportion of communication and linguistic analysis to meet specific classroom situations, for instance, learners' level of English, motivation, and necessity of knowledge transmission. One teacher wrote, "If students have good ability, e.g., English language majors, questions and answers are often used to make them active and speak more. If [they are] not so able, grammar analysis is used to make things clearer." She further explained,

> By able or less able students, my definition is this: The former has the feeling of the whole language, strong insight, sensitivity to grammar, and a fairly large vocabulary. It is almost of no necessity for them to do language and grammatical analysis and translation unless it is in a translation or interpretation class. Instead, the method of questions and answers—real language communication, should be used. We should use, to be exact, the speech as a carrier of thought and its exchange. Honestly, only in this way, can the language of students be better trained and the accuracy achieved, and their insight into the language strengthened. To the latter (less able students), however, more basic language training should be given. Through grammatical analysis and translation, we help them understand the difference between languages and cultivate their most basic sense of

> language and also encourage them to increase vocabulary. Only after some linguistic foundation has been laid can they proceed with communication in the form of questions and answers (translation).

She argued, "if we teach the two kinds of students in the opposite way (able students with grammar, less able with communication), the able will feel bored and the work for the less able cannot proceed" (translation).

In fact, the assumption that when facing students assumed to be low achievers, the teacher's main task is to impart grammatical knowledge or skills is questioned in the SLA literature as misguided for "it contravenes what we know about how language and thinking skills are acquired by young children" (Cummins, 1984, p. 223). Cummins continues

> Furthermore, . . . the passive and dependent role assigned to the child in programs that reflect the assumptions of the transmission model inhibits the intrinsic motivation and active involvement in learning that are essential for the development of high-order cognitive and academic skills (p.223).

Cummins (1984) believes that this type of teaching may appear effective only when programs are evaluated in relation to the acquisition of lower level cognitive and academic skills at the expense of robbing children of both the motivation and ability to promote and regulate their own learning (p. 262). He suggests that teachers should take responsibility for making classroom instruction conform to what we know about how language acquisition is most effectively achieved by decentralizing control within the classroom so that students can become actively involved in pursuing and regulating their own learning.

Activities the teachers liked to use in class were: student presentations (7),

discussion (6), questions and answers (5), translation (3), summarizing (2), problem solving (1), individual coaching (1), paraphrasing (1), pair work (1), debating (1), role playing (1), dictation (1), reading aloud (1), and listening to English songs (1). Some teachers indicated the gap between what they wished to do in class and what they could do in class. For example, two teachers commented that the communicative approach was good to "activate students' potentialities," but it was time-consuming as well. In order to make sure that all the content in the textbook (e.g., words and language points, understanding of the text, exercises on text comprehension and grammar checks) was covered and mastered by students within class hours, the classroom had to be teacher-centered most of the time. Especially when the teacher was preparing a class for the national examinations, more teacher dominance had to be used.

Twelve teachers (92.3 percent) believed that English teaching should be improved. Suggestions for improvement focussed in three areas: to improve teaching methodology (5), to teach what students need (4), and to teach beyond language (2).

It was evident that many teachers saw the disadvantages of teacher-centered pedagogy, and were trying to make their teaching communicative. But the distance between what was wished and what was in reality was great. Although the teachers wished and were actually trying individually to bring some innovation to the classroom, the heavy teaching loads, poor access to research literature and other resources, and the existing evaluation devices made the work extremely hard.

Some teachers (4) identified a mismatch between English teaching and learners' needs. One teacher believed that educators should "pay attention to the change of

demands and adjust our teaching to meet the demands." Another teacher echoed, "let the students study what they are in bad need of." Another teacher talked in a more concrete way by saying, "textbooks must be renewed. More time should be given to students to practise speaking and writing."

Content teaching was suggested by two teachers as a means of improving English teaching. They said that teachers should teach "less knowledge about English and more knowledge about English speaking countries." Additionally, teachers should teach learning strategies and "put students to learning [have students learn] both in and outside classrooms."

Learning Outcomes

Question 8 ***In general, are you satisfied with students' learning outcomes? If not, why?***

Question 15 ***According to your observation, do students make plans by themselves for English learning and stick to them? If not, why?***

Eight teachers (61.54 percent) were not satisfied with students' learning outcomes. Some of them (4) thought the learning method students used was not correct. A typical comment was "Most students cannot use what they have learned skilfully. They are only receptacles. They just take in anything. The main reason is that they are used to this kind of learning. It takes time to make them creative in learning." Nine teachers (69.23 percent) observed that students didn't know how to discipline their own study as college students should. They were used to being told what to do. Some teachers (2)

insisted that primary and secondary schools should be responsible for the passive learners they produced. Four teachers especially expressed their dissatisfaction with the speaking and writing abilities of English students. One teacher wrote, "They should have been able to speak and write English better since they have studied it for many years." Another teacher believed the reason that students could not speak and write English well was that "they spent too little time on the practice." A third teacher elaborated this in more detail.

> 1. Many of the students do not use English when they have the chance. Some of them are afraid of making mistakes. Some are nervous and shy. Some find it hard to express themselves in English. 2. Students do not have enough time to use the language. They have to spend a lot of time preparing, listening to teachers, and doing exercises and so on. 3. Many students do not form the habit of using the language neither in speaking nor in writing. The passive role the students played in class. Most of the students are used to just listening to the teacher, taking in whatever they are taught. They do not think actively in class. This passive role was nursed by the teaching that only requires the students to memorize things, to get knowledge; this kind of teaching does not require the students to analyze, to synthesize, and to think.

An interesting finding was that a discrepancy between the teacher survey and the student survey was noticed. According to the student survey, most students were interested in English learning. They were busy with language learning. They complained that teachers did not give them enough chance to practise the language. Teachers, by contrast, thought that students were not active in learning. However, more opinions in common were found in the surveys. Both teachers and students identified speaking skills and writing skills, especially speaking, as weak areas. They all agreed that English teaching needed immediate modification.

Summary of Survey Findings

The learning experience of the English students investigated could be summarized as follows: Most learners were not satisfied with the English education they had received and the progress they had made in target language skills. They saw the programs they had followed as promoting a process of summarizing linguistic rules, transmitting facts, and memorizing notes that didn't allow much student participation. Their comments on the textbooks, teaching approach and evaluation also suggested that these were designed mainly for linguistic knowledge transmission rather than all-round language skill development. Students were particularly aware of and deeply concerned about their weak abilities in English speaking. They were looking forward to a language classroom that allowed more student engagement and interaction in learning activities. They preferred the learning to be conducted in a meaningful and productive way rather than a boring mnemonic process. We can also conclude from the survey that although the survey subjects were all college students with an English learning experience close to ten years, they were almost entirely ignorant of learning strategies and learning autonomy.

According to the thirteen teachers investigated, English teachers in China were confronting many frustrations and physical limitations, which required special attention and effort from the government before any significant changes in foreign language teaching could be expected to take place. The effort the teachers made in teaching was mismatched by students' learning outcomes. Students, on the whole, were seen as

passive in learning and as relying completely on classrooms and instructors for language acquisition. The lack of voluntary practice and learning autonomy led to weak development in speaking and writing skills. At the same time, the teachers contended that teaching methodology was closely related to learning results and they saw a need for improvement in present teaching methodology.

From the data presentation above, we notice several issues that seem to be the common concerns of the survey participants: weak speaking skills, learning interest, pedagogy, learning strategies, and teachers' professional development. These issues will be further discussed and examined against the theoretical framework--ways of learning-- in the chapter that follows.

Chapter Five

Discussion of the Findings

As presented in the preceding chapter, both student participants and teacher participants showed concern about certain communicative skills, speaking skills in particular. The existing pedagogy was mainly questioned as causing the inefficiency in developing speaking proficiency and as affecting learning interest. Poor knowledge of learning strategies and lack of self-regulation further undermined the desirable language acquisition. Conditions for professional development were far from meeting the teachers' basic needs. Following is a focussed discussion on these issues.

Impaired Speaking Skills

Answers to the survey questions "Are you satisfied and happy with the progress you have made in English language skills?" and "In general, are you satisfied with students' learning outcomes?" demonstrated that many student subjects (71.42 percent, see page 63) and teacher subjects (61.54 percent, see page 79) were not satisfied with the learning outcomes achieved. They felt that English students in China were weak in speaking and writing skills, especially speaking. Their perception is confirmed by other studies. Li, Ren, Liu and Xiao (1993) found

> Although many students have passed Band 4 or Band 6 of College English

> Test, they still find it difficult to make oral and written communications. The phenomenon of high scores with low English language performance skills is common among college students (p. 101).

As the data revealed, most of the English students (64 percent in the survey, see page 52) and teachers (83.33 percent of the samples, see page 72) like English learning and teaching, and think they work hard. Yet 85.7 percent of the student subjects (see page 63) reported feeling awkward in English communication and unable to express themselves clearly after eight to ten years' of uninterrupted learning. Is English learning really "time-consuming and not rewarding" as a fourth year student concluded in the survey? To answer this question, we need first to look at where research has led us.

Many researchers (Price, 1979; Ford, 1988; Zhao, 1990; Campbell and Zhao, 1993; Zheng, 1996) are critical of the teaching approach prevailing in foreign language classrooms in China. They maintain that the pedagogy, among many other factors, is neither efficient nor effective. Because of the pedagogy used, students are doing less well in speaking and writing since they don't get adequate and appropriate opportunities to practice these two skills. Exploring further, Ting (1989) perceives that it is Confucian philosophy that has ingrained and modeled the existing education format. The Confucian ethic of respect for seniors and superiors determined the master-disciple relationship between teachers and students. Students are expected to learn the ancient wisdom of human beings with reverence. Any innovative activities of students are likely to be seen as unacceptable and contradicting tradition. The passive role students play in learning continues as it has in China for centuries. Therefore, the

matter of innovation in foreign language teaching is more than a simple shift from one approach to another. Rather, it is a matter of redefining the relationship between teachers and students, and of re-examining how learning occurs and how education matches ways of learning.

In past decades, researchers in psychology like Piaget (1959) and Vygotsky (1934, 1960, 1978, 1981 and 1986) showed that human beings are born active learners. Learning takes place most effectively when learners are actively engaged in the learning process conducted in a negotiative and communicative way. This is also true of foreign language learning. While some SLA researchers (Krashen, 1982, 1985) emphasize enough exposure to language input at a challenging yet manageable level, other research (Swain, 1985, 1993) has shown that second language acquisition involves a substantial level of production activities. These research results help us see that, on the one hand, second language learning involves understanding linguistic facts and building up hypotheses about the language studied, but on the other hand, full development of language skills needs enough production that tests the hypotheses till the language becomes the learner's own. Both learning and performing are best achieved through teacher-student and student-student negotiation and social construction of meanings.

As has been demonstrated in this study (see pp. 54-55), foreign language classrooms in China have too much observance to authorities. Teaching is mainly restricted to what is laid out in books, and students are supposed to remember teachers' lectures and prepare for examinations. As a result, teachers dominate language

classrooms, and language acquisition becomes a process of fact and knowledge memorization. The lopsided emphasis on learning linguistic facts at the expense of practicing communicative skills is directly reflected in the inadequate development of certain language skills, specifically speaking skills. Obviously, fundamental changes have to be brought into language classrooms to enable our students to achieve English speaking abilities that can equal their linguistic knowledge. This position is firmly supported by the survey finding that 92.86 percent of the student participants (see page 64) and 92.3 percent of the teacher participants (see page 78) appealed for further innovations in the existing teaching pedagogy.

As the associate dean stated in the survey, "It is necessary to improve English teaching. [But] How can it be improved is a big problem which still remains unsolved." It is true that there are still many "unknowns" before any fundamental changes can take place. However, a recall of the data obtained in this study may facilitate our understanding of what changes we should bring to English classrooms. The students asked for more participation in class (see page 64). They named student presentations, discussion, debating, conversation, English movies, stories, role playing, and speech contests as what they liked to do in language class (see page 61). They looked forward to changes in textbooks so that more information about contemporary English-speaking countries would be provided, and more discussions could be generated (see page 55 and 65). It is explicit that our students like to be actively involved in learning activities and they need sufficient communication and lots of social interaction. Our teaching, as many teachers believed, should correspond with students' and societal needs (see page

78), and teach what is perceived by students as useful and practical through creating enough opportunities for learner participation, social interaction, and practices.

Language Progress and Learning Interest

It is well documented in the research literature that students must be interested or motivated before they can learn. The data, however, suggested that this can also go the other way around: Awareness of learning progress sustains learning interest and stimulates learners for more challenging tasks. In contrast, a sense of not progressing frustrates students and even stops them from making further effort. Following is a reiteration of a student's report quoted before.

> When I was a middle school student, I loved English very much. Whenever I had time, I would read or write in English. But since [after] I became an English major, I found English sometimes boring. I lack necessary words. I always feel I have no improvement in reading, writing, listening or speaking. Sometimes I feel my English is poorer than ever.

Obviously, this student had pleasant learning experiences when he started learning English in middle school. A possible explanation is that it is usually easy for beginners to notice progress they make as progress tends to be rapid in early stages of language learning. The experience of progressing from not knowing to knowing something about a language makes the student interested so that he or she wants to learn more. Thus, it happened "Whenever I had time, I would read or write in English." Maybe it even explains why the student chose English to study in higher education. But when he became a second year university student majoring in English, which suggests that he

had reached an intermediate level in terms of English language skills, he found English boring. What made him lose interest in learning was the feeling that no apparent progress was made as he described, "I lack necessary words. I always feel I have no improvement in reading, writing, listening or speaking. Sometimes I feel my English is poorer than ever."

This is also reflected in other students' reports on their feelings when they use English. The common experiences among the student subjects were interest, enjoyment and feeling fantastic when they found they had communicated well or learnt new things by using the language. But when they experienced difficulty in handling the language, they were bored and 73.8 percent of them resorted to mother-tongue communication (see page 57).

This may be explained by Krashen's theory of the affective filter (1981, 1982, and 1985). According to Krashen, attitudinal factors like motivation, self-confidence, anxiety, nervousness and so on affect second language acquisition and form the affective filter. When the learner is interested and self-confident, the filter is down. But when the learner is worried and not motivated, the affective filter is up. Generally speaking, the students who see improvement in language acquisition are optimistic and ready for more learning. The confidence built in prior learning lowers the affective filter and enables more progress in subsequent learning. Conversely, worries about incompetence and lack of progress increase anxiety and deepen linguistic uncertainty. Students in this case become more hesitant in trying the language and the affective filter is up. The high affective filter prevents the active process of input and stops the input

from reaching the part of the brain responsible for the language acquisition device. This is vividly illustrated by a student's remark quoted previously in the data analysis, "I feel nervous in oral communication with others. If I speak English improperly, I will feel more nervous. Therefore, I do not dare to speak English."

While it may help relieve some anxiety with the explanation of plateaus that language learners experience during certain learning periods, it would be even more beneficial if teachers could make sure that their instruction falls right in the ZPD of individual students, and let the students experience learning progress more frequently.

In the data analysis, I noticed that the English students experienced ups and downs in learning alternately. The nonlinear experience makes them "Sometimes enjoy learning English, sometimes not." The students reported in the survey that when they found the learning "interesting," "not very difficult," yet "challenging," they enjoyed it. But when they found it "too difficult," "too many new words," or "not rewarding," they began to doubt their ability. This phenomenon is best explained by the zone of proximal development theory (Vygotsky, 1978) and i + 1 hypothesis (Krashen, 1981, 1982, 1985). According to Vygotsky and Krashen, the learning potential is at its best when education falls within the ZPD and teaching goes just one step ahead of the learner's current level. Here, challenging and manageable are the two key words for successful instruction. Being challenging, the teaching motivates students and stretches them to a higher level of learning. Being manageable, the teaching makes students see that learning is possible with effort. The challenge and manageability make students aware of constant development in learning and, consequently, gear them for more

advanced learning.

To make instruction stimulate maximal learning development, a careful design of teaching details regarding goals, assessment, learning capacities, materials, classroom activities and process is absolutely necessary. The data suggests that informative materials and interactive activities of interest to students are more likely to be challenging yet interesting for students.

Language Learning and Content

"If it (English speaking training) is a free chat, I enjoy it. But if making conversation as a way to practise oral English, I am bored and nervous." This is an excerpt from a fourth year student respondent. Actually, the harm brought about by practice for language's own sake only is more than tediousness. Mai (1983), dean of Studies of Shanghai Foreign Languages Institute, notes

> Because our students with a foreign language major spend four or five years studying within the school, only listening, speaking, reading, and writing, with little work done in learning any other knowledge or any other specialty, they are narrow in knowledge, lacking in practical training, and weak in ability for independent work; they have to take a period of time to adjust to their work after graduation (p.56).

Perhaps this explains why 52.38 percent of the student respondents (22 out of 42) expressed dissatisfaction with learning English only and wished to be able to take up another specialty for the typical reason of being able to "use the language as a tool to learn something more," "learn something besides [in addition to] English" (see pp.66-67). While it is unrealistic for the students to register in two programs simultaneously,

an English teaching integrated with content instruction should probably solve the problem to a certain degree.

But, what content learning can a language class offer? Our students and teachers gave some suggestions: "Practical things we can use after graduation." "I think language teaching should be associated with culture, history and tradition." "Less knowledge about English and more knowledge about the English-speaking countries." "Information about nowadays society." "Problem solving ability is important when our students step into the society. They (students) need something, some skills to survive." In short, students need to learn things that are useful and want to be prepared for the immediate challenge after graduation. This can find support from research work on China's foreign language education. For instance, Fu (1985), deputy chairperson of the Chinese Association for Research in Foreign Languages Education, writes

> In order to raise the quality of foreign language personnel and to meet the needs of the Four Modernizations, [we] should gradually change the present one-sided model of language/literature-centered instruction. In addition to learning a foreign language, [the student] should also learn a humanities or social science subject that is related to the language being learned, e.g., politics, economics, trade, law, philosophy, international relations, history, etc. (p. 4).

Another researcher, Ting (1987) supports the conception by elaborating that teachers of foreign languages in China

> should emphasize real, meaningful communication in the target language . . . they should emphasize the use of the target language as the medium of instruction in the study of nature and society. Language is language-in-use; it cannot be independent of its use in a social context . . . The isolated drilling and expounding of grammar and vocabulary should be reduced to a minimum because in such drill and expounding language is not seen as a

means to an end, which it is, but as an end in itself (p.59).

It seems safe to say that the purpose of learning a language is not to talk, read or write about the language itself, but to know about the world and widen our vision by using the language. Thus, there is no reason for the language classroom to be restricted to the study of the language in isolation from content learning and from contexts of communication. A communicative approach to target language teaching in content subjects can make language acquisition concur with personal development. Knowledge of nature and society and the development of language abilities together can enrich the learning experience, and motivate students as they feel that they are "learning something useful."

Learning Strategies and Learning Autonomy

When the student informants were asked to reflect on what they perceived to be effective ways of learning, 59.52 percent were either unable to comment on this or reported no knowledge of effective ways (see page 58). Considering the fact that they are college students with nine years' of English learning experience on average, this ratio is astonishingly high. It shows the existence of two problems in English language education.

One, students are used to being passive in learning. Their prior experience tells them that teachers will tell them what to do and how to do it. They rarely consciously articulate to themselves or to fellow students how they can learn better or subsequently review what they have done and achieved. This can be seen in a teacher's complaint,

"They (students) are only receptacles . . . Most of the students are used to just listening to the teacher, taking in whatever they are taught. They do not think actively in class." Even the other 40.48 percent of the students who were able to suggest effective ways of learning mainly took knowledge accumulation like reading more, listening more, and memorizing more as recommendable strategies. This finding seems discrepant from a previous conclusion that many students advocated more participation and communication in language class (see page 64). However, a careful reflection enables us to see the profound influence of the traditional master-disciple conception on students. Unconsciously existing in their mind is the belief that learning is subordinate to teaching. This is seen in the fact that although they have the wish to be more active and involved in learning, they seldom think how they can alter their learning behaviour and challenge teachers by demonstrating their wish in action, but rather wait for teachers to produce appropriate chances for them to speak and let them participate.

Two, students are not informed of learning strategies because these are not introduced and discussed in language classes. Teachers do not give students concrete and systematic guidance in this regard, though some may occasionally remind students to be strategic in a very general way.

Corresponding with the discussion, 69.23 percent of the teachers (see page 79) investigated observed that their students didn't have the habit of making study plans. In fact, 65.71 percent of the students (see page 67) reported that they had never thought of making any plans. A typical explanation from the students for not doing this is that they were already busy with class assignments and preparations such as going through

exercises, checking and memorizing new words.

Similar to this study, other researchers found that English students in China are a diligent group (Price, 1979; Ford, 1988). Some researchers believe that Chinese students have the "most developed memories on earth--a skill, in part, that derives from the demands of learning a character based language" (Agelasto, 1992, p. 78). Why, then, do they still feel incompetent after spending an enormous amount of time on learning? Again, we have to question the methodology observed in most language classrooms. Learning outcomes are, of course, closely related to the quantity of time devoted to learning, but they are even more closely related to the quality of effort put into learning and the quality of teaching. This makes us teachers think if and how we can alter students' learning behaviour through language classroom instruction. Can we make any difference if we provide prompts, hints, directive questions, or strategic guidance intended to make students think and become autonomous rather than summarizing linguistic rules for them to remember? Once our students become strategic, goal directed, and capable of regulating their own learning, we'll find them coming to class fully motivated, well-prepared, ready with comments, questions, ideas and insights, and willing to take risks. They won't be passive recipients anymore. They will be problem finders and problem solvers. By doing this, we enable our students to maximally succeed in second language learning, and, more significantly, we make them lifelong learners.

Teachers' Professional Development

Last, but not least in importance, we come to the issue of teachers' professional development. As can be seen in the data, all the teachers who participated in the survey fully realized the importance of continuing professional growth (see page 73). The reality in China, however, is far from desirable. As in many developing countries, education in China cannot get enough funding from the government. The shortage of funding is immediately reflected, as the data demonstrated, in teachers' low pay, backward teaching facilities, out-of-date textbooks, heavy teaching loads, lack of teaching resources and so on. All these become obstacles in professional development.

According to the personal information obtained from this study, 70 percent of the teachers (the percentage would be sure to grow larger if a wider range were investigated) have only a bachelor's degree of English language and literature. This suggests that many English teachers received little or no training in pedagogy themselves. While teaching, they felt a "lack of knowledge and experience" and had a strong desire to "study in order to enrich my own knowledge" as some teachers typically wrote in the survey. Nevertheless, the lack of in-service programs, unbelievably limited teaching resources, modest income, and heavy workloads make their wish unlikely to be fulfilled. Teachers know that teaching needs improvement, but do not feel theoretically and pedagogically informed as how to implement changes in class. These factors along with the top-down evaluation system leave teachers with little choice but to resort to the traditional pedagogy that they are familiar with, and to teach the same way they themselves were taught years, even decades ago.

As is widely known, China has been witnessing accelerating changes in social development and economy in the past two decades. The new situation creates new requirements for English personnel. English students are expected to have not only solid language knowledge, but also proficient communication skills and independent learning strategies. To meet the challenge education is facing, teachers' qualifications, above all, should be upgraded. Only when teachers are knowledgeable of students' ways of learning, only when teachers are confident of how to adjust their pedagogy to ways of effective language acquisition, only when teachers can give correct and timely guidance when students are frustrated with plateau periods, upset by linguistic and cultural uncertainties, or reluctant with language production, and only when teachers can teach students not only what to learn but also how to learn, only then, can fundamental changes be expected in English teaching.

Summary of the Discussion

The data collected and their discussion explicitly addressed the three research questions chosen for this thesis: What do the students and teachers feel about the English teaching they have experienced? Do they perceive a need for improvement in the teaching? How can it be improved? Both teacher and student respondents showed dissatisfaction with the English teaching practiced in the educational system of contemporary China. Compared with the outcomes achieved, the effort exerted in teaching and learning was not well paid off. Students felt weak in some skills such as speaking. They believed that the teaching pedagogy has to be changed if English

proficiency is to be improved. The current pedagogy makes students passive in learning. The relationship between teachers and students is one of lecturing and being lectured to. Language is taught as knowledge and facts that are rigidly memorized. Students do not feel that they are learning something useful since the language is learnt for its own sake rather than as a means to an end. Students do not have enough chances to practice with teachers and fellow students in class. Students are not informed of how to be strategic in learning. Thus, after almost ten years of learning, students are still not proficient in English communication.

In chapter two, the review of literature referring to psychological development and second language acquisition showed that human beings are born active learners, and the development of intelligence is an active process. So is second language acquisition. Effective learning occurs when learners are actively involved in the learning process. English teaching in contemporary China, however, is proved in this study as not being conducted within this theoretical framework. Students are not treated as dynamic learners, but passive recipients waiting to be lectured. Thus, learning potential is not maximally explored. This partially explains why learning outcomes are not satisfactory even after eight or nine years of learning. The literature review also illustrates that learning is a process but never an event. The process is completed through communication and negotiation between teachers and students. Through mutual interaction, instruction becomes comprehensible. Furthermore, research results in the field of second language acquisition emphasize that knowing a language does not necessarily mean being able to use the language skillfully. Enough practice for output

production is imperative for successful second language acquisition. However, this study demonstrated that English is taught in China mainly through the lecturing style. Learning a second language is rather a matter of memorizing individual words and grammatical rules than a matter of practice. Hence, it happened that students are less proficient in certain skills like speaking and writing than other skills such as grammar and reading.

The review of research work on SLA informed us that attitudinal factors like motivation, self-confidence, anxiety and so on are strongly related to effective language acquisition. Since the language is taught in China without much student engagement and separate from informative content, many students find the learning boring and not challenging. Students are disappointed by slow progress in certain language skills caused by insufficient language practice. Learning motivation is affected.

The experience of the students and teachers investigated in this study indicated explicitly that fundamental changes have to take place in order to improve English education in China. Some tentative suggestions based on this study for innovations are presented in final chapter.

Chapter Six

Conclusion and Recommendations

The learning and teaching experiences of the participants in this study confirm my personal observation that English teaching in China focuses too much on learners' linguistic development at the expense of communicative competence and autonomous learning. This kind of classroom instruction determines the passive role students play in language learning. The major language acquisition activities are restricted to mechanical recitation, rigid grammatical analysis and monotonous drills. As a result, English students are found to be competitive in language achievement tests, yet do not feel equally proficient in communicative skills, especially speaking skills. The drawbacks of this teaching approach become evident when China is experiencing accelerating changes in social and economic development, and witnessing a rapid increase in contact with the outside world. English students feel challenged by the new market economy, and ask for further innovation in English education. So do English teachers.

But how can English teaching be improved? This is a question puzzling English teachers including myself. This study approaches this issue from ways of learning human beings demonstrate, and establishes the position that the pedagogy prevailing in contemporary China does not harmonize with student and societal needs. The pedagogy minimizes the learners' learning potential by depriving them of opportunities for active

engagement in the language learning process. The teacher-dominated classrooms discourage student participation and social negotiation of meaning that facilitate language acquisition. The lack of language production opportunities further hinders the development of English speaking abilities and makes students experience frequent disappointment in target language communication. Thus, to make English teaching more effective, the pedagogy should be changed. It has to meet the students' needs and match their ways of learning.

Yet changes are never easy to implement since pedagogy is relevant to and decided by many factors, for instance, traditional philosophy, the evaluation system, available funding, and resources as shown in this study. However, some suggestions, based on this study, are promoted for English teachers and policy makers who have an interest in making a difference in this area. Although this study was conducted on the basis of the data collected from one single university department, the results are believed to be representative and the recommendations applicable to most, if not all, English language classrooms in China.

The first suggestion is to understand learners. As informed by this study, students are not satisfied with only being able to get high scores in language tests. They want to have practical conversational skills and to be proficient in target language communication as well. They like active engagement in language learning rather than passivity and being told about rigid grammar rules. They want to speak the language and communicate in the language rather than to be lectured about the language. This indicates that the traditional philosophy of appropriate roles teachers and students play

in English language classrooms should be challenged. Instead of being empty vessels waiting to be filled with lectures, students are active learners with great creative potential to be explored. The teachers' role in class should be to stimulate this potential and facilitate an active learning process. Activities that allow student involvement, social negotiation and cooperative constructions of meaning like student presentations, discussion, debating, conversation, role playing and so on are recommended to foster the roles students and teachers should play in language classrooms.

The second suggestion is to understand how effective learning occurs. The study shows that awareness of progress in language skills provides students with enjoyable learning experiences and makes them eager for more learning. It indicates that teachers should ensure that their instruction is always challenging yet manageable so that individual students can experience constant progress. To achieve this, teachers should be familiar with their students, aware of students' needs, reflective and critical of their own teaching, and resourceful and flexible in teaching methods.

Awareness of knowledge growth through using the target language as a medium of authentic communication is also found by this study to promote learning motivation. Relevant content in language class generates learning interest and gives much room for social negotiation. Hence teachers should try to embed their language teaching in social and cultural studies of English-speaking countries. In other words, work on content by using English as a medium of instruction. Textbooks, of course, must be upgraded for this purpose, too. They should contain rich information about contemporary English-

speaking countries. They should provide exercises that leave enough space for discussion and reflection upon issues of concern in addition to text comprehension checks and grammatical drills. The concurrence of content learning and language improvement obtained through thinking and talking will make students willing for more language learning.

Third, learning strategies and learning autonomy should be introduced and included in language teaching. As seen in this study, many of the students had little or no knowledge of how to discipline their own study and learn English strategically. This partially explains the mismatch between effort and outcome that astonishes researchers and upsets English students and teachers. To make students effective learners, English teachers have to familiarize them with the idea of strategies and show them how to become autonomous learners. Teaching learning strategies and self-regulation doesn't have to be ambitious. It may start from specific things like talking about learning dilemmas and possible solutions, encouraging students to consciously take advantage of practice opportunities, making up long-term and short-term plans, practising self monitoring and self evaluation and so on. By doing this, we are not only helping students with their English language acquisition, we are also training lifelong learners.

To make the above suggestions a reality, teachers need to be academically and pedagogically qualified. Nevertheless, the reality English teachers in China are facing is not encouraging. Low pay, heavy teaching loads, a shortage of teaching facilities, no access to reference resources, and few in-service training programs, are all factors that prevent teachers from renewing their knowledge and expanding their teaching

repertoire. Although they are a dedicated group with profound affection for teaching, they find it beyond their ability to achieve what they desire. Thus, the first step to take for any possible progressive changes in English teaching is that the government should give adequate attention to education, and support it with sufficient funding so that continuing professional development becomes possible. Together with improved working conditions, adequate in-service programs aiming to improve language skills and pedagogical qualifications should be provided. Since English teachers are busy during semester time with heavy workloads, training courses can be arranged between semesters, or during summer or winter vacations. Bursaries should be made available to teachers who want to take these upgrading courses instead of having a holiday. Teachers should also be well informed about what courses are going on far in advance, so that they can find a suitable one and make plans. Teaching resources should be constantly enriched and updated, and made accessible to teachers.

Finally, the present evaluation system should be questioned and innovations implemented. After examining the literature on program evaluation, Brown (1989) summarizes evaluation as "the systematic collection and analysis of all relevant information necessary to promote the improvement of a curriculum and assess its effectiveness and efficiency, as well as the participants' attitudes within the context of the particular institutions involved" (p. 241). This means that evaluation is a complicated multifaceted issue. All sources of information related to the program should be pulled together to form a complete picture of how the program is implemented. In China, however, the top-down national unified examinations are used

as the only means of English program evaluation. Thus, some elements that are essential to program evaluation are not included. The suggestion of this study is that other forms of evaluation such as questionnaires, interviews or classroom observations are adopted as complementary options because they provide qualitative information as valuable as data based on examinations. An integration of different kinds of evaluation means including less formal and more holistic ones may reduce teaching and learning anxiety, and allow space for learning autonomy. At the same time, it can orient English teaching to proceed toward a more communicative approach. Since the means of evaluation used has a backwash effect on classroom instruction, it is really something of utmost importance and needs careful consideration.

With these suggestions, this study can be brought to a close. There is no doubt that the design of the thesis fulfils the purpose of this study and addresses the research questions. The first hand data carefully collected from both student and teacher sources, and the qualitative interpretation certainly reconstruct the participants' views and perceptions of English teaching. Based on these data and analyses, this study clarifies weak areas and puts forth practical suggestions. The way of approaching the issues under discussion by examining the students and teachers' accounts of pedagogy and ways of learning gives a reliable argument for further innovation in English pedagogy. Above all, this thesis contributes to the research on English teaching in China by grounding the discussion in open-ended questionnaire surveys and letter exchange, an approach that is unique in the research literature in this field.

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Appendix A Consent Letter

March 17, 1998

Dear teacher/student:

I am a graduate student in Faculty of Education at Memorial University of Newfoundland, Canada. Right now I am working on the thesis as part of the requirement of the university for the completion of master degree that I am pursuing.

My thesis is about English language teaching and learning in China. The purpose of the study is to identify weak areas of English teaching in China and promote tentative suggestions for the improvement of English teaching. To make the research valid, I would like to know your opinion about English teaching and learning. Therefore, I forward some questions to you and hope to hear your response.

This survey is to find out what you think about English language teaching and learning in general. It is not about any course or class in particular. You may either give a brief answer to each question, or skip some that you think are overlapping and focus on other questions where you have more to say.

All the information you provide in this survey is confidential and for this study only. At no time will they be used for other purposes without your permission. Your participation in the survey is completely voluntary. You possess the absolute right to refrain from answering whatever questions you prefer to omit. The results of my study will be made available to you upon request.

This study meets the ethical guidelines of the university and has received the approval from the Ethics Review Committee of Faculty of Education. If you agree to participate in this survey, please sign below and return one copy to the classroom teacher (for teachers, please return one copy in the enclosed envelope). The other copy is for you. The signature doesn't mean your participation in the survey is risky in any sense. It is only a requirement of the university.

If you have any questions, please don't hesitate to contact me at any time. Enclosed please find a list of mailing address, e-mail address and telephone number at which you can reach me. You may also contact my supervisor, Dr. Elizabeth Yeoman or Dr. Linda Phillips (dean of research and graduate studies) in Faculty of Education at Memorial University of Newfoundland.

Your response is appreciated and will play a significant part in my research. I am looking forward to your anticipated enthusiasm and support.

Yours sincerely,

Shi Yongping

.....

I, , am willing to participate in the survey described above. I understand that my response is based on my own experience of the curriculum in general, and it is used for this study only.

Date Signature

Appendix B Questionnaire for the Students

Name ***Sex*** ***Class*** ***You're from***

1. How long have you been learning English?

2. Do you enjoy English language learning? What are your feelings about English language learning?

3. Are you satisfied with the English language teaching you have received? Why or why not?

4. Describe your feelings when using English in conversation.

5. Is there a tendency to fall back to "mother-tongue" communication? If so, why do you think this happens?

6. From your own experience, is there a way of learning English that is more effective than others?

7. Have you ever had an English teacher whose way of teaching impresses/impressed you particularly? If the answer is "Yes," please describe how he or she teaches/taught.

8. Name some activities you like most in English language class?

9. Do you believe that there is a direct relationship between teaching method and learning outcome?

10. Do you think there is a better way of teaching English?

11. Are you satisfied and happy with the progress you have made in English language skills?

12. Can you identify certain English language skills that are comparatively weaker than

the others? If the answer is "Yes," what are they? Can you tell the reason or reasons for the lack of progress?

13. Do you believe that there is a need for improvement in English language teaching in China? Where and how can we improve it?

14. Is learning English of your own choice? If you could, would you switch to another subject instead of English?

15. Do you have and always stick to a self-made plan of learning English? Why or why not?

Appendix C Questionnaire for the Teachers

Name Sex Course(s) you teach

Please tick where applicable: department head ( ) section head ( )

professor ( ) associate professor ( ) lecturer ( ) teaching assistant ( ) B. A. ( ) B. Ed. ( ) M. A. ( ) M. Ed. ( ) Ph. D. ( )

.....

1. How long have you been teaching English?

2. What do you enjoy most in your job?

3. What physical limitations do you have in your teaching (e.g., large classes, teaching loads, etc.)?

4. What are your major concerns with regard to English teaching?

5. What frustrates you most in your teaching job? Have you ever thought of quitting the job? Why or why not?

6. Do you agree that teaching is a profession that needs constant development? Please explain.

7. In your opinion, what conditions should be provided and guaranteed for teachers' professional development?

8. In general, are you satisfied with students' learning outcomes? If not, why?

9. Do you believe that there is a direct relationship between teaching method and learning outcome?

10. What teaching method(s) do you use? Why did you choose this (these) method(s)?

11. Are there any specific activities you like to use in class? What are they?

12. Do you believe that there is a need for improvement in English language teaching? How can it be improved?

13. Have you ever discussed or workshopped the English curriculum with colleagues?

14. Have you attended any in-service programmes/workshops since you started teaching? If the answer is "Yes," then how many and what are they?

15. According to your observation, do students make plans by themselves for English learning and stick to them? If not, why?

Appendix D Follow-up Letter to Class 96

April 2, 1998

Hello, students of Class 96!

Thank you so much for participating in the survey. Your answers are interesting and some are insightful. I share many of the opinions with you. I promise I will try my best to let your voice be heard in English curriculum discussion. When I first went through your responses, I couldn't help wanting to have a face-to-face talk with you about certain topics. Of course, the Pacific Ocean and the limited fund stopped me from being able to do so. However, I talked with my supervisor and expressed my desire to explore with you further on some questions through correspondence. The supervisor is positive about my suggestion and supports the method as something new in research. I decided to call it a "follow-up talk" for the time being. Since this talk is something in-depth, in other words, it needs some thought. You may use Chinese if you want to. Try to make your answer as long as one paragraph.

The first answer I find interesting is from Xiaomin. You say you feel nervous when talking with English native speakers and don't know how to continue the conversation. I am eager to know, in your opinion, what causes the problem? For instance: not confident about your English language skills, cannot understand the speaker, lack of words to express yourself, hard to be understood, when you concentrate on

communication the sentence structure becomes messy, no idea what to talk about etc. Try to identify the problems that cause your nervousness and frustration in oral communication with Gong Li and Li Bing, because the same feeling is also presented in their answers.

The second interesting answer is from Chen Kai. You told me you once had an English teacher whose way of teaching impressed you most because she gave you many details. Are you talking about me? (It's a joke.) Chen Kai, you raised my curiosity and stopped with a suspension. Would you please write a paragraph and describe what kind of detail she gave you and how she gave the details?

Tang Rui once also had a good English teacher who "always summarizes the most important things in an article." Tang Rui, please write a paragraph describing what kind of thing she summarized and how. How did her summary help you with your study?

The next person I'll address here is Shuangmei. By the way, are you a twin? Your answers are really thoughtful. I like discussions as much as you do. I also agree that our students need more practice in speaking and writing. Your and Chen Li's opinion that teaching materials are out of date attracts my attention. Do you mean textbooks as Chen Li does? Could you and Chen Li discuss this in more detail and write a paragraph as to why you think they are "out of date," and what kind of content you wish to be included in an ideal textbook? You may use some examples.

Zelin sounds like a pleasant guy. You certainly experienced interesting games in English class. I would be very much pleased if you would tell me in detail what "ice breaker, scatter gofies" are and how to do them.

Yulan and Chunyan, you both complain that English teaching is not practical. I think you mean you do not learn practical language skills from English class. Am I right? Please describe what teachers teach you in class. What do you think they should teach you? You may have Tang Rui join you in your discussion because she has the same viewpoint as you do in this regard.

Peng Yan, your suggestion that "middle school should pay more attention to listening, speaking and understanding" sounds a very good one. Please describe as you experienced yourself how middle school teachers taught English and what their teaching focuses were. I believe Meijing would be glad to cooperate with you to work this out because she has almost the similar concern about English teaching in middle school.

Zhao Na, Wang Ying, Li Chao and Yulan share the viewpoint that English learning needs language environment. You four please discuss whether or not we can create an English environment all together. Why or why not? And how? Let me know the result of your discussion.

Yunmei, you said you are not satisfied with the English language teaching you have received because "it is patternized." Do you mean it is stiff? Could you please describe in detail?

Another interesting thing I notice is that almost 50 percent of you say that you sometimes enjoy learning English, sometimes not. I'd like to have Zhang Lei, Peng Yan and Aiping tell me when you enjoy the learning and when you don't.

I know plans are easy to make, but hard to stick to. In addition, Du He, Peng Yan,

Yulan and Gong Li find students are too busy to make their own plan. Could you four tell me what make you so busy?

Lastly, we come to the issue of vocabulary. Many of you are not satisfied with the vocabulary size you have. Please find out and tell me how many words you are supposed to know as second year students in universities, the actual vocabulary size you have on average, the active vocabulary size (words you can use with confidence in speaking, listening, and writing), and the passive vocabulary size (words you can only use in reading). Zhu Kun, Ou Hui, Fuqiang and Zhang Lei please work this out and let me know the results in written form.

Please use this as a chance to practice your speaking and writing. I'm looking forward to your thoughtful paragraphs.

Thanks again for your participation!

Sincerely,

Shi Yongping

PS. I'll mention some of your names in the data analysis section of the study. If you wish to remain anonymous, please indicate.

Appendix E Follow-up Letter to the Teachers

May 25, 1998

Dear teachers:

Thank you so much for your participation in the survey. I am glad that most of your answers echoed with my opinion and addressed the research questions of the study. In order to get an accurate understanding of your viewpoints, I send this letter to you for further exploration on some issues that I find interesting. Please make your explanations or elaboration as detailed as possible.

Lucy, when describing the teaching approach used in classrooms, you said you use questions and answers with smart students, and grammatical analysis and translation with those less smart. Could you specify what kinds of students are regarded as smart, and what kind not? If you taught in a reversed way, e.g., linguistic analysis with the smart group and communication with the less smart group, what would happen?

Ke laoshi, you said you would be more satisfied if students could speak and write English better. Your greatest enjoyment is to see students make progress toward fluency in speaking and writing. One of your major concerns in teaching is how to enlarge students' vocabulary and the ability of using them. Could I make the inference that you think it is mainly vocabulary that restrains our students from fluent speaking and writing skills? If yes, please explain with some examples. Are there other factors

that are responsible for the weak communicative abilities of our students? Please elaborate.

Qiu laoshi, I like the description you gave of the education in China, "qiaozhong nianjing." It is objective and vivid. I also appreciate your suggestions for teacher development in linguistics, applied linguistics and TESL theories and methodologies. Could you please describe and explain more as to how practitioners "qiaozhong nianjing," why they teach this way, and how this could be changed?

Deng laoshi, I feel especially thankful to you, as I know how hard it is for you to find time to do the survey questions. I even feel guilty of approaching you again for more response. However, your answer that teaching grammar is the thing you enjoy most makes it so hard for me not to ask for explanation. Could you tell me why you enjoy teaching grammar so much? If you were asked to use other teaching approaches, let's say communicative approach, would you be happy and comfortable with that? Why or why not?

Gao Hong, you perceived the imbalance of effort exerted and learning effect achieved as a major problem in English teaching. Do you mean the effort teachers make in teaching, or the effort students make in learning, or both? Please clarify and give some details. I also notice that you hope most teachers improve present approaches of teaching. Could you please give a description of how most teachers teach presently in English class? And what kind of approach is suggested and why?

Qin Dan, you identified the renewal of textbooks as one of the areas for curriculum improvement. Please elaborate why, and what kind of textbooks we need.

Bill, could you give some examples as how you help students develop their problem solving abilities and way of learning? Why you think those abilities are important?

Zhou Yi, you stated that your major concern in teaching is the establishment of an environment in which students and teachers can interact with each other. Are you suggesting that we do not have enough interactions between students and teachers in language learning class? If my understanding is right, what you think hinders the interaction? How could we establish the environment that facilitates interaction? Your comment that students are interested in money or money making businesses than learning itself is also interesting. Could you please elaborate more on this issue?

Lei Limin, you said you found that students could not use what they learned skillfully. Could you tell me why you think this happen? You also complained of the passive role the students played in class. Please explain why they are passive? Could we, teachers, make them active? Why or why not?

Yang Mingjin, you specified the achievement of cooperation from students as the most enjoyable moment in your teaching. Could you explain what kind of cooperation you look forward to from students? Do you often get the cooperation? Why or why not?

Please feel free to do so if you want to write in Chinese in order to save time and assure my accurate understanding. Thank you all again for your support and participation. I am looking forward to your responses.

Sincerely,

Shi Yongping