

Do We Reliably Know What EFL Students Like in English Classrooms at University Level?

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This paper reports on a comparative study what English language learning classroom activities Chinese EFL learners liked, and then compares these preferences with the activity preferences that their teachers thought the learners held. The study makes use of questionnaires to survey 210 university-level English majors and 50 Chinese English-language teachers of English majors from two universities in China. They enquire about 39 classroom activities (including communicative and non-communicative), language learning strategies and attitudes towards learning culture in the EFL programme. The results show that teachers were able to gauge their learners' preferences with accuracy for 41%. The study has implications for English classroom instruction, syllabus and material design. The finding is also helpful for English native-speaker teachers who are engaged in teaching Chinese students in their home countries.

The communicative language teaching (CLT) approach was introduced to China in the early 1980s but the outcome of TEFL to English majors at university level has not been satisfactory (Gu, 2002; Wu, 2001; Zhang & Zhang, 2003). Regarding classroom behaviours, it is not uncommon to find literature reviews which report that Chinese students are passive learners and just recipient of knowledge from the teachers. Chinese students are expected to show 'total obedience or submission to their teachers', to be 'passive receivers of knowledge', and therefore to offer 'little input to the class' (Song, 1995, p. 35

cited in Littlewood, 2001). Generalizations like these are so widespread that they tend to become stereotypes (Littlewood, 2001). However, some Chinese TEFL researchers hold different views. Cheng (2000) argues that if Chinese students are found in the [English] class to be quieter than expected in certain circumstances, the causes are situation specific rather than culturally pre-set (p. 435). For example, the possible causes might lie in the teaching methodologies used by the teacher or the lack of required target language proficiency on learners' part.

The revised Chinese national English language curriculum for English majors at tertiary level requires that innovative teaching methods, i.e., student-centred approach, should be employed in English classrooms (English Division, 2000). A student-centred approach to lesson, material and syllabus design advocates the involvement of learners in contributing to this design. Learners can be invited to express their views on their needs for learning the language (Brindley, 1984), their preferred learning styles (Willing, 1988), their beliefs about language learning (Horwitz, 1988) or their preferred activity types (Alcorso & Kalantzis, 1985 cited in Spratt, 1999; Barkhuisen, 1998). These views then can inform the classroom instruction design process (Spratt, 1999). However, so far little empirical study in Mainland China has examined the students in an overt systematic way about their preferred classroom learning activities and then compared the degree of correspondence between learner's preferences and the activities that teachers believed their students liked (Gao et al., 2001; Gu, 2002).

The question this study seeks to answer focuses on examining the degree of perceptual match and mismatch between learners' preferred activities and the activities teachers believed the learners liked. This is part of a larger investigation of learner preferences for CLT approach and traditional teacher-centred approach in the Chinese TEFL context. This study will gain information on the accuracy of teachers' beliefs about their learners' preferences as an input to syllabus and material planning, and to lesson planning and classroom practice.

THE REASON FOR THIS STUDY

Various studies have shown that there can be considerable discrepancies of opinions between learners and their teachers in relation to what learners need, what they prefer, and the nature of language and language learning (Brindley, 1984; Kern, 1995; Kumaravadivelu, 1991; Nunan, 1988a; Nunan, 1988b; Spratt, 1999). Such discrepancies between learners and teachers suggest that teachers might not be able to confidently assume that they know what their learners' preferences are. In other words, teachers' assumptions or unaided intuitions might not be sufficiently well-founded to contribute reliably to English lessons, materials, syllabus planning and classroom instruction (Spratt, 1999).

On the other hand, some research on teacher decision-making processes and classroom behaviours indicates that contextual factors such as teachers' perceptions of learners' activity preferences play a considerable part in influencing teachers' teaching processes and behaviours (Binnie Smith, 1996; Burns, 1996; Willcoxson, 1998). Teachers' behaviours in turn influence the way learners learn the target language since teaching and learning are interrelated. Therefore, the need for classroom-based empirical research is obvious in TEFL so as to gain insightful information for teachers' classroom instruction, management, lesson planning and teaching materials.

METHODOLOGY

Subjects

The empirical study was carried out in late 2001. The subjects consisted of 210 English-majored students and 50 English language teachers of English majors from two multi-faculty universities in North China. Most of the teachers surveyed were trained as language teachers to at least MA level and above. They varied, of course, in the particular amount and kind of training

they have received, including their learning and training experience in China and abroad, mainly in English-speaking countries.

The Questionnaires

Two sets of questionnaires were used as the initial survey instrument: one for students and the other for teachers. Each questionnaire consisted of 39 identical items including a section of main problems which students have encountered so far in their English learning process. The questionnaires were all written in Chinese and five-point *Likert* scale was used. For example, (1). strongly disagree, (2). disagree, (3). neutral, (4). agree, (5). strongly agree. The questionnaires for student and teachers were identical except the marked difference in questionnaire item stem. For instance, the student questionnaire reads, 'In English class, *I* like to take part in group discussion or role play'. In the teachers' questionnaire, the item stem is slightly modified into: 'In English class, *I think that students* like to take part in group discussion or role play'.

Data Analysis

Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS) techniques were used to analyse the group data. Mann Whitney *U* test was then used to compute if there was any significant difference between the teacher and student group. Mann Whitney *U* Test can, in a statistical manner, show which apparent similarities are not, as a matter of fact, similarities, and where varying degrees of differences begin to matter. The data collected from the questionnaires cover various aspects of teaching and learning English, ranging from attitudes towards communicative and non-communicative classroom activities, e.g. reading, writing, speaking, listening, testing and participation modes that learners could be requested to carry out by teachers in English class; language learning strategies; attitudes towards learning target culture in EFL program; dependence on L1 and major difficulties confronting Chinese EFL

learners at tertiary level. The questionnaires contained a couple of items which concerned the similar information. This was out of consideration that they would help confirm the reliability of informants' responses. The data collected were categorized according to the same theme of the questionnaire items, on which basis they were analysed and discussed. This way of categorizing and viewing classroom activities reflects a general classroom practice in teaching English language for English majors in the universities where the study was carried out. This also corresponds with Quinn's (1984) characteristics of communicative and traditional approaches (cited in Nunan, 1988a), and the definition of 'weak version of communicative teaching' outlined by Howatt (1984, p. 279).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Mann Whitney *U* Test Result

The Mann-Whitney *U* Test results showed that 23 of the 39 items (59%) were significantly different at a level $p < .05$ or below. In 19 of these 23 items, learners scored activities more highly than teachers did whereas in 4 items teachers scored higher *Likert* points than students, indicating a considerable perceptual mismatch in various aspects between the two groups.

Discussion: Areas of Correspondence Between the Two Groups

The results of the comparison between the two groups generally reflect an approximate 41% correspondence between teachers' perceptions of learners' preferred classroom activities and learners' actual preferences and opinions. The findings are discussed in detail below.

Working in a Small Group (Item 1)

Both groups thought that students, to a lesser or greater degree, were

interested in working in a small group of two to four people in class. However, as the follow-up classroom observations revealed, only one out of five teachers observed engaged students into meaningful group activities in their English classes.

Speaking out in Class (Item 4, 5, 38)

Students were interested in speaking English with their peers in a small group rather than with their teacher in class. Both groups matched on these items concerning students' reluctance to show off in class. In other words, students were not active in answering questions or initiating questions to their teacher in English class. However, on *Item 38* students showed a negative attitude towards asking or answering questions in class. This phenomenon may be derived from the assumption that students considered a small group to be a more protective environment in which they would feel freer to communicate in English than a situation in which they were forced to speak in front of the whole class. The results indicate the following:

- Their attitudes reflect their own perceptions of the student role in class, that is, learning from the teacher and not challenging what teachers said. Asking questions for clarification in class would indicate that the student has not grasped a good understanding of what the teacher said. In this case, asking questions would expose one's ignorance, thus a loss of face.
- The way questions were raised by the teacher might be the cause of their reticence. Perhaps these questions neither stimulated a response nor adequately aroused their interest. They seemingly did not challenge the students enough.

It is important to note that the second assumption was supported by the students' qualitative data in the follow-up interviews and the classroom observations carried out at later stage for a larger investigation project. A preliminary analysis of *Item 38* indicates that this result, to certain degree, seems to support the claims reported in earlier studies that Chinese students are reticent in class and do not answer questions unless asked to (Burnaby & Sun,

1989), or ‘Chinese students are expected to show total obedience or submission to their teachers’ (Song, 1995, p. 35). Although the finding of *Item 5* supports some other studies of Chinese students’ behaviours, which reveal collective-oriented national cultural traits in the classroom (Cortazzi & Jin, 1996; Littlewood, 2001), the follow-up interview data reveal that the reasons for their apparent reticence in English language class are more closely related with teaching performance than cultural or psychological traits. In other words, what really matters in class is complex and includes many factors: teaching methods used by teachers, the way the questions were asked and the answers were elicited, the topics chosen for group discussion, and the students’ own perceptions of being active in class.

Teaching and Learning Culture in English Class (Item 30, 20)

Both group thought that students were interested in learning the target cultures in TEFL programmes. This finding indicates the need to develop a pedagogy which can integrate the teaching of culture into TEFL in order to enhance sociocultural competence of English language learners (Savignon, 2001).

Attitudes Towards TCA (Item 7)

Both students and teachers alike preferred student-centred approach (SCA) to teacher-centred approach (TCA) in English class. This finding is supported by their responses to the same question in the open-ended section of the follow-up investigation. However, at the same time both groups considered that, to some extent, the TCA was necessary and effective in its own way. They felt that traditional methods should not be totally discarded in the process of adopting CLT. This finding both supports and contradicts some conflicting reports made by earlier studies. In relation to learners’ opinions on their own preferences, a study by Green (1993) reported that learners tended to enjoy communicative activities more than non-communicative ones.

A study by Barkhuisen (1998) found learners' resistance to participating in communicative-type activities and their preference for more traditional classroom work (p.95). Rao (2002) examined Chinese students' attitudes towards communicative and traditional approaches, and reported that students preferred the latter to the former in English classrooms.

Non-communicative Learning Activity in Class (Item 9)

Further to the finding of *Item 7*, the results of *Item 9* showed a consensus that both groups thought the traditional teaching methods were still found to be necessary and effective, to a certain extent. This implied that for some knowledge-oriented courses, especially those for advanced students teacher-centeredness was seen more appropriate in that it was time-saving, easy to handle for teachers, and relaxing to follow for students and effective for exams as revealed in both students' and teachers' interview accounts.

Dependence on L1 (Item 15, 35)

Both groups acknowledged some degree of dependence on L1 when students had a difficulty in expressing themselves in English. The study also shows that students' dependence on L1 tends to drop with their improvement in target language skills and awareness of language learning strategies (LLS) use in their learning process.

Students' Learning Styles (Item 22)

Both teachers and students considered that students' learning styles needed improvement. This result obviously reflected the dissatisfaction from both groups with the present target language competence that the students had acquired after years of formal learning. However, the follow-up interviews with the students revealed that they considered their learning styles had been influenced by their teachers' teaching styles in the classroom. Their learning

experience reinforced their learning habits. This finding supports some earlier studies by Western researchers in the related areas. Pintrich and Schunk (1996) point out that teachers and students have reciprocal effects on each other. Teachers' classroom instruction affects students' learning orientation (Zubir, 1988 cited in Gow et al., 1996), and in turn teachers' instruction is affected by the way students respond to classroom activities (Salili, 2001).

Meta-cognitive Strategies (Item 32)

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

Form-based Strategies (Item 37)

This finding showed a consensus that both groups considered that students tended to concentrate on every linguistic detail when they were listening to English or doing listening exercises. This finding, in general, is in support of the statement that Chinese students are meticulous learners and intolerant of ambiguity in learning English (Oxford & Anderson, 1995; Samovar & Porter, 1995; Stefani, 1997).

Function-based Strategies (Item 36, 39)

The findings indicated that students were interested in receptive skills outside classroom (e.g. listening to English on radio). However, their responses showed clearly that students took little initiative in practising oral English with their peers or teachers outside the classroom. This reflects their low level of exposure to the English-speaking environment which in turn leads to their weakness in communicative competence.

Impact of EMT-4 and EMT-8 on Students (Item 27)

Both groups revealed that the nation-wide mandatory English Major Tests (EMT) Band-4 and Band-8 exerted certain pressure on learners. This inevitably would have an impact on the process of teaching and learning English which set priorities on passing these tests.

To sum up, the findings described above reflect the consensus of both groups in teaching methods, teaching and learning culture in TEFL programmes, language learning strategy use and students' learning styles. Awareness of this perceptual match between the two groups may help teachers meet learners' needs and contribute towards teaching and learning English in classroom-based setting (Pintrich & Schunk, 1996; Salili, 2001). A perceptual match seems to be a first step towards this end. However, as described below, the issue of perceptual mismatch between the two groups deserves a special reconsideration of pedagogical practices used by Chinese EFL teachers at university level.

Areas of Disparity

Proportionately the significant difference (59%) occurs in the areas as shown below. Of the 23 items with statistical significance, there are 11 items with $P < .001$, 4 items with $P < .003$, and 8 items with $P < .05$, thus indicating significant differences between the two groups concerned. The areas of disparity are discussed in detail below.

Working in Small Groups in Class: Item 2 ($p < .012$)

The comparison showed that the students expressed much stronger interest in group work than the teachers presumed their students did. This finding revealed the need on the teachers' part to improve their classroom instruction to meet learners' needs. This assumption can be supported by the follow-up classroom observation as well as the interviews with the students. The

qualitative data revealed that the students liked group activities in class, especially when the topics for group discussion or individual presentation were closely related to their college life experience.

Pre-prepared News Reporting or Oral Presentation in Class: Item 3
($p < .028$)

This item showed that the students considered their peers' news reporting or story-telling in English more useful than their teachers thought they did in class. The result revealed that students thought that peer presentations that were well-prepared in advance were viewed more helpful than textbook-based pattern drill exercises in class. It is important to note that through classroom observation, I discovered that when the students gave a news report, the speakers merely *read* the news rather than *talked about* it. This may be due to their lack of confidence in using the target language or they were afraid of making errors or what Hofstede termed 'uncertainty avoidance' (1991, 1994). The findings also reveal the need for both teachers and students to have a correct understanding of SCA and appropriate ways to achieve its goals.

Teaching and Learning Culture in English Class: Items 6 ($p < .038$), *Item 11*
($p < .032$)

Even though both groups came to a consensus that students were very interested in learning target culture in the EFL programme, it was the students who expressed a much stronger desire than teachers thought their students did. The findings also showed that teachers needed to improve their teaching methods to meet learners' needs in this respect. Although some introductory courses to Western cultures were offered to students, for instance, *Introduction to Western Cultures*, the content of textbooks and the way the course was taught were found to be problematic as revealed in the classroom observation conducted by the author. Many teachers saw the teaching of

Western culture courses as automatically developing the learners' cross-cultural communicative competence irrespective of how the courses were taught. However, the data in this study showed that this assumption could not be made. Students complained about the way the culture course was taught. This raises a very important issue of curriculum design and innovation of teaching methodology as well as further improvement of the teachers' own crosscultural communicative competence.

Student-centred Approach (SCA): Item 8 (p<.016)

The divergence between students and teachers on this item showed students' stronger needs for SCA in English class than teachers presumed. The findings may partially reflect students' dissatisfaction with the prevalent teacher-centred approach in the English classrooms and their request for innovation in teaching methodology. This is supported by the students' responses to the similar questions in the open-ended section. Seventy six percent of the students surveyed expressed their dissatisfaction with the current teaching methods employed by their teachers in English class. This was in sharp contrast to only twenty two percent of the students who rated the current teaching methods positively.

On the other hand, the gap between the two groups revealed the teachers' conservative mindset in that they assumed that their students still felt very comfortable with the traditional approach in class. This was a main reason why they still adhered to teacher-centeredness and prioritised the imparting of knowledge to learners. There were some other reasons, such as the nature of courses that the teachers were teaching (some courses were thought to be more skill-based while other courses more knowledge-based), and a 'sense of insecurity' that teachers might have in 'employing new unproven methods' in their classes (Rao, 1996).

Watching English Videos and Films: Item 10 (p<.000)

On this item, students scored much more highly than teachers did, showing

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

Doing Unassessed Tests and Planning Exam Answers: Item 12 ($p < .000$)

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

Thought-provoking Questions in English Class: Item 13 ($p < .013$)

In English classes, students rated text-based communicative activities and thought-provoking questions raised by their teachers much higher than the

teachers thought that their students did. This revealed that teachers should refocus their classroom instruction and be aware of the question-making skills which should stimulate learners' interest and sensitise their analytical and problem-solving awareness. In other words, teachers should formulate their questions at discourse level rather than merely paraphrasing grammatical points as revealed in the classroom observation carried out by the author in the follow-up investigation. Long and Sato (1983) make a distinction between 'display' and 'referential' questions. A 'display' question is a question to which the teacher who asks it already knows the answers, and which is designed to elicit or display particular structures; whereas a 'referential' question is a question to which the teacher does not have a ready answer but seeks information. Only when teachers encourage learners to think, to judge, to infer and to criticise can learners improve their ability to read and to think critically. This might prove to be a tougher and more difficult job for teachers than just asking 'display' questions. Needless to say, in order to change the way the questions are asked, teachers have to take on the challenge of renovating their teaching methodology. The way the lesson is taught can affect the way the questions are raised and answered.

Dependence on L1: Item 14 ($p < .000$)

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

Use of Compensation Strategy: Item 16 ($p < .007$), Item 17 ($p < .002$)

The findings showed that when speaking English, learners used more paraphrases and gestures than teachers predicted. The teachers' opinion

seemed to be derived from their own observations in the classroom rather than from their own (within or out-of-class) interactive experience with the students. Lack of experience of active interaction and communicative activities seemed to limit teachers' expectations of their students.

Use of Social Strategy: Item 18 ($p < .000$), Item 19 ($p < .001$)

On these two items, diverging views were expressed. Teachers assumed that students should practise after class what they had learned in class. As a Chinese proverb says, 'practice makes perfect.' But the reality turned out to be quite disappointing, though. Most students did not wish to take part in extracurricular activities to practise their spoken English. Their lack of enthusiasm for oral English practice rose, in part, from lack of a real need to communicate in English in their daily life, and from little exposure to English-speaking environment outside the classroom. One of the main concerns that students had was that they would speak Chinese English or Chinglish with their peers, and no one would correct their own errors. If not corrected, these errors, they thought, would be reinforced and then become a habit in their learning process, and hard to shake off.

Long-term Goal and Motivation: Item 21 ($p < .003$)

An obvious difference between the two groups arose on this item. Students scored more highly than teachers, indicating that students often found themselves lacking a long-term goal and being poorly-motivated in their learning process. Teachers, on the other hand, gave the opposite response to this item, presuming that students had their own ambitions and goals for their own future. It would be unimaginable for teachers to think that students would come to the university without a clear goal in mind, especially after a couple of years of study on campus. Yet students reported that some courses they took or had taken were boring. They found out some teachers prepared poorly in terms of presentation skills, specialised knowledge and expertise in

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teaching methodology.

Few Opportunities for Oral Practise in Class: Item 23 ($p < .021$), Item 26 ($p < .000$)

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

Lack of Authentic English Materials: Item 24 ($p < .000$)

Students thought that there was a shortage of authentic materials, especially audio and visual varieties. However, teachers assumed the opposite, believing that the Reading Rooms and language laboratory were good places for learners to acquire an ear for the language and synthesise the knowledge they had learned. But students thought that the materials were out of date and, not as interesting or authentic as they would have liked. The findings pointed to the importance of linking modern technology with TEFL, for instance, to use audio and video means or internet to teach English in a multi-media classroom.

Pressure from Job Market Competition: Item 25 ($p < .003$)

Students were under greater pressure about their prospective employment upon graduation than teachers presumed. This was due to the tight job market in China. This concern also reflected students' commitment to taking various exams aimed at obtaining 'certificates', which they hoped could enhance their chances in getting a job. This was especially so in the case of the 4th-year undergraduates as reported in the study by North Project Group (NPG, 1998).

Undue Emphasis on Grammar and Structure: Item 28 (p<.000)

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

Textbook not Suitable for Communicative Activities in Class: Item 29 (p<.003)

Both students and teachers suggested that the textbooks had to be revamped to encompass communication-oriented activities in class. But the students expressed stronger opinions about textbook innovation than did the teacher group. Many students found that the text materials were 'neither authentic nor useful' for their future employment, with the result that their interest in such courses fell off. On the other hand, constant re-jigging of text materials involved a tremendous amount of extra work for teachers. The findings indicate that teachers need to revise or renew the textbooks. But the focus should be on *how* and *in what way*. Teachers need to come up with a solution which would dovetail with the new textbooks.

Meta-cognitive Language Learning Strategy: Item 31 (p<.000), Item 33, (p<.000), Item 34 (p<.000)

On these items, there was, again, a divergence between the two groups. The students scored higher than the teachers, showing that students thought they could make relatively good use of time after class. Teachers, on the other hand, considered that learners did not work hard enough nor showed

enough commitment to learning English. This might reflect the teachers' own dissatisfaction with students' classroom behaviours, assignment work and linguistic skills. However, students reported that the boring English classes made them lose interest in the courses they took, resulting in a weaker commitment to learning the language. Another possible explanation for the mismatch on these items may be derived from the fact that these activities were more mental than behavioural in nature. Consequently it was not easy for teachers to make an accurate prediction based merely on classroom observations or intuitions, especially when there was poor communication between the teachers and the learners at personal level.

CONCLUSION

As mentioned earlier, one of the reasons for conducting this study was that we hoped its findings about the perceptual match and mismatch between the two groups could feed into classroom practice, and provide guidance for classroom instruction, teaching materials and syllabus revision. Now that we have the findings, we have to explore their implications in TEFL for English majors at tertiary level in China. As shown in this study, there is approximately 41% correspondence and about 59% divergence between the two groups. The perceptual mismatch mainly lies in the areas of communicative and non-communicative language learning activities, attitudes towards speaking out in class, towards learning target culture in the EFL programmes, and the way teachers elicited questions in English class. It is too early to say whether these results would hold true in other university-level situations across or outside China. However, the significance of this comparison indicates strongly that teachers' perceptions of learners' preferences for classroom activities as unaided intuitions cannot be fully relied upon when used as an input to classroom management, lesson planning, textbook writing or syllabus design for the purpose of effective teaching. In this sense, they, therefore, need careful support or mediation. Some of this support can come

from surveying students' needs for the purpose of a better understanding of learner variables. This is a very important step towards integrating a student-centred approach into the prevalent traditional teaching methods. In addition, the results of this study show the significance of obtaining learners' views on activities that form part of the learning process.

The findings also show that the current teaching approach widely used by the teachers in this study seemed to have failed to capture many of the students' preferences, nor was it found effective to develop learners' ability to use the language appropriately for communication purposes. The results demonstrate how useful it is to consult learners and involve them in the teaching and design processes. Teachers and curriculum planners who want to be sensitive to the needs of the students they serve cannot always 'rely on their unaided intuitions' (Rudduck, 1991). Many studies demonstrate that bridging the gap between teachers' and learners' perceptions plays a very important role in enabling students to authenticate and thus maximize their classroom [learning] experience (Breen, 1998; Kumaravadivelu, 1991; Van Lier, 1996; Spratt, 1999). Kumaravadivelu (1991) asserts that 'the narrower the gap between teacher intention and learner interpretation, the greater are the chances of achieving desired learning outcomes' (p. 98). As such, Chinese EFL teachers need to base the improvement of their classroom practice on a proper understanding of learners' needs and perceptions. It is crucial for teachers to develop their teaching methods 'appropriate to their learners, their colleagues and their societies' (Edge, 1996, p. 18). Of course, it is not always easy for teachers to hear what learners think about their teaching. Learners often are very critical. However, as Kumaravadivelu (1991) points out, it would be a much worse option to 'have learners sitting in class day after day not enjoying themselves and believing that they are not learning anything' (p. 104).

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APPENDIX A

Categorizing the Themes of the Questionnaire Items Showing Differences and Correspondence between the Two Groups

<i>Categorizing the themes of the questionnaire items showing significant difference per theme (59%)</i>	<i>Number of items with significant difference in this theme</i>	<i>Total number of questionnaire items in this theme</i>
Students' attitudes towards working in groups in English class	2	3
Students' attitudes towards communicative activities in class	3	4
Students' attitudes towards non-communicative activities in class	2	3
Students' use of compensation strategy in their communication in English	2	3
Students' use of social strategy in their English-learning process	2	2
Students' attitudes towards learning target culture in EFL program	2	3
Students' dependence on their native language	0	1
Use of meta-cognitive strategies of language learning strategies	3	4

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Difficulties confronting Chinese EFL students at tertiary level in adopting communicative activities in class	7	10
<i>Categorizing the themes of the questionnaire items showing correspondence per theme (41%)</i>	<i>Number of items with correspondence in this theme</i>	<i>Total number of questionnaire items in this theme</i>
Students' attitudes towards target culture learning in EFL learning	1	3
Students' use of function-based strategy in their English study	3	3
Students' attitudes towards speaking out in the class	3	3
Students' attitudes towards working in groups in the open class	1	3
Students' attitudes towards communicative activities in the class.	1	4
Students' attitudes towards non-communicative activities in class	1	3
Students' use of compensation strategy in their communication	1	3
Students' use of social strategy in their English study	0	2
Meta-cognitive strategies of Language Learning Strategies (LLS)	1	4
Difficulties confronting Chinese EFL students at the third level in adopting communicative activities in the class	3	10

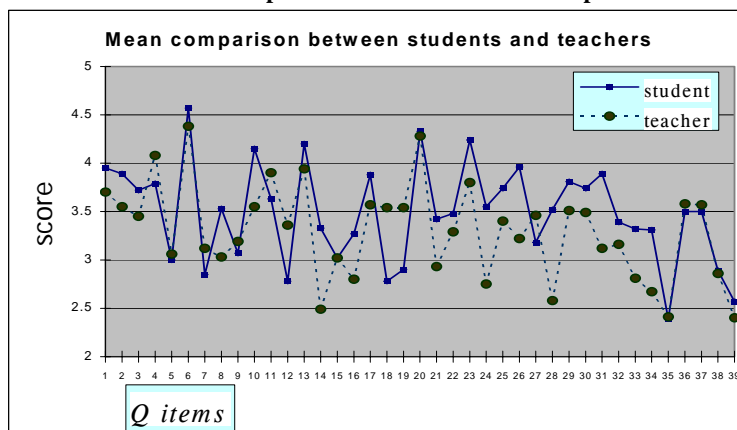
APPENDIX B
Mann-Whitney *U* Test between Students and Teachers
(23 items with significant difference, $p < .05$)

Item No.	Mann-Whitney U	Wilcoxon W	Z	Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)
02	4107.000	5382.000	-2.514	0.012 *
03	4240.500	5515.500	-2.191	0.028 *
06	4369.500	5644.500	-2.133	0.033 *
08	4155.000	5430.000	-2.407	0.016 *
10	3539.000	4814.000	-3.798	0.000 ****

11	4267.000	26422.000	-2.147	0.032 *
12	3589.500	25744.500	-3.582	0.000 ****
13	4151.000	5426.000	-2.479	0.013 *
14	3461.500	4736.500	-3.847	0.000 ****
16	4023.000	5298.000	-2.675	0.007 **
17	3887.500	5162.500	-3.054	0.002 ***
18	3435.000	25590.000	-3.919	0.000 ****
19	3721.000	25876.000	-3.319	0.001 ****
21	3875.000	5150.000	-3.007	0.003 ***
23	4221.500	5496.500	-2.314	0.021 *
24	3582.000	4857.000	-3.613	0.000 ****
25	3900.500	5175.500	-2.955	0.003 ***
26	3258.000	4533.000	-4.452	0.000 ****
28	2994.000	4269.000	-4.903	0.000 ****
29	3918.500	5193.500	-2.989	0.003 ***
31	2647.500	3922.500	-5.731	0.000 ****
33	3432.500	4707.500	-4.041	0.000 ****
34	3349.500	4624.500	-4.150	0.000 ****

Note: ****p<.001; ***p<.003; **p<.008; *p<.05

APPENDIX C Mean Comparison between the Two Groups



APPENDIX D

The Questionnaire for English Majors and Their Teachers

This questionnaire is designed for academic research purpose only and is done on an anonymous basis. All the information will be kept confidential. [For teacher respondents, please answer in terms of how well the statement describes **your students**]. Do not answer how you think you should be, or what other people do. There are no right or wrong answers to these statements. Work as quickly as you can without being careless. This usually takes about 15-20 minutes to complete.

Please write the response (1, 2, 3, 4, or 5) in the bracket at the end of each statement, based on your judgement.

- 1 = Strongly disagree
- 2 = Disagree
- 3 = Neutral
- 4 = Agree
- 5 = Strongly Agree

Note: *No.3: Neutral*, by 'neutral', it means you feel that you somewhat agree and somewhat disagree about the statement.

[For teacher respondents, each questionnaire item should begin with an added stem, e.g. In English class, I think that **my students** (*in place of 'I'*) like to _____.]

The following statements (1-20) concern different classroom learning activities, teaching methodology, learning target culture in EFL programme, use of language learning strategy, and extracurricular activities. Please answer in terms of how well the statement describes you. *For teacher respondents, please answer in terms of how well the statement describes your students.*

1. *I like to participate in group work with 2-4 people, e.g. English dialogues, group discussion, and role play.*
2. *I like my teacher to divide the whole class into several small groups in which we do teacher-directed group work.*
3. *I like listening to my peers to give English oral presentations of interesting stories or information that are well-prepared before the class.*
4. *In group work, I like to ask and answer questions in English.*
5. *In group work, I do not like to 'stand out' by voicing my opinions or asking questions.*
6. *I like to learn about Western cultures including their way of life, social customs, etc.*
7. *I like teacher-centred teaching methods employed by teachers.*
8. *I like student-centred teaching methods employed by teachers.*

9. In English Intensive Reading class, *I* like my teacher to deal with the text materials in a sentence-by-sentence way.
10. *I* like to watch English language films or videos, and then discuss them in groups with teacher's facilitation and guidance.
11. *I* have learned a lot about Western cultures from my English classes.
12. *I* like to do simulation test exercises and listen to my teacher's explanations.
13. *I* like my teacher to ask text-based and thought-provoking questions to keep the lesson interesting in order that we have chances to practise our spoken English.
14. *I* like my teacher to translate some difficult paragraphs of text materials into Chinese to enhance my comprehension and translation skills.
15. If *I* cannot think of a word during a conversation in English, *I* depend on Chinese to explain it.
16. When *I* can't think of a word during a conversation in English, *I* use gestures.
17. When *I* can't think of a word during a conversation in English, *I* use a word or phrase that means more or less the same thing.
18. *I* like to participate in extra-curricular activities in which *I* can practise my oral English.
19. *I* like after-class activities in which we can practise our English writing skills, e.g. drama group and newspaper group.
20. *I* like to read English language text materials which cover Western cultures.

The following statements (21-30) consist of some of difficulties confronting Chinese learners of English at tertiary level in adopting communicative activities. Do you think they might be difficulties for you? [For teacher respondents, please answer in terms of how well the statement describes your students].

21. *I* do not have a clear long-term aim of learning English, and lack motivation.
22. *My* learning style is too rigid and inflexible.
23. *I* have few opportunities to practise my English in English class.
24. There is a lack of authentic English materials, both audio and visual.
25. Finding an adequate job after graduation exerts heavy pressure on me.
26. *I* lack a chance to speak English in class.
27. EMT-4 (English Major Test-4) and EMT-8 exert heavy pressure on *me*.
28. Teachers place too much stress on the structure, grammar and reading comprehension in English class.
29. The English language textbooks are not compatible with the requirements of the student-centred approach in English class.
30. *I* have little knowledge or information about Western cultures.

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The following consists of language learning strategies involved in EFL learning process. [For teacher respondents, please answer in terms of how well the statement describes your students].

31. Apart from finishing assignments assigned by teachers, *I* have my own study plan.
32. *I* have clear goals for improving my English.
33. *I* think about my own progress in learning English so as to find out my strength and weakness in this regard.
34. *I* think about my own personality traits so as to find out my strength and weakness with regard to learning English.
35. *I* translate the English text materials into Chinese to enhance my comprehension.
36. *I* often listen to English language radio broadcast and recorded tapes.
37. *I* intend to understand every single word when *I* listen to English.
38. *I* like to answer questions in English in class.
39. *I* like to speak English with my peers or teachers outside the classroom.