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The changing context of tertiary English  
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to the challenges

Lianli Clara Gao  
University of Wollongong

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# **The Changing Context of Tertiary English Teaching in China and Teachers’ Responses to the Challenges**

A Thesis Submitted in Fulfilment of the  
Requirements for the Award of the Degree

**Doctor of Education**

from

**University of Wollongong**

by

**LIANLI CLARA GAO**

B.A. and M. A., Literature and Linguistics in China

**Faculty of Education**

March 2007

## **Thesis Certification**

I, Lianli Clara Gao, declare that this thesis, submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the award of Doctor of Education, in the Faculty of Education, University of Wollongong, is wholly my own work unless otherwise referenced or acknowledged. The document has not been submitted for qualifications at any other academic institution.

Signed

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**LIANLI CLARA GAO**

28<sup>th</sup> March 2007

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

For me, the process of my thesis research writing has been most valuable in making me review and rethink my life and work. This is because I have greatly benefited from a variety of human resources. I sometimes have even thought that this thesis is not only mine; rather, it is the working result of all the people who have given me their deep love and devotion, unselfish support and encouragement, patient guidance and help, and who have won my great respect and affection.

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## **GLOSSARY OF ABBREVIATIONS**

ALM	The Audiolingual Method
CEC	College English Curriculum/Curricula, in particular, in 1985 and 1999
CECR	College English Curriculum Requirements 2004
CET-4/6	College English Test (Band Four/Six)
CLT	Communicative Language Teaching
EAP	English for Academic Purposes
EFL	English as Foreign Language
EGP	English for General Purposes
ELT	English language teaching
ESL	English as a Second Language
ESP	English for Specific Purposes
ICT	Information and Communications Technology
ME	The Ministry of Education in China
SET	Spoken English Test in CET-4/6
SLA	Second Language Acquisition
TESOL	Teaching English to Students of Other Languages
TET	Tertiary English teaching



## ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to examine changes in tertiary English teaching in China and the perceptions and reactions of university English teachers, administrators and policy-makers to these changes. In particular, the study focused on the tension between policy and reality in the areas of curriculum, pedagogy and assessment in Chinese university English teaching. The key research question, therefore, related to how tertiary English teachers are meeting the challenges of the changing expectations of their profession, taking into account the complex context of tertiary English teaching in China with its characteristic historical, cultural, economic and political issues.

Different from most other research in this field in China, the study adopted a sociocultural perspective, using Bourdieu's (1971b; 1984) notion of 'field' and Bernstein's (1990; 2000) 'three message systems' to diagnose the expectations placed on English instructors as a result of changes in what to teach (curriculum), how to teach (pedagogy), and how to assess (assessment and evaluation). The study, finally, was organized around the principles of *temporality*, *autonomy*, and *specialisation* (Maton, 2004a, 2005) to identify teachers' and administrators' orientation to change, the degree of autonomy conferred by the changes and the specialist knowledge needed to respond to the changes.

A qualitative inquiry approach was adopted to explore thick and authentic data from a variety of sources, including policy documents, university syllabi, course designs, textbooks, assessment instruments, surveys, and interviews with teachers, administrators and policy-makers.

It was found that, although there is a great recognition of the need for reform, attempts have so far been ineffective because:

- policy appears to be inconsistent and unclear in its theoretical basis;
- the universities tend not to play a mediating role in interpreting national policy at the local level, leaving teachers to fall back on what is familiar;
- there is a lack of adequate pre-service training for English language instructors in the areas of ELT curriculum, pedagogy, and assessment, and a lack of sufficient in-

service professional development for further understanding and implementing policy in their teaching;

- textbooks and external examinations dominate tertiary English teaching, inhibiting change;
- as a result, university English language instruction is in a state of inertia and English language instructors are feeling confused and uncertain.

The study argues that power over university English language education remains centralised despite the apparent policy mandate to devolve autonomy in curriculum, pedagogy, and assessment to the universities and university English language instructors do not have the necessary background and experience in language education to assume autonomy or implement reform.

# **CHAPTER ONE:**

## **INTRODUCTION AND PURPOSE**

### **1.1 Introduction**

Fullan (1991) places teachers at the heart of the success or failure of educational change; he also asserts that if change is to happen it requires teachers to understand themselves and to be understood by others. The purpose of this study is to better understand the impact of changes in the field of tertiary English teaching<sup>1</sup> (hereafter TET) in China on teachers and administrators. In particular, the study aims to examine how tertiary English teachers perceive their roles as educators in the complicated field of English teaching at university level in China and how well they are prepared to meet the challenges of the changing expectations in Chinese education.

### **1.2 Rationale for the study**

The motivation for this study arose out of my personal experience as a senior educator in a Chinese university, confronted by significant upheavals for which I and my colleagues felt quite unprepared. As a researcher, I wanted to think about teaching English language from the viewpoint of a practitioner who is personally involved with the issues facing Chinese university English instructors. I wanted to research the instructors' responses to these changes, other than from the viewpoint of a neutral gatherer of knowledge, facts, and statistics.

In the thesis, I wanted to represent my colleagues because I am one of them, facing the same issues and challenges. It is pertinent, therefore, to describe my experience as an educator in the field of tertiary English teaching in order to exemplify the challenges faced by the profession.

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<sup>1</sup> College English Teaching (CET) is often used in China to describe English Language teaching at university level. However, since CET is often mixed with the College English Test (CET), this study adopts tertiary English teaching instead of college English teaching. In this sense, TET stands for English language teaching at university level.

I have been an English instructor in the Foreign Languages Department of an Engineering University in northern China since I graduated from the English program at a neighbouring university in 1986. My pre-service training was focused on the structure of the English language in the first two years of my study and then on English and American literature, with a limited amount of applied linguistics in the last two years. Throughout the degree, I had no opportunities to enrol in courses in pedagogy, syllabus and course design, teaching methodology, assessment, or materials development. I remember that when I had a trial lecture in front of all the teaching staff at the beginning of my career, I was very nervous because I realized that I knew so little about what I was teaching and how I should teach. My confidence in what to teach did not improve even after the dean had given me the textbook required for all non-English major students, which I used for almost ten years. I did not know how to deliver the content of the textbook to my students. I tried to recall details of how my instructors had taught me in class. In the trial lecture, I wrote vocabulary and phrases that I had learned on the board, and then I explained their use and paraphrased the text as much as I could. The extended applause I received after this trial lecture, along with several awards for teaching excellence that I received throughout the following years, greatly encouraged me in my teaching.

However, I became discouraged after some of my students had left my class. When I served as an interlocutor in the Spoken English Test for College English Test (Band Four/Six) (hereafter CET-4/6), I was embarrassed to discover that I could not actively and successfully communicate with my students. I also had to confront the fact that before each mid-semester I had used up all of my methods, skills and even energy; to use a Chinese metaphor, *Qian Lu Ji Qiong* (黔驴技穷), 'like a donkey who has no other way to threaten an approaching tiger except with its hopeless braying', I no longer had the ability to deal with a growing number of issues in my teaching. I had reached a point where I no longer bothered to prepare for classes because I had repeated the same content from the textbook for many years.

From 1996, I was the sub-dean of the general English teaching program with forty-one

English teachers and around 5,000 non-English major students<sup>2</sup>. As a member of a faculty committee, I was involved in designing university-based syllabi. I was in charge of the course design, teachers' plan, the selection of materials, the content of teacher-made tests at university level and was responsible for administering such a test in each semester for all 5,000 students. I was also responsible for the collective preparation of each unit of the textbook once a week, and the specific plan and preparation of College English Test-4. During this period, the passing ratio of CET-4 of our program was twice ranked the first among all universities in the local province. I received the cooperation of almost all of my colleagues and the former deans of the faculty.

All of these experiences brought me to an awareness of the problems and issues confronting the teachers. My particular attention was drawn to factors affecting their ability to meet these challenges, such as their level of English language proficiency, their knowledge of the subject matter, their teaching methodology, and their professional development. Not wanting to locate the problems with the individual teachers, I was also conscious of external structural demands being placed on them in their workplace, such as the national curricula, university-based syllabi, textbooks, and the examination system.

After having several articles published, I was appointed to the rank of Associate Professor in 1997. However, the promotion did not help me better understand what I needed to know about English language teaching and learning. I still felt unsure about curriculum and pedagogy, so I began a research project to find an appropriate method that would resolve some of my concerns, such as 'Why do students like or not like my classroom teaching?' and 'What should a good instructor do?' In this process, I encountered a variety of difficulties because I had no formal training in research methodology nor any theoretical background in education, psychology or sociology. Two years later, when I heard that my project had received the First Prize in teaching studies in my Province, I felt my heart was suddenly empty. If I, a young teacher who had such limited knowledge and ability, could receive such an important prize, what about other teachers? This project did not help my teaching become more effective

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<sup>2</sup> English is taught both to students whose major is English Linguistics and Literature, often taken as English major students, and to students whose majors are science or technology as non-English major students.

because it was merely just a summary of my own experiences. I felt confined in desperate subtle relationships with my ineffective teaching on the one hand and a lack of autonomy on the other. These factors drove me to make a significant personal decision: to examine myself, then transform myself, and if possible, to contribute to a transformation of tertiary English teaching in China.

However, although I was full of enthusiasm and energy and I wanted to begin my thesis research as quickly as possible, I found I had to adjust to being a student again, which was a challenging psychological process to adjust from being an associate professor to becoming a graduate student. I recognized the huge gap between what I could do and what I was expected to do in terms of the knowledge of subject matter, research methodology, and most importantly, a sound framework not only for understanding a variety of theories, but also understanding how to apply them. I discovered that my many years of teaching experience could not help me understand what I was learning because of the many differences between the contexts in China and Australia.

After this difficult period of adjustment during which I re-assessed my knowledge and reflected on my abilities, I recalled my issues in China and I discovered that things were more complicated than I had expected, not merely the issue of specialised knowledge (Gao et al 2004). As an instructor, I was also impacted upon by external elements, such as globalisation of English, economic forces and the education reforms around me. I discovered that my identity as an instructor was entangled in a web woven by complex relationships between 'Me' and the relative elements around 'Me'. These unstable, non-linear, and both possible and impossible relationships helped me identify the issues that I needed to explore, such as the expectations that were placed on 'Me' and how 'I' was able to respond to them. That is, I needed to understand firstly the changes which surrounded and challenged 'Me'; secondly, the autonomy 'I' was given to confront these changes and challenges; and thirdly the specialist knowledge 'I' needed in order to take up any such autonomy in the changing context. This study, therefore, is my attempt to understand the issues from the point of view of the instructors impacted upon by these changes.

### **1.3 The context of tertiary English teaching (TET) in China**

It is essential to understand the dynamics of tertiary English teaching in China in order to examine the challenges English instructors are confronting. We can identify the context of university English teaching as a 'field' (Bourdieu 1971b; 1984) possessing its own internal features, including an historical perspective as well as contemporary issues and pressures. The field is also concurrently impacted upon by elements outside, such as the globalisation of English, economic forces and educational reform.

#### **Internal influences on TET in China: tradition**

The internal influences that affect university English teaching are characterised by a conflict between a traditional Chinese sense of intellectual identity and approach to learning and the contemporary dilemma of continuous transformations within English language teaching.

Traditional Chinese philosophy, in particular, Neo-Confucian (新理学 'Xin Li Xue') thought, continues to shape the basic behaviour of instructors and determines much of their present thinking and attitudes about English language teaching. For 2000 years, Chinese intellectuals lived in an environment in which they never questioned the demands of authorities. They were given promises of lucrative positions, but at the cost of critical thinking and challenging the decisions of authorities.

An intrinsic part of traditional Chinese thinking in both politics and geography is the concept of 大同 (Da Tong), which can be rendered in English as 'harmony' or 'unity' (Mao 1964). To be harmonious or unified in politics and geography, the individual was required to have a 'harmonious worldview' which involved acquiescence to the authority who held the 'Mandate from Heaven' (天命 Tiānmìng); therefore, what concerned the controllers of the social order in China was any sign of divergent thinking by the intellectual class (Li 2005). The process of unifying thinking in China can be understood through at least three significant historical movements. The first movement is 'Book Burning and Intellectual Burying' (焚书坑儒) (Si Maqian) which took place in 213 BC. According to tradition, the Emperor Qin ordered the burning of books and then, when he heard complaints about his oppressive regime from some scholars, ordered more than 460 intellectuals be buried alive. Rather than depending on the intelligentsia

to advise him, the Emperor Qin feared that the official class had the means to overthrow his rule with written texts just as military leaders had the means to destroy his dynasty with weapons (Si Maqian). This first event, to use a Chinese metaphor, ‘broke intellectuals’ spine’ by sending them a strong warning that critical thinking would not be tolerated and that they did not have the freedom to ignore or question imperial authority. This attitude is still reflected today in English instructors who are reluctant to question the government policies on English language teaching and curriculum even when they recognise the problems with the policies.

The second traditional event was the movement ‘to Eradicate Other Schools and to Authorize Confucians Solely’ (废黜百家，独尊儒术) (Si Maqian). Based on an account by Si Maqian (145 - 87 BC), around 140 BC, the Emperor Wu Di in the Western Han Dynasty decided that Confucius’ concept of ‘仁德’ (Ren De, which can be rendered into English as *magnanimity* or *benevolence*) should be the key political and moral feature of his regime to maintain the people’s respect for the emperor and his authority to rule. Therefore, the Emperor decreed that only Confucianism would be recognised and allowed to exist in the nation and ordered the elimination of all other schools of thinking (Si Maqian). Thus, it was from the Western Han Dynasty (BC 206-AD8) that Confucianism became the mainstream of Chinese classical thinking (Li 2005).

During the Sui (A.D. 581-618) and Tang Dynasties (A.D. 618-907), knowledge of the Confucian writings was accepted as the only criterion to select officials. The result was the development of the Ke Ju (科举) Examination System, a relatively complicated and systematic organization of national examinations designed to choose members of the intellectual elite for positions of authority (Qian 1984). In the Song Dynasty, the synthesis by Zhu Xi (朱熹) of Confucianism with elements of Buddhism and Taoism became the official government doctrine. As a result, all candidates were required to base their examination essays on Zhu Xi’s commentaries (Huang 2005). Continuing through the Ming (A.D. 1328-1644) and Qing Dynasties (A.D. 1616-1911), the examination was conducted through candidates submitting 八股文 (Ba Gu Wen), a basic, very formalistic format of writing with eight requirements that discussed items taken from the *Analects of Confucius* (论语) (Huang 2005) as interpreted by Zhu Xi. As a result of the Neo-Confucian examination system, the traditional ‘formal’ way of learning Chinese language was in ‘private schools’ (Si Shu 私塾). Only boys were



formally educated and learned the Confucian classics. No attention was given to mathematics, which was left to merchants, nor to science and technology. An educated scholar in China was expected only to know the Confucian classics and be able to write essays and compose poems.

The foundation of traditional Chinese education was learning *The Four Books* (Si Shu 四书) and *Three Character Classic* (三字经). Instead of learning grammar, students learned ‘characters’ (Zi 字), ‘phrases’ (Ci 词), ‘sentences’ (Ju 句) and ‘texts’ (Zhang 章) (Cortazzi et al 1996a) and then read and recited what they had learned (Jiang 2004). Formal education often started when boys were about seven years old, usually in a village, temple, or private school. Teachers were most often “failed” scholars who had passed preliminary examinations, but had not succeeded with the higher-level examinations. However, because they had passed some levels of examinations, they were considered to be “scholars” and still enjoyed some privileges of the elite (Miyazaki 1976).

During this process, the original Confucian values were lost, and the system was misused by controllers, who required candidates to submit prescribed texts that were for the most part memorized with no allowance for creativity or critical thinking. As a result, the system lost its intellectual essence and became political. This second event ‘broke the knees’ of intellectuals because they willingly acquiesced to authority as well as to the temptation of the gaining power. This tendency for students to depend on rote memorisation is still found in Chinese education, even in English language learning.

The third event was the ‘文字狱’ (*Wen Zi Yu*, which can be rendered in English as ‘Literary Inquisition’), a government policy that was continued through a series of imperial dynasties. This ‘literary inquisition’ dissuaded intellectuals from freely expressing their ideas because if they did, they faced a real danger of being accused of criticizing and threatening the political establishment. ‘Wen Zi Yu’ continued to dominate Chinese intellectual and political thinking for more than 2000 years, during which time intellectuals were never autonomous. This third development was ‘a sword’ above the heads of all intellectuals because they were spiritually emasculated.

Persisting through the Ming (A.D.1328-1644) and Qing Dynasties (A.D.1616-1911), these three developments led Chinese culture to the epoch in which academic success depended more on flattery than ability; therefore, thinking in China was neither creative nor interpretive. While this policy of unity in politics, geography and thinking averted the disintegration of the imperial system until the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century (Mao 1964), the effect was a creation of a particular Chinese ‘mindset’ that continues to influence the behaviour of EFL instructors in China today. English instructors exhibit the traits of the first incident (a failure of critical thinking about ‘what should be taught’), the second event (the dependence on established policy and resistance to change, particularly in the matter of new knowledge), and the third misfortune (the loss of an awareness of identity and autonomy, which is the primary focus of this thesis).

### **External influences on TET in China: government policy**

In reference to the demands on university English instructors, the Ministry of Education in China has invested a great amount of money into the university English teaching program and has introduced three large-scale innovations involving the revision of the national syllabus, the change of teaching methods, and reform of assessment (ME 1985/1986; 1999; 2004). The innovations that were introduced demonstrate a major attempt of the Government to improve university English teaching and therefore new expectations on university English instructors have arisen. Changes to the College English Curriculum Requirements (hereafter CECR) 2004 challenge university teachers of English in terms of shifts in the content and skills to be taught. In addition, instructors have had to come to grips with a series of approved textbooks by the Ministry of Education (Cai 2005) and considered the only acceptable content for teaching in the classroom (Feng 2003). Moreover, the influence of the College English Test – Band Four dominates present university English teaching for both teachers and students (Liu et al 2003; Zhao 2003a). As Lamie (2005; 2006) points out, English instructors are faced with multiple policy changes in terms of curriculum proposals, educational management, the testing procedures, teaching methods and the production of new textbooks. Such changes construct the complicated field of tertiary English teaching in China.

### **External influences on TET in China: globalisation**

During the past twenty years, the arguments regarding ‘who owns English?’ (Quirk &

Widdowson 1985; Widdowson 1994; 1997) and the ‘standardization of English’ (Bex & Watts 1999) have been replaced by the issue of ‘global English’ (Canagarajah 1999; Crystal 1997; Pennycook 2003) or ‘world Englishes’ (Kachru 1985; Rajagopalan 2004). English is now accepted as an ‘international’ language (McKay 2002) throughout the world and has become accepted as the medium of communication in global business even though the influence of the history of English politics and colonialism should not be ignored or avoided (Canagarajah 1999; McKay 2002).

The acceptance of English as the global language has greatly affected language attitudes in China. The goal is for ‘global’ English in China, but only as a means of communicating with people who are not Chinese. Thus the government perceives English as an external accommodation, not as an internal alternative language, as it is in India or Singapore. English would not be established as a ‘second language’ in China nor would it be accepted as an official language (Cai 2003; 2005). Nevertheless, the language policy of the Chinese government since Deng Xiaoping has changed dramatically. For instance, English has gone from being completely banned in Chinese classrooms as an unwanted foreign influence to being the state-mandated compulsory foreign language requirement for all students, especially in universities (McCarthy 2000). ‘More than 200 million’ (Wu 2001, p.191) people are studying English in China. English instruction begins at the age of nine in public schools and at three in private kindergartens (Nunan 2003). Some university students refuse to accept the formal classroom teaching in public schools, preferring instead to go to the private language training centers (Cai 2002a, Liu et al, 2003). As such, the emerging wave of English language instruction as a result of the change of the language policy has been a serious challenge to university English instructors.

### **External influences on TET in China: the economy**

As a result of globalisation, along with the rapidly changing economic system, there has developed in China a necessity for proficiency in English. The beginning of the 1980s saw great changes in the economy in China, which has directly led to the development of university English teaching and learning. In 1981, the Government introduced an open market economic policy. As a result, a significant amount of foreign investment capital has poured into China, which has created a demand for university-educated personnel who can communicate in English. To meet this demand, there has developed

an expectation for university English instructors (and their students) to demonstrate a high proficiency in communicative English. The rapidly developing economy has pushed China to become more involved in world affairs, such as joining of the World Trade Organization (WTO) in 2001 and the awarding of the 2008 Olympic Games to Beijing in 2002. These trends provide increasing opportunities for more Chinese to master English as an essential communicative tool. In this sense, the economy has directly influenced the change of instructors' thinking on the nature of language and the nature of language learning.

In a competitive labour market, a certificate of English serves as an essential prerequisite for almost all professional opportunities. For example, the Band Four/Six Exam for College English Test (CET-4/6) has become almost a necessity and as a result has become an obstacle to opportunities for graduates. If graduates or postgraduates wish to apply for any professional occupation in Chinese cities, the CET-4/6 certificate must be verified by the government (Liu et al, 2003). In order to provide this certificate, some universities (or some instructors) have abandoned formal teaching and instead offer special training for CET, often in the first semester of a student's enrolment (Liu et al 2003; Wu 2003). When students get high marks on English exams, their instructors are often rewarded with money or are even promoted (Liu et al 2003). As a result, the assessment system has become a serious challenge for university English instructors because the CET has become not only a measurement of students' English levels, but also a judgment by universities on university English instructors' competence (Liu et al 2003). This suggests that economic forces are also influencing the direction of university English teaching and learning.

### **External influences on TET in China: educational reform**

In addition to global and economic factors, enormous pressures have been exerted on university education in terms of the structure, function and financing of the university system (Anonymous 1999; Cai 2002a; Liu & Tan 2003; Zhang 2003). The Chinese government has attempted to deal with several major challenges in reforming university teaching and these pressures have been highly influential on TET in the university system.

Classes have been increasing by 8% annually (Zhang 2003) since the policy reforms. There are 55, 000 teachers of English at universities. The ratio of students to English instructors is currently 130:1 (Zhang 2003). As a result of the enrolment policy for university education issued in 1995, students now vary greatly in age, experience, socio-economic status, linguistic ability and cultural background (Cai 2005). The status of university English teaching has changed from being regarded as an elitist academic discipline to being viewed as an income-generating necessity. For instance, most university English instructors are no longer satisfied with just teaching English, but have a second or even a third job for the purpose of earning additional income, thereby neglecting to focus on their English teaching responsibilities at universities (Liu et al 2003). All of these factors have placed heavy demands on English instructors at university level.

#### **1.4 Statement of the problem and its significance**

As a result of both internal and external pressures on TET in China, including the changes in the university ELT curriculum, pedagogy and assessment methods, many expectations have been placed on Chinese university English instructors. This study contends that an ambiguity has developed between the stated goals of official policy and the established curriculum that result in instructor confusion and uncertainty as to the nature of the expectations that have been placed on them. The motivation for this study has been to investigate how these expectations are perceived by three groups involved in university ELT: policy-makers, administrators of ELT programs in universities, and the English instructors.

In view of the complicated background of historical and philosophical roots that are unique to China, along with a complicated contemporary context that involves a significant level of impact from external influences, it has been suggested that English instructors at university level are inadequately prepared for their responsibilities (Chen 1999; 2003; Feng 2003; Hou 2001; McCarthy 2000; Nunan 2003; Xia 2002; Zhang 2003; Zhang & Ding 1996; Zhou 2002; 2005). Thus, this study has considered the perceived expectations in relation to established curriculum, pedagogy and evaluation that have been placed on these instructors by the changing demands and how instructors perceive their ability to meet these demands.

From the above, it is clear that tertiary English teaching in China is confronting enormous challenges. This is particularly serious as China enters the global economy and needs managers and entrepreneurs who are competent and proficient in English.

Taking into consideration of my own personal experience in trying to deal with the challenges confronting English instructors in Chinese universities as well as the problems highlighted in the literature, this study will seek a clearer understanding of the issues from the perspective of those stakeholders most intimately involved in the process of change.

### **1.5 Research questions**

The central research question, therefore, is ‘How are tertiary English teachers meeting the challenges of the changing expectations of their profession?’ This gives rise to the following three contributing questions:

1. What changes have occurred in the field of English language teaching in Chinese tertiary institutions over the past 20 years?
2. What expectations have been placed on teachers and administrators as a result of these changes in terms of:
  - the content of curriculum;
  - contemporary pedagogy;
  - assessment procedures in classrooms
3. How have teachers and administrators responded to these changes?

The first question is concerned with the complicated context of the TET field and the pressures for change. The second question examines the expectations placed on Chinese university instructors of English as a result of these changes, particularly in the key areas of curriculum, pedagogy and assessment. The final question is concerned with how these expectations have been perceived by policy-makers, ELT administrators in Chinese universities, and English language instructors.

## **1.6 Theoretical orientation**

It is possible to view the issue of the changing expectations being placed on university English instructors in China in relatively straightforward terms, such as the Ministry of Education project in 2001 on ‘The Study of Foreign Language Instructors’ Training and Development’ (01JAZJD740010) (Liu 2005, p. 211; Zhou 2005, p. 206; Wu 2005, p.199). However, this thesis adopts the position that such an issue is, in fact, extremely complex, involving how human beings make sense of multiple realities enmeshed in historical, ideological, political, social and cultural contexts. This thesis recognizes that the instructors are part of a highly elaborated network of interdependent components. In order to understand the factors influencing their practice, it will be necessary to locate these issues within a much broader framework. For this reason, this study adopts a sociocultural stance as part of the fundamental philosophical orientations to help address the research problem.

To map out university English teaching as a ‘field,’ this study first considers the sociological views of Bourdieu (1971b; 1984) on ‘field’ theory. Based on Bourdieu’s model, a ‘field’ has its own features that are uniquely embedded with traditional ideology and current issues, and are concurrently influenced by external elements, such as, here, globalisation of English, economic forces, and educational reforms. Understanding this ‘field’ helps the researcher to picture the total context of TET in China and also helps the researcher to recognize and acknowledge the complex relationships between instructors and the elements impacting on them.

In addition, the sociological model of Bernstein (1990; 2000) concerning ‘the three message systems’ is used to identify what university English instructors are expected to know and do and how they respond to changes in curriculum, pedagogy and evaluation. The legitimation principles of Maton (2004a; 2005) are used as a tool to frame the structure and interpretation of the findings.

## **1.7 Organization of the thesis**

The thesis is organized into eight chapters. Chapter 2 reviews the literature of changes in English language teaching at the tertiary level in China and the research into current English language curriculum, pedagogy, and assessment practice and theories in China.

Chapter 3 provides the theoretical framework underpinning the study, in particular the ‘field’ theory of Bourdieu, Bernstein’s ‘three message systems’ and the integration of these ideas (Maton 2004a).

Chapter 4 outlines the design of the study including details of participants, data collection, cultural and ethical considerations, and data analysis procedures.

Chapters 5, 6, and 7 report the findings of the study based on analysis of the data in terms of orientation to change, autonomy and specialised knowledge.

Chapter 8 discusses the results and implications of the findings and offers recommendations for university English language teaching in China.

## **1.8 Summary of Chapter One**

The purpose of this study was to discover how Chinese university English language educators perceive and react to expectations that have been placed on them as a result of changing policies and resultant shifts in curriculum, pedagogy and assessment in English language teaching.

This study examines the ambiguity between the stated goals of official policy and the established curriculum that results in teacher confusion and uncertainty as to expectations that have been placed on them. The study also focuses on the confusion shared by policy-makers, university ELT administrators, and ELT resource editors and CET-4 test makers. The study seeks specific reasons for this situation such as a lack of understanding by educators of current ELT curriculum developments, pedagogical methods, and assessment procedures. This study therefore seeks to understand the response of tertiary English instructors to the changes surrounding them, taking into account the historical and



contemporary influences within the field and the external pressures impacting on the field.

## **CHAPTER TWO:**

### **REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE**

#### **2.1 Introduction**

The purpose of this review is to examine the relevant literature concerning curriculum, pedagogy, and assessment as related to university English language instruction in China in terms of a) identification of changes in the general field of second language education at university level and b) research studies into the nature of these changes. Such studies, in turn, provide a context for better understanding the responses in the data analysis chapters in relation to teachers' 'orientation to change'.

The sources for this review range from key international journals in TESOL, EFL, curriculum, and teacher education to regional publications in Asia, such as RELC and the Asian EFL Journal. Also included are several key local EFL journals published in China. In addition, information was accessed through the Internet. As will be seen from this extensive review, research is still lacking in the fundamental area of teachers' perceptions of and responses to change.

The chapter is organized on the basis of Basil Bernstein's notion of the 'three message systems' – 'what to teach' (curriculum), 'how to teach' (pedagogy) and 'how to assess' (assessment).

#### **2.2 Changes in curriculum**

Curriculum is the first of Bernstein's message systems. This section will firstly provide an historical overview of changes in curriculum in China and will then look more specifically at the CECR 2004 curriculum requirements and their theoretical rationale before moving on to a review of the research literature regarding issues surrounding tertiary English curriculum.

##### **2.2.1 Historical overview of curriculum change**

While English language curriculum has been developing in most Western countries with

an emphasis on such perspectives as communicative strategies, genre theory, English for specific purposes, and sociocultural considerations, English language curriculum in China has developed over the past twenty years with uniquely Chinese characteristics. Recently, the pace of reform in English curriculum has quickened. For instance, in 2005, the Asia Society Business Roundtable Council of Chief State School Officers, in a report on *Education in China*, observed that ‘China is trying to move away from its traditional didactic teaching practices with their heavy emphasis on rote memorization to a curriculum that incorporates inquiry methods, classroom discussion, applications of knowledge, and use of technology’ (2005, p.6).

In the traditional Chinese context where, in the words of Confucius, ‘schooling is superior to all other things,’ (唯有读书高) in order to be considered educated and cultured, language learning involved a thorough knowledge of the Chinese Classics that was deemed to be essential. Formal language education, therefore, was not focused on achieving communicative proficiency. Instead, formal language learning consisted of attaining a mastery of the classical literature and the ability to replicate the form and content of the classics as well as developing an expertise in established poetic genres. Therefore, traditionally, literature was considered the most important content. This attitude has prevailed in second language teaching in China, and for many Chinese, the goal of a good English language education is to cultivate an elite scholarly group with a strong background in literature rather than with communicative competence, as shown in the process of the development of the national English curricula after the Cultural Revolution.

The English language curriculum in China has developed over the past twenty years with distinctive Chinese characteristics (Liu et al 2003). This realization is reflected in recent attempts at educational reform in China, especially in English language education. After the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976, Xiang 2002) in China, English language teaching began to reflect a more formal and academic mode which was demonstrated by the issue of a series of national English curricula. In 1980, the first college English curriculum for all students was published with the requirements that reading speed be emphasised with a goal of seventeen words per minute whereas listening, speaking and writing were downplayed; therefore, there were few requirements addressing these skills (ME 1980). In 1985, the then State Educational Commission, which is the present

Ministry of Education, issued a College English Curriculum (ME) for science students (1985), and in 1986, a College English Curriculum for arts students was also issued (1986) (Han, Lu & Dong 1995). In these two curricula, as expressed by their designers' opinions (Han, Lu & Dong 1995), a common core of language was emphasised as vocabulary and grammar. In order to improve the requirement of vocabulary, *General Reference Words of College English Curriculum*, which combined the vocabulary requirements of the two curricula, was subsequently published. In addition, English was emphasised as a communicative tool not only for study but also for common use. Moreover, textbooks were taken as the most important means to implement the curricula (ME 1985/1986). Finally, College English Test – Band Four and Six was designated as the guarantor of successful learning (ME 1985/1986).

A modified version of College English Curriculum, which combined the two curricula from 1985 and 1986 into the one for all undergraduates with non-English majors was issued in 1999. It required college English teaching 'to foster stronger reading ability of students and certain abilities of listening, speaking, writing and translation in order to help students communicate with English' (ME 1999). Five years later saw the College English Curriculum Requirements 2004 (For Trial Implementation) (CECR hereafter) for non-English majors at universities (that is, students whose majors are, for example, IT, Engineering, or Medicine and therefore are required to study general English).

### **2.2.2 College English Curriculum Requirements 2004**

The CECR (College English Curriculum Requirements for Trial Implementation 2004) is the most current document that offers changes in the English language policy for Chinese universities. It was designed 'with a view to keeping up with the new developments of higher education in China, deepening the teaching reform, improving teaching quality, and meeting the needs of the country and society for qualified personnel in the new era' (CECR 2004, p.3).

The version of CECR 2004 used for this study is the English translation issued by Tsinghua University Press in 2004. The main content is covered in 16 pages in total. It is appended with a Computer- and Classroom-based Multimedia College English Teaching Model, Self-Assessment/Peer Assessment Form of Students' English

Competence, and Reference Word List of College English Curriculum Requirements (for trial implementation), Reference Phrase List of College English Curriculum Requirements (for trial implementation), and Active Word List of College English Curriculum Requirements (for trial Implementation). The latter lists of lexical items consume 185 pages (pp.56-243). Table 2.1 shows major characteristics in CECR 2004.

**Table 2.1 Changes in the CECR 2004**

<b>Content</b>	<b>The College English Curriculum Requirement 2004 (<i>by Tsinghua university press</i>)</b>
<b>Purpose</b>	Attempt to provide guidelines for English instruction in CET (p.3)
<b>Objective</b>	To foster listening & speaking ability (p.5)
<b>Requirements on students' language level</b>	Three levels of achievement: in terms of listening, speaking, reading, writing, translating & vocabulary (pp.5-19)
<b>Vocabulary</b>	4,500-6,500 among three requirements (pp.5-19)
<b>Length of student texts</b>	120 – 200w among three requirements (pp.5-19)
<b>School-based syllabus</b>	Emphasises the content of university syllabus based on students' abilities & needs and the content of vocabulary and 5 skills (p.19)
<b>Teaching methodology</b>	Provides a new teaching methodology: Computer- & Classroom-based Multimedia College English Teaching Model (pp.21-25)
<b>Assessment</b>	By individual university; by region; by the national exam, including summative and formative (pp.25-27); and self-assessment (pp.36-55)
<b>Management</b>	Teaching documents, the credit system & Teachers' training (pp.29-31)

### 2.2.3 Theoretical rationale of CECR 2004

When major changes to curriculum policy are introduced, it is reasonable to expect that the rationale underpinning such changes would be readily available, and preferably accompanying the policy document, so that those who need to implement the policy have a clear understanding of the theoretical basis and practical implications of the changes. Despite extensive searching, no such rationale for the decisions made in designing CECR 2004 appears to be available. Based on a detailed search of the best-known journals<sup>3</sup> in China after the publication of CECR 2004 (for trial), none of which deals with the theoretical rationale of the policy.

From the document, however, an eclectic theoretical approach can be inferred. Several researchers point to the content-driven nature of the curriculum (Anderson 1993; Zheng et al 1997; Wang 2002; Feng 2003; Zhao 2003). In his research on learners' and

<sup>3</sup> *Foreign language Journal*, *Foreign Language Teaching and Research*, *Foreign Language World*, *Modern Foreign Languages*, and *Foreign Languages* are generally accepted by tertiary English teachers as the main journals in the field of TET. This is because the articles published in these journals are regarded as meeting high scholarly standards by most universities in terms of contributors' professional promotion.

teachers' beliefs, Wang (2002) finds a 'magic circle' that he identifies as 'teachers teach knowledge, learners learn knowledge, the test tests knowledge; knowledge is recited before the test and is forgotten after it' (p.30). Wang provides the results of his survey on content teaching in which more than half of the teachers believed that the purpose of their teaching is the transmission of knowledge. This is evidenced, for example, in the following vocabulary requirement:

*Basic requirements:*

*6. Recommended Vocabulary: Students should acquire a total of 4,500 words and 700 phrases (including those that have been covered in high school English courses), among which 2,000 are active words (see appendix IV: Reference Word List of College English Curriculum Requirements (for Trial Implementation) (2004, p.11).*

There is still a strong emphasis on the traditional skill of translation, including precise specifications of speed:

*With the help of dictionaries, students should be able to translate essays on familiar topics from English into Chinese and vice versa. The speed of translating from English into Chinese should be 300 English words per hour whereas the speed of translating from Chinese into English should be 250 Chinese characters per hour. The translation should read smoothly. Students are expected to be able to use appropriate translation techniques (CECR 2004, pp.9-11).*

Alongside this 'content-driven' approach, there are indirect references to language in use, communicative functions, genre theory, English for specialised purposes, and so on. Without explanation as to how these diverse elements form a coherent theoretical basis for curriculum, the policy document risks misinterpretation and confusion on the part of teachers, as will be explored in later chapters.

#### **2.2.4 Issues surrounding tertiary English curriculum**

There is little available research on the nature of CECR 2004. However, in 2002, Wang concluded that the intended goal of TET curriculum in China was discrete knowledge rather than a process of language use. In his research on learners' and teachers' beliefs, Wang (2002), from the results of his survey on content teaching, discovered that more than half of the teachers believed that the purpose of their teaching is the transmission of knowledge. While this study addressed the impact of the nature of the College English

Curriculum 1999 rather than the nature of CECR 2004, it shows that even before CECR 2004, teachers took the transmission of content to be their main task.

Another issue raised in the research literature is the place of English for Specific Purposes in the curriculum. As early as the end of the 80's, Zhou (1988) proposed a reform of EST (English for Science and Technology) in China. Problems surrounding ESP in the national curricula have been recently recognised (Zhang 2003; Cai 2004a, 2004b; Xia 2005). Zhang (2003) argues that English language learning in TET should be based on the needs of students rather than on a general English course that is required for completion of an undergraduate programme. Cai (2004a; 2004b) points out how English for specific purposes (ESP) has been resisted by national curricula in TET. He claims that the two curricula in 1985 and 1999 designated ESP to be the responsibility of teachers in other non-English subjects and was required to be introduced in subject areas after the first four semesters' of general English instruction. CECR 2004 does not reflect the trend of developing tertiary English by focusing on ESP, but rather on successfully completing general English course books. He believes that ESP in the CECR 2004 is merely mentioned without adequate interpretation. Cai (2004b) also explains the reasons why EGP has dominated TET for so long. He claims that EGP relates to the increasing scale of College English Test- Band Four (CET-4) each year and supports the continuous waves of textbooks that must be compiled and revised. He also points out that EGP relates to the knowledge structure of tertiary English teachers and their academic achievements although he does not explain how it happens.

Cai (2005) also claims that what has mostly affected general English teaching is the fact that the period for general English learning is too long from the first year of primary school to postgraduate study and even to doctorate language learning, which lasts around 20 years. He explains the reasons for this issue as a) inconsistency of English teaching between primary school, secondary school and university learning; b) general English teaching is the generally preferred paradigm among Chinese intellectuals; c) other pressures coming from CET-4/6, teachers and textbooks. He also emphasises that around 60,000 English teachers at universities would face great challenges if the general English teaching was replaced by teaching English for specific purposes.

A further issue in the literature is the shift from reading and writing to listening and speaking in CECR 2004. The objective of university English teaching is now described as follows (CECR 2004):

*... to develop students' ability to use English in an all-round way, especially in listening and speaking (p.5).*

The change in emphasis to listening/speaking is also emphasised in the course design:

*In designing College English courses, requirements of competence in listening and speaking should be fully considered (p.19).*

This change of focus has the potential to provoke a reaction from university English language instructors who are more accustomed to teaching literacy skills than oral/aural communicative skills. There is limited research on what this shift in focus in CECR 2004 really means to teachers and their teaching. Nevertheless, in 2003, Liu and Dai provided a report on the Reform of Foreign Language Teaching at Universities in China where they present a survey on what language abilities should be developed at universities. The survey shows that 66.2% of college English teachers believed that all the skills of listening, speaking, reading, writing, and translation should be developed; 19.2% of them suggested teaching four of the skills without translation; 7.9% preferred listening and speaking; 6.7 % of the teachers indicated a preference for reading and writing. They pointed out that while what was required in the 1999 version of the curriculum, where reading and writing were over-emphasised, did not meet teachers' expectations, what is now required in CECR 2004, where listening and speaking are focused on, might still not match the ideas of general teachers who believed that all five skills should be equally developed.

Cai (2002b; 2003) claims that many students were unsatisfied with what they learned in English course in universities because they did not think the knowledge they learned could be transmitted into their practical skills and abilities of language use. As a result, many of them went to many social training organizations for their specific purposes, such as oral English, interpreter certificate training, TOEFL, and IELTS. He suggests that course design be readjusted, the curriculum modified, and that students' language skills be comprehensively developed.



And finally, there is the issue of the influence of textbooks on the TET curriculum. In Chinese tertiary English classes textbooks are used as the main resource for course and syllabus design instead of a university or departmental developed syllabus (Zhao 1998; Feng 2003). When examining ELT methodology in tertiary English teaching, Feng (2003) concludes that ‘teachers use textbooks as their syllabus to guide their lesson planning’ (p.15). He also observes that the necessity for teaching substantial textbook content makes it difficult for teachers to carry out a communicative approach. Researchers have also challenged textbook content in terms of interfering with effective language teaching (Zhao 1998; Feng 2003). Feng (2003) points out serious issues implicit in textbooks, using *College English* (Dong 1997) as an example.

(They) are [a] slightly modified version of the same title first published in 1986. They are largely grammar-structure and vocabulary-based course books which most teachers use with traditional methodology. *The Teacher’s Book* for each of the four ‘core’ *Intensive Reading* booklets contains, in each text, a large number of ‘language points’ – basically grammar and vocabulary items for detailed explanation in class (Feng 2003, pp.11-12).

This issue is not only characteristic of *College English*, but is also common in other currently used textbooks.

### **2.2.5 Summary of section 2.2**

Most of the studies discussed above cannot be considered as responses to the changes of CECR 2004 since they were almost all published before the introduction of CECR 2004. However, the research conducted after CECR 2004 highlight some characteristics of College English teaching which persist even after the introduction of CECR 2004:

- a) the tertiary curriculum is seen as content-oriented teaching with teachers perceiving the transmission of knowledge as their main task;
- b) tertiary English teaching in China does not reflect the trend of an increasing focus on ESP, but rather on successfully completing English course books;
- c) English for General Purposes continues to be taught at the tertiary level because of a lack of continuity and coordination between primary, secondary school and university learning, because of the pressure from the CET-4/6 examination,

because of the vested interests of the textbook producers, and because of teachers' limited knowledge of ESP;

- d) there is general dissatisfaction among students because what they learn in English courses at universities cannot be put into practice;
- e) the abrupt shift in emphasis from reading and writing to speaking and listening is problematic and doesn't satisfy teachers' preference for a balanced approach to all five skills.

The literature on English language curriculum in China has focused mainly on the primary and secondary levels, which have been well developed (Adamson 1994; 1995; 2002; 2004; Adamson & Morris 1997; Ng & Tang 1997; Nunan 2003). University English language curriculum in China has, however, had insufficient attention (Wu, 2001). Wu (2001, p.192) claims that 'the reformers are still far from knowing a sound basis on which to plan the sequence of learning' and 'research is needed to address these curriculum and evaluation issues'.

While the above findings shed light on some of the issues surrounding changes in tertiary English curriculum in China, they say nothing about the demands placed on teachers by these changes and how teachers have responded to these demands. This study will take up these issues in Chapter 5.

## **2.3 Changes in pedagogy**

The second of Bernstein's message systems deal with pedagogy. This section will again provide an historical overview of changes in pedagogy in China. This is followed by a review of research into ELT pedagogy in China before a more detailed look at pedagogical changes in the CECR 2004 and the research surrounding these changes.

### **2.3.1 Historical overview**

Pedagogy in Chinese language learning has a long history with its own Chinese characteristics. Hu (2002b) explains that 'education has been traditionally viewed more as a process of accumulating knowledge than as a practical process of constructing and

using knowledge for immediate purposes' (p.97). In addition, he mentions that Chinese education emphasises maintaining a hierarchical but harmonious relation between teacher and student with the example of 'being a teacher for only one day entitles one to lifelong respect from the student that befits his father' (p.98) (一日为师，终生为父). Moreover, he mentions that Confucius was willing to take in anyone who wanted to be educated and insisted that 'no distinctions should be made in dispensing education' (p.98) (寓教于乐). Hu (2002b) also discusses the expectations of Chinese cultural thinking regarding the roles of teachers as 'gardeners' or 'engineers of the human soul' and teachers' profound body of knowledge and effective skills of teaching.

As a result of the Confucian examination system as mentioned in Chapter One, the traditional 'formal' way of learning Chinese language was in 'private schools' (Si Shu 私塾). Learning *The Four Books* (Si Shu 四书) was the foundation of traditional Chinese education. Instead of learning grammar rules, students learned 'characters' 'phrases', 'sentences' and 'texts' (Cortazzi et al 1996a) and then read and recited what they had learned (Jiang 2004). This approach is very much a rote activity and a form of pattern learning. For the scholarly examinations, which depended on replication rather than interpretation, this method was effective.

With the establishment of the first foreign language school in China in 1862, grammar-translation was accepted as a more effective method for foreign language teaching. The goal, as with Latin, was to have Chinese students learn formal written English and translate it into Chinese and vice versa.

With the push for a more 'scientific' approach to pedagogy, behaviourist principles were introduced into language teaching pedagogy in China through the Audiolingual Method (ALM). Rather than see behaviourism as theoretically opposed to grammar-translation, ALM was simply absorbed into the mix of traditional Chinese pedagogy and grammar-translation. In fact, pedagogy in ELT in China is often referred to as 'traditional structural thinking' (Anderson 1993; Huang et al, 1998; Yu 2001; Liu et al 2003) and is seen as 'a curious combination of grammar-translation and the audiolingual method, which is characterised by systematic and detailed study of grammar, extensive use of cross-linguistic comparison and translation, memorisation of structural patterns and vocabulary...' (Hu 2002b, p.93).

Most principles of ALM are believed to be compatible with the original pedagogical orientations in Chinese traditional education (Cortazzi et al 1996a; 1996b; Hu 2002b). Cortazzi (et al 1996a; 1996b), Hu (2002b), Zheng (et al 1997), and Liu (et al 2003) attribute this to the following factors:

- a) The first factor is that most principles of ALM are compatible with the original pedagogical orientations in Chinese traditional education (Cortazzi et al 1996b; Hu 2002). As mentioned previously, Chinese is traditionally learned at the ‘word’, ‘phrase’, ‘sentence’, and ‘text’ levels by reading and reciting. This reductionist view of Chinese literacy learning not only led to a main teaching method called ‘Shou Ye (授业)’ (Han Yu), meaning ‘delivering knowledge’, but also determined ‘what to teach’ throughout language learning history, such as ‘Bai Jia Xing’ (Hundreds of family names) and ‘San Zi Jing’ (a book with each sentence restricted within three characters). They were written by Confucians and taught in a way from being easy to being difficult with interpretation. Such practices in traditional Chinese teaching might explain why behaviourism is still favoured by Chinese teachers. In this sense, what ALM emphasises meets with what teachers have already been familiar with, such as a structural syllabus, accuracy rather than fluency as outcome, drilling and memorisation as strategies, and a teacher-centred approach.
- b) The second factor is the thinking of Chinese intellectuals which is seen as interpretive, not critical and creative, because of the traditional cultural autocracy. Such thinking makes ALM, originally from overseas and mostly compatible with the traditional orientation in education, easily accepted without critical thinking.
- c) The third factor is that ALM does not challenge teachers’ knowledge and skills and does not require excellent proficiency in the language. The prescribed linguistic knowledge, structural drill exercises, ‘teacher-proof’ lessons and books all make teachers comfortable. This is one of the explanations for tertiary English teaching to be seen in terms of ‘a book, chalk, and a tape-recorder’ (Zheng et al 1997; Liu et al 2003).

The next pedagogical wave to wash over China from foreign shores was the

Communicative Approach. While Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) spread through ELT worldwide, in China it has been greeted both with enthusiasm and suspicion, which is reflected as different stages: support, resistance and debate (Li 1997; Hu 2002b).

In 1984, X. J. Li supported the Communicative Approach by insisting on the use of authentic, appropriate language and stressing the necessity of sufficient input. This proposal was based on her work in 1981 with Canadian teachers in developing a set of CLT materials for English majors. While the syllabus at the time was based on intensive reading of written texts, Li (1984) proposed an integrated course using all the skills – listening, speaking, reading, and writing. She argues that China has to change itself to fit the Communicative Approach, such as change of the examination systems. She asserts that ‘the communicative tide will come when language testing has changed its focus from testing students’ linguistic competence to assessing their communicative competence’ (1984, p.13).

However, suspicion also arose after the initial enthusiasm. The reform from the Ministry of Education around the mid-1980s attempted to import CLT and implant it into the Chinese context. Evidence for this can be seen in the National Curriculum of 1985 with its objectives of communicative competence. However, this was confronted by great resistance in its implementation. Some believe that such resistance came from cultural factors which favoured traditional approaches (Maley 1984; Anderson 1993; Hu 2002b; 2003). Some believe that teachers lacked proper training for CLT, sufficient language proficiency, and sociolinguistic competence (Anderson 1993; Li 1997; Wang 2002; Hu 2002b). Others believe that the lack of uptake was due to insufficient resources, examination pressure, large class sizes, and limited instructional time (Zheng et al 1997; Wang 2001; Liu et al 2003).

Professor Wang Zuo Liang, a late outstanding Chinese linguist, showed his disagreement with CLT based on his experience (1985, p.47). He claimed that

The grammar-translation method has been much criticized in language teaching. It has been regarded as old-fashioned. I am afraid that I’ll have to disagree. To me, the grammar-translation method not only has had a long history in language education but is much needed in language teaching today.

Although Prof. Wang insisted on the importance of Grammar-Translation, he also took an objective attitude towards traditional, structural and communicative methods:

The grammar-translation method, just like the audiolingual and communicative methods, is one of the important language teaching methods (1985, p.47).

While the government has made great efforts in promoting CLT by changing national curricula at different levels, producing communicative-oriented English textbooks and amending national English Tests (Adamson et al 1997; Hu 2002b), teachers' knowledge of and skills in current language learning theories and pedagogies remain an issue. This is one of the focuses in this study.

### **2.3.2 Research into ELT pedagogy in China**

Various research studies have been conducted in response to the changing pedagogical approaches. Here we will canvass some of those more relevant to the present study.

Zheng et al (1997) conducted a series of investigations into tertiary English language teaching methods from 1996 to 1997. Through the use of questionnaires, they found that a) while Grammar-Translation has not been the basic method for most teachers, the general model of college English teaching is featured as 'language-centred', 'teacher-centred', and 'text-centred'. Their questionnaire data show that 87.8% of teachers explain new words, grammar and structure in class and 67.8% often do sentence translation in class. In addition, 68.1% of teachers claim that their own interpretation of language points takes the most time of the class. Moreover, the main teaching model is 'textbook + board + tape recorder' (1997, p.3). 23.6 % of teachers often use the language laboratory, implying a use of ALM. The big change shown by the research is that 81.3% of teachers claim to use English as medium of instruction in their classroom. b) Some teachers do use certain communicative skills in their classroom, such as 'role-play', 'pair work', and 'discourse teaching'. However, it is not the mainstream in TET. c) The adoption of a specific method relates to the objectives of the course, the levels of students, the competence of the teachers and the sociocultural context.

Based on the findings above, Zheng et al (1997) provide four suggestions for improving college English instruction: a) a balance of teaching activities between form-focused and meaning-focused; b) learning-centred principles are required and teachers should encourage students' own discovery in learning rather than over-interpreting; c) procedural abilities and communicative tasks, such as 'making inferences, drawing conclusions, information transfer, negotiation of meaning, and problem solving' (Widdowson 1984, p.210) should be emphasized; d) the integration of macro skills, including reading, writing, listening and speaking, and the integration of micro skills within each of the macro skills, such as specific skills of reading.

Liu and Dai (2003), in their report on the project of *the Present and Development of Tertiary English Teaching Reform* in China show that only 8.1% of teachers said that they use Grammar-Translation. However, in a survey study investigating students' language learning strategies by Zou (2000) found that 76.6% of students believe that the method their teachers used is Grammar-Translation, with only 11.3% believing their teachers used listening and speaking methods. In addition, based on their survey of teachers' thinking on pedagogy and the review of literature on traditional teaching and present tendencies of teaching in TET, Liu and Dai (2003) report that the present teaching model follows a prescribed pattern of 'reviewing the content learned – guiding to the new content – explaining the new content – consolidating the new content by doing exercises – then assignments'. They also report that a) present teaching uses the traditional intensive reading method which constrains students' potential ability and leads to low skills in listening and interaction; b) the traditional method follows teacher-centred principles; c) English language teachers prefer 'teaching to the test' to teaching for skills development and cultural understanding; d) a student-centred thematic teaching model is perceived to be a good beginning for English language education reform; g) an eclectic model is an appropriate and ideal method for TET reform, although studies did not provide information on how to arrange activities and time.

From a case study, Zheng and Adamson (2003) also report finding a conflict between traditional influences and present challenges. In analysing the pedagogy of a 'traditional' secondary school teacher, Mr Yang, they challenge 'the stereotypical portrayal of English Language teachers in China' (Zheng & Adamson 2003, p.323). They first distinguish the teacher's personal construction of beliefs and practices about

teaching and learning. Then they examine the whole process of the change in pedagogy on the part of Mr. Yang – the conflicts between his own pedagogy and the new promoted methodology, how he was constrained by examination requirements, the pressure of time, and the limitations of textbooks. They finally point out that the portrayal of English language teachers as transmitters of grammatical knowledge, ‘fails to capture the dynamic nature of pedagogy as a personal construct forged by the interplay of beliefs, experiences and practice, and contextual factors operating at the micro-level (the chalkface) and at the macro-level (state policy)’ (Zheng & Adamson 2003, p.323).

Recently, the difficulties Chinese English teachers have in using CLT in the Chinese context have been studied. Based on the observations of six Chinese English teachers from elementary, secondary and tertiary levels, and on-site observations of teaching, D. F. Li (1997), indicates that Chinese English teachers, while cognizant of the achievements ‘have had difficulties in implementing CLT in their classrooms’. These difficulties ‘have their sources in the fact that CLT, as a methodology developed in the West, is laden with Western cultural values which are very different from dominant Chinese cultural values’ (1997, p.i). He also found that while teachers are interested in change and eager to identify with CLT, they were not confident in overcoming the difficulties and therefore felt that there would be only limited use of CLT in TEFL in China. In this sense, he suggests that ‘rather than adopt CLT completely, Chinese teachers might want to incorporate a communicative component into their traditional teaching methods’ (1997, p.ii). He points out that changes must be made in teachers’ understanding of language learning, teaching and curricula in teacher education programs.

Ying et al (1998), Huang et al (2000) and Shan (2000) all report an English language ‘teaching model with themes’ in Zhejiang University. This model refers to student-centred and teacher-guided learning with the help of the textbook around the same theme throughout training in the five macro-skills (listening, speaking, reading, writing and translation). They conduct an experiment with two classes. One of them was taken as the experimental variable, another was taken as the control variable. The scores of the students in the experimental class were lower than those of students in the normal class. After one semester, the scores of students in the experimental class were higher than students in the normal class. Ying et al (1998) found that the new model made students



learn autonomously because students became more interested in learning strategies. They found that it is important to foster students' comprehensive language abilities by considering the needs of students. In addition, students' autonomous learning is important for their language learning.

What is reviewed above builds up the picture of pedagogy and research into pedagogical changes in ELT in general and more specifically at university level. The following section will examine the current changes in pedagogy promoted by the College English Curriculum Requirements in 2004 and studies of the impact of such changes.

### **2.3.3 Pedagogical change in CECR 2004**

With the 'open market' policy, changes in pedagogy in tertiary contexts in China have basically followed the changes in the national curricula (Han et al 1995; Feng 2003). The 1985 version required that the ultimate goal of the College English programme was to develop students' competence in communicating in the target language by written and oral means. In terms of teaching methodology, the curriculum raises the notion of '*Bo Cai Zhong Chang*' which means adopting the advantages of different teaching approaches for one's own use. It does not propose any specific teaching methodology although it indicates a shift from the intensive reading model towards CLT (Li et al 1988). It was believed that the 1985 curriculum 'brought the brightness' for ELT in China by introducing aspects of CLT (Feng 2003). The 1999 curriculum was said 'to face the challenge of the new century and to raise College English teaching to a new level' (ME 1999, p.1). Feng criticizes the 1999 version, stating that 'the most obvious change is that the ultimate goal stipulated in the 1985 version to develop students' communicative competence is entirely missing from the new version' ... 'what is unchanged is the emphasis on reading skills' (2003, p.14). As for teaching methodology, the 1999 version did not stipulate a methodology to be adopted but appealed to seeking out a methodology based on 'our effective teaching methods and experience ... with Chinese characteristics' (ME 1999, p.11). After the 1999 curriculum, most teachers' focus was diverted from CLT to those teaching methods with which they were comfortable from their own experience resulting in an 'eclectic' approach (Liu et al 2003, p.78).

The current changes in pedagogy at university level are mainly reflected in the College

English Curriculum Requirements 2004. CECR is an attempt to maintain:

*... the new development of higher education in China, deepening the teaching reform, improving teaching quality, and meeting the needs of the country and society for qualified personnel in the new era (p.23).*

As for teaching methodology, CECR 2004 heavily promotes Information and Communications Technology (ICT hereafter) – a ‘teaching model’ that emphasizes multimedia and network technology (p.24) known as *Computer- and Classroom-based Multimedia College English Teaching Model* (2004, p.33).

The purposes of the new model are to encourage students’ individualized and autonomous learning, calling for a shift from teacher-centred to more student-centred pedagogy in an attempt to solve the problem of the lack of teachers. This is shown in CECR 2004 as:

*The new model should be built on modern information technology, particularly network technology, so that English language teaching will be free from the constraints of time or place and geared towards students’ individualized and autonomous learning. ... should combine the principles of practicality, knowledge and interest, mobilize the initiative of both teachers and students, and attach particular importance to the central role of students.... ... should technically attain to a high level of interactivity, feasibility and operability (p.23).*

To achieve the purpose of autonomous learning and the shift from teacher-centred to student-centred teaching a series of learning outcomes are specified:

*An important indicator of the successful reform of the teaching model is the development of individualized study methods and the autonomous learning ability on the part of students (p.23).*

Alongside the ‘technological model’, CECR 2004 also mentions employing the strengths of other current teaching methods, suggesting support for an eclectic approach although it is not stated explicitly (p.23):

*In addition, it should take into full account and incorporate into it the strengths of the current model while fully employing modern information technology.*

The following sections will deal more fully with the issues of ICT and autonomous learning as well as eclecticism in pedagogy.

### **ICT and autonomous learning in tertiary English pedagogy**

At the beginning of the current century, the head of the Higher Education of the Ministry of Education, Zhang (2002; 2003) strongly advocated the trial in tertiary English teaching of multimedia resources and the internet from the point of view of policy and management. Subsequently, ICT was taken up as an important tool in the field of tertiary English teaching, culminating in CECR 2004. Some of the studies find that ICT has many advantages over the traditional approaches (Zhang 2002; Cai 2001; 2003) while others find that the use of ICT has some constraints (Dong et al 2002).

Dong et al (2002), who did a comparative study among ninety-six undergraduates with medical major, analysed the meaning and effect of English language teaching with ICT. They divided students into two large groups with different language levels by placement assessment. Then each large group was divided into two smaller groups, from which one was taken as the experimental variable. In the experimental group, the teaching with ICT was used; in the control group, traditional teaching was used with the textbook of College English (published in Shanghai) and its VCD. The experimental group had one hour for consultation and help with learning strategies. By comparing the scores of students in ten summative assessment tests including one CET, it was found that there was no differentiation between the results of teaching with ICT and traditional teaching.

Other researchers also believe that ICT has certain constraints (Shen 2000). After using the software of *College English – Intensive Reading*, Shen (2000) summarizes her findings on the limitation of multimedia:

- 1) for students, multimedia fosters ‘imitated communication’ rather than authentic communication;
- 2) the exercises provided are boring in format and answers;
- 3) it is difficult to correct students’ mistakes on time;
- 4) once it is accidentally stopped, it has to start from the very beginning – a waste of time and makes students anxious;
- 5) the volume of information makes it difficult for students to catch the focus, i.e., structure or discourse, background or language points.

In the study by Cai (2001), both strengths and weakness of ICT were considered, using three teaching methods: multimedia, autonomous learning with reference books, and teachers' traditional teaching to two groups of students in 1999 and 2000. Based on a comparison of students enrolled in 1999 and in 2000, Cai reports that the scores of students in the College English Test were higher with those using multimedia than those using traditional methods. Cai (2001) concludes that the electronic method is effective. The use of multimedia makes up for the lack of teachers, allows for individualised learning, provides free learning content, creates better learning conditions and multiplies time for learning.

At the same time, Cai (2001) also points out some issues of ICT which cannot be neglected: a) teachers who use multimedia feel worried about what they should do in class; b) some students feel a lack of guidance and focus (63% of students believed the software of multimedia to be over-rich in content); c) teaching management is difficult as it is hard to monitor student learning and because there are answers to the content on the CD-ROM. Because the criterion to measure students' learning effect is CET, whose content and format is contrary to the objectives students should achieve, and because students tend to get high scores because they spend more time with multimedia, these findings cannot be taken as evidence that the new teaching model is superior to the traditional one.

Studies by Li (2004) and Kang et al (2003) in the implementation of ICT in tertiary English teaching found only superficial changes in pedagogy. The writing on the board was replaced by the multimedia technology; teachers' notes were replaced by content downloaded from CD ROMs or the internet; and textbooks were transposed directly onto CDs.

In the limited studies on how to integrate teaching with ICT, the findings almost all were based on the review of literature (Cai 2001; 2003; Li 2004) or drawn from their own experience (Kang et al 2003) rather than on original research data. All these studies show little understanding by teachers of appropriate pedagogy for ICT in TET.

The introduction of ICT into the teaching/learning program and the associated move towards autonomous learning has profound implications for pedagogy and for teachers'

professional development (McDougall & Squires 1997; Warschauer & Whittaker 1997; Leach & Moon 2000; Mumtaz 2000; Watson 2001), not only in terms of teachers' ability to use the technology effectively but also in terms of the challenges posed to the traditional role of the teacher in Chinese culture (Dong et al 2002; Li 2004).

The studies above show that research into ICT and pedagogy are at the stage of identifying the advantages and disadvantages and suggestions as to how ICT could be effectively used in English language instruction. Little has been done, however, into the responses of teachers to using ICT as a mandated pedagogy. The present study will address this issue to a certain extent.

### **Eclecticism and principled eclecticism in China**

One view of English language instruction in China is that Communicative Language Teaching there has evolved into 'eclectic' teaching (Liu et al 2003). Based on their survey, Liu and Dai (2003) report that, of the teaching methods teachers claim that they often use, 20.5 % of teachers said they used CLT whereas 70.2% claimed they adopted an 'eclectic method'. By this they possibly mean that teachers might not subscribe to a given approach, but use whatever methodology they believe is effective. Liu and Dai discovered that in reports of classroom teaching, teachers often consider grammar-translation as the main teaching approach among the eclectic methods they adopted. They conclude that the confusion in teaching approaches was a result of the direct transplant of CLT from the West into China and because of a resulting 'pendulum effect' in language teaching, CLT finally evolved into 'eclecticism' where teachers talk about CLT, but use more traditional approaches in their teaching.

The use of an eclectic approach to teaching English in China was initially described by Luo et al (2001). They define eclectic method not as a concrete, single method, but a method which combines listening, speaking, reading, and writing together and may include some practice in the classroom. They claim that the current preferred teaching methods are an integration of Grammar-Translation, structural method and CLT and advise teachers to take advantages of all other methods and avoid their disadvantages. They suggest five features of successful eclectic teaching: a) determine the purposes of each individual method; b) be flexible in the selection and application of each method; c) make each method effective; d) consider the appropriateness of each method; e)

maintain the continuity of the whole teaching process. They divide the operation into three stages: teacher-centred in the input stage; learner-centred in the practice stage; and learner-centred at the stage of production. While these opinions are based on their personal experiences, they tend to reflect the present thinking of teachers and their confusion over ELT theories and practice.

It is suggested that the prerequisite for adequate perception of language learning and teaching is to understand theories holistically with no 'black and white' prescription as to teaching approaches. Nunan states that 'it has been realised that there never was and probably never will be a method for all' (1991, p.228). From the standpoint of critical pedagogy (Pennycook 1989; Kumaravadivelu 1994), rather than representing the results of steady, linear progress, Pennycook believes that current language pedagogy is merely 'different configurations of the same basic options' (1989, p.608). These options, however, are coloured by dynamic social, political or philosophical factors.

Such complexity gives rise to the question of how teachers are to evaluate the efficacy of the different theories. To address this, Brown (2002) proposes 'principled eclecticism' where teachers select what works within their own dynamic contexts. Principled eclecticism helps language teachers participate in a teaching process of 'diagnosis, treatment, and assessment' (Brown 2002, p.13). It requires that teachers diagnose proper curricular treatment for learners' needs in their specific context, make effective pedagogical designs for appropriate objectives, and assess accomplishment of curricular objectives (Brown 2002).

Principled eclecticism challenges teachers in terms of sufficient and appropriate training background in teaching methodology and the ability to make decisions in selection of suitable pedagogical processes. This means that any decision-making must be based on a thorough and holistic understanding of all learning theories and relative pedagogies in terms of the purposes and contexts of language learning, needs of language learners, how language is learned, and how and what teaching is all about (Brown 2002; Harmer 2003).

Tertiary English teachers in TET in China, however, are led towards Eclecticism rather than Principled Eclecticism by such policy documents as CECR. This is due to several

factors. First, the definition of teaching *approach* (or teaching methodology) is implicit in the policy. CECR (2004) suggests that a ‘teaching model’:

*should be built on modern information technology, particularly network technology, so that English language teaching will be free from the constraints of time or place and geared towards students’ individualized and autonomous learning. The new model should combine the principles of practicality, knowledge and interest, mobilize the initiative of both teachers and students, and attach particular importance to the central role of students in the teaching and learning process. This model should technically attain a high level of interactivity, feasibility and operability. In addition, it should take into full account and incorporate into it the strengths of the current model while fully employing modern information technology* (2004, p.23).

This model is technology-oriented with the intention to achieve students’ autonomous learning. While the model makes heavy demands in its implementation, it does not provide guidance on what it exactly means in terms of language learning and its related pedagogy, nor interprets how to achieve students’ autonomous learning. In addition, the policy also does not define what ‘the current model’ is. As a result of the lack of clarity in such documents, tertiary English teachers’ understanding of teaching methodology is unclear (Luo 1999).

Second, without a firm grasp of learning theory, tertiary English teachers are prone to take up the most recent teaching ‘fad’, typified by Ma’s (1998) enthusiasm for techniques in grammar teaching such as ‘chain story’, ‘the hot seat’, or ‘information transfer’ (pp.44-46). Such approaches include ‘the theme teaching model’ (Ying et al 1998), ‘the inquiring teaching model’ (Liang et al 2004), and ‘the holistic, vertical teaching model’ (Huo 2003). Ying et al (1998) propose a particular method based on the rather unsurprising findings that teaching reading, writing, listening and speaking based on the same topic enlarges students’ vocabulary and helps learners easily master language points.

Third, the present TET focuses on introducing overseas teaching methods (Xie 2001; Jia 2004; Li 2004; Yi et al 2004). Jia (2004) believes that the purpose for doing so is that

‘as language teachers, we need to learn something about language teaching, especially to read some books on language teaching approaches and methods by world famous applied linguists so as to guide our teaching’ (2004, p.74). Yi et al (2004) introduces the genre approach developed in Australia, ‘focusing on its assumptions about language teaching and learning, the teaching and learning cycle, and issues in application’ (2004, p.33). Such an approach can lead to uncritical adoption of whatever is being promoted at the time by international ‘experts’ rather than basing decisions on a secondly-learned theoretical position in relation to the Chinese context.

Finally, in order to understand why TET methodology in China tends towards Eclecticism we need to recognise that teachers are short of sufficient training in teaching methodology (Anderson 1993; Li 1997; Zhou 2005). Zhou believes that ‘the variety of what teachers think needs special conditions which can help change them into how they behave in their classroom’ (2005, p.209).

From the above we can see that there have been significant changes in pedagogy in tertiary ELT in China, resulting in considerable demands being placed on tertiary English teachers. Changes in policy in particular have placed an emphasis on the use of ICT and on an eclectic approach to methodology. Teachers’ reactions to these changes will be presented in Chapter 6.

#### **2.3.4 The need for further research**

Through a review of 255 articles on English language teaching in China, Yang (2003) attempted to identify effective teaching strategies and criteria for evaluation of teaching that would be effective in Chinese classrooms and developed *The Index of Foreign Language Research and Studies* in 1999 at university level in China into ten categories shown in Table 2.2.

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Table 2.3 shows that, first, ‘40.7% of the articles are on general thinking on foreign language teaching and reform. Their content deals more with personal experience and views instead of data research’ (2003, p.59). In addition, it shows that 34.5% of articles focus on the introduction and application of Western theories, especially on second language acquisition, teaching methods, and crosscultural communication. Moreover, the table reveals that only nine articles connect with teaching research, and most of these studies seem to be interested in teaching management and comparison between teaching research in the West and China. Finally, it shows that among 255 articles, just five articles focus on teachers, and what they reported on was mainly the role of teachers rather than the responses of teachers towards the changing field around them.

There are a number of other more recent studies in the field of pedagogy of ELT in China (Teng et al 2004; Zhang 2004; Dai et al 2005; Liu 2005; Yang et al 2005, and Wu 2007). These tend to deal with claims about the Chinese context or what should be done rather than reporting on what is actually happening. There is virtually no research presenting the voice of teachers in their classroom and their views on the changes, in particular, in CECR 2004, which is the focus of this study.

### **2.3.5 Summary of section 2.3**

This section reviewed the changes in English language pedagogy in ELT in China (and more specifically in CECR 2004) and how these changes are understood in the field of tertiary English teaching.

Based on the review above, the research suggests that:

- a) most teachers currently adopt an eclectic approach to pedagogy;
- b) the original pedagogical orientations in Chinese traditional education still impact on contemporary English language teaching;
- c) grammar-translation is still very much in evidence in tertiary English classrooms;
- d) behaviourist pedagogies persist as they are seen to be in harmony with the traditional Chinese view of the nature of learning and the role of the teacher;
- e) communicative pedagogies have not been wholeheartedly adopted and are viewed with some suspicion, but have had an influence on CECR 2004.

Despite a number of studies into language pedagogy in China, there is little empirical research into the perceptions and responses of teachers regarding teaching methods and practices. This gap will be addressed in Chapter 6.

## **2.4 Changes in assessment**

Bernstein's third message system deals with assessment. This section provides a brief overview of adult language assessment in China with a focus on the dominant CET-4/6 examination. This is followed by a review of the changes in language assessment in CECR 2004, and the research into these changes in the context of tertiary English teaching.

### **2.4.1 Overview of English language assessment at university level in China**

The history of language assessment in China began relatively recently. In 1985, the Public English Test System (PETS – a standardized English proficiency exam for professionals for academic learning overseas) appeared. This provided assessment and certification of the communicative English language skills of the general public at a variety of levels of competence in cooperation with the English Council of Cambridge University (Liang et al 1999). In 1987, the Business English Certificate (BEC) by the National Educational Examinations Authority of China was developed to test the general proficiency of test-takers for business English, in co-operation with the English Council of Cambridge University ([www.moe.edu.cn](http://www.moe.edu.cn)).

Also in 1987, the College English Test (CET) was developed and administered by the National College English Testing Committee to measure the general English proficiency of Chinese college students on behalf of the Higher Education Department in the Ministry of Education of the PRC. Since 1987, the CET has become the most powerful assessment instrument in the country, with the number of examinees increasing dramatically each year. By 2003 more than nine million college students in China were taking the written test (Jin & Yang 2006).

The CET Spoken English Test (SET) was developed during the 1990's. The CET-SET is held twice a year in May and November. Students who wish to sit for this test should have already passed either the CET-4 with a score of 80 or above or the CET-6 with a score of 75 or above.

The CET consists of written tests at two levels: Band 4 (CET-4) and Band 6 (CET-6), which are graded on a 100-point scale. The CET-4/6 is administered twice a year on the same days: the first Saturday in January and the third Saturday in June. Reports of scores are provided by the CET Committee to test-takers as well as to colleges and universities. In addition, Certificates from the Higher Education Department are issued to students who qualify. Results are also reported to the education departments of each province or city. 'The CET-4/6 Certificates have two categories: *pass*, awarded to those who achieve a score between 60 and 85, and *distinction*, awarded to students who achieve a score of 85 or above. The CET-SET is available in 28 provinces and cities and by 2004, 163,521 students had sat for the test' (Jin & Yang 2006).

### **Components of the CET**

Jin and Yang (2006) note that the CET is a component test that is composed of several sections assessing the four language skills of reading comprehension, listening comprehension, speaking and writing. Based on Jin and Yang (2006), the four components are tested as follows (see Table 2.3).

**Table 2.3 The four components tested in CET-4/6 (based on Jin and Yang, 2006)**

	<b>Reading</b>	<b>Listening</b>	<b>CET-SET (speaking)</b>	<b>Writing</b>
<b>Content</b>	4 passages; 1500 words	10 short dialogues & 3 passages; 300-350 words; 130-150 wpm (CET-4)	Accuracy, range, size & discourse management, flexibility & appropriateness	A para. or a composition on the basis of a topic sentence/some assigned key words/diagram, etc.
	20 MCQs	20 MCQs	Given verbal cards/non-verbal pictures, photos, etc.	An essay of no fewer than 120 words for CET-4
<b>Purpose</b>	To test recognition of main ideas & supporting details	To measure students' ability to understand and interpret spoken English	To test Ss' oral proficiency by a face-to-face interview with tester & argue with 2-3 other Ss on given topic	A composition relevant in content, well-organized, coherent, written in standard E
	35m	20m	20-30m	30m
<b>Other</b>	Possibly another passage with 5-8 SAQs. The flesh Readability Index is used for texts, believed difficult than articles in Reader's Digest as criteria of readability.	Since 1997, compound dictation is used to require candidates to listen to a passage and supply the missing words and sentences based on their understanding	The examiners are trained by the CET Committee. The interview and discussion are videotaped and transferred to CD-ROMs for archiving	

In terms of reading comprehension, Jin and Yang (2006) note that in the past 15 year, the average score of the CET reading component has steadily improved, but they do not indicate if the cause of this improvement was the result of improved teaching or the effects of 'cram schools' that specialize in preparing students for this type of exam. Similar to the reading comprehension component, Jin and Yang (2006) note that during the past 15 years Chinese university students have steadily improved their CET listening comprehension scores, but admit that there is still a need for improvement of students' listening abilities. With regard to speaking, Jin and Yang (2006) argue that CET-SET has had a positive backwash effect on English language teaching, but they do not provide evidence to support this conclusion. Although composition competence is an important factor in university education, the CET writing component accounts for only a total of 15 points out of a total of 100. As with other components of CET, Jin and Yang (2006) note that writing scores have improved in the last several years, but they also admit that much greater improvement is still needed.

Since 1987, more than 7.47 million students have qualified in the CET-4, and more than 2.36 million students have qualified in the CET-6. However, as Jin and Yang observe, because China is a large country with different regions at various stages of

economic development, there is an imbalance in the quality of education across the country (2006). Therefore a major concern for China is addressing the discrepancies in the CET results. Another major concern that needs to be researched is the backwash effect of the CET on teaching; in particular, the responses of teachers to assessment in their classroom teaching, as one of the considerations of this thesis.

### **Validation of the CET**

Validation for the CET was conducted through *The CET Validation Study*, a three-year Sino-UK (Yang et al, 1998). The group concludes:

- strict quality control measures in the test design had been taken for item-setting, pre-testing, item analysis and item banking to achieve a high standard of educational assessment;
  - a series of computer procedures for machine reading, IRT equating, writing score adjustment, and score normalisation were developed to ensure the objectivity of scoring and the consistency of score interpretation;
  - detailed and clear administrative procedures had been established to ensure the rigour and fairness of the test.
- (Yang et al 1998, pp.12-54)

Jin and Yang (2006), representing the National College English Testing Committee of China (NCETC), contend that the CET has been successful in implementing the NCETC standards and has encouraged improvement of English language teaching and learning in colleges and universities in China. The findings of this thesis present a different view of this assertion based on the perceptions of English language teachers, administrators, and policy-makers.

### **Research on CET before establishment of CECR 2004**

Some contend that CET-4/6 is the most effective assessment in TET, and that it has improved tertiary English teaching (Yang 2000a; 2000b; 2003; Yang & Jin 2001; Jin & Yang 2006). One important research study was conducted by Yang and Weir (1998), whose findings were based on the results of an item analysis, pilot tests, survey, focus groups, and a study on the reliability of the writing component. In order to show the increasing influence of the CET-4 and its importance in students' lives, Yang and Weir (1998) provide an example to show the scale of CET-4 with different proportions in terms of universities, students, pass rates and rates of high distinction, as shown in the following table 2.4.

**Table 2.4 General case for CET-4 from 87.9 to 95.6 (adapted from Yang & Weir 1998, p. 2)**

<b>Date</b>	<b>No. of Uni.</b>	<b>No. of Participants</b>	<b>No. of Pass</b>	<b>No. of High Distinction</b>
<b>87. 9</b>	471	102,821	53,871	3,433
<b>88. 6</b>	560	266,050	98,781	5,461
<b>89. 1</b>	484	131,397	13,197	308
<b>90. 1</b>	639	278,197	92,210	3,710
<b>90. 6</b>	641	309,870	129,734	5,340
<b>91. 1</b>	588	205,339	58,438	2,975
<b>91. 6</b>	701	300,179	91,148	2,732
<b>92. 1</b>	675	247,496	49,273	2,581
<b>92. 6</b>	770	329,679	159,919	14,898
<b>93. 1</b>	730	271,668	66,067	4,921
<b>93. 6</b>	841	372,345	145,515	14,008
<b>94. 1</b>	821	390,180	100,234	4,695
<b>94. 6</b>	935	486,258	214,937	11,074
<b>95. 1</b>	925	519,766	105,987	3,305
<b>95. 6</b>	1,058	583,135	189,988	6,955
		4,794,380	1,569,299	86,487

Table 2.4 shows the steady increases in the number of participating universities and the numbers of participating students (What it does not explain however is the wild fluctuations in the results from year to year, calling into question the reliability of the test procedures).

This report (Yang & Weir 1998) evaluated CET-4 as high in both reliability and validity. (See Table 2.5)

Please see print copy for image

From these positive evaluation results, it would appear that CET-4 is an almost perfect test. There are those, however, who have questioned the validity and reliability of the test. The first scholar who seriously criticised the CET-4/6 and almost directly drove the

reform of the CET-4/6 was Professor Liu Runqing. In their study, Liu and Dai (2003) collected data from interviews and conducted a survey in forty universities all over the country among 1,200 teachers. The section on assessment in their survey sought the responses of university teachers of English to CET-4/6, such as the influence of the CET-4/6 on classroom teaching and what a national test should be. They report that 79.1% of teachers did not think that CET could improve college English teaching; 72.8% did not believe CET could help students better master language knowledge. 39.4% believed that CET was a 'baton' of college English teaching, beating the time and calling the tune. They also report, however, that 70% of teachers disagreed with cancelling CET, that leading groups of teachers did not want to put their own time and energy into designing and grading papers for students. Teachers believed that any proficiency test they designed could not be better than CET; the objective content they designed would be too troublesome for them to grade. Liu and Dai (2003) believe that it was just such thinking of teachers that supported the existence of the CET.

Liu et al (2003) found that 48.3% of teachers believed that CET-4 interfered with their teaching. In addition, they found other impacts of CET on teachers:

The greatest contribution of CET-4/6 is to make the whole society realize the importance of tertiary English teaching and create an opportunity of ranking for the evaluation of teaching quality. Since such a test involves the achievement or the 'face' of all universities, teachers devote a great amount of energy to prepare students for the passing rate of CET-4/6. To show the attention of university authority, many of them make measures for appraisal and punishment: give heavy awards to the class, teacher, and tutor; the promotion of teachers is related to the passing rate of CET-4/6, students' certificates are related to the certificate of CET-4. Therefore, CET-4 brings pressure as well as driving force (Liu et al 2003, p.129).

Guo (2003) surveyed teachers in her university on what they did in their assessment procedures, concluding that assessment in the classroom is seen only in terms of CET-4 because teachers photocopy the format and even the content of CET-4. She finds that formative assessment, therefore, is a field unexplored (2003, p.77).

Based on a two-year longitudinal study of 1773 students, Zhao (2003b) suggests 'a new concept – College English Teaching Evaluation System' (2003b, p.85) which ideally should consist of three subsystems of evaluation: the summative tests at the end of the

first three semesters, the CET-4/6 at the end of the fourth and sixth semesters, and ‘the assessment by society’ – which means to test students’ language abilities based on social demands or criteria in using English. By analysing results of a questionnaire on the washback of end-term testing and scores on students’ examinations, Zhao argues that the end-term examination is distorted by students simply imitating the items and formats of CET-4/6, and the ‘assessment by society’ is failed at the expense of highlighting CET-4/6 and weakening the courses of ESP. To ‘reinforce the achievement test nature of the end term examination’ (2003b, p.91), Zhao recommends certain measures like enlarging the number of items in the test paper, judging students’ classroom performances and their assignments, and changing the genres of writing, which are different from CET-4/6 (pp.91-92). Zhao argues that the marks of CET-4, which are always taken as an assessment criterion of college English teaching (2003b, p.88), lead to the dominant position of CET-4 in Chinese tertiary institutions, which interferes with the normal university assessment.

While the validity and reliability of the CET discussed in the studies above are not central in this study, the research above does demonstrate the extent to which the CET continues to impact negatively on the teaching of English in Chinese tertiary institutions, hampering efforts at reform and highlighting the need for upgrading the professional knowledge and skills in the area of assessment and evaluation.

#### **2.4.2 Changes in assessment in CECR 2004**

The argument about the effectiveness of CET-4/6 led to a change of assessment requirements in the College English Curriculum Requirements 2004.

Compared to the former two national English curricula (1985/1986; 1999), CECR 2004 mandates a major change in assessment in terms of the purposes of evaluation, content and form, even though the whole content of assessment in CECR 2004 takes only one page and a half. In CECR 2004, assessment:

*... not only helps teachers obtain feedback, improve the administration of teaching, and ensure teaching quality but also provides students with an effective means to adjust their learning strategies and methods, and improve their learning efficiency (p.25).*



CECR 2004 explains that:

*Formative assessment includes students' self-assessment, peer assessment, and assessment conducted by teachers and school administrators. ... Summative assessment refers to final tests and proficiency tests (p.27).*

CECR 2004 stresses that formative assessment is to help students' autonomous learning whereas summative assessment is, as proficiency assessment, to measure students' general language abilities.

However, CECR 2004 also emphasises that the assessment of College English teaching should be used as a criterion in the evaluation of the overall teaching quality of the individual university:

*Government education administrative offices at different levels and colleges and university should regard the evaluation of College English teaching as an important part of the evaluation of the overall teaching quality of each school (p.27).*

At the beginning of 2005, with the reforms introduced by CECR (2004) and the increasingly strong appeal to reform CET-4/6, the Ministry of Education hosted a formal press conference and published the *Reform Plan on the National College English Test Band Four/Six* (ME 2005, p.5). According to the plan, the new, reformed sample of the CET-4 will be published by Shanghai Foreign Languages Education Press at the end of October in 2005. It was later announced to be introduced in August 2006 with a trial in 180 universities. The new sample of CET-4 was supposed to be administered all over the country in January 2007. The Vice Minister of Education, Wu Qidi introduced the reform plan with its three aspects:

- To focus on testing students' comprehensive language abilities, in particular, the abilities of listening and speaking
- To change scoring and the way of reporting scores since June 2005: the new full scores are 710, no pass requirement; the certificate of the test is changed into the score-informing paper. The informing information includes the overall mark and specifics for each item with interpretation from the Committee of CET-4/6.
- To improve CET management system (2005, p.5)

It would appear that the reforms are more related to the administration of the test rather than its content.

### 2.4.3 Research on assessment after CECR 2004

It has to be emphasised that there is limited research on assessment in tertiary English teaching. In the process of data collection, articles in four main Chinese journals were reviewed: *Foreign Language Journal* (in Harbin), *Foreign Language Teaching and Research* (in Beijing), *Foreign Language World* (in Shanghai), and *Modern Foreign Languages* (in Guangzhou)<sup>4</sup>. These journals, in particular from January 2005 to November 2006, were reviewed for relevant articles on assessment.

Among 218 articles in *Foreign Language Journals*, there was one article on assessment which addressed a general topic: *the possibilities and the present study of second language acquisition and language assessment*. Among 146 articles in *Foreign Language Teaching and Studies*, there were no articles dealing with assessment. Among 110 articles in *Modern English*, there were three articles on assessment. In *English Language Worlds*, out of 129 articles, there were twenty-two on assessment.

Among 603 articles, therefore, in the four key journals between January 2005 and November 2006, only twenty-six articles, which represents 4.2% of the total number, dealt with assessment. These twenty-six articles are categorized based on their content in Table 2.6.

**Table 2.6 The percentage of the content in assessment in twenty-six article in four journals**

Category	Topics	Number	Percent
Language content assessment	The possibilities and the present study of second language acquisition and language assessment.	1	3.8%
Theory study, such as validity	The validity study of spoken test in College English Test; the reliability of the measurement of Rasch in assessing writing online; overview of validity study in fifty years.	4	15%
Classroom assessment	To develop materials for self-learning to improve ability for self-learning; the role of reading aloud in assessment; a trial on listening and speaking test on computer; the effect of assessment procedures to the scores of listening.	6	23%
Introduction, news & review on CET-4/6	Introduction to the web of the Committee for CET-4/6; the issuance of CET-SET system in Foreign Language Education Press; comment on the system of CET-SET.	11	42%
Means of assessment	The analysis & thinking of translation as the means of assessment.	1	3.8%
Study on CET & SET	The validity, reliability and practicality of CET-SET on computer.	1	3.8%
Other language	CEMT-4/8 for Japanese test.	1	3.8%
Washback	The washback of assessment and language assessment design.	1	3.8%

<sup>4</sup> Sometimes, *Foreign Languages* is also considered as a main journal that focuses on linguistics.

Table 2.6 shows eight categories of topics in the twenty-six articles dealing with assessment. Eleven articles focused on upgrades in the CET, news, and review of CET-4/6. Six articles were on classroom assessment and four dealt with theory studies. In short, at least half of the articles dealt with descriptions, summaries, reviews and reports rather than on empirical studies.

In addition, in the *Index of Foreign Language Research and Studies in 1999* (Yang 2003), no articles on assessment were mentioned. From this, it can be concluded that assessment in English language teaching has not been adequately researched in China and hard information on assessment is therefore very limited.

However, there are some studies done by Chinese researchers in China and overseas, which combine assessment with classroom teaching. One study by Feng (2004) explores the optimal syllabus, methodology, and assessment method concerning oral English teaching in light of contemporary second/ foreign language learning theories. The research work was carried out in two classes totalling 71 non-English major sophomores. The hypothesis of the benefits of a three-staged task-oriented syllabus was tested and a variety of methods were designed accordingly to be tried out in the class. The scoring result of the terminal test, which is a combination of the students' self-rating and the teacher's evaluation, shows that through one semester, the majority of students considerably improved their speaking ability independent of where the individual was in the linguistic competence hierarchy. In short, by firmly putting the students at the centre of language teaching, more effective syllabuses, methodologies, and ways of assessment regarding oral EFL classes for non-English majors could be implemented, in line with the recent CECR 2004 provided by the Ministry of Education.

Tang and Peng (2004), using questionnaires and interviews, investigated the washback of the CET-4/6 Spoken Test and found that it positively impacted upon students only in their attitude to testing whereas it negatively impacted on students in learning content and methods (2004, p.28). This study indicates that the CET Spoken Test attracts students' positive attention to oral English practice in order to pass the test on the one hand, but does not help students' content and skills on the other. This study also shows

that teachers are beginning to think about the relationship between CET-4 and their classroom teaching.

After applying statistical analysis, Wang and Yang (2004) conclude that there are some factors which contribute to the results of Unsuccessful College English Learners (UCEL). These are those ‘undergraduate students who score less than 49.5 points in their fourth semester’s CET-4’ (2004, p.55). They suggest that one factor leading to this characterization is that ‘college English teaching and learning are all revolving around CET-4’ (2004, p.57). Another factor is that ‘all the university students of the country, whether in key or in average universities, use completely the same syllabus, the textbooks at the same level, have the same learning targets, and after two years’ study, they must meet the same requirements by passing CET-4, which is another important reason for UCEL’ (2004, p.57). Wang and Yang (2004) put forward some proposals to improve UCEL students’ English learning conditions and help them to overcome difficulties. They suggest that ‘CET-4/6 has been seriously affecting the normal order of college English teaching so much that it is a task of top priority now to separate it from the conventional college English teaching and learning’.

#### **2.4.4 Summary of section 2.4**

This section described what assessment at university level looked like before CECR 2004, the change of assessment in CECR 2004, and how these changes have impacted teachers and their classroom teaching. Among other outcomes, it was found that:

- a) before CECR 2004 there was already a shift from the focus on College English Test to the consideration of the role of assessment in classroom teaching; however, formative assessment is still a field relatively unexplored;
- b) CET is dominant in Chinese tertiary institutions, which interferes with normal university assessment and teaching;
- c) teachers are not confident in their own design of test papers.

After the introduction of CECR 2004, there was another shift of assessment in tertiary English teaching towards a comprehensive re-thinking of assessment practices under the framework of curriculum development:

- teachers have begun to consider assessment in terms of curriculum development, such as the relationship between assessment and their classroom teaching;

- there is a strong movement to separate CET from the conventional universality English teaching and learning.

While we have research information on these shifts before and after CECR 2004, we still do not know how teachers have responded to the changes and assessment requirements of CECR 2004 in their practice, how much autonomy teachers have, and whether they are well prepared for such changes of assessment. This will be one of the focuses of this study in Chapter 7.

## **2.5 Summary of the literature review**

This chapter has reviewed the changes in curriculum development, pedagogical practices, and assessment procedures in the area of tertiary English teaching. In particular it has looked at changes in policy, through CECR 2004. It has also reviewed the limited amount of research literature which relates to these changes.

The literature tends to confirm both what is already known in tertiary English teaching before CECR 2004 and what yet needs to be investigated following the introduction of CECR 2004. In terms of what has been known, before the implementation of CECR 2004, curriculum was identified as being content-oriented with teachers taking the transmission of knowledge as their main task. Reading and writing dominated the curriculum at the expense of speaking and listening and a more balanced approach to the five skills. Pedagogy was typically content-based and constructed as ‘textbook + board + recorder’ and the teaching method was an eclectic mix of Grammar-Translation, ALM and communicative methods embedded in the traditional Chinese cultural context. In terms of assessment, CET maintained a dominant presence, skewing classroom teaching practices. Teachers lacked confidence in their ability to design and administer their own assessment procedures.

After the publication of CECR 2004, there were significant changes in curriculum content, with speaking and listening gaining prominence over reading and writing. In pedagogy, the perception that teachers are transmitters of grammatical knowledge was being challenged by a more dynamic pedagogy and teachers perceived a need to incorporate a communicative component into their traditional teaching methods. In

addition, CECR 2004 mandated the inclusion of a computer-based approach to pedagogy. In assessment, teachers strongly wanted to separate CET from normal tertiary English teaching and began to consider assessment in terms of curriculum development, as specified in CECR 2004 with its emphasis on formative and self/peer assessment.

In all three areas – curriculum, pedagogy, and assessment – what is not known is how these changes have impacted on teachers and administrators and what their response has been to these changes. Moreover, there is virtually no research into teachers' professional development in relation to the changing context and policy. It is the aim of this thesis to address these gaps in our knowledge.

## CHAPTER THREE:

### THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

#### 3.1 Introduction

The research questions for this study address three general areas:

- a. What changes have occurred in the Chinese context over the past 20 years that have affected the role of the tertiary teachers of English?
- b. What sort of expectations are placed on English language teachers at universities as a result of these changes?
- c. How have English language teachers and administrators perceived and responded to these changes?

To address these questions requires: (a) a means of conceptualising tertiary English teaching in the Chinese context as an object of study; and (b) a means of conceptualising the practices and perceptions of tertiary English teachers in China in such a way that reveals whether their practices and perceptions have changed or not over time.

To provide these means I first draw on Pierre Bourdieu's 'field' theory (1977; 1984) to construct tertiary English teaching as an object of study. Secondly, I adopt the 'three message systems' of Basil Bernstein (1990; 2000) to identify key issues in tertiary English teaching. Bernstein's three 'message systems' are used to organise the thesis into analyses of *curriculum* (chapter 5 on what to teach), *pedagogy* (chapter 6 on how to teach), and *evaluation* (chapter 7 on assessment). Finally, I draw on Maton's thinking (2004a; 2005), which integrates Bourdieu's 'field' theory with Bernstein's 'code' theory to provide a means of conceptualizing the practices and perceptions of university teachers of English in such a manner as to identify change. Specifically Maton's concepts of 'temporality', 'autonomy' and 'specialisation' are used to structure analyses *within* chapters, in order to capture different dimensions of Chinese university English teachers' practices and perceptions.

### 3.2 Conceptualising tertiary English teaching as a field

Curiously, tertiary English language teaching in China is a field that is widely discussed but rarely analysed. This is reflected in the index of the articles in the five journals from 1990 to 2005 in the field of English teaching in China (see Chapter 2). In addition, the topics discussed in these articles are either from the points of view of policy formation or from the perspective of classroom teaching. It can be argued that existing approaches tend to obscure tertiary English teaching as a whole object of study. To highlight this missing dimension one can fruitfully draw upon the sociological approach of Pierre Bourdieu.

Bourdieu (1993) argues that many studies of education and culture more generally tend towards either ‘internalism’ or ‘externalism’. For Bourdieu, studies exhibit ‘internalism’ when they focus exclusively on constituent parts of the field (such as specific institutions, actors, discourses or practices) abstracted from their wider determinations. Such approaches thereby tend to neglect the broader historical and sociological context. For example, many phenomenological studies consider teachers’ and students’ interactions in the classroom as if they were separate from wider issues. Examples in tertiary English teaching in China include studies that focus on individual suggestions concerning teaching methods in the classroom. For instance, Huo (2003) attempts to build a college English teaching model based on what he himself does in his classroom. Similarly, Liang et al (2004) analyse their own teaching model in their classroom at university level. On a broader level, Dai et al (2004) discuss the basis of modern learning theories of foreign languages for developing a classroom language learning model. Internalist approaches highlight the significance of understanding practices *within* higher education. However, such studies as those above view only one side of tertiary English teaching by focusing on what happened in specific classrooms, isolated from wider and complex contexts. In this sense, internalism represents only part of the picture of tertiary English teaching.

‘Externalism’, in contrast to internalism, focuses on how education is impacted by broader influences and focuses on external relations, such as those of the state, economy or social structure (see Maton 2005). Externalism sees the changes of education as a result of changes in these wider interests, such as the effects of social issues, state



policies, or economic adjustments. Recently, with continuing analysis of external relations to objective structures, subjective issues of 'voice' have emerged as another form of externalism. An externalist approach would thereby tend to look beyond tertiary English teaching. In China, externalism is often reflected in researching peripheral relations around university English teaching in China. For instance, many studies focus on relations between, on the one hand, English language teaching in China and, on the other hand, globalisation and internationalisation. For example, Yang (2001) discusses the role of the English language in internationalising Chinese universities. Nunan (2003) presents the results of an investigation into the place of English in the curriculum mainly in China, which indicates that the emergence of English as a global language is having considerable impact on policies and practices. Some studies focus on reform and restructuring related to globalisation and marketisation by comparing higher education in China with that of other Asian countries (Bray & Qin 2001; Mok 2003).

These studies share a focus on the external relations of education. The positive aspect of externalism is that it highlights the value of viewing Chinese tertiary English teaching from a macro perspective and the significance of wider determinants on the field's development. What they highlight is important, but that is not the whole story. They tend to assume that external changes are reflected in changes within higher education in a relatively unmediated fashion. What is missing is determining how external and structural relations impact upon the internal field in language learning and teaching and how teachers respond to external influences in their classroom practice.

Both internalism and externalism highlight important issues. For example, externalist studies stress the impact of globalisation on shaping educational policy and the effects of economic changes on language teaching in higher education. Internalistic studies highlight what teachers are doing in classroom. However, for the purposes of this study both approaches are reductive. An internalist approach would reduce tertiary English teaching to its internal components and practices; an externalist approach would reduce tertiary English teaching to other issues and pressures emanating from outside tertiary English teaching (e.g. from the political or economic sphere). Each approach thereby presents only part of the whole picture. Moreover, tertiary English teaching is more than just a sum of internal and external relations, and understanding the dynamics of language teaching requires more than simply combining the two approaches.

### **Bourdieu's notion of 'field'**

Bourdieu (1984, 1993) offers a way of bringing these insights together with his notion of 'field'. Bourdieu's 'field theory' comprises a sophisticated, interlocking set of concepts (see Swartz 1997; Web et al 2002; Naidoo 2004; Maton 2005). Here I briefly focus on 'field' to highlight the key issue of how changes emanating from beyond higher education may affect actors within it.

Bourdieu views society as comprising a series of relatively autonomous social fields of practice, including higher education. Each field is a structure of relations among actors who are struggling over status and resources. Crucially, agents within a field may follow the 'rules of the game' of that field while simultaneously being influenced by fields outside it. Bourdieu highlights the critical issue of *relative autonomy* for both the field's existence and its structure. The relative nature of autonomy can be understood from the viewpoint that each field is neither wholly divorced from other fields (and, in particular, the fields of economic and political power which dominate the structure of society) nor wholly reducible to another field. Maton (2005, p.689) explains three issues relating to this issue of relative autonomy. Firstly, wider changes cannot be ignored. Secondly, how wider changes are played out within a field depends on the degree of autonomy from other fields. Thirdly, the degree of the influence from wider pressures is also determined by the field's internal structure which shapes the way these pressures are realised within the field. Thus, contrary to internalism, tertiary English teaching in China is not a separate sphere untouched by social, political and economic influences; and, contrary to externalism, it is not simply a wholly enclosed part of the political or economic worlds. One thereby cannot understand changes within TET through an exclusive focus either on policy change or classroom practices. Chinese higher education has its own relative autonomy.

Bourdieu's notion of 'field' has proven to be a useful concept in studies of education, as demonstrated in research by Bourdieu himself (Bourdieu 1988; 1996; Bourdieu et al 1994; Bourdieu & Passeron 1977; 1979). Bourdieu analyses the internal structuring of fields using a complex framework focused on the concepts of 'capital' and 'habitus'. Here, however, I shall adopt 'field' simply as a heuristic device to emphasise tertiary English teaching in China as a configuration of positions comprising university teachers

of English, the national curricula, university-based syllabi, teaching methods, universities, CET-4, and resources materials, as shown in the following figure.

**Figure 3.1 The TET field in China**

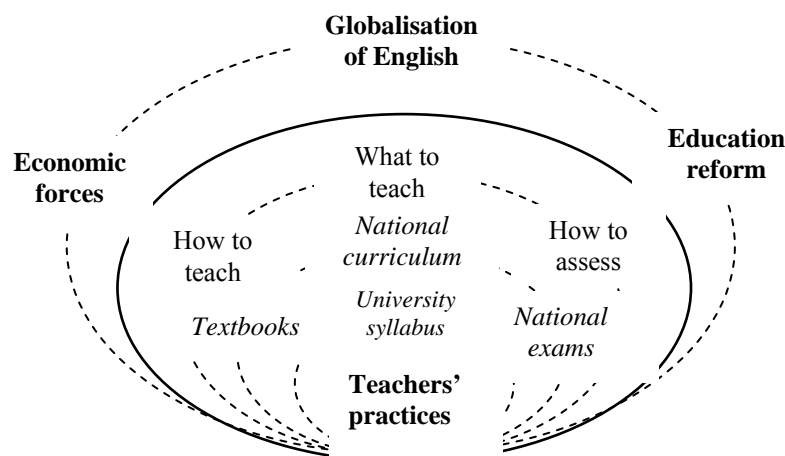


Figure 3.1 is used to show tertiary English teaching in China as a complex field. English teachers' practices, at the bottom, are impacted upon by such factors as the university syllabus and the National Curriculum (CECR 2004) in terms of 'what to teach', by factors such as mandated textbooks and technology in terms of 'how to teach' and by national and local examinations in terms of 'how to assess'. The outside dotted line symbolises factors outside tertiary English teaching, such as the globalisation of English, economic forces and educational reforms, which affect the internal field.

Autonomy in the nature and the structure of a *field* suggests that tertiary English teaching in China has its own structure and logic, which are different from the structure and logic in other fields. For instance, the national curriculum and the national examination system provide a top down policy issued by the government that establishes 'what to teach' in terms of five macroskills (listening, speaking, reading, writing and translation) and vocabulary, 'how to teach' in terms of a computer assisted teaching model, and 'how to assess' in terms of the CET-4/6. In this sense, tertiary English teaching possesses its own relative autonomy: it produces its own value and assesses its own achievement.

However, the *relative* nature of the autonomy means that these values and achievements are not alone in creating the field; wider influences such as globalisation of English,

economic forces and educational reforms also play a role. University teachers of English have their own cultural and social norms shaped by their traditional and modern culture and are thereby struggling over their monetary power, status and knowledge. Identifying the level of autonomy in tertiary English teaching in this study will focus on the resources teachers bring to their workplace within the dynamics of curriculum, pedagogy and assessment, by considering such issues as national curricula, university-based syllabi, course design, textbooks, teaching methodology, and CET-4. Since there is no complete autonomy inside the field, the *relative* nature of the autonomy impacts on teachers from the external pressures, such as the influence of economic forces.

Bourdieu offers a useful means of viewing tertiary English teaching in China that helps to construct it as an object of study. As discussed above, externalism tends to highlight tertiary English teaching primarily from a macro point of view whereas internalism tends to focus on the local and ignores wider issues. While they both highlight important factors, they need to be integrated in order to understand relative changes both inside and outside the field. The structure of tertiary English teaching is impacted upon by the fields outside of it on the one hand, and also by teachers who are positioned by such a structure on the other. This is how ‘field’ thinking is valuable in guiding this study.

### **3.3 Theorising teachers’ practice - Bernstein’s ‘code’ theory**

Thus far a means of viewing the system of tertiary English teaching through Bourdieu’s ‘field’ has been discussed. What is now required is a means of identifying practices in tertiary English teaching and a way of analysing whether these practices have changed over time. Bourdieu’s framework does not by itself offer a sufficient means of analysing practices in tertiary English teaching. The concepts Bourdieu develops in his studies of education, such as ‘pedagogic authority’ and ‘cultural arbitrary(iness)’ (Bourdieu & Passeron 1977; 1979) cannot by themselves generate empirical descriptions of specific forms of educational institutions, curricula or teaching practices in a way that allows us to see whether and how they change over time (Maton 1999). Moreover, as has been argued by various commentators, Bourdieu’s approach, when fully implemented, tends to treat practices within a field as reflecting social relations of power within that field (Bernstein 1996, Maton 2000a). For the current study, what is needed is a means to

analyse the practices of tertiary English teaching and to determine whether there have been changes in this field. Specifically, this study is focused on how teachers are caught up in the changes of policy, how they perceive these changes, what problems they face because of policy, and how teachers reflect on their classroom teaching. To achieve this, I shall turn to the work of Basil Bernstein.

Bernstein identifies ‘three message systems’: curriculum, pedagogy and evaluation (2000, p.88). Curriculum defines that which is accepted as valid knowledge, pedagogy defines what is considered to be a valid transmission of knowledge, and evaluation defines the means of determining a valid realization of this knowledge on the part of the taught (Bernstein 1975; Atkinson 1985). In other words, they define what to teach, how to teach, and what and how to assess. In this study, ‘the three message systems’ are used to structure the analytic chapters. Bernstein suggests that ‘the three message systems’ of curriculum, pedagogy and assessment should be identified as key practices. However, if only the surfaces of these practices are observed and described, it is difficult to identify change, variation or similarity, or to analyse the significance of observed change. For this we can turn to Bernstein’s notions of ‘code’. As with Bourdieu’s notion of ‘field’ I shall primarily be using the idea of ‘code’ here as a heuristic device. It is also a necessary stepping stone for reaching the principal concepts used in this study, but one requiring a brief theoretical exposition.

Bernstein’s educational ‘codes’ offer a means for analysing the underlying structuring principles of educational practices. Codes comprise the concepts of classification and framing:

- strength of *classification* (C) stands for relative strength of boundaries between categories or contexts - such as academic subjects in a curriculum; and
- strength of *framing* (F) stands for the relative strength of control within these categories or contexts - relatively strong framing indicating strong control ‘from above’, such as by a teacher in a classroom (see Maton 2004a, p. 47).

Curriculum is given by ‘variations in the strength of classification’ (Bernstein 1995, p.89). It is not as simple as ‘*what* is classified’ (p.88), but ‘the *relationships* between contents’ (p.88). Pedagogy is ‘given by variations in the strength of frames’ (p.89). ‘Frame refers us to the range of options available to teacher and taught in the control of

what is transmitted and received in the context of the pedagogical relationship' (Bernstein 1975, pp.88-89). Evaluation is taken as a function of both the strength of classification and frames (Bernstein, 1975). For Bernstein, classification and framing can vary independently, giving four possible modalities or codes (+/-C, +/-F). Bernstein (1975) describes 'educational knowledge codes' as the underlying principles shaping such practices as curriculum, pedagogy and assessment; they are in turn realisations of the code.

Bernstein describes two principal codes: a collection code (stronger classification, stronger framing) and an integrated code (weaker classification, weaker framing). A collection code consists of strongly classified and bounded domains in which students do not have significant opportunities for decision-making over the selection, sequencing and pacing of transmission and acquisition (1975; 2000). The underlying rule of this code is 'things must be kept apart'. In contrast, in an integrated code the boundaries of contents are blurred and students have more opportunities in the pedagogic situation. The rule for this case is 'things must be put together'. If CECR 2004 projected itself solely as the source of the course requirements for general English teaching in China while separating itself from other subject contents, such as Information Technology, Engineering, or Social Science subjects, this would be a case of strong classification. The strong classification would show that tertiary English language teaching is a discrete subject that is not integrated with other subjects for practice in using English for Academic Purposes or English for Specific Purposes, for example, would not be areas of study in CECR 2004. In addition, if CECR 2004 required 'what to teach' specifically in terms of five macroskills and vocabulary, this would further strengthen the classification in terms of the strong control of CECR 2004 over 'what may be transmitted' in a classroom. CECR 2004 would thereby be a collection code. However, if an objective of CECR 2004 is to integrate English learning into language use with other subjects, such as English for Specific Purposes or English for Academic Purposes rather than as a basic course as English for General Purposes, and if the rule of 'things must be kept together' was also followed, CECR 2004 would be an integrated code. As such, students and teachers would be provided more power and control over what they want to learn and how to learn. In language learning and teaching theories, it would tend to be a more learner-centred curriculum.

The key value of thinking in terms of ‘code’ lies in its attempt to go beyond empirical description to get at the principles underlying practices and perceptions. This enables, firstly, an analysis of change. In the current study, for example, to determine whether CECR 2004 represents change, one needs to analyse the code represented by its policy prescriptions. Secondly, it enables comparisons among policy, perceptions and practices. If CECR 2004 does represent change, then this does not necessarily mean that the perceptions of practitioners in Chinese tertiary English teaching have changed, nor that their practices will follow suit. Thirdly, such a way of thinking can enable analyses of a variety of practices and beliefs to be brought together, including policy documents, school-based syllabi, textbooks, teaching methods, teachers’ identities, and the structure and management of the university and faculty. For example, assuming CECR 2004 was a collection code it would thereby show the strong power of the government and its strong control over the content of CECR 2004, this would indicate that teachers were obligated to follow the specific requirements of ‘what to teach’ in terms of five macroskills and vocabulary, linked with the required computer teaching model, to reach the goal of getting good scores in College English Test –Band Four/Six. If this scenario were true, teachers might not take the university-based syllabus seriously nor consider it particularly important as a guide to classroom teaching because they would be aware of the power and control of CECR 2004. Moreover, if the university syllabi did not explicitly incorporate the requirements of CECR 2004, and there was no contribution by teachers to a university syllabus, tertiary English teaching would be a reflection of teachers’ individual perceptions and understanding of CECR 2004 rather than a full and multidimensional collaborative interpretation. One key issue would be that teachers’ understanding of CECR 2004 would greatly depend on their specialised knowledge, which would lead to other issues.

### **Autonomy, Specialisation, and Temporality**

Both Bourdieu and Bernstein offer ‘thinking tools’. Bourdieu’s concept of ‘field’ helps construct tertiary English teaching as an object of study, highlighting the necessity of studying both changes in the wider contexts and also practices and perceptions within the field. However, his approach tends to neglect the nature of practices within this field. Bernstein’s ‘three message systems’ highlight key areas of practices and perceptions for analysis. His notion of ‘code’ offers a way of thinking about the principles that underlie

practice, enabling us to go beyond description, be able to compare policy, perceptions and practices, and to analyse change over time. However, ‘code’ can be applied to many things. A key question remains: how do we bring together the insights of these two ways of thinking? One useful approach is that offered by Maton (2004a) who outlines a sophisticated conceptual framework that builds on, integrates and develops the insights of Bourdieu and Bernstein within a major study of higher education.

Maton (2004a) highlights four principles that together comprise the ‘legitimation device’: *Autonomy, Specialisation, Temporality and Density*. The present study draws on the first three of these four principles, employing them as useful heuristic bases for structuring the analysis for this study: stronger/ weaker autonomy, knowledge/ knower specialisation and retrospective / prospective temporality. The fourth principle, density, was not considered (in consultation with Maton) to be relevant to this study and has been omitted.

Within the framework as a whole, these three principles proved most valuable in the course of analysis and within the limitations of this thesis given my focus on understanding changes in Chinese tertiary English teaching. They provide a simple way of tracing change over time. Using these concepts we can ‘code’ Chinese higher education in terms of its past policies and practices, contemporary policy changes and the attitudes, and the beliefs and practices of English teachers to see whether they have changed over time. For example, have Chinese policy changes weakened or strengthened the autonomy of teachers? Have they redefined the basis of their identity from knowledge to knower? If changes in Chinese policy are forward looking (prospective), is this mirrored in the attitudes and practices of teachers or do they remain retrospective? Is there a fundamental mismatch between policy and practice?

I shall briefly outline the key issue each concept identifies, highlight how these build on the insights of Bourdieu and Bernstein, then illustrate the kinds of issues they bring to light for the current study.

### **Stronger / weaker autonomy**

The concept of *autonomy* addresses relations between agents within higher education and other arenas of social practice (Maton 2004a). As discussed further above, Bourdieu (1984; 1993) highlights relative autonomy as central to the way a field like higher



education is structured and as the key to understanding how external pressures might affect practices within it. Simply put, Maton (2004a) applies Bernstein's notions of classification and framing to this issue of external relations to describe various forms of autonomy. Here I shall highlight two simple modalities: stronger autonomy and weaker autonomy. Changes in autonomy which originate from a new policy (such as CECR 2004) would have a profound effect on the context of tertiary English teaching in China because it would control the nature of change, teachers' perceptions of the change, and the actual practice of teaching in English language classrooms. CECR 2004 would confer stronger autonomy if the policy required a focus on English language usage by establishing English for Specific Purposes and for Academic Purposes rather than English teaching for General Purposes. It would also be stronger autonomy if it fully interpreted how to achieve the requirements of the five macroskills and vocabulary with sufficient theoretical underpinning rather than simply overemphasising a large amount of vocabulary and if it required both formative and summative assessment rather than emphasising the importance of CET-4/6 results. Increased autonomy in the policy would provide teachers more opportunities and space for decision-making in their classroom teaching.

However, if autonomy in tertiary English teaching in China were stronger, this would lead to some other issues of power and authority. For instance, consider if CECR 2004 decentralised the authority to design individual university syllabi and the test papers for summative assessment. While this would ostensibly allocate power to teachers, in actuality they might not have sufficient specialised knowledge and experience to assume the power. A primary question addressed in this study is the degree to which autonomy is granted by government to tertiary English teaching in China and how the perception of autonomy or lack of autonomy impacts upon teachers' thinking and classroom teaching.

Autonomy in the context of tertiary English teaching in China would be weakened if CECR 2004 emphasised that CET-4/6 results were an important part of university evaluation. This would result in less autonomy and would be likely to result in pressure to teach toward the CET-4/6 because all universities would have to compete to obtain financial support and recognition. In such a scenario, universities would believe they have no alternative but to participate in CET-4/6. When universities and teachers are not

provided with sufficient autonomy in teaching practices, they must follow the letter of the policy. Inadequate autonomy would shape and restrict teachers' thinking and classroom teaching.

### **Knowledge / knower specialisation**

A second key concept I shall draw upon is that of 'specialisation'. This concerns the basis of claims to insight and legitimacy within the field (Maton 2004a, p.89). Bourdieu (1993) highlights how educational fields structure education practices by emphasising that each field comprises a 'field of positions' (such as an institutional map) and a 'field of stances' (such as a disciplinary map). Bernstein (2000) highlights the structuring significance of educational practices for fields by emphasising the underlying principles generating knowledge structures. Maton (2004a) integrates these ideas to establish the ways in which agents and discourses within a field not only are positioned in a structure of *knowers* (or field of positions) but also in a structure of *knowledges* (or field of position-takings). Maton suggests that each of these can be more or less emphasised in practice as the basis of what makes someone or something special or worthy of status.

Most important is that Maton (2004a, p.90) points out four modalities for specialisation, among which is a *knowledge* code emphasising mastery of specialised procedures, techniques or skills and a *knower* code that emphasises the dispositions of the subject, whether portrayed as 'natural' abilities, cultivated sensibilities or resulting from the subject's social position. Specialisation focuses on the issue of the knowledge or the knower. The key issue, for Maton (2004a), is whether agents emphasise knowledge and skills, or emphasise the way of thinking and knowing which deals with attitudes and aptitudes. This is important because, for example, if curriculum changed things from very detailed procedures to very loose procedures with the purpose of affecting attitudes, it would greatly impact upon the way that teachers see themselves and the way that they see their practices. Therefore, the move from the knowledge code to knower code is an important way for teachers to think about the elements in the field of tertiary English teaching which closely relate to the teachers themselves.

In the context of tertiary English teaching in China, for instance, if CECR 2004 emphasises teaching English for General Purposes by focusing more on vocabulary, structures, and language skills, this would guide teachers' content teaching rather than

provide more autonomy to teachers for fostering students' language abilities for language use in their classroom. If there were no shift on 'what to teach' from the specific knowledge requirements to loose targets for students' practical needs, content knowledge would be the teachers' focus rather than the performance of the learners themselves. In this sense, any proposal of 'learner-centred' teaching in CECR 2004 would merely be rhetorical.

In terms of teachers' professional development, if teachers did not have the attitudes and aptitude for teaching – the way of knowing as knower to be a teacher, which is the way they think about themselves and what they are doing – it would be difficult for them to understand the requirements of the curricula, and the procedures in 'what to teach', 'how to teach' and 'how to assess'. The question considered in this study is straightforward. If there were not adequate guidance provided by CECR 2004, university-based syllabi and textbooks on 'the three message systems' in practice, and if there were insufficient autonomy so that teachers merely had to follow what was required in the policy, then, what would tertiary English teaching look like?

### **Retrospective / prospective temporality**

The final concept I shall draw upon is 'temporality'. Temporality deals with the issue of time and change, or more precisely orientation to change (Maton 2004a, p.92). Bourdieu (1988) emphasises agents' trajectories within a field as central to its structure. Bernstein (2000) suggests we can talk of *prospective* and *retrospective* identities when mapping contemporary educational identities by highlighting issues of change and exploring the temporal orientations of knowledge structures<sup>5</sup>. Maton (2004a) draws on these concepts to talk of codes of *temporality* and describes two principal modalities: prospective and retrospective. *Retrospective* temporality refers to established positions in a field whose characterising attributes are based on inheritance from the past. *Prospective* temporality identifies the attributes that are oriented towards newer forms. In a major study of post-war English higher education, Maton (2004a) finds that prospective and retrospective temporalities are the main traditional modalities shaping the field and its change over time.

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<sup>5</sup> Bernstein (2000, p.65) describes various temporal educational identities, which remains at the level of a mapping of possible positions; it is an 'embryonic outline'.

In the context of tertiary English teaching in China, the change of textbooks could possibly be either retrospective, that is, derived from the traditional format and following the principles of structuralism, or prospective, that is, guided by new trends in language learning and teaching and orientating towards the new formats. The differentiation between them would be critical because it would determine ‘what to teach’ and even ‘how to teach’ in classroom teaching. In addition, the level of difficulty of the textbooks, the goals they are establishing, and how much they have been changed would determine teachers’ perceptions and students’ language learning.

In terms of teachers’ professional development, if teachers were retrospective in terms of temporality, they would be resistant to change. This would affect the way they respond to any change in the curriculum and would likely result in little change in classroom instruction. Contrarily, if teachers were prospective, they would welcome changes and would implement change in their classroom.

### **Three key heuristic concepts**

These three concepts, here presented in a simplified form, offer a valuable heuristic means of analysing and comparing changes in policy, practices and perceptions in tertiary English teaching in China. In this study I shall employ these ideas to discuss the issues in terms of whether curriculum, pedagogy and assessment exhibit stronger / weaker autonomy, knowledge / knower specialisation, and retrospective / prospective temporality. The analytical value of the concepts is fourfold. Firstly, they share with Bourdieu’s ‘field’ a focus on bringing together external relations to higher education with internal practices within it. Secondly, they share with Bernstein’s notion of ‘code’ the capacity to be applied to a host of key foci, such as policy documents and interviews with practitioners. Thirdly, they can be used to ‘code’ the field of tertiary English teaching as a whole or specific institutions within the field or the practices and beliefs of specific actors. Fourthly, they enable key issues underlying what is a highly complex set of changes to be delineated and their interrelations to be teased out. For instance, has Chinese language policy at tertiary level changed? If yes, have these policy changes weakened or strengthened the autonomy of teachers? Have teachers redefined the basis of their identity from, say, knowledge to knower? If Chinese policy change is forward looking, is this mirrored in the attitudes and practices of teachers or do they remain

retrospective? Is there a fundamental mismatch between policy and practice? And what are the possible interpretations and conclusions regarding what these principles code in tertiary English teaching in China?

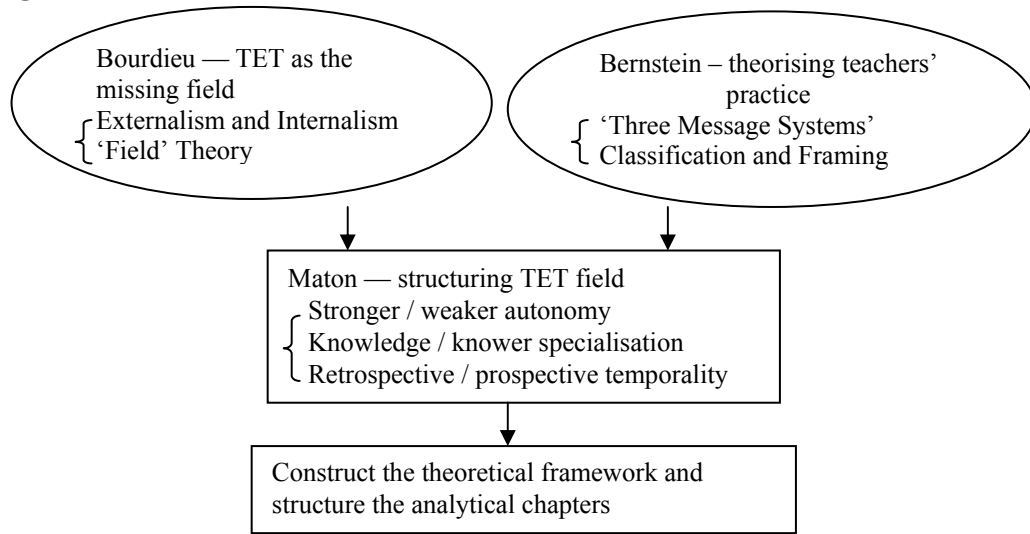
In short, these ideas enable the three principal questions of this thesis to be addressed by offering a means of analysing (and not just describing): the changes that have affected the role of tertiary teachers of English; the forms taken by the expectations of these teachers resulting from any such changes; and the forms taken by their perceptions of and responses to these changes.

### **3.4 Summary of the chapter**

This chapter has presented the steps to establish a theoretical approach to answer the research questions of this study: (1) a means of establishing a perspective on the system of tertiary English teaching and construct it as an object of study; (2) a means of identifying the practices of tertiary English teaching that demonstrates whether they have changed or not over time; and (3) a method to combine the insights of these two means together to structure the field of tertiary English teaching.

Bourdieu provides one means of seeing the system of tertiary English teaching as a 'field'. Bernstein offers another means of viewing the practices of tertiary English teaching that demonstrates whether they have changed or not over time. His views help identify key features of the practices in the tertiary English teaching field: curriculum, pedagogy, and evaluation. Bernstein's 'codes' offer a way of thinking about whether curriculum, pedagogy and assessment have changed or not and whether policy and practice are the same. Finally, viewing tertiary English teaching with 'field' theory and theorising it together with 'code' theory, Maton (2004a) integrates the insights of Bourdieu and Bernstein to talk about the field of tertiary English teaching as exhibiting stronger/ weaker autonomy, knowledge/ knower specialisation, retrospective/ prospective temporality. This theoretical approach is shown in Figure 3.2.

**Figure 3.2 The outline of the theoretical framework**



In this study, the ‘three message systems’ are used to structure the analytical chapters respectively as curriculum, pedagogy, and assessment. Autonomy, specialisation and temporality are used as underlying principles to structure and analyse each of the three message systems. They are used to answer the research questions by coding the issues in the theory and practice of the tertiary English teaching field and to interpret any possible or impossible relations, such as:

What are the changes in the field of tertiary English teaching over the past twenty years? What drives these changes? In what ways has the policy changed? What has changed and how? What does such change mean to all its relevant agents? How do university teachers of English respond to the changes in policy? How do all these relate to teachers’ professional development?

In answering these questions, the underlying principles help interpret the relations among teachers, the policy and their practice in terms of autonomy, specialisation and temporality, thereby, establishing a model of the relations between internal and external contexts, changes in policy, and the perceptions and practices of teachers in the field of tertiary English teaching in China.

## **CHAPTER FOUR:**

### **METHODOLOGY**

#### **4.1 Introduction**

This chapter deals with how the study was designed in order to address the research questions outlined in Chapter 1. It will consider the appropriateness of the research paradigm in addressing the questions. It will then discuss the kind of data required, the selection of data sources, the collection of data and the conduct of data analysis. It will also take into account relevant ethical and cultural phenomena.

#### **4.2 Qualitative inquiry**

The research aim of this study is to investigate how English teachers in university contexts in China are prepared to meet the challenges of the changing expectations of the workplace. The nature of the research questions in this study determines that qualitative inquiry would be the most appropriate methodology as the questions deal with how human beings make sense of multiple realities enmeshed in personal, historical, social and cultural contexts in China and constructed by complicated interactions between internal impacts within the field, such as syllabus documents, textbook, exams, and so on, and external impacts outside the field, such as globalisation of English, economic influences, and educational reforms.

A qualitative paradigm seeks to understand a particular social situations, event, role, group, or interaction in a broader societal context (Locke et al 1987; Punch, 1998; Cohen et al 2000; Creswell 2003; Gay et al, 2006). Such an approach is appropriate for studying the world of experience in an exploratory way (Creswell 2003; Shank 2006). In this study, the researcher wanted to understand and identify the ‘field’ in which she lives and works. For this purpose, the field theory of Bourdieu (1971b; 1984) has been used to define the field of ‘tertiary English teaching’ in China, which is different from any other fields. The reality of the social and cultural context where people are born shapes their thinking and behaviour, so the researcher is seeking an understanding of the field in which she has lived and worked as an insider participant. In this sense, the

researcher's personal experience as an insider has been a prime motivator for the study. An important research aim was to understand the complexity of views, including the different 'voices', which are seldom heard and even ignored. In order to gain an understanding of this field, it is necessary to take into account the different standpoints of policy developers, administrators and instructors, and to examine the artefacts produced in the field such as policy documents and course materials. The researcher has, therefore, located the research problem in a broad, interactive and complex context, drawing on Bourdieu's (1971b; 1984) notion of 'field' and Bernstein's 'three message systems' (1990; 2000).

Qualitative research also allows the researcher to extend scientific thinking and methods into areas where the phenomena to be studied are not easily measured (Shank 2006). In contrast to quantitative research, in qualitative research, data collection other than experimentation is established as the standard, because qualitative research deals with phenomena that 'possess certain properties, states and characters, and the similarities, differences, and causal relations that exist within and between these' (Labuschagne 2003, p.100). In contrast, studies on tertiary English teaching and teachers' professional development in China have generally used traditional inquiry methods, such as in the studies of Zhang et al (1997), Zhan (2000), Liu et al (2003), Zhou (2005). However, as Shank (2006, p.9) observes, 'we need to turn to the holistic settings in order to validate and confirm our understandings'. The qualitative approach allows the researcher to consider a variety of phenomena that focus on 'the properties, the state, and the character (i.e., the nature) of phenomena' (Labuschagne 2003, p.100). 'Qualitative' therefore emphasises a process or phenomenon that is rigorously examined, but is not measured in terms of quantity and amount.

Naturally, it is recognised that no definitive answers will arise from a qualitative study and no firm generalizations can be made to other contexts. However, the aim of this research is not to 'prove' but to illuminate our understanding.

### **4.3 Research design**

As mentioned above, the research design is contingent upon the nature of the research problem (Bouma 2000; Cohen et al 2000; Creswell 2003). In practical terms, qualitative



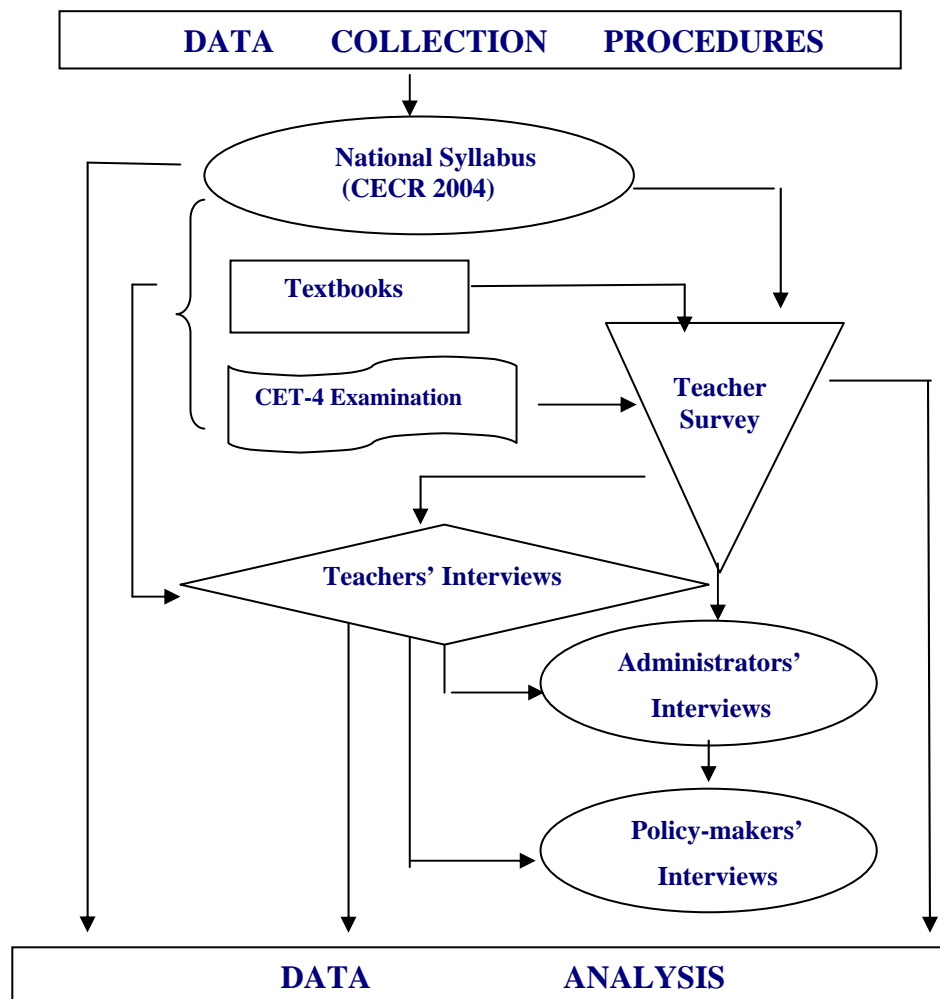
inquiry entails employing a range of different procedures and strategies in the research process which enable the probing of the multiple realities of the field. In order to come to an understanding of how English teachers in tertiary institutions in China are dealing with the changes in curriculum, pedagogy and assessment, it was necessary to obtain the views of the teachers themselves. This was done in two ways: through a **survey** in order to obtain a wide cross-section of views and information and through individual **interviews** in order to explore issues in greater depth. (Focus group interviews were considered culturally inappropriate as teachers were unlikely to reveal their true feelings in front of peers.)

It was felt that the perspectives of administrators and policy-makers were also important in gaining a well-rounded overview of the field. Thus, **interviews** were carried out with those who created policy and designed syllabus documents at both the national and university level.

The demands placed on teachers came in part from the syllabi and materials that informed their practice. A **document analysis** was therefore required in order to investigate the nature and role of the national syllabus, the university curricula, examination papers and course materials.

Triangulation has been used to interpret the relationships between data sources and the process of converging upon a particular and strong finding by using different sorts of data and data-gathering strategies (Creswell 2003; Shank 2006). It enables us to look at how teachers' perceptions and practices might be constructed from different perspectives and by using different methods. The following figure (4.1) describes the various procedures used and their relationships.

Figure 4.1 Data collection procedure



The document review gave rise to questions such as how policy was implemented and what were teachers' general perceptions and practices in response to these documents. To answer these questions, a survey was administered based on teachers' knowledge of the 2004 national curriculum, teaching methodology, language proficiency, and their professional development. The document review and the survey results also informed the questions designed for the teacher interviews, such as issues of curriculum, pedagogy and teachers' professionalism. The teacher interviews in turn provided the context for interviews of administrators and policy makers. In this sense, the document analysis, survey and interviews were used to investigate from different perspectives a variety of expectations placed on teachers. The documents and interview data with administrators and policy-makers represent the official voices. The survey and teacher interview results reflect the voices of teachers.

Table 4.1 summarises the various data sources, mode of analysis and relationship to the research questions.

**Table 4.1 Research design**

<b>Data collection Procedures</b>	<b>Participants &amp; Sources</b>	<b>Data Analysis</b>	<b>Research Questions to Answer</b>
Document Review	Policy statements; Syllabus documents; Teachers' programs; Textbooks; CET Exam; Curriculum guide lines; Researcher's log.	Identification of their role in determining curriculum, pedagogy and assessment and the degree to which they encouraged change, autonomy and specialist knowledge.	Q.1 (changes); Q.2 (expectations)
Survey	English teachers in tertiary institutions in China.	Coding according to categories determined by the survey as well as some coding of 'free' answers according to themes.	Q.2 (expectations); Q.3 (responses)
Interview	Teachers, administrators and policy-makers. Field notes.	Transcribing; Categorizing thematically according to themes arising out of the interviews as well as themes suggested by the theoretical framework. Summarizing; Interpreting	Q.1 (changes); Q.2 (expectations); Q.3 (responses)

Data collection for this study took five months from February to the end of June in 2004 (See Table 4.2).

**Table 4.2 Timetable for data collection**

<b>Data Resources</b>	<b>From</b>	<b>To</b>
Document identification and retrieval	1 <sup>st</sup> Feb.	31 <sup>st</sup> Mar.
Survey	1 <sup>st</sup> Apr.	30 <sup>th</sup> Apr.
Interview	1 <sup>st</sup> May	30 Jun.

## 4.4 Defining the participants, sample and scope

In line with qualitative inquiry, purposive sampling, in which ‘the researcher samples cases or individuals that differ on some characteristic’ (Creswell, 2002, p.194), was used in this study. This section will outline which participants/data sources were selected for the study and why.

### 4.4.1 The selection of universities

Based on the report of the Ministry of Education ([www.moe.edu.cn](http://www.moe.edu.cn)), the population of this study is potentially 1,200 public universities across China. Among these universities, more than 200 universities are under the control of different ministries of the central government, which provides national funding for academic and research development for these universities. (These are called key universities in this study.) Other universities belong to the local governments and receive financial support from these governments. The number of students at these universities is 6,000,000, on average, annually. These students already have a certain level of English from their secondary studies. The number of university teachers of English at these universities in China is around 100,000 (See Table 4.3).

**Table 4.3 Categories of Universities in China**

Categories	Central Government Universities	Local Government Universities
No. of Universities	More than 200	Less than 1,000
No. of students	6,000,000	
No. of teachers	100,000	

Additionally, there are some other colleges which belong to certain national institutions such as Department of Transportation or Tax. Moreover, some private universities and colleges have been introduced recently in China. These two categories of institutions are not the focus of this study. One reason is that there is insufficient literature on their English learning and teaching in higher education. Another reason is that students are often not required to achieve high English levels.

Six universities, from Harbin, Anshan, Beijing and Suzhou, were selected for various aspects of the study. Selection was based on the provision of a relatively representative sample in terms of classification of university, size, educational features, facilities and

location (see Table 4.3). In addition, however, selection had to take into account accessibility. In China, access to information is not readily available and obtaining interviews and documents is very much a matter of personal contacts. Details of these universities are presented in Table 4.4 below.

**Table 4.4 Universities or institutions**

UNIVERSITY CATEGORIES	PLACE	UNI. FEATURES	STUDENT NUMBER	ENGLISH TEACHERS
HSTU (Local Government)	HARBIN	Science and technology	31,000	70
HLJU (Local Government)	HARBIN	Comprehensive	25,000	45
HCU (Local Government)	HARBIN	Commerce	26,000	75
BUCT (Central Government)	BEIJING	Chemical technology	26,000	50
SU (Local Government)	SUZHOU	Comprehensive	24,000	100
ANU (Local Government)	ANSHAN	Normal (Teaching)	15,000	40

The above universities provided data in terms of interviews with administrators and teachers. Three universities (HSTU, HLJU and BUCT) also provided documentary data (programs and syllabi). An additional 29 universities were involved in responses to the survey.

#### **4.4.2 The selection of teachers, administrators and policy-makers**

The key participants interviewed in this study were nineteen teachers of non-English major students in general English teaching, seven administrators and three policy developers, from Harbin, Beijing, and Shanghai. They were selected basically according to different age, gender, institution, qualifications, experience, and working status (see Table 4.5).

While a good range across these categories was achieved, participation was also dependent on willingness to be involved. Since there were no volunteers from the survey respondents, interviewees were initially identified by the Deans of the departments. After the researcher contacted them about the project, and they had agreed and signed their names on the consent form, other problems emerged. Firstly, these teachers, favoured by the Deans, were normally the heads of teaching programs or group leaders. Their ideas might not be the same as those of the classroom teachers. Secondly, their acceptance might have been out of their deference to their deans. According to my interview notes, only one of these three interviewees was very interested in my topic. Thirdly, there could have been a concern that I might report their ideas to their deans, resulting in inauthentic responses. As a result, I decided to go to the teachers' staffroom

in those universities and identify interviewees by myself. This was very challenging and difficult for a researcher because it took considerable time explaining what I wanted to do and how and why they would not be at risk. However, the results were satisfactory because nobody refused me except those teachers who had classes at fixed times or those teachers who had babies. Participants generously gave me average time of more than an hour and a half. I was thus able to gain the forthright opinions of those working ‘at the coalface’.

From the nineteen teachers interviewed (including three pilot interviews), six teachers’ interviews in Table 4.5 were selected for the final data. The selection was based on the following:

- In order to achieve the research purposes and answer the research questions within the qualitative inquiry, a variety of experiences and opinions of teachers was required in this study. This meant that variation in ages, genders, qualifications, positions and experiences amongst the participants was required. Therefore, the interviewees were selected for in-depth analysis who reflected these demographic variables. The age range of the teachers is from twenty-five to fifty-three. There were four female teachers and two male teachers, since the ratio of female to male teachers is approximately 2:1 in TET in China (Liu et al 2003). Teacher participants were selected from six different universities in Heilongjiang, Beijing area, and Shanghai from the north to the middle of China. Among them, two people were Master’s Degree holders and four had Bachelor’s Degrees, occupying different positions in their workplaces varying from assistant lecturer to associate professor. These teachers also had varying lengths of English teaching experience; the longest one almost thirty years, the shortest one only three years. Another factor is that they were all involved in general English teaching for non-English major students at their universities.
- These six interviewees provided a variety of responses to the interview questions and elaborated more openly on those questions that they felt unable to answer fully in the survey. Most importantly, they provided sufficient information around their specialised knowledge on curriculum, pedagogy, and assessment which demonstrated that tertiary English teachers did need ongoing professional training.

All these six interviews clearly demonstrated and expanded on themes that were touched upon in the other thirteen interviews.

- All these interviewees were enthusiastic and very willing to participate in the research. Many of the other interviewees were less forthcoming and provided only partial responses.

**Table 4.5 The selection of the interview participants for the study**

NAME	SEX	AGE	DEGREE	POSITION	UNI	CITY	HOW IDENTIFIED
SH	M	33	Master	Lecturer	BUCT	Beijing	Met in his office
HY	M	40	Bach.	Lecturer	HUCT	Harbin	Met in his office
G	F	25	Bach.	Assist. L.	BUCT	Beijing	Met in her office
M	F	31	Master	Lecturer	BUFTB	Beijing	Recommended
HU	F	46	Bach.	Assoc. Prof	SU	Shanghai	Met at ELT Conference
WM	F	53	Bach.	Assoc. Prof	HEU	Harbin	My colleague

Seven administrators in relevant institutions and two policy developers in the national education system, from Harbin, Beijing, and Shanghai, were introduced by my colleagues. In the section on ‘doing research in China’, the nature of ‘conducting’ and ethical considerations will be explained further.

**Table 4.6 Administrators and policy-developer participants in the study**

NAME	Sex	AGE	DEGREE	POSITION	RANK	CITY	HOW IDENTIFIED
SHI	F	37	Master	Dean at a Uni.	Assoc P.	Beijing	Introduced by Dean
Q	M	46	PhD.	President of a Uni	Prof.	Harbin	Introduced by an education officer
CH	M	53	Bach.	Director of a CET orgn. in Beijing	Prof.	Beijing	University dean
CL	M	47	PhD.	Dean at a Uni.	Prof.	Shanghai	Met at Conference
LI	M	59	Bach.	Head of Higher Education Department in a Province	Ad.	Harbin	Introduced by a Ministry of Education staff
GS	M	54	Bach.	Head of a group for policy	Prof.	Beijing	Introduced by an education officer

Of the administrators, four were included in the final data set as they represented various perspectives and different demographic variables (see Table 4.6). Three were the deans of foreign languages departments. One was the chancellor of a university. One policy-maker was a member of committee for the national curriculum (2004); another policy-developer was from the Ministry of Education. Three were from Beijing; one was from Harbin, and the other two were from Beijing. The youngest was thirty-seven and the oldest was fifty-three. The oldest was a Bachelor’s degree holder, the youngest was a

Master's degree holder and the other two were PhD holders.

All were considered experts in their fields and, unlike some of the other interviewees, provided extensive information, the longest interview lasting two hours and twenty-seven minutes and the shortest fifty-six minutes.

I was greatly encouraged by these interviewees' frank attitudes, authentic ideas, and optimism for the future of ELT in China.

#### **4.4.3 The selection of documents**

Documents help to provide information about the background of university English teaching and insights into policy formation and the expectations placed on teachers. Key documents were selected for analysis in order to complement the views of teachers, administrators and policy-makers regarding the challenges facing tertiary English teachers in China. In order to identify the demands placed on teachers in relation to curriculum, pedagogy and assessment, it was considered necessary to examine:

- official syllabus documents including the national curricula (1985/1986; 1999; 2004) and their relevant reports (ME 2002; 2005);
- university-based syllabi and course programs;
- nationally approved textbooks and teaching materials; and
- the national English examination (CET-4, 200106).

Thus the policy documents are seen in relation to their contexts of implementation (Gewirtz, Ball & Bowe, 1995) as they are recontextualized into local syllabi and curricula, textbooks and examinations. The study looked in passing at what happens in the process of recontextualization (e.g., How is policy interpreted? Who is responsible? How well are they equipped to undertake the responsibility? What constraints are present?) as well as the relationship between these various documents (e.g., How coherent is the relationship between the national syllabus, the university syllabi, mandated textbooks and materials, and the examinations?). Ultimately, the study was focused on how the teachers responded to and made sense of these curricular and pedagogical demands in their classroom practice.



## **4.5 Data collection**

Qualitative enquiry is an ongoing and iterative process which involves complex interpreting and reasoning between participants and researchers with recycling back and forth between data collection and analysis (Crabtree et al, 1999). While the process was indeed simultaneous and recursive, the various data sources will be treated separately here.

Details regarding the credibility of the translation throughout the thesis writing are outlined as follows:

- a. The survey schedule and the interview schedules for both teachers and administrators/ policy-makers were reviewed by my supervisor before they were translated into Chinese. After they were translated into Chinese, one of my colleagues, the dean of the Foreign Languages Department in HLJU, checked the translations. Prof. LRQ, the former dean at BUFL in Beijing checked all translations before the survey was conducted in April.
- b. The English translation from Chinese of the survey interpretation and interview transcripts was examined by my former co-supervisor throughout the process of data analysis. It was checked again by my principle supervisor in the process of thesis writing.
- c. Most of the document materials were written in English, in particular, CECR and course books. The translated materials involve university syllabi and course designs. They were examined by my principle supervisor face-to-face with me in the process of data analysis. The basic principle for survey interpretation, interview transcripts and the translated documents is that they were translated into simple English which attempts to honestly match the language level of English teachers and the documents that they designed.

### **4.5.1 Survey**

A semi-structured survey instrument, with Likert scale to provide a range of responses to a given question (Cohen et al 2000) was developed to collect the responses from teachers and to describe, compare, contrast, classify, analyse and interpret the perceptions of teachers in tertiary English teaching. This pilot survey was conducted to

trial the survey items for their clarity and usefulness. Around 50 surveys were distributed with envelopes by the Dean of a university in Harbin, and 46 were collected by the secretary of the faculty and were given to the researcher directly. The following issues were found by analysing the responses in the pilot survey:

- Some questions were intimidating. For instance, the fourth question was ‘How much do you know teaching methodology?’
- The first question was ambiguous as it was not clear whether it referred to the 1999 curriculum or the 2004 curriculum.
- The questions reflected more the researcher’s assumptions rather than the realities of the teachers’ situations.

The questions were redesigned for the final version of the survey (See Appendix 1: Survey). The questions arose out of the literature review, the document analysis and the researcher’s personal experience. After the Ethics Committee Approval was provided formally at the end of March, the main survey began from the 1<sup>st</sup> April to 30<sup>th</sup> April. It was conducted in 6 universities in HSTU, HLJU, HCU, BUCT, SU, and ANU. Additionally, from 23<sup>rd</sup> to 25<sup>th</sup> May 2004, I also administered the survey during the Fourth EFL International Conference in Beijing (See Table 4.7). Table 4.7 shows that 510 surveys were distributed and 293 were collected, a collection ratio of 57%.

**Table 4.7 Survey distributed and collected**

Universities	Students	Teachers No.	Survey Distributed	Survey Collected %	
<b>HSTU</b>	31,000	70	100	42	42%
<b>HLJU</b>	25,000	45	50	40	80%
<b>HCU</b>	26,000	75	80	58	73%
<b>BUCT</b>	26,000	50	50	40	80%
<b>SU</b>	24,000	100	100	41	41%
<b>ANU</b>	15,000	40	60	35	58.3%
<b>ELT. CON.</b>			70	39	56%
			510	293	57%

Before the surveys were given to the teachers in departmental meetings by the deans of the Foreign Languages Departments, the deans were asked to give a brief explanation on the research and the researcher. My email and contact numbers were provided for questions and further contact for interview volunteers. Teachers were provided with the consent forms and all relevant documents on the study. They were informed of the confidentiality and the freedom to withdraw from the research. Teachers were provided with envelopes to ensure the confidentiality of their responses. Those participants at the

EFL conference were from 29 different universities all over the country. I distributed 70 surveys to each individual sitting around me, and 39 of them were collected.

The survey enabled the collection of information from a large number of teacher participants in different places. The survey results provided a variety of responses because the survey included open-ended responses from the participants. However, there were also some issues which challenged the quality of the survey data. First, teachers might not be honest in answering the questions for a variety of possible reasons. Second, since the survey had to be administered by other people in universities in other cities, it was difficult to control the process of conducting the survey. Third, in the interests of practicality, the information was limited to 'yes/no' or short answers rather than 'why' questions.

Despite the logistical difficulties of distributing and collecting the survey, the return rate satisfied the requirements of quantitative analysis (293 surveys in this study).

Contrary to expectations, the results from the normal university (teacher training university) did not differ markedly from other institutions.

#### **4.5.2 Interviews**

The interview schedules both for teachers and administrators/policy-makers were checked by my supervisor before they were translated into Chinese. One of my colleagues, the dean of the Foreign Languages Department in HLJU, checked the translations before they were conducted in April.

In order to ensure the quality of the interview data, three pilot interviews were conducted with three teachers in April. Due to time constraints and availability of participants, I did not do pilot interviews with administrators and policy-makers. All of the pilot interviewees were my colleagues from the Foreign Languages Department at HEU. Since they were my colleagues, it was easy to contact them, receive positive support, and frank expressions of attitudes and ideas because I was not their head and I was residing in Australia. The interviews were conducted in their offices and were digitally recorded. The first one was a lecturer (29 years old), the second a professor (57 years) and the third was an Associate Professor (46 years). They were all male and were

selected according to different ages and teaching experiences.

The feedback received from the pilot interviews was as follows:

- Each individual pilot interview lasted more than 2 hours, which indicated that the interview schedule might be too long.
- Sometimes when the interviewee answered one question, he became excited and often extended answers to the other questions, which were designed to be asked later interview schedule. Or sometimes when they were very excited in expressing their ideas, it was difficult to interrupt them and ask pertinent questions.
- Some questions were repeated to probe the responses and some questions were added such as, 'By what means do English teachers evaluate their teaching?'

There was no obvious difference in the content of each individual pilot interview. One reason might be that the interview questions were not adequately designed to make participants respond clearly. Another reason might be that they came from the same university which made them have similar perceptions and insights about themselves and their environment. I reported these observations to my supervisor and made some modifications to the final interview schedule for teachers (See Appendix 2: Interview Schedule with Teachers; Appendix 3: Interview Schedule with Administrators and Policy-makers) in order to clarify the meaning in the Chinese context. In terms of practical operation, I became very sensitive to the subtle relationship between length of interview time and the amount of information to be gained from interviewees.

The revised interview consisted of a semi-structured schedule with opportunities for probing where necessary and for free response where the interviewees indicated the desire to go beyond the schedule. The questions were based on the findings from the survey, where more extended responses were needed, on the document analysis, and on the research questions. The advantage of the interview was that it allowed participants to introduce their own perspectives, unlike the more restrictive survey, and to clarify their responses in a more discursive context. The disadvantages were that, in a face-to-face situation, some interviewees might have felt reluctant to expose their true feelings.

In addition to the digital recordings of the interviews, I made field notes to remind myself of details that might not be evident from the transcript. In the beginning of the

data collection, I did not realize how important these interview notes would be. At the stage of data analysis, I found that in fact the interview notes were also an important source of information such as in anecdotes, reminders on how to improve data collection, and how to organize the data.

Transcribing and translating were undertaken by the researcher and were conducted almost simultaneously. Interview transcriptions were translated into English by the researcher, who had served as an official translator for a Chinese agency for two years.

On occasion, translation is difficult because in some instances meanings in Chinese cannot be expressed precisely in English. Therefore, the contents of interviews with teachers, administrators and policy-makers were translated as closely as possible to the literal expressions in the original and as a result in many cases the English version may appear unpolished.

#### **4.5.3 Documents**

Document collection occurred in three stages. The national English curricula for higher education and related documents during the past twenty years were identified and collected from a variety of sources, such as university libraries, faculty material rooms, the national archive, and from individuals. Documents in individual universities were collected to provide documentary evidence on how universities implement policies and to identify expectations that universities placed on teachers. Finally, relevant documents on specific instructional and assessment content were collected. All documents were studied to ascertain how teachers responded to policies and the expectations of universities on teachers in terms of ‘what to teach’, ‘how to teach’ and ‘how to assess’.

Documents were collected throughout the process of the research and writing since the policies underwent changes from 2004-2007 (e.g. the policy on College English Test – Band 4).

## 4.6 Data analysis

Detailed analyses of the documents, interviews, and survey were needed in order to map out the complicated picture of tertiary English teachers in TET in China and to answer the research questions. To help interpret the data, the study drew on the ‘three message systems’ of Bernstein (1990; 2000) to provide a focus in terms of curriculum, pedagogy and evaluation. Maton’s categories of ‘orientation to change’, ‘degree of autonomy’ and ‘specialist knowledge’ were also employed to further enhance the interpretation of the data.

The analysis of the different data sources involved somewhat different procedures. The categorization of the survey data was relatively straightforward as it was simply a matter of reporting the frequencies in terms of the survey questions and summarising the more open-ended questions. For the survey, descriptive statistical analysis was used not only for the frequency distribution for each question but also for cross-tabulation of the relationships between questions. The survey responses have not been reported systematically here but rather are used to illustrate certain points being made throughout the chapters on finding. The main reason for not making more of the survey results was that:

- the survey was conducted very early in the process of collecting data and before the theoretical framework was fully developed;
- while a great deal of effort was put into the survey and the results were of some interest, the data from the subsequent interviews provided more compelling insights.

In analysing the interview data, two interacting processes were employed. At the broad level, the data analysis was guided by the research and interview questions and by the theoretical framework in terms of the demands on teachers in relation to Bernstein’s (1990) three message systems of curriculum, pedagogy and assessment. To ensure that the participants’ voices were not unduly constrained by the imposition of this framework, however, the data were also analysed ‘from the bottom up’ by coding emergent themes using Nudist. In reporting the findings, both the more structured and the less structured analyses informed each other.

The documents were also analysed according to the expectations they placed on teachers in terms of curriculum, pedagogy and assessment.

All the data were further interpreted in terms of the insights they provided into attitudes towards change, the degree of autonomy accorded and how it was taken up, and the specialist knowledge needed to respond adequately to the changes and expectations.

#### **4.7 The role of the researcher**

In qualitative inquiry, the researcher is the prime source of data collection, analysis and interpretation, leaving the results open to potential assumptions and biases throughout the process of the study (Locke et al, 1987). In this study, precautions taken to counter such biases included the use of multiple sources of complementary data (large-scale survey, interviews with educators) from different backgrounds and perspectives, peer debriefing (e.g., through feedback from colleagues, supervisors, fellow doctoral students and conference presentations) and member checking of results.

From this perspective, we could see the role of the researcher in terms of hermeneutics, which is ‘the process of using language to make experience understandable or comprehensible’ (McQueen et al, 2006, p.341). The nature of hermeneutics is summarised as follows:

- i. this approach focuses on the individual as an interpreter who struggles to make sense of the world as he/she finds it;
- ii. meaning is based on the shared understanding and interpretation of culture, history, language and practice rather than on the discovery of a new form of knowledge. Therefore, hermeneutic analyses are historically and culturally grounded;
- iii. there are no end in interpretations because of the Hermeneutic Circle, with each new cycle hopefully adding new depths and nuances of understanding. This means the end product of interpretation is more interpretation (Shank 2006, p.134).

In hermeneutics, the researcher’s own background has a bearing on the investigation and interpretation which depends on reflection on the interaction between researcher and

participant, and on the researcher's role within that interaction (McQueen et al 2006, p.341). In this study, I took on the role of myself as an instrument as well as interpreter, acknowledging the inevitable presence of personal values, assumptions and biases throughout the process of the study (Locke et al, 1987). My understanding of the tertiary English teaching field in China has been shaped by my personal experiences as described in Chapter One.

## **4.8 Researching in China**

It is worth noting that when researching in the Chinese context, one cannot necessarily make the same assumptions as in a 'Western' context with different traditional research approaches. It is important to keep in mind the cultural, historical and practical issues that need to be considered.

In many universities in China, there is no established research culture among tertiary English language educators (Liu 1997; Wu 2001; Yang 2003). If teachers are encouraged to research at all, they generally undertake small-scale experimental studies within a positivist paradigm or write up minor teaching initiatives that are published as university 'working papers'. These studies are typically seen as a pathway to promotion rather than as an integral part of academic life. Qualitative studies dealing with rich and complex data are rare, particularly as they are not promoted by the leading journals, which emphasize 'pure theoretical studies' in fields such as linguistics or literature. The *Foreign Languages Journal* in Heilongjiang University, for instance, declares that studies on applied linguistics are not welcome in order to guarantee the academic quality of the journal. In this journal, there is only one article on tertiary English teachers (in 4/1997) and one article on English teaching (in 3/2003).

A further issue in researching in China in English language education is a widespread reluctance to participate. Because of the relative lack of a research tradition, particularly in the qualitative paradigm, my research was often greeted with suspicion. As recorded previously, certain protocols needed to be followed in gaining access to interviewees, often resulting in the selection of unsuitable participants. In this sense, the method of



identification of interviewees may have had its limitations, but nevertheless the interviewees were sufficiently representative of the relevant categories.

Issues of hierarchy and power relations are an important consideration in collecting interview data in China. At the beginning of the pilot interviews with my colleagues, they refused to be recorded and hesitated to answer my questions, possibly due to the fact that I was once their head before I left China. In the interviews with administrators a couple were unwilling to be open, even though all of them accepted being recorded. When they answered questions, their language was used in a fairly diplomatic way, masking their exact meanings. However, when I asked them to explain their meanings further after turning off the recorder, both of them gave me wonderful interpretations of their ideas. As part of the member-checking process, one of the policy-makers remained silent for a long time after I sent an email containing the transcribed file of the interview. When I contacted him, he cautioned: 'You know how to use it appropriately?' In response to his perceived concern, I assured him that I would not publish relevant parts of my thesis in the following five years.

A further disappointment was the withdrawal from the interview of a key administrator at HLJU. The morning following the interview, he called me and said, 'I have been unable to sleep for the whole night. I worry that I might have said many things that were not appropriate. I don't want to get involved too much. I want to withdraw from your research and ask you to destroy everything from your recording.' (Interview notes). This was particularly regrettable as his ideas represented a particular section of university teachers of English who see their employment principally in terms of earning money rather than as a professional vocation. Although I really needed his data, I had to respect his decision.

Another source of difficulty in researching in China is the limited access to official documents. As McCarthy (2000) states, it is difficult to collect data in China, not only for westerners but also for Chinese nationals. The Ministry of Education, for example, offers national awards for effective English instruction every four years (<http://www.moe.edu.cn>). The documentation of these projects, however, was treated as confidential when I went to the relevant government department. To obtain official documents, it is often necessary to rely on a 'web of friendship'. The only way I could

get one of the official records needed for this study was to approach one of my friends who worked in the Ministry of Education in HLJ province.

The new national curriculum (CECR 2004) should have been readily available for teachers to trial and discuss, but it proved almost impossible to find a copy and I had to photocopy one from a dean in a university. Similarly, copies of the national CET-4 exams were hard to come by through official channels as the Committee for the National College English Exam stipulates that the exam papers are not allowed to be photocopied or distributed in any form to any people including all English teachers and all undergraduates (even though in reality the papers were available so widely that teachers often used the newest instruments for three months' training before the testing date for CET-4). At the university level it was even more difficult to collect relevant documents such as university-based syllabi, course designs, teachers' programs, and teacher-made tests, possibly because the administrators were not confident about the quality or relevance of these documents.

Methodologically, then, this study has had to overcome ethical, political, cultural and ideological challenges in gaining access to the information needed to come to an understanding of the research questions.

## **CHAPTER FIVE:**

### **CURRICULUM:**

#### **Changing Demands and Responses to These Demands**

##### **5.1 Introduction**

The following three chapters report on the results of the analysis of document sources, survey and interviews in relation to the research questions. The three chapters are organized around Bernstein's (1975) three message systems: curriculum, pedagogy and assessment. Although these are dealt with separately, ultimately, of course, they would need to be considered holistically. Maton's (2004a) modalities of *temporality*, *autonomy* and *specialization* will be drawn upon in interpreting the findings: what do the analyses show about orientation to change, about the degree of autonomy and about the role of specialist knowledge?

This chapter addresses expectations placed on university teachers of English in relation to curriculum changes as evidenced in the national syllabus (*College English Curriculum Requirements*, hereafter CECR 2004), university-based syllabi, and English language course materials. It further investigates the responses to these changes on the part of teachers, administrators and policy makers as revealed in interviews with six teachers, four administrators and two policy-makers, and the survey of 293 university teachers of English from seven institutions.

##### **5.2 The National Curriculum: challenges and responses**

As discussed previously in Chapter 2, there have been three versions of the national English curriculum in the past twenty years (ME 1985/1986, 1999 and 2004). In this section, the documents will be analysed in terms of changes in the purpose and function of the national curriculum, the theoretical and research bases, the aims and objectives and the content requirements. Integrated into the analysis will be data from interviews with teachers, administrators and policy-makers indicating their responses to the demands of the curriculum.

### 5.2.1 Purpose and function of the National Curriculum

The national syllabus in China plays a pivotal role in either fostering or inhibiting change. In such an immense population, the processes of change are subtle. Even though the central government can mandate reform in a top-down fashion, one cannot assume that there will be immediate and substantial change, as suggested by CH, a dean from Beijing, who sees change as cyclical:

*In CECR 2004, one requirement guides thousands of universities in China even though it requires universities to make their own different syllabus. Actually, when the top pays attention, some changes happen. When some changes happen, the top pays more attention. This relationship between the change and the top is subtle.*

**Excerpt 1 [Int] (Prof. CH, Beijing)**

The various versions of the national syllabus define their function differently. The 1985 version claims to guide tertiary English teaching instruction. The 1999 syllabus emphasises its influence on both ‘how to teach’ in terms of instruction and ‘what to teach’ in terms of course material design. CECR 2004 describes its function as:

*providing colleges and universities with guidelines for English instruction for non-English major students (CECR 2004, p.3).*

In addition to the above purpose and function of CECR 2004, the role of CECR 2004 is further described as providing minimal content and standards, decentralizing the authority for designing specific, detailed syllabi to individual universities:

*Because institutions of higher learning differ from each other in terms of teaching resources, students’ level of English upon entering college, and the social needs they face, colleges and universities should formulate, in accordance with the Requirements and in the light of their specific circumstances, a scientific, systematic and individualized college English syllabus to guide their own College English teaching (CECR 2004, p.3).*

Thus CECR provides the basic outline to guide tertiary English teaching. Therefore, it is general, not specific. Second, it allows for a great deal of autonomy by entitling individual universities to create their own syllabus; third, it emphasises the important role of university-based syllabi in actual classroom teaching in the individual institution.

As a policy-maker, GS, one of the chief members of the designing committee for CECR 2004, emphasised the autonomy that CECR 2004 grants each university:

*The CECR 2004 is policy document for guidance, not for mandate; therefore, it is general, not specific.*

**Excerpt 2 [Int] (Prof. GS, Beijing)**

Excerpt 2 [Int] confirms the role of CECR 2004 as providing general guidance to tertiary English teaching. While this is the case, there is little indication in CECR as to how institutions might convert the general guidelines into specific curricula. The interview data indicate that many teachers and policy-makers in practice see no particular role for CECR 2004 in their teaching. WM, from a university in Harbin, stated:

*I do not think there is any change in the new curriculum (2004). It is too far from me, I mean it has no influence on my classroom teaching. ... I do not see any relationships between the CECR 2004 and my classroom teaching.*

**Excerpt 3 [Int] (Assoc. Prof. WM, Harbin)**

Similarly, an English lecturer, SL, from a university in Beijing, believed that:

*There is no substantial change in the new curriculum (2004) in terms of the purpose or function because it is as useless as any one before. Theoretically, it is always mentioned whereas in practice, there is no practical meaning. ... When I prepare my lessons, I just think about what students really need, for example, the language points that might occur in the CET-4/6 exam.*

**Excerpt 4 [Int] (Lecturer SL, Beijing)**

### **5.2.2 Theoretical and research base of the National Curriculum**

A project as substantial as a national syllabus needs to be based on solid theory and empirical evidence. A sound theoretical framework helps teachers understand the rationale for curriculum development and policy and can serve as a form of professional development.

In the 1985 curriculum, many of the merits of communicative language teaching models by Western scholars were adopted (Han, 1985, 1999). For instance, in a significant break with more traditional models from the past, it refers to the principles of Brumfit (1984) relating to the use of communicative methodology in balancing language usage and in mediating accuracy and fluency in foreign language education. Additionally, it acknowledges van Ek (1976) as the main reference for the ‘functional and notional inventory’. Moreover, it is observed that the ‘inventory of micro-skills’ of language use is a direct copy of the ‘taxonomy of language skills’ listed in Munby (1978) (Han, 1999).

Empirical data from a needs analysis survey conducted in 1983 is mentioned briefly to justify the ranking of the five language skills (Feng 2003).

In the 1999 syllabus, Functional and Notional Usage is listed as an attachment (Feng, 2003, pp.159-163) which, to some extent, is an indication of the theoretical approach being adopted. The 1999 syllabus also drew on an investigation of the nature and amount of vocabulary needed by students (Huang & Shao 2001).

However, in CECR 2004, there is no direct reference to any empirical research or theoretical framework. GS, one of the members of the committee for CECR 2004, frankly admitted that in the process of designing CECR, its philosophy and rationale had not been established and that it is not solidly based on research:

*The former curriculum (1999) had done a lot of investigation. The new one (2004) did not do that much, but it does consider the needs of students, society, and the responses of some seminars.... There is no in-depth research in terms of how many words students should know. Normally based on students' language level at entrance, we predict and estimate the general amount. ... A theoretical model for the CECR (2004) has not been formed yet.*

**Excerpt 5 [Int] (Prof. LS, Beijing)**

GS made similar comments:

*We did not take into account many theoretical references, but referred to some books on syllabus design. Although there was no special research for this curriculum, we looked at the research which was conducted for the previous curricula.*

**Excerpt 6 [Int] (Prof. GS, Beijing)**

Such a situation has significant implications for the 60,000 English teachers and administrators who rely on the national syllabus for direction and guidance.

As an administrator, CL, a dean of a foreign language department at a university in Shanghai, considered that the absence of empirical research and theory in CECR 2004 represents a backward step, with arbitrary decisions plucked out of thin air:

*CECR 2004 does not change. Rather, it withdraws compared to the previous curricula. ... It is arbitrary, unrealistic and bureaucratic in content. The evidence is that it is not based on any scientific theories and research.*

**Excerpt 7 [Int] (Prof. CL, Shanghai)**

### **5.2.3 Aims and objectives of the National Curriculum**

With the communicative emphasis of the 1985 and 1999 syllabuses, the main focus of

the objectives in CECR 2004 is to recognize the importance of speaking and listening, in a context where reading and writing still predominate:

*The objectives of College English is to develop students' ability to use English in an all-round way especially in listening and speaking, so that in their future work and social interactions they will be able to exchange information effectively through both spoken and written channels (CECR 2004, p.5).*

Such a re-focusing has implications for teachers as well as students. In responding to the change, almost all teachers interviewed believed that moving from 'reading and writing' to 'listening and speaking' was a big change for them, requiring a shift in their own language proficiency. HY, a lecturer from a university in Harbin, in his interview, mentioned:

*The requirement to improve the listening and speaking ability of students has made teachers improve their listening and speaking ability first.*

**Excerpt 8 [Int] (HY, Harbin)**

Similarly, SL, a lecturer from Beijing, in his interview (2004) claimed that:

*English teachers' language proficiency, particularly listening and speaking, must be improved. In this sense, the new requirement to focus on students' listening and speaking is a challenge to teachers. I think I have to do so.*

**Excerpt 9 [Int] (SL, Beijing)**

In contrast with the teachers, almost all the administrator interviewees reflected that moving from 'reading and writing' to 'listening to speaking' did not represent much of a change in practice. In his interview, CH, a dean at a university in Beijing, stated that:

*The CECR 2004 emphasizes practical learning purposes -- a shift from reading and writing to listening and speaking, compared to the 1999 version; however, teachers just teach their textbooks as usual.*

**Excerpt 10 [Int] (Prof. CH, Beijing)**

This view is supported by CL, a dean from a university in Shanghai:

*I personally believe that the new curriculum is unrealistic. The CECR made a change from stressing reading and writing to listening and speaking, it is good. But it clashes with the classroom teaching. The proportion of teacher to students is around or over 60; meanwhile, an amount of content of the textbook has to be finished, with a lot of exercises for CET-4/6. Could the shift from reading to speaking solve these problems?*

**Excerpt 11 [Int] (Prof. CL, Shanghai)**

All the above excerpts indicate that the change to speaking and listening is seen as mere rhetoric as the syllabus fails to acknowledge the realities of the Chinese context, both in

terms of the lecturers' own language proficiency and in terms of the pressures on lecturers to teach to the textbook and the exam. Speaking and listening are not considered to be a high priority, either for academic success or for practical communicative purposes.

#### **5.2.4 Content requirements of the National Curriculum**

The main change in terms of content in CECR 2004 is the increase in vocabulary items to be taught – from 4,000 (1985) to 6,500 (2004). The emphasis placed on mandatory vocabulary is illustrated by the number of pages devoted to vocabulary lists in the syllabus, some 185 pages (pp.58-243) in total (See Appendix 4: The List of the Content of CECR 2004). In addition to vocabulary, the skills of listening, speaking, reading, writing, and translating make up the content of the syllabus. The content is organized according to the three levels or standards: basic level, intermediate level, and higher level. (pp.5-19). As an example, listening has three levels of skills ranging from basic, to intermediate and higher level (CECR 2004):

Basic requirements:

*1. Listening: Students should be able to follow classroom instructions, everyday conversations, and lectures on general topics conducted in English. They should, by and large, be able to understand special English programs spoken at a speed of about 130 words per minute (wpm), **grasping the main ideas and key points**. They are expected to be able to employ basic listening strategies to facilitate comprehension (p.9).*

Intermediate requirements:

*1. Listening: Students should be able to follow, in the main, talks and lectures by people from English-speaking countries, to understand longer English radio and TV programs produced in China on familiar topics spoken at a speed of around 150 wpm, grasping the main ideas, key points and relevant details. They should be able to understand, by and large, course in their areas of **specialty** taught by foreign teachers in English (p.11).*

Higher requirements:



*1.Listening: Students should be able to understand longer dialogues and passages, and grasp the key points even when sentence structures and complicated and views are only implied. They should, by and large, be able to understand radio and TV programs produced in English-speaking countries. They should be able to understand lectures related to their **areas of specialty and grasp the gist and main points** (CECR 2004, p.15).*

From the above, it can be seen that the CECR expects that students will be able not only to develop listening skills and strategies, but also to apply these in a range of contexts, including English for Academic Purposes.

While these examples suggest a forward-looking approach to syllabus content, in fact they are simply mentioned in passing and contrast with the majority of the document, which stresses the content of discrete areas such as vocabulary and grammar.

Responses to Question 3 in the survey shows that 53.8% of teachers considered that the reformed CECR 2004 had impacted on the content of their teaching; 32.9% of them chose ‘some impact’; 13.3% selected ‘no impact’ on their teaching at all. In the interviews, on the other hand, teachers and administrators responded that the content of CECR 2004 could not be considered as having changed; therefore, there were no expectations on teachers to reflect this. WM, from Harbin elaborated that:

*I know a bit of the CECR, such as how many words and sentence patterns are required, what levels students have to achieve etc.; meaningless. Teaching is still grammar teaching, nothing has changed.*

**Excerpt 12 [Int] (Assoc. Prof. WM, Harbin)**

Excerpt 12 [Int] shows lecturers’ perceptions of English teaching at university level is seen as grammar and vocabulary instruction (‘how many words and sentence patterns were required’) and that in reality, *‘nothing has changed’*.

In terms of the large vocabulary section and the isolated skills descriptions, some administrators (CL, Q, CH) pointed out that CECR 2004 has not changed because it is still a content-oriented curriculum. CL points out that:

*What does 185 pages of vocabulary mean? What does it mean to have five isolated skills descriptions without any relationship between them? They just show one thing: the CECR 2004 is a typical content-driven curriculum.*

**Excerpt 13 [Int] (Prof. CL, Shanghai)**

In the interviews, some teachers voiced their frustration at the lack of real change in the syllabus content. SH from Beijing, for example, expressed his disappointment that CECR is so general that it provides no more guidance than the textbook:

*The CECR 2004 for general English teaching does not make me understand more my classroom teaching... What I can do is – just teach to the textbook ... for CET-4.*

**Excerpt 14 [Int] (SH, Beijing)**

Of particular concern was the issue of whether to teach ‘general English’ as opposed to the more specialist academic and professional English required at tertiary level. HY, a lecturer from a university in Harbin, argued that:

*The CECR 2004 has not made any substantial changes and differences in terms of what to teach at university level because it is the same as the general English teaching that students have received in their previous English education. ... The failure of the college English teaching is the focus on vocabulary and grammar, not language use. Students should focus on developing subject knowledge through English after they enter universities.*

**Excerpt 15 [Int] (HY, Harbin)**

As an administrator, the chancellor of a university in Harbin, Q also pointed out that the emphasis on English for General Purposes seriously obstructs students’ language learning and the learning of other subject knowledge through English:

*Vocabulary and grammar teaching repeats what students have learned in their high schools. This leads to the huge consumption of their valuable time and energy. For students, English for General Purposes has already seriously disturbed students in terms of their own major learning. Students need to spend more time on the specialist English of their discipline.*

**Excerpt 16 [Int] (Prof. Q, Harbin)**

### **5.2.5 Summary: The National Curriculum**

While the theoretical rationale of CECR is fairly implicit and eclectic, the syllabus gives the impression of being forward-looking, making reference to contemporary ELT concepts and leaving a great deal of freedom for individual universities to flesh out the details and adapt the content to their own contexts. In reality, much of the change appears to be simply rhetoric and ‘tinkering at the edges’, with little guidance on how the syllabus might be implemented. Teachers feel either frustrated with the lack of real change in the syllabus or threatened by new challenges such as the emphasis on speaking and listening for which they have not been adequately prepared.

### **5.3 University syllabi: challenges and responses**

What is absent in the literature in the field of tertiary English teaching is research into university-based syllabi and yet these play a crucial role in interpreting the National curriculum (CECR) at the local level. This section will partially fill this gap.

Three university-based syllabi were collected from BUCT, HLJU, and HUST in June 2004. The BUCT syllabus was designed in a university in Beijing in 2003 by the dean and the two sub-deans. The other two were designed in Harbin in 2002. The HUST syllabus was planned by the dean whereas the HLJU syllabus was drawn up by a group consisting of the heads of all relevant programs. Each document consists of only a few pages.

#### **5.3.1 Overview**

In this section, these university-based syllabus documents are analysed in terms of their purposes and functions, the theoretical bases, the aims and objectives, the content requirements, and planning and programming requirements. The responses from university administrators and teachers of English language towards these syllabi are shown in the interview data.

#### **5.3.2 Purpose and function of university-based syllabi**

When CECR 2004 states that it serves as general guidance only and requires each individual university to develop a more specific syllabus, the university-based syllabus takes the role of bridging between CECR 2004 and classroom teaching in terms of outlining ‘what to teach’, ‘how to teach’, and ‘how to assess’. University syllabi function to recontextualize the national curriculum (Bernstein 2000), interpreting the broad content and standards in terms of the local conditions and providing a detailed working document to guide the day-to-day planning and programming. An analysis of the documents reveals, however, that they generally fail to take up this role.

In none of the three syllabuses is there any mention of their purpose or function. In responding to this absence most administrators (CL, Q, SHI) stated that the university-based syllabi don’t really play a role in guiding teaching. For example, CL, a dean from a university in Shanghai, claimed that:

*...Principally, there should be something to interpret the CECR 2004 further to help teachers understand 'what to teach' and 'how to teach'. However, in practical terms, the university-based syllabus does not exist at all. This is a serious and complicated issue which relates to the policy, university and teachers, and then students.*

**Excerpt 17 [Int] (Prof. CL, Shanghai)**

Another administrator, CL, queried the quality of university syllabuses, noting that most syllabuses don't attempt to interpret and apply CECR but simply copy it, calling into question the preparation and expertise of the designers:

*Look at those so-called syllabi and course designs; even if some universities did have them, those documents are just a simple copy of the national curricula – objectives, five skills, vocabulary. ... This reveals a serious problem of syllabus designers.*

**Excerpt 18 [Int] (Prof. CL, Shanghai)**

The failure of the university syllabus to take up its proper role results in teachers ignoring it:

*To be honest and serious, I do not think the English syllabus designed for our university is useful and meaningful for classroom teaching. I just use my textbook to design the content each time.*

**Excerpt 19 [Int] (Assoc Prof. WM, Harbin)**

SH, a lecturer from Beijing, confirms this view:

*... and I do not think we really need it because we are not told what it is for, such as how to improve students' skills. I just ask students to recite that large vocabulary.*

**Excerpt 20 [Int] (SH, Beijing)**

The perceived role of the university syllabus varied according to the extent of teachers' participation in curriculum development. In the survey, Question 7 shows that 46.3% of teachers reported participating in curriculum design, 23.9% responded that they participated to a limited extent in the designing process and 29.8% had never participated at all. The latter figure indicates that more than half of the teachers were not very familiar with their syllabus.

In contrast to the survey results, however, almost all teachers in their interview stated that their university syllabi were designed by the 'elite' – 'the dean and the subdeans of programs' of the faculty (SH, G, M, WM). For instance, SH, a lecturer from Beijing, explained that:

*The syllabus was made, maybe a long time ago, by the dean and the subdeans of programs, and my colleagues and I have never seen it.*

**Excerpt 21 [Int] (SH, Beijing)**

As a program head in her department, M, a lecturer from Beijing, explained the absence of autonomy of teachers in syllabus development:

*Before I came to this university, the syllabus had already been made. I did not need to make any change. What I was told is to select the new textbook without discussing with the twelve teachers in my group and 5,000 students at that level.*

**Excerpt 22 [Int] (M, Beijing)**

The excerpt above reveals that to some extent even the head of the program might also not have the autonomy to make any change to the syllabus. In this sense, although he/she was in a position to make some change, the power he/she had was only to select the textbook that the teachers and students were going to use.

SH, in his interview, connected the issue of teachers' lack of autonomy in syllabus development with 'top down' policy:

*The case in our country is normally like this: People at the top instruct, people at the bottom implement. We are less involved with the syllabus because we are not given opportunities for syllabus design. Another reason is that it is impossible to make any change. It is not your business. For instance, we are expected to complete the required content of the textbook. You cannot change unless you have enough power to do so.*

**Excerpt 23 [Int] (SH, Beijing)**

### **5.3.3 Theoretical base of university syllabi**

Because the syllabuses of the universities in question are primarily copies of CECR, they similarly lack any explicit theoretical or empirical basis. There is no evidence that a needs analysis has been conducted or that the syllabus has been adapted to the local context.

The data reveals that neither lecturers nor administrators were able to articulate a rationale for the content of the local curriculum.

### **5.3.4 Aims and objectives of university-based syllabi**

The aim and objectives of the three university-based syllabi almost all copy from the national curriculum (1985/1986; 1999) and CECR 2004. In the BUCT syllabus, 'to develop students' comprehensive language ability, especially listening & speaking to communicate' and 'to emphasize autonomous self learning' come from the draft of CECR 2004. In the HUST syllabus, 'to emphasize a better reading ability & abilities in listening, speaking, writing and translating to communicate information with English as

*a tool*’ basically comes from the national curriculum in 1999 whereas *‘to master the basic knowledge of English language and applicable skills, especially communicative ability’* in the HLJU syllabus mainly comes from the national curriculum of 1985.

In relation to the change of the aims and objectives in university-based syllabi, almost all teacher participants in their interviews believed that there has been no substantial change in their university-based syllabus, nor practical implications for their classroom teaching. WM, from Harbin, stated with a cynical smile:

*I do not know when, who, how it was designed nor the aims and objectives we have to achieve. It has nothing to do with my teaching. ... It seems sleeping somewhere in the cabinet of the dean.*

**Excerpt 24 [Int] (Assoc. Prof. WM, Harbin)**

### **5.3.5 Content requirements of university-based syllabi**

Listening, Speaking, Reading, Writing, Translating, and Vocabulary are the main content required by CECR 2004. All three universities had various understandings of these requirements. In the BUCT syllabus, all five skills and vocabulary are specified in some detail. The specifications, however, are primarily in terms of the mechanics of word length, time allocation, and so on, with little substantive guidance. For instance, in listening, students are required to *‘understand teachers in class, daily talk, general topic lecture, and to get the gist of the English program in 130w/m with the help of some listening skills’*. Writing is allocated 16 hours over four semesters (two years). It requires students to *‘finish a general topic within 30 minutes with 120 words in terms of individual experience (accounts), events (narrative), feelings (story)’*. In terms of translating, *‘16 hours within four semesters are required. The speed is 300 words each hour with dictionary from English to Chinese, and 250 words per hour from Chinese to English with some translating skills such as nominalization, ellipse’*. Students are also required to master 4500 words and 700 phrases in both oral and written form.

In the HUST and the HLJU syllabi, there is no further interpretation of these five skills and vocabulary and how to achieve these objectives. They were taken directly from the original requirements in the national curriculum (1999).

In responding to curriculum content (the five skills and vocabulary) in the university-based syllabi, teacher participants believed that there has been no change nor is there

any connection between the syllabus and teachers' classroom teaching (M, SH, WM). For instance, SH, a lecturer from a university in Beijing, pointed out the unchanged syllabus in terms of the requirements:

*... It is not more practical and important than the textbook in terms of the content in each lesson we have to teach in class.*

**Excerpt 25 [Int] (SH, Beijing)**

SH further comments that the syllabus gives no guidance '*such as how to improve students' skills, what they should look like*'. This indicates that the university syllabus did not reflect and interpret the national syllabus well, with teachers needing greater detail in terms of content. This excerpt suggests that it is not that teachers want to ignore the university-based syllabus, but rather that the syllabus itself does not help teachers to relate the policy, such as CECR 2004, to their teaching. The absence of specific content makes the syllabus redundant for classroom teaching.

### **5.3.6 Planning and programming requirements of university-based syllabi**

Perhaps the most elaborated part of the university syllabuses relates to the specification of time allocation in the programs. In the BUCT syllabus, the timeframe for a semester is 16 weeks of 64 periods. Among them, intensive reading takes 48 hours and listening takes 16 hours. In terms of course planning, teachers' activities are determined as collective preparation, peer observation, and consultation (2-4 h/w), with the textbook taking precedence in terms of the topics to be covered, sequencing, and so on.

In the HUST syllabus, there is no such specific course planning. The vice dean of the Foreign Languages Department in HUST explained that:

*We do not need to use a course plan. Teachers teach according to each unit of their textbook: each unit takes six periods, including three periods of vocabulary, text paraphrasing and translating, eg, intensive reading in Part A, and another one period for exercises and two hours for extensive reading in Part B and C.*

**Excerpt 25 [Int] (the vice dean of HUST, Harbin)**

It is evident from this excerpt that there is no need for any collaborative planning and programming as each teacher is required simply to follow the chapters of the textbook according to a very rigorous schedule.

In HLJU, course planning again simply emphasises the content of the textbook. With regard to the relationship between course planning and teaching, there were quite a few responses from teachers. However, Q, chancellor of a university in Harbin, stated that:

*All departments/faculties at this university have to provide their own course plan based on their different situations and the features of the discipline, and the requirement of the national curriculum. Whether a course plan can be made appropriate or not fully depends on the extent of teachers' knowledge. However, it is difficult to satisfy with the course plan in the Languages Department because of the designers' qualifications.*

**Excerpt 26 [Int] (Prof. Q, Harbin)**

This comment suggests that, while there is an expectation that lecturers will take responsibility for planning and programming, there is a concern about the degree of expertise in the Languages Department to undertake this role. This concern is echoed by the lecturers themselves. Although in the survey 84% stated that they believed their qualifications were sufficient to implement the syllabus, in the interviews they expressed serious misgivings. M, who was once an interpreter in the United Nations in Geneva and is now the head of the speaking program at a university in Beijing, frankly admitted her deficiency in subject knowledge:

*The University syllabus is not very rational and scientific, even though my university is very good in our country. I have realized that there must be something wrong with it, but I am not sure what the issues might be and how to make change. ... I was thinking that if I did know what these issues are and how I can deal with them, things might be different.*

**Excerpt 27 [Int] (M, Beijing)**

Teachers' interviews also show that teachers often have inappropriate qualifications for teaching tertiary English (HY, SH, HU, M, W). Most teachers' undergraduate and postgraduate majors were Literature and Linguistics (HY, SH, HU, M, WM, Interviews, 2004). SH (Interviews, 2004) described the main courses he took for undergraduate and postgraduate studies (Table 5.1) as an English major student:

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Table 5.1 shows that the courses SH studied were highly content-oriented, in particular the courses for undergraduate English major students. The table reveals that SH received no pre-service training in curriculum development, pedagogy or assessment. In contrast with the rhetoric of CECR 2004 that skills should be integrated, the model provided by the courses above is that skills are taught discretely. In addition, there is a heavy emphasis on literature. While this might be appropriate for those intending to teach English in upper secondary school or in tertiary English Literature courses, it is not very useful for the majority who are teaching English to students of engineering, computing science, chemistry, and so on, who need English for Specific Purposes in order to engage with the predominantly English-based research and communication in their disciplines.

SH felt that his training had prepared him to ‘teach to the textbook and the exam’ rather than to take on the role of a professional ELT specialist:

*With such a background, I feel that, on the one hand, it is enough for the present textbook and CET-4 teaching. On the other hand, it makes me feel helpless in the classroom because I really do not know what is wrong with our tertiary English teaching.*

**Excerpt 28 [Int] (SH, Beijing)**

Policy-makers also realize the issue of teacher preparation. Professor GS, a member of the committee for CECR 2004, pointed out that:

*The whole level of masters degree holders is unsatisfactory. The reason for this is the unscientific course designs at universities. ... This has brought a lot of problems.*

**Excerpt 29 [Int] (Prof. GS, Beijing)**

Both survey and interviews suggest that in-service training of teachers in TET is insufficient:

**Table 5.2 Teacher’s participation in professional development (Question 13)**

One day seminar	Around 1-7 days Training	Other Training (fill-in)	Missing data	Total
194 (72.7%)	20 (7.5%)	53 (19.9 %)	26 (8.9%)	293 (100.0%)

Table 5.2 shows that 72.7% of teacher participants attended the basic departmental one day seminar in their professional development activities. 7.5% attended 1-7 day training and 19.9% attended professional conferences or other professional development activities including computer training and conferences for textbooks promotions. Compared with academics in other disciplines and in other countries, this does not represent a substantial professional involvement. In addition, around 9% of teacher participants did not provide any answer in relation to their professional development. This might indicate that they were not sure what sort of in-service training they had had.

The interview results from almost all teachers similarly show that they have inadequate in-service professional training (HY, SH, HU, G, M, WM Interviews). HY stated that

*Compared with other teachers in my department, I am so fortunate that I have more opportunities for learning, such as to go to conferences. This is because I am the head of the program (of listening). Other teachers do not have opportunities for training except sitting in the exam for the Masters degree, but not many teachers get the opportunity to earn a postgraduate degree owing to the limitation of universities.*

**Excerpt 30 [Int] (HY, Harbin)**

Excerpt 30 supports the assertion that general English teachers have few official opportunities to develop themselves both in terms of conference participation and further study, particularly for those not in administrative roles.

SH also pointed out that in-service training is often combined with business to some extent:

*The only possible opportunity of training for my colleagues is to go to textbooks sale meetings. Since 1998, publishers organize conferences every year for marketing. Some scholars are invited to present workshops on how to use those textbooks.*

**Excerpt 31[Int] (SH, Beijing)**

Excerpt 31 shows that most English teachers have few opportunities to develop themselves professionally in any formal way. The absence of official systematic training provides an opportunity for textbook publishers to fill the vacuum for commercial purposes.

### **5.3.7 Summary: university syllabi**

Despite the autonomy offered by CECR to interpret and implement its requirements, at the institutional level, the university syllabuses do not take up the opportunity to develop a curriculum relevant to the needs of local students, in part due to the lack of

expertise in terms of language curriculum development. In interviews, the teachers felt that the university syllabus was irrelevant and offered no guidance. Because of their own perceived lack of professional expertise, they felt unable to participate in the curriculum design process and fell back on the security of the textbook.

## **5.4 Textbooks and materials: challenges and responses**

The void left by the university-based syllabi tends to be filled by the textbook. This section will describe the purpose and function, theoretical base, format and content, teachers' handbook, and course software of course books, and the views of teachers and administrators with regard to their content and use.

### **5.4.1 Overview**

Any proposed changes to a curriculum must receive support from the materials produced for and used by the teachers (Fullan 1991; 1993; Lamie 1998; 2005; 2006). As mentioned in the background in Chapter One, the Ministry of Education has approved ten sets of course books for university English teaching in line with the educational reforms of 2002 (ME 2002). The textbooks analysed for this study are TFCE (1999) published by Fudan University Press and Higher Education Press and NHCE (2001) published by the Foreign Language Teaching and Research Press (including NHCE Software, 2004).

TFCE (1999) has four volumes which include *Reading and Writing*, *Listening and Speaking*, *Work Book* and *Teachers' Handbook* in each volume. *Reading and Writing* are also transferred to CD and tape format (p.1). NHCE (2001) also has four volumes, each including *Reading and Writing*, *Listening and Speaking*, *Work Book* and *Teachers' Handbook*. NHCE (2001) has three different modes of delivery: course book, disc, and online course (2001, p.3). Additionally, NHCE (2001) also provides a language corpus of around 150,000 words (p.iii).

### **5.4.2 Purpose and function of teaching materials**

In responding to the issue of purpose and function of teaching materials, Question 6 in the survey showed that 87% of teachers taught English completely based on their textbooks, 12.7% answered that they sometimes relied on their textbooks, and 0.3%

claimed that they did not use textbooks. This indicates that the majority of teachers taught directly from the textbooks rather than referring to the national curriculum and university syllabus.

Additionally, most teachers claimed that ‘more than 90% of the content comes from our textbooks ...’. Most teachers (SH, G, HY, M) stated that they simply teach the content of each unit of the textbook in the classroom. For example, M, a lecturer from Beijing, commented that:

*I am not sure what the purpose and function of the course book should be. I just know there is no change in the course books – I use it as usual – teach Text A in the first two periods, do exercises in the second two periods, and teach Texts B and C in the final two periods. ... that is all, each unit takes six hours, ... easy.*

**Excerpt 32 [Int] (M, Beijing)**

It would appear, therefore, that the purpose of the textbook is perceived as supplying the entire content for the course, with little or no input from the teacher.

In relation to course book development, most teachers (SH, HY, G, M, WM) considered that they did not have opportunities to participate in the process. SH, for example, states:

*I am the only teacher in my university asked to participate in the production of the new textbooks.*

**Excerpt 33 [Int] (SH, Beijing)**

Furthermore, most of the teacher participants (SH, HY, G, M, WM) considered that they did not have the power to select which course book they wanted to use and they were not encouraged to use the materials they prepared for their own classes. WM, an Assoc. Professor from Harbin, claimed that:

*Normally, the head of my office determines which textbook we teachers have to use. Once the course book was selected, teachers just teach the course books each unit after another. ... I do not use any materials I like in my class because I do not want to take the risk of affecting my students’ score in the CET-4 exam, and we are not encouraged to do that actually.*

**Excerpt 34 [Int] (WM, Harbin)**

As a head of the Speaking Program in her department, M, from Beijing commented:

*... What I was told is to select the textbook without discussing with teachers regarding which textbooks we should select. As for ‘what to teach’, this is determined by the textbooks. Teachers do not need to know the university syllabus because it will be fine for them just to teach their textbook.*

**Excerpt 35 [Int] (M, Beijing)**

Overall, the teachers interviewed appeared quite happy to hand over responsibility for program content and design to the textbook. Comparing three sets of textbooks, M concluded that such materials, authorised by the Ministry, provided security for the teachers:

*College English* (2001, 3<sup>rd</sup> Ed.), *Experiencing English* (2003), *New College English Course* (1999). All these are approved course books by ME in 2004. The only common advantage of these textbooks is that teachers feel comfortable with them because they are content-oriented and do not challenge teachers that much.

**Excerpt 36[Int] (M, Beijing)**

The interviews with teacher participants showed that half of them consider that teaching from the textbook does not require a great deal of expertise. WM and M acknowledged that:

*Teachers do not need to have knowledge and skills to teach textbooks for CET-4/6.*

**Excerpt 37 [Int] (Assoc. Prof. WM, Harbin)**

*Yes, my level of experience is enough for me to deal with my teaching, especially teaching textbooks for CET-4/6.*

**Excerpt 38[Int] (M, Beijing)**

In considering the role of textbooks, it is useful to keep in mind that textbook production is a highly commercial activity which is strongly supported by the Higher Education Department of the Ministry of Education (2002):

*Content: Ten series of textbooks are planned to be financed;  
Implementation: ... They will be recommended by the Ministry of Education to universities all over the country based on their nature and characteristics (ME, 2002, p.7).*

Professor CL alluded to the subtle relationships in textbook development in China:

*Power closely relates to course book production in a variety of subtle ways. For instance, the chief producer of New College English Course (1999) in ZheJiang University is the wife of the chairman of the committee for the 1999 national curriculum. This is what everybody knows and these connections cannot be avoided.*

**Excerpt 39 [Int](Prof. CL, Beijing)**

CL characterised textbook production as a financial deal among ‘academics, business and politics’:

*The publishing companies are motivated by CET-4/6 and TET textbooks. They came to my university and competed for marketing their own books. They also promised some workshops for teachers’ development as a reward, actually for a holiday. This is a business - academics associate with politics as well as business. The competition and struggles*

*among textbooks indicate the competition and struggles among academic groups between the North and the South – this is a culture as well as academic corruption.*

**Excerpt 40 [Int] (Prof. CL, Beijing)**

### **5.4.3 Theoretical base of teaching materials**

In relation to TFCE (1999), there is no mention of a theoretical base which supports the framework of the textbook, whereas in NHCE (2001), Widdowson (1983), Quirk (1992), and Harmer (2001) were mentioned (p.ii) to explain how and why NHCE was compiled. The integration of language skills and communicative competence by Widdowson was used as the basis of NHCE (2001) in which ‘listening, speaking, reading and writing are integrated together’ (p.ii). To explain why NHCE (2001) focused on vocabulary, Quirk is cited: ‘Quirk acknowledges that language cannot be mastered without mastering the construction of vocabulary’ (p.ii). Harmer is quoted to support the claim that ‘all items and exercises in NHCE (2001) are well and closely arranged around texts’ (p.ii). While it is heartening to see some reference to the literature, it appears to be somewhat tokenistic and does not represent a coherent, up-to-date theoretical foundation.

Given the potential for textbooks to take on the role of providing implicit professional development for teachers, their general lack of an explicit theoretical rationale is a missed opportunity. CL from Shanghai, in his interview pointed out that:

*There is no theory on what course books were based, nor any guidelines for teachers to help them understand what they should teach.*

**Excerpt 41[Int] (Prof. CL, Beijing)**

### **5.4.4 Format and content of course books**

TFCE (1999) and NHCE (2001) share a similar format and content. For instance, in each unit in TFCE (1999), there are three parts where Part A is *Intensive Reading* in which the text is interpreted, paraphrased and translated along with reading comprehension questions, vocabulary, grammar and translation exercises, and writing (TFCE 1999, p.1). Parts B and C have the same pattern and organization of the text and exercises as in Part A, with reading skills, such as how to read a text and how to get the main idea, incorporated into *Extensive Reading* materials.

While intensive reading and extensive reading are not explicitly mentioned in NHCE (2001), it also has three sections in each unit. Section A is composed of the main text and exercises around it, such as pre-reading activities, reading aloud, text reading

comprehension, two vocabulary exercises, two structure exercises, translation from Chinese into English, and vice versa, story and essay summary, text structure analysis and structured writing (structure analysis and writing are put together whereby the structure of a text is taken as an example of writing). Similar to TFCE (1999), Section B and C have the same format/pattern as Section A. Reading skills are emphasised in Section B (and C), such as how to use ‘hint, example, explanation’ (NHCE 2001, p.11).

Although the textbook producers claim to have made changes in the latest textbooks in terms of format and content, teachers and administrators tend to have contrary opinions. SH, drawing on his own experience as someone involved in textbook production, claimed:

*I experienced two waves of textbooks compiling and revising in the past ten years. There is change in form, not in essence. For instance, the same types of Text A, B, C; the same types of workbook and teachers' book. Exercises still focus on vocabulary and grammar. These contents are isolated from students' lives, not real.*

**Excerpt 42 [Int] (SH, Beijing)**

Further evidence regarding the lack of change in textbooks came from WM:

*Textbooks are as the same as before; the texts might be a little bit newer than before, maybe in the 90s. ... There are huge vocabulary lists and more exercises which we do not know whether students really need or not.*

**Excerpt 43 [Int](Assoc Prof. WM, Harbin)**

Another teacher, M from Beijing, did not notice any change in the content of textbooks:

*College English (2001, 3<sup>rd</sup> Ed.) was compiled very traditionally and carefully. It has stood the test of time for many years. However, the materials are out of date. It has wide scope in content, however, still focuses on grammar and exercises. Compared with College English, materials in Experiencing English (2003) are new, but not compiled strictly and seriously in terms of text content, language expressions, and even grammar. Nothing new in it, for example, exercises are designed mainly on grammar and structures, which seems over-simplistic. It is the same with New College English Course (1999).*

**Excerpt 44 [Int] (M, Beijing)**

In addition to the apparent lack of change in textbook content, SH also commented on the quality of the content of present textbooks, based on his experience in the process of textbook production:

*I found that the materials for the content of the textbook were taken from some articles on the Internet but with some awkward changes. Textbook producing was like doing a jigsaw. It is inconsistent in terms of the content. Exercises were based on sentence patterns and language points....I rushed to complete the part I was required within two months. There was no time for the pilot before they came into the market.*

**Excerpt 45 [Int] (Prof. CL, Beijing)**

Apart from their incoherence, lack of innovation and the rush to publish, SH also expressed his concern at the lack of guidance:

*I was given the format of the whole textbook, Text A, B, and C, the exercises after each text, and some materials needed to be reorganized as texts, but no guidelines such as objectives or outcomes students have to achieve. The problem is that such a series of textbooks has been approved this year.*

**Excerpt 46 [Int] (SH, Beijing)**

#### **5.4.5 Teachers' handbook**

The teachers' book in TFCE (1999) includes background knowledge, language points (grammar and vocabulary), and activities in class (which means pre-reading discussions around the content of Text A), complementary materials, translation, and key answers to the exercises in Reading and Writing, and Listening and Speaking (1999, Vol.1, Teachers' Handbook, p.1). The teachers' handbook in NHCE (2001) is composed of three parts. The first part includes background information, text detailed study, text structure analysis, reading skills and drill patterns, idioms and examples. The second part contains all key answers, and pre-reading activity (asking and answering discussion around the content of Text A in Section A in Reading and Writing). The third part is the translation of all texts (2001, Vol /1, Teachers' Handbook, p.3).

In response to whether teachers' handbooks have changed or not, teachers and administrators seemed to have negative ideas. Evidence came from HY:

*... They (teachers' books) follow the similar pattern and content as other previous teachers' books: language points, key answers, and translation.*

**Excerpt 47 [Int] (HY, Harbin)**

A young lecturer assistant in a university in Beijing expressed her concern at the fact that the students have access to the teachers' handbook which provides them with the answers:

*... I worry about the fact that almost all of the students have the Teachers' Handbook. This makes me nervous and I am not sure what to teach since most of the students have already known the answers to the exercises and translation of textbooks in Teachers' Handbook.*

**Excerpt 48 [Int] (G, Beijing)**

This indicates that providing the answers to the exercises and translation in the textbook is seen as the main task for teachers in their classroom, but that even this role is



undermined by students' access to the teachers' handbook – a fact that provides a large market for the course book publishers.

Administrators strongly criticised the content of the Teachers' Handbook. CL, not only claimed that teachers' books were unchanged, but also pointed out the serious problem in classroom teaching:

*Teachers' handbooks? They should be students' books rather than teachers' handbooks (satirical). The content of almost all Teachers' Handbooks are the key answers to all exercises, translation of texts and almost all explanations of grammar and structures in these texts. This has not been changed in tertiary English textbook produced in China yet. Students are eager to know the answers before class, therefore, they are the main group for the consumption of teachers' books. The problem is what teachers will teach in class after students have known the answers to language points, the Chinese meaning of texts and the answers to the exercises?*

**Excerpt 49 [Int](Prof. CL, Beijing)**

Excerpt 49 shows that on the one hand, teachers' handbooks failed to provide teachers with guidance in terms of how to understand curriculum issues and how to adapt and innovate on the content of the textbook. Rather than fostering teachers' ability to use the textbook creatively, the teachers' handbook encourages a dependence on slavishly following the textbook.

#### **5.4.6 Course software**

The Ministry of Education encourages the development of new course materials based on multimedia/internet, corpus, and student autonomous learning using the university net (ME 2002, p.6). One of the requirements for the approved textbooks is that when these textbooks were first published or revised, the revisions, compared to the textbooks that had been published previously, should focus on the use of computer technology as a method of instruction. NHCE Software, for example, was designed to meet the requirement of CECR 2004 to make greater use of technology. This software is composed of audiotapes, CD-ROMs, online resources, a corpus, digital teaching aids and a testing bank (NHCE Software 2004, p.4).

The content of language learning is mainly reflected in the CD-ROM which contains two texts. Text A includes the following parts: pre-reading with questions on what will be learned; text recording; vocabulary (in Chinese with English explanation); background information with online websites; learning and understanding which

includes vocabulary, language points and translation; text structure at the paragraph level (eg: gist or main point of each paragraph). Exercises include reading aloud and reciting; reading comprehension; vocabulary and grammar; translation (in the form of sentence and paragraph); story summary (including cloze); and text structure analysis (repetition) (based on NHCE 2004, CD-ROM, Vol. 1).

Text B includes the following content: finding out word meanings; reading skills (eg: hint, example, explanation); learning and understanding; vocabulary and reading comprehension (NHCE 2004, CD-ROM, Vol. 1).

In relation to the new technological changes, teachers expressed somewhat negative views in their interviews. For instance, HY considered it ineffective:

*If we have to say there is any change on textbooks, the only change is to put them in electronic format. ... Just look at the content of those CD-ROMs attached to those textbooks.*

**Excerpt 50 [Int] (HY, Harbin)**

It would appear that the possibilities for curriculum change provided by new technologies have not yet been taken up, with much of the content of the textbook simply being transferred to CD-ROM format.

#### **5.4.7 Summary: textbooks and materials**

Section 5.4 describes the purpose and function of teaching materials in CET, their theoretical base, format and content, teachers' handbook, and course software as well as the responses of participants to the teaching materials.

Despite CECR's emphasis on a communicative approach with a focus on speaking and listening, the textbooks still tend to concentrate on intensive and extensive reading along with vocabulary, grammar, translation and writing. Teachers and administrators perceive little change in the content of the textbooks. The textbooks and Teachers' Books tend to focus on traditional exercises rather than provide the basis for more communicative activities, concentrating on accuracy at the expense of fluency. The introduction of new technologies has not resulted in innovative curriculum renewal. Teachers' autonomy is challenged by the expectation that they will simply work through the chapters of the textbook – and even this limited role is undermined by students'

access to the answers provided in the teachers' handbook. The dependence on the textbook neither values nor enhances teachers' professional knowledge.

## **5.5 Summary of Chapter Five**

In summarising the changes in the university English curriculum in China and the responses of policy-makers, administrators and lecturers, we can draw on Maton's categories of 'orientation to change', 'specialisation' and 'autonomy'.

### ***Orientation to change: temporality***

Although, relative to syllabuses in many Western and regional countries, CECR 2004 is a fairly conservative document, it nevertheless demonstrates a somewhat positive orientation to change in relation to previous syllabuses, particularly with its emphasis on speaking and listening (prospective). The administrators interviewed, however, are given little guidance on how to translate the syllabus to suit local contexts and tended to have a fairly negative, cynical view of change given the constraints of exams and textbooks. While some teachers expressed a positive attitude towards change, particularly in terms of English for Specific Purposes, they perceived little real change in the new syllabus and stayed with their current practices, encouraged by the lack of change in university-based syllabi and textbooks (retrospective).

### ***Autonomy***

Although it is 'top down' in authority (and very specific in terms of such areas as vocabulary), CECR leaves a great deal of space for individual institutions to shape their specific curricula. This autonomy, however, is not taken up at the level of the individual institution and administrators, with the university-based syllabi simply copying the main points of CECR 2004 and only elaborating in terms of formalities such as time allocation and assessment. The autonomy of individual lecturers is highly dependent on the degree of freedom given by department heads to make curriculum decisions. Most appear to be unaware of CECR 2004 or even of their own university-based syllabus and stick closely to the chapters of the textbook.

### ***Specialist knowledge***

Syllabus change has implications for the specialist knowledge required at all levels of the system. The syllabus designers have the responsibility to create a syllabus that is theoretically coherent and informed by contemporary research. CECR 2004, however, provides little insight into its theoretical rationale or research base and the document itself appears somewhat eclectic in its content, with teachers questioning its credibility and relevance. As indicated by GS, one of the members of the committee for CECR 2004, there could be an issue regarding the committee members who, while experienced Faculty deans, might not have had the necessary expertise in syllabus design or ELT theory:

*Our group is composed of different people; most of the members are from different universities in different cities. While most of the designers do not have the background of the curriculum design, they are almost all deans with a great amount of experience.*

**Excerpt 51 [Int] (Prof. GS, Beijing)**

As an administrator, CL also points to the issue of specialization of knowledge of the committee members for CECR 2004:

*Some technical terms are not used appropriately in the CECR, such as 'autonomous learning', 'learner- centred' ... etc. These terms can be used anywhere, but cannot be used in isolation in a formal government document. I really wonder who, why and how it was designed?*

**Excerpt 52 [Int] (Prof. CL, Beijing)**

Administrators such as heads of department are expected to translate the syllabus into workable curriculum guidelines, but often feel that they lack the training and experience to do so. The lecturers have similar concerns.

So although CECR provides a great deal of autonomy, the lack of specialist knowledge has an impact on the extent to which this autonomy can be taken up. The challenge of developing and implementing a curriculum is often seen as overwhelming and educators again fall back on what they know. Teachers revert to the security of the textbook as they feel they have had inadequate pre-service or in-service preparation to deal with the challenges of the new syllabus, particularly in terms of their own language proficiency.

In summary, any autonomy and opportunities offered by the national curriculum tend to be thwarted by the lack of expertise in curriculum design and ELT at the level of the individual institutions and by individual teachers' lack of freedom or lack of confidence

in their own specialist knowledge. The textbook therefore becomes the default curriculum.

## **CHAPTER SIX:**

### **PEDAGOGY:**

#### **Changing Demands and Responses to These Demands**

##### **6.1 Introduction**

This chapter addresses the demands placed on tertiary English language instructors concerning pedagogy and the responses of teachers to the pedagogical requirements in the tertiary English context in China by analysing the interview results of teachers, administrators, and policy makers.

The chapter is organized in the same way as the previous chapter, dealing with pedagogy as one of the message systems of Bernstein (1975). Pedagogy will be examined in relation to the national curriculum, university syllabi and teaching materials.

The chapter is developed around the notions of *temporality*, *autonomy* and *specialisation* (Maton 2004a), referring to how lecturers and the system are oriented towards pedagogical change, to teachers' independence in implementing change, and the knowledge and skills that teachers need to accomplish such change.

##### **6.2 The national curriculum: challenges and responses**

Although the role of a syllabus is generally to specify content and standards, it is also possible to find expectations regarding pedagogy in such documents. Over the past twenty years, there have been two major shifts in the pedagogical orientation of the various versions of the national curricula (ME 1985/1986, 1999 and 2004). A major change of pedagogy in the version of 1985 was the shift from the intensive reading model to Communicative Language Teaching (Feng 2003), further pursued in the 1999 version. In College English Curriculum Requirements (CECR) 2004, there is a move towards student-centred learning along with a new computer-based multimedia teaching model:

*Changes in the teaching model by no means call for **changes in teaching practices or approaches** only, but, more important, consist of **changes in teaching philosophy**, and in a shift from the teacher-centred pattern, in which knowledge of the language and skills are imparted by the teacher in class only, to the student-centred pattern, in which the ability to use the language and the ability to learn independently are cultivated in addition to language knowledge and skills (CECR 2004, p.25).*

The move towards autonomous learning and computer-based approaches is not based purely on pedagogical principles but also on a pragmatic recognition that in a context of large classes and increasing pressure on teachers, computers might ease the burden:

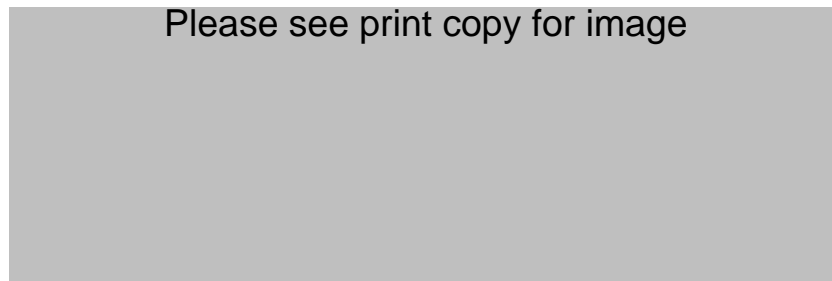
*In view of the marked increase in student enrolments and the relatively limited resources, colleges and universities should remould the existing teacher-centred pattern of language teaching by introducing **new teaching models with the help of multimedia and network technology**. The new model should be built on modern information technology, ... (CECR 2004, pp21-23).*

Students are urged to take more responsibility for their own learning not because this is advocated by contemporary learning theories but because the resources of the current system are over-stretched:

*... The new model should enable students to select materials suited to their individual needs, make up for the limitations of the conventional classroom teaching of listening and speaking, and track down, record and check the progress of learning as well as teaching as coaching, ... It is proposed that the credits acquired via computer-based learning account for 30% -50% of the total (CECR 2004, p.23).*

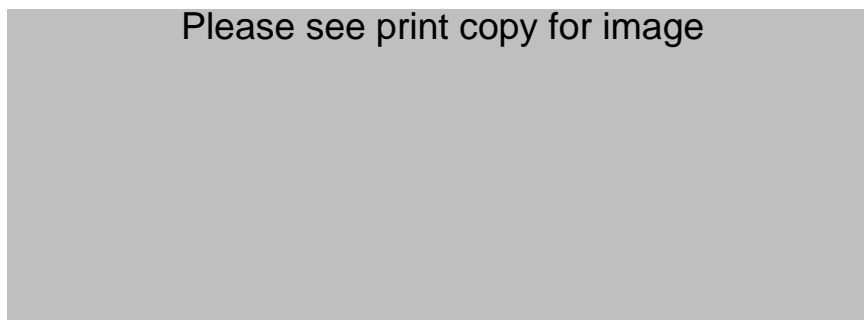
The figure 6.1 shows the basic structure of the suggested model, indicating the role of students and teachers, the content of teaching (five skills) and the model of teaching. It suggests that there are two types of classroom teaching: self-learning tutoring which is based on computer-based teaching and regular classroom-based teaching.

**Figure 6.1 The computer- and classroom-based teaching model 1 (CECR 2004, p.33)**



In addition, the process of computer-based English learning is also provided, as shown in Figure 6.2 below although there is no further interpretation for why it is designed like this and how it should be transformed into classroom practice.

**Figure 6.2 Process of computer-based English learning (CECR 2004, p.35)**





Beyond these details, there is no explanation of the theoretical rationale underpinning such a model and little guidance as to how such a model might be implemented.

In response to the new teaching model in CECR 2004, policy-makers interviewed seemed confident of such a change whereas administrators and teachers expressed contrary views.

As a policy-maker and the key member of the committee for CECR 2004, GS expressed his support for the new approach, though he recognised that the new computer-teaching model, to some extent, challenged teachers and textbook developers:

*The computer teaching model will impact the whole foreign language teaching field in terms of a great amount of content accomplished by computer, dealing with the software and hardware, the relationship between computer and human being, language ability of students, and whether textbooks could achieve the requirement.*

**Excerpt 53 [Int] (Prof. GS, Beijing)**

An administrator, Professor Q, chancellor of a university in Harbin, considered, however, that computer-based English teaching did not represent a positive innovation but was rather the recycling of a dated and failed approach:

*Computer teaching is not new for us and not effective; we tried it several years ago, but failed. ... It is only a means of teaching rather than a teaching model or approach. Most university students who are one child in their families, still cannot control themselves very well, interesting learning is not enough. ... We found that any teaching has to be determined by teachers' understanding of both English teaching and computer.*

**Excerpt 54 [Int] (Prof. Q, Harbin)**

Q was thus pessimistic about students' interest in such a model and about the teachers' ability to integrate good quality English teaching with computer-based learning.

M, a lecturer from a key university in Beijing, commented that computer equipment was not an issue:

*We had no good computer equipment when I came here in 1996. Now, the technological equipment at our university should be the best among universities in this city. ... There is also a computer-training centre available for teachers at any time.*

*We know how to use multimedia equipment, and communicate with students online.*

**Excerpt 55 [Int] (M, Beijing)**

The availability of hardware and technical support at top urban universities, however, does not reflect the situation elsewhere in China. It does not also mean that there is

equally high-quality software or that teachers are trained in creating online or blended learning environments.

Q from Harbin expressed his pessimism on the ability of computer-based teaching to solve the problems of learning English in China:

*I do not think the new computer model is that effective in the classroom.*

**Excerpt 56 [Int] (Prof. Q, Harbin)**

Most teachers in this study seemed not to be confident with the change to the new teaching model (HY, SH, WM, G). For instance, SH, a lecturer from Beijing, explained that:

*...I really do not understand what the computer model really means. Based on my understanding, we just use a CD of the textbook, which put the written content into a visual one, and this is what all teachers are doing. It does not impact anything in my teaching.*

**Excerpt 57[Int] (SH, Beijing)**

Along with the shift to computer-based learning, the change from a teacher-centred model to a student-centred philosophy radically challenges the traditional model of the teacher transmitting knowledge about the language to one of students becoming active, independent learners and users. The comment below by WM, from a university in Harbin, indicates a willingness to adopt a student-centred approach but a lack of understanding of how this might work within traditional grammar-translation pedagogy:

*I always adjust my teaching because I have to find what students really like. I help students remember more vocabulary to help their reading ability by helping them to see how it is formed and how to use them in context. I got to know this method from my students because they often gave up English learning because of the large vocabulary. I then put vocabulary and sentence patterns into translation. This is practical because you cannot ignore Chinese meaning when you learn English.*

**Excerpt 58 [Int] (Assoc. Prof. WM, Harbin)**

Similarly, HY, a lecturer from Harbin, shows a desire to change, though his efforts demonstrate a confusion regarding what is meant by learner-centred pedagogy:

*I want to change what I am doing because it is not only for myself. I focus on students' language ability. I did an experiment by adding one hour for listening each day. I asked students to repeat what they listened to.*

**Excerpt 59 [Int] (HY, Harbin)**

The teachers' lack of confidence in their ability to implement the new teaching model is reflected in the results of the survey and interviews which showed that the present teaching approaches adopted by teachers were mainly traditional, as seen in answers to

Question 4:

**Table 6.1 Teacher's responses on present approach to English teaching**

Grammar-translation	Communicative	Other methods	Missing data	Total
91 (31.1%)	46 (15.7%)	68 (23.2 %)	88 (30%)	293 (100%)

Table 6.1 demonstrates that almost half of the teachers (31.1%) used a Grammar-Translation approach, 15.7% used a Communicative method (or similar to it) and 23.2% used other approaches. The data indicate that the teachers used Grammar-Translation more frequently than Communicative Approaches and other methods.

However, the responses to survey Question 5 show a contradiction with the result of Question 4 above (see Table 6.2).

**Table 6.2: Teacher's responses on a change in teaching approach in the past few years**

Yes	No	Missing data	Total
264 (90.1%)	23 (7.8%)	6 (2.0%)	293 (100.0%)

The result for Question 5 in the survey shows that 90.1% of the participants had changed their teaching methods in the recent past. Only 7.8% had not made any change to their teaching methods. This figure implies that almost all teachers were actively transforming themselves and were trying new teaching methods, even though responses to Question 4 indicated that a great number still used traditional methodology. Interviews with teachers also supported results for Question 4 that at least half of the teachers used the traditional method (HY, MW, SH).

Administrators also noted the continued use of traditional methods. For instance, the chancellor of a university in Harbin, Q stated that:

*Everybody knows that teachers teach vocabulary and grammar in their English teaching. This is what we believed as 'dumb and deaf English', which fails to make students communicate with others. The reason for such a failure is that we learn English in a Chinese way – word, phrase, sentence, and text, one generation after another, rather than how a mother tongue is naturally learned. It takes us more time but seems less effective.*  
**Excerpt 60 [Int] (Prof. Q, Harbin)**

As a policy-maker and key member of the committee for CECR 2004, GS pointed out the same issue from different point of view:

*Most teachers can satisfy their present teaching because Reading, Writing and Translation*

*belong to general English teaching. ... The traditional teaching method is sufficient for them.*  
**Excerpt 61 [Int] (Prof. GS, Beijing)**

Comments from lecturers suggest that the pedagogy implied in CECR is of little relevance, given the pressures of textbooks and exams. A young lecturer assistant in a university in Beijing, G observed:

*To be honest, I do not know that much about computer teaching. I use the CD-ROM for my teaching. For me, the teaching model is the exam teaching before CET and textbook teaching after CET.*  
**Excerpt 62 [Int] (G, Beijing)**

Further evidence was provided by SH, a lecturer also from Beijing:

*...in terms of teaching method, I teach textbooks focused on basic language knowledge, based on my own methods, such as Grammar-Translation, or Audiolingual in the first three semesters. In the final semester, my teaching focuses on CET-4 by doing a large amount of exercises; the textbook is almost given up.*  
**Excerpt 63 [Int] (SH, Beijing)**

These comments show that textbook teaching serves as the basic teaching approach, which matched the result for Question 6 in survey that teachers were 87% dependent on textbooks in their teaching. It also shows the dominant position of the CET-4 exam in shaping the pedagogy in tertiary English teaching in China.

### 6.3 Pedagogy in university-based syllabi

In terms of pedagogy, the university syllabi from BUST, HUST, and HLJU show that a consideration of pedagogy was almost absent (see Table 6.2).

**Table 6.3 Pedagogy in university-based syllabi in BUCT, HUST, HLJU) (Until June 2004)**

<b>University Syllabi</b>	<b>BUST (Syllabi &amp; Plan)</b>	<b>HUST (Syllabi &amp; Plan)</b>	<b>HLJU (Syllabi &amp; Planning: renewed in 2002)</b>
<b>Teaching Method</b> (In Ch6)	None	Elective method / heuristic method / student-centred method	1. student-centred & Ts as guides. Group discussion, role playing, presentation, & Ts explanation. Emphasize interaction. 2. multimedia by using technology & sources in the web. 3. task-based teaching and multimedia.

The BUCT syllabus (2003) does not mention anything about methodology. The four pages of the course syllabus at HUST (2003) requires teachers to use ‘elicitation’, ‘heuristic’, and ‘student-centred methods’, and recommends that teachers ‘employ more exercises than teaching to get more language knowledge’ (p.2). In the HLJU syllabus

(2002), methods of teaching are divided into two parts based on students' language levels. 'In the first two years for general English teaching, teaching is *student-centred* with *teachers as guides*'. Group discussion, role playing, presentations, teachers' explanation, and interaction between teachers and students are emphasized. In the final two years for advanced teaching, the pedagogy suggested is 'task-based and multimedia teaching' (HLJU, p.10).

In none of the syllabi is there any elaboration on the meaning of the terms used nor any explanation of the pedagogical approach underpinning the syllabus. There is no guidance on how to implement the syllabus, providing no bridge between the national curriculum and the teachers' classroom practice.

In response to these syllabi, interviews with teachers and survey results show that there was little change in teaching methodology. For instance, SH, a lecturer from Beijing, commented that:

*I have not seen it yet, (laugh) how could I know if there is any change in (my university) syllabus on teaching method? ... To be honest, I have never considered the syllabus in my teaching because whether it exists or not is not important... In my case, I just focus on teaching to the textbook. ... for CET-4.*

**Excerpt 64 [Int] (SH, Beijing)**

This lack of awareness of the university syllabus was reinforced by WM, from Harbin:

*In terms of teaching methods, school syllabus also means nothing for my teaching because I have not seen it for a long time and I arranged my teaching completely based on my course book – teaching grammar and vocabulary, and doing exercises.*

**Excerpt 65 [Int] (Assoc. Prof WM, Harbin)**

As an administrator, Q, chancellor of a university in Harbin, pointed out that the university syllabi plays no role in guiding classroom practice:

*Grammar and vocabulary teaching as intensive and extensive reading by using course books is a routine for English teachers. University syllabus, therefore, are not taken seriously.*

**Excerpt 66 [Int] (Prof. Q, Harbin)**

Further evidence came from an administrator, SHI, the dean of a foreign languages department in a university in Beijing. She suggested that any reform to English teaching might be a challenge in the absence of the university syllabus playing a strong role:

*Students do not need teachers' reading the textbook for them, nor do they need to be shown how to use computers in learning language because they have enough abilities for these by themselves. ... we need to make changes in how to reorganize teachers.*

**Excerpt 67 [Int] (Assoc. Prof. SHI, Beijing)**

Assoc. Prof. SHI also specifically described the reforms she had introduced in language teaching at her university. However, as an administrator, she did not rewrite the university syllabus with her challenging and exciting ideas although she was entitled to do so (Interview notes, 2004). SHI answered this question by directly pointing out her limited knowledge in syllabus design:

*I do not know how to write the syllabus. I am creative in doing in practice, but not trained to write in theory. ... I do need help in theories.*

**Excerpt 68 [Int] (Assoc. Prof. SHI, Beijing)**

So while SHI had the willingness and enthusiasm to experiment with methodological change, she lacked the confidence and knowledge to transform the syllabus into a working document based on coherent pedagogical principles.

Despite some teachers' openness to pedagogical change, there is a general impression that traditional methods inevitably prevail over more recent ones. LG, a policy maker from a provincial higher education department, pointed out that, despite a search for more up-to-date methods, the old 'deaf and dumb'<sup>6</sup>, non-communicative practices still hold sway:

*Our English teaching keeps looking for better teaching methods all the time, however, the present teaching approaches have failed to break away from the old methods of the deaf and the dumb English.*

**Excerpt 69 [Int] (LG, Harbin)**

SH, a lecturer from Beijing, reported that he had explored current methodologies used by his colleagues and found that traditional methods were still in use, leaving little scope for interaction in English:

*I went to several colleagues' classes and found that we all use Grammar-Translation, which indicates that there are not many opportunities for communicative English and almost no teachers use English throughout the class.*

**Excerpt 70 [Int] (SH, Beijing)**

He also remarked on the lack of collegiality:

*We do not help each other that much and no cooperation in teaching*

and questioned the relevance of the university syllabus:

*We never use our syllabus. ... I am not sure what it is for.*

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<sup>6</sup> 'Deaf and dumb English' is often used in Chinese to describe the English level of some learners where they still cannot hear and speak English very well although they have learned English in a classroom setting for several years.

G, a lecturer assistant from Beijing, drew attention to her colleagues' inability to translate the university syllabus into practice and their apparent unwillingness to collaborate in pedagogical matters, perhaps due to their own insecurities and limited knowledge with regard to pedagogy:

*You cannot expect that you can consult on any practical issue of teaching with them in order to learn something from them. For example, when I asked the question about why the syllabus was designed in this way and how to carry it out, the answer I got was more ridiculous than the question I asked! Therefore, I never asked any question in teaching because it was so difficult to get help, and there was no cooperation and no collaboration among my colleagues.*

**Excerpt 71 [Int] (G, Beijing)**

In terms of survey responses, of the 293 respondents, 206 provided an answer to Q4 regarding their teaching practice and the rationale underlying it. Using their own words, they described their methods in terms such as 'explaining', 'instructing', 'exercising', or 'computerising', revealing little about underlying principles or theory. The fact that some 30% (see Table 6.1) did not respond to this question suggests that they were uncertain about how to define what method they were using and might not have been able to locate their own teaching within a paradigm recognised in the literature.

This inability to nominate a coherent pedagogical approach is echoed by SH, a lecturer from Beijing, who saw her teaching approach simply in terms of teaching students to pass the exam:

*I do not know what underpins my teaching. If you really want to know, I can say 'pragmatic teaching for CET-4' is the most effective teaching for me.*

**Excerpt 72 [Int] (SH, Beijing)**

The lack of an articulated, research-grounded approach to pedagogy is reflected in the views of WM from a university in Harbin, who downplayed 'teaching method' in favour of 'enthusiasm' and 'love of students':

*Effective teaching is "teachers' quality plus teachers' enthusiasm plus teaching method". Teachers should have enough language proficiency, appropriate skills for classroom teaching, and the most important is that they should love their students and have enthusiasm for their teaching. The enthusiasm can make up what teachers do not have in their abilities.*

**Excerpt 73 [Int] (WM, Harbin)**

In some cases, methodology was equated with classroom management. HY, a lecturer from Harbin, stated that teachers need to be in control and that students need to take responsibility so that standards are maintained:

*The best way for teaching is student management. Teachers should have appropriate method to satisfy students' needs; otherwise, they will lose the control of the class. Students need to manage themselves and to be managed. Universities should require students to do what they should do because students after the 'university open policy' are not well qualified.*

**Excerpt 74 [Int] (HY, Harbin)**

Similarly, G, a lecturer assistant from Beijing, equated effective teaching with control of students:

*Teachers' control of the class with appropriate method along with teachers' responsibility should be my most effective teaching.*

**Excerpt 75 (G, Beijing)**

From the above findings, we can see surmise that university personnel lack the knowledge and confidence to translate the pedagogy suggested in CECR into credible university syllabi that guide teachers in implementing communicative, student-oriented, computer-mediated methodologies. Most teachers appear to lack a clear understanding of what such terms mean in practice and are unable to explain their own philosophy of teaching, often confusing pedagogy with classroom control or the teacher's personality. Given their lack of confidence in their training in pedagogy, the pressures of the examination and the convenience of the textbook, most teachers see the university syllabus as irrelevant and unhelpful.

## **6.4 Pedagogy in teaching materials**

In the absence of clear support from university syllabi in implementing the national curriculum, most teachers, as we have seen above, fall back on the teaching materials. In Chapter 5, the content requirements of the CECR were investigated in relation to how they were interpreted in the two selected textbooks (TFCE 1999 published by Fudan University Press and Higher Education Press; NHCE 2001 published by Foreign Language Teaching and Research Press) and one course book software (NHCE 2004), revealing little change in response to the new curriculum. In this section of the chapter, changes of pedagogy embodied in these teaching materials, the role of teaching materials and how teachers make use of them are examined.

The materials above were packages including the textbook, multimedia resources such as CD-ROMs, and teachers' handbooks. It might be expected that the place where one might find issues relating to pedagogy would be the teacher handbook. The teachers'



handbooks of the TFCE and the NHCE however, provide no explicit description of the pedagogical principles underlying their design nor of the ways in which teachers might use the materials. The focus of the Teachers' Books was simply on background information, explanation of language points including sentence structure and text structure, translations of texts used, and key answers to all exercises after each unit of the course books. The only pedagogical practice referred to in the TFCE Teachers' Handbook (1999) relates to activities around pre-reading, such as listening to the tape, answering the questions related to the text, and discussing the topic on the text by group work – relatively traditional strategies in teaching reading comprehension.

Apart from any explicit pedagogical direction in the teachers' handbooks, there is little in the textbooks themselves that provides any explicit guidance in terms of supporting teachers attempting to implement new approaches. The following outline gives an idea of the contents of a typical chapter in NHCE (2001). The main part UNDERSTANDING AND LEARNING of Chapter 1 is composed of three sections: Sections A, B, and C. Each section includes the following activities; in particular, Section A: background information, detailed study of the text, and text structure analysis. Background information refers to introduction of some terms like *online learning and junior middle school*. Detailed study of the text consists of paraphrasing a sentence, which might be difficult to understand along with some language points. For example:

7. **Unlike** my senior middle school teacher, ... (Para. 4)

**Meaning:** Different from my senior middle school teacher, ...

Unlike: prep. Different; not like, not the same

Her recent report is quite **unlike** her earlier work. 她最近的报告与以前的大不相同。

**Unlike** me, my son likes to get up early. 与我不同, 我儿子喜欢早起。

(NHCE 2001, p.7).

Text structure analysis is more like text analysis. For example:

In Reading Passage A, the author presents the reader his own language learning experiences for different stages, from junior middle school to online learning, and for each different stage of learning he describes an effect that results from some causes. This is an example of cause and effect writing, which makes clear the reasons why something happens by showing the relation between a cause and its effect (NHCE 2001, p.11).

The following exercises from this chapter also demonstrate that the implied pedagogy is a fairly traditional one of translation, grammar and vocabulary exercises, comprehension activities, and so on (NHCE, 2001, pp.17-23). The part: KEY TO EXERCISES in Chapter 1 is composed of pre-reading activities, comprehension of the text, vocabulary (word), vocabulary (preposition), structure (tense), structure (sentence pattern), translation from English to Chinese, translation from Chinese to English, story summary (with some words and sentence patterns learned), structured writing (similar to story summary), key to the exercises, and Chinese translation of all three texts in Chapter 1.

It would be very difficult for a teacher to incorporate such activities into the sort of thematic, communicative, learner-centred pedagogy promoted by the CECR. WM explained why and how the textbook restricted her teaching:

*On the one hand, you are required to finish one volume of textbook in one semester based on the units of the textbook. This means you just teach the content in the textbook. If you were interested in other activities, which you believed helpful for students, it might take the time from the textbook. If the textbook was not finished, it would be dangerous for students to have the final exam because some content of the exam might be taken from the exercises of textbooks.*

**Excerpt 76 [Int] (Assoc. Prof. WM, Harbin)**

Teachers' attempts at using more innovative teaching methods were suppressed by the practice of collective planning around the textbook, constraining all members of the group to teach the same content at the same time. A lecturer assistant from a university in Beijing, G, explained that:

*Teachers are often required, once a week, to prepare for their class together in a program group, based on the same textbook. This often determines the same content we will teach; therefore, the same teaching approach we often use.*

**Excerpt 77 [Int] (G, Beijing)**

WM lamented the fact that the textbooks did not promote creative teaching:

*Textbooks do not tell me 'how to teach' and provide no sound activities or tasks that are well designed as models for teaching. ... my teaching is dead (sighed).*

**Excerpt 78 [Int] (Assoc. Prof. WM, Harbin)**

This disappointment at the failure of textbooks to play a more active role in the promoting the teachers' understanding of pedagogy is echoed by another teacher, SH, from Beijing, from the perspective of a teacher who had been involved in textbook development:

*I was not given any principles for the textbook developing, such as what approaches could be possibly appropriate for the textbook. ... For the Teachers' Book, I merely provided the answers to the exercises of each unit I compiled.*

**Excerpt 79 [Int] (SH, Beijing)**

As a teacher, SH noted the apparent autonomy given to teachers in terms of how they teach, but then pointed out that this autonomy could not be taken up due to the requirements to teach a particular amount from the textbook within a particular time:

*It seems that you can teach in any way you like. However, you are required to teach certain content within limited hours for this volume, and actually, I do not know how to deal with it to have effective teaching.*

**Excerpt 80 (Int) (SH, Beijing)**

While the textbooks themselves offered little prospect of change, the introduction of computer-based pedagogy was seen by some as a major innovation. In the draft of the document on *the Project of College English Teaching Reform* issued by the Ministry of Education in 2001, website and multimedia software teaching was emphasised as the main priority in textbook development:

*6.2.3 Textbooks should build an all-in-one college English course book package which is based on website and multimedia software. The Ministry of Education will not finance college English textbooks without computer software (2001, p.6).*

GS, the key member for the committee of CECR 2004, outlined the required change from the point of view of policy as follows:

*Based on the government document in 2002, the change of textbooks should mainly focus on 'local web teaching'.*

**Excerpt 81 [Int] (Prof. GS, Beijing)**

Another policy maker, LG, chair of a higher education department in a province, evaluated the new teaching materials in terms of their ability to arouse students' interest through the use of technology:

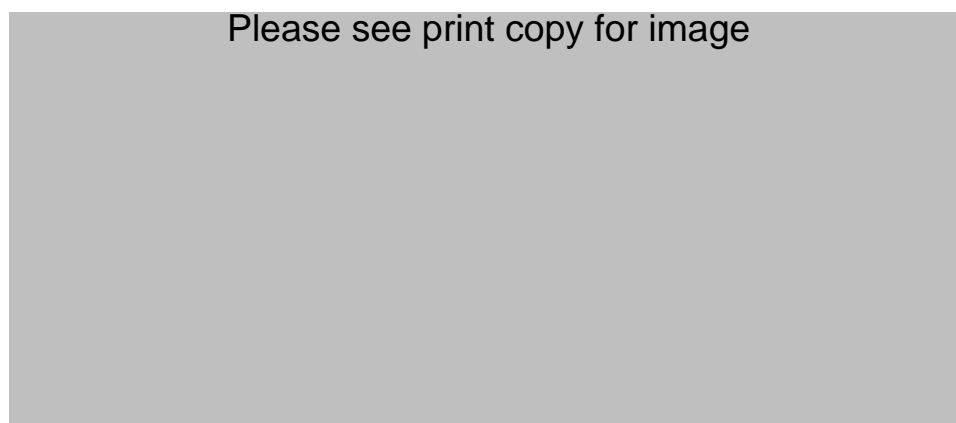
*The big change in course books based on the computer model will greatly improve English teaching. At least, it will help make classroom teaching interesting rather than boring grammar teaching.*

**Excerpt 82 [Int](LG, Harbin)**

There is, however, no clear model of computer-assisted language learning underpinning the new materials. As mentioned earlier, the possibilities of the medium are not exploited in the CD-ROMs. There is little use of hyperlinked pathways that would support student autonomy. There is no innovative use of animation and sound to

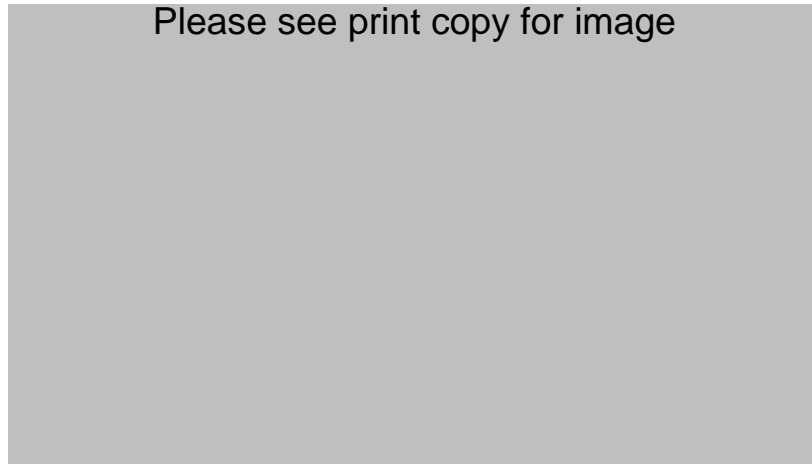
promote interactive listening. There are few examples of corpora to enable students to use concordancing programs in learning vocabulary. Websites don't provide the rich electronic learning environments reflecting current constructivist learning theory. And it is not clear how teachers are meant to implement 'online' learning in terms of website selection and use or how they are meant to integrate the new technologies with their classroom teaching. These points can be seen from the guidance of online teaching system for teachers in teachers' handbook in NHCE (2001, p.327) (<http://www.nhce.edu.cn/help>) and CD-ROMs themselves. For instance, in teachers' handbook, Volume 1 (NHCE 2001), the NHCE website organizes the activities around 'course', 'class', and teacher and students (NHCE 2001, p.327). As the first step, Online Teaching Organization is simply listed as shown in Figure 6.3.

**Figure 6.3 Online teaching organization (NHCE 2001. Teachers' Handbook, Vol. 1, p.328)**



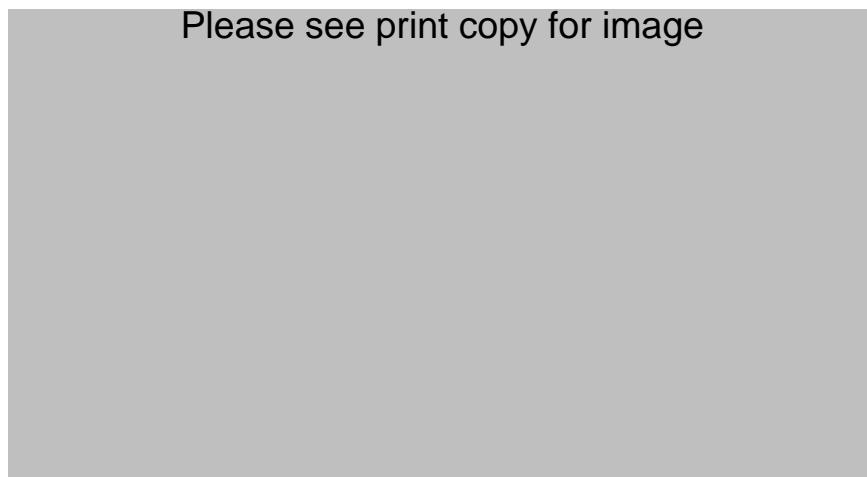
As the second step, Online Students Learning Activities are described as textbook learning, complementary materials learning, discussion and group work in the forum and emails, assignment submission, and use and visit websites with other learning resources and tools (p.329) (See Figure 6.4).

**Figure 6.4 Online students learning activities (NHCE 2001. Teachers' Handbook, Vol. 1, p.329)**



Teaching Activities Online, taken as the third step, simply includes information, assignments, complementary materials, discussion by forum and emails, check and grade assignments, manage students and class members (p.329).

**Figure 6.5 Teaching activities online (NHCE 2001. Teachers' handbook, Vol. 1, p.329)**



Evidence above shows the unsatisfactory state of pedagogy in teaching materials. As an administrator, Assoc. Prof. SHI, a dean from a university in Beijing, was not convinced about the power of materials and technology to transform English teaching:

*Teaching online is the new version of traditional teaching which puts the modern technology in it; therefore, it is still textbook teaching, restricting teachers' thinking and creativity.*

**Excerpt 83 [Int] (Assoc. Prof. SHI, Beijing)**

She preferred that more emphasis be placed on the teachers themselves:

*Textbooks are always there, without any change in terms of helping classroom teaching. Maybe we should not expect too much and we should not wait for any change ... what we should do is to focus on teachers and teaching rather than the textbook itself.*

**Excerpt 84 [Int] (Assoc. Prof. SHI, Beijing)**

Teachers seemed to share similar ideas. A lecturer from Beijing, SH stated that:

*What has changed is that the textbooks were put online. In this way, it was hoped that students would learn autonomously. Actually, students may or may not learn autonomously. Who knows? ... But for me, the electronic version of textbooks was made only for teachers to teach conveniently. ... Putting the texts online has different effects for different students. Some students in universities like Tsinghua might like it and learn English by themselves. But some other students might just be interested in it for a short time. It will finally come to teachers' effort to teach in the classroom.*

**Excerpt 85 [Int] (SH, Beijing)**

These comments reveal a degree of scepticism about the use of technology in language teaching and in particular, about the way in which the present materials appear to be based more on pragmatic motives (eg: convenience for the teacher) rather than on enlightened pedagogy. Ultimately, according to SH, the success of these initiatives depends on the teachers themselves.

## **6.5 Summary of Chapter Six**

As with Chapter 5, we can use Maton's framework to summarize the findings from the document analysis, the interviews and the survey in relation to pedagogy.

### ***Orientation to change: temporality***

In terms of pedagogy, the national syllabus appears to be forward-looking (prospective) with an openness to contemporary approaches to teaching English, requiring a change of teaching philosophy from simply delivering knowledge of language and skills in the classroom using a teacher-centred approach to improving students' abilities in language use and promoting independent learning. However, in reality, CECR 2004 does not

describe what these teaching philosophies are in detail and there is little guidance on what they mean in the Chinese context or how such an approach might be implemented (particularly given the somewhat eclectic nature of the content of the syllabus). The major change in the national syllabus is the push towards the use of new technologies, both inside and outside the classroom – though this is seen more as a pragmatic move to relieve the burden of large classes than a genuine embracing of the learning potential offered by such media. There is the risk that the adoption of computer-assisted language learning will, in fact, work against the implementation of a more communicative methodology, with students working in isolation through banks of exercises and recording the cumulative scores. Ironically, the national syllabus sees the computer model as *‘making up for the limitations of the conventional classroom teaching of listening and speaking’* – those oral skills which are best learnt through human interaction, not simulated interaction with a computer.

The university syllabi examined in this study give very little indication of furthering the forward-looking agenda of the national curriculum. There is no evidence of a vision about how the changes at the national level (or in the profession generally) might be interpreted at the level of the institution or the classroom. There is no relationship between university-based syllabi and teachers’ classroom teaching. The university syllabi appear to be irrelevant, leaving the teachers to fall back on the textbooks.

The teaching materials analysed in this study consist of a package of the teachers’ handbook, the textbook, and computer resources. The teachers’ handbooks give virtually no guidance as to how the content of the textbook or the CD-ROMs might be used in the classroom and provide no insights into the rationale underpinning the design of the materials. The textbooks themselves appear to have changed little over the years and do not readily lend themselves to a more ‘communicative’, ‘learner-centred’ approach. And while the inclusion of electronic materials give the appearance of being forward-looking, they do not reflect cutting-edge learning theories.

The response of teachers and administrators to the emphasis on communicative teaching and computer delivery was a general willingness to consider pedagogical change, but a lack of confidence in their understanding of new methodologies and a perception of pressure to systematically cover the material from the textbooks in order to ensure that

students pass the exams. In reality, teachers' pedagogy has not changed (retrospective). The present teaching approaches adopted by teachers are mainly traditional. The teachers reported using Grammar-Translation more frequently than any other contemporary methods, including the Communicative Approach. In addition, what teachers know about the new computer teaching model is limited to remarks about 'multimedia equipment' and 'communicating with students online'.

### ***Autonomy***

In terms of the national syllabus, the one area where pedagogy is mandated is the computer-teaching model. Institutions are urged to 'take into full account and incorporate into it the strengths of the current model while fully employing modern information technology' (p.23). While limiting the autonomy of teachers in this regard, this was intended to make students 'more autonomous', giving them more responsibility for their own learning. The terms 'student-centred' and 'learner autonomy' used in the document, however, do not appear to carry the same meaning as their use in the ELT literature, where autonomy is seen as a scaffolded process rather than 'self-study' (Benson & Voller 1997; Morrison et al, 2006).

At a more general level, the changes proposed in the national syllabus are quite vague, with only implicit references to pedagogy. This lack of detailed guidance on how the national syllabus was to be implemented in the classroom appears to leave a great deal of autonomy to the individual institutions. This autonomy is not, however, fully taken up at the level of the university, with little leadership being shown in terms of assisting teachers to plan and program in ways that could make their teaching more interactive or learning-centred. The response of teachers has been to heavily rely on the textbook. Even here, however, autonomy is restricted. Course books used by individual institutions have to be selected from those approved by the Ministry of Education. Group planning has resulted in the coordinated, systematic teaching of textbook chapters in a linear fashion. Teachers are strongly discouraged from using their own materials. In this sense, teachers' voices were rarely heard in classroom teaching. They have neither the opportunity nor the independence to use activities for more communicative teaching, nor dare to risk the scores of their students in the final exams by using their own materials.



### ***Specialist knowledge***

A major reason why the autonomy provided by the syllabus has not been taken up is the teachers' lack of confidence in their knowledge of current pedagogical approaches. In some cases, this was attributed to the absence of training in methodology in their pre-service courses. WM, from a university in Harbin, represented a generation that had no access to training in teaching methods:

*The time when I was an undergraduate was just after the Cultural Revolution. There were no teaching methods provided for us; therefore, the method I adopted in teaching textbook is based on my experience and what students like.*

**Excerpt 86 [Int] (WM, Harbin)**

Even in more recent times, teacher training tends to focus on learning about the language and literature, with little input on teaching methodology and theories of language learning. Another teacher from Harbin, HY, also remarked on the limited pre-service training received:

*What I learned on teaching methods was from the one-month training organized by the local government just before my teaching career. That is for general teaching. No formal in-service training for me on teaching theories after that.*

**Excerpt 87 [Int] (HY, Harbin)**

In terms of in-service professional development, very little appears to be available on a regular and in-depth basis:

*As for in-service training, I did not receive any training on teaching methodology after I came into this university 25 years ago.*

**Excerpt 88 [Int] (WM, Harbin)**

The main source of training in pedagogy appears to be the publishers of textbooks, who naturally have a vested interest and would simply instruct teachers in how to use the teaching materials supplied by their company:

*That training from various publishers for textbooks sale once a year does not help me understand teaching methodology because there was no teaching methodology at all in textbooks.*

**Excerpt 89 [Int] (HY, Harbin)**

In the survey, in response to the question on how the teachers sought to improve their teaching, nearly 40% failed to respond. Of those who did respond, 92.7% indicated that they relied on their own resources ('self-improvement'), while only 6.7% had undertaken further education (e.g. in the form of degrees). When asked for further information on the nature of the self-improvement, 87.6% failed to provide any details, while 9.3% nominated 'reading'. One might therefore conclude that there is little

interest in or access to further professional development on the part of classroom practitioners.

In relation to pedagogical change, there would appear to be considerable scope for improvement in terms of the pre-service training of teachers and their in-service professional development. In addition, further support is needed for syllabus developers (particularly at the university level) and materials designers. Given the limited pre- and in-service training in methodology, the national and university syllabi and the course materials potentially play a significant role in providing ‘on-the-spot’ input and modelling to teachers while they are engaged in the act of teaching. In order to do this effectively, the designers themselves need to be competent in the skills of syllabus development, needs analysis, the harmonious integration of the various macroskills, the role of assessment and electronic media, and so on. The syllabus and materials need to be underpinned by an explicit, coherent and detailed rationale based on contemporary theories of language and learning appropriate to the Chinese tertiary context.

## **CHAPTER SEVEN:**

### **ASSESSMENT:**

#### **Changing Demands and the Responses to These Demands**

##### **7.1 Introduction**

This chapter addresses assessment – the third of Bernstein’s message systems (1975, p.88) – in terms of changes in university English language assessment policy in China and the responses of tertiary English teachers to these changes. The chapter is developed through an analysis of the assessment expectations of CECR 2004, of university-based syllabi, and of the CET-4 examination. In addition, the responses from the survey results and the interviews of teachers, administrators, and policy makers on ‘how to assess’ are integrated throughout the chapter. Results of the analyses are again interpreted in relation to Maton’s conceptualisation of *Temporality*, *Autonomy* and *Specialisation* (2004a, p.83).

##### **7.2 Changing demands: challenges and responses in assessment**

Previously, the only mention of assessment in the 1985/1986 curriculum was in relation to the national exam – College English Test (1985, p.10). The national curriculum of 1999, on the other hand, emphasized a range of responsibilities for assessment at the level of the individual university, the region and the national exam (1999, p.9). In the CECR 2004 assessment (see Appendix 5 Requirements of assessment in CECR 2004), the assessment guidelines 2004 are more comprehensive and more student-centred than in the previous national curricula, and is seen as both formative and summative:

*Evaluation consists of formative assessment and summative assessment.*

*Formative assessment includes students’ self-assessment, peer assessment,  
And assessment conducted by teachers and school administrators. ...*

*Summative assessment refers to final tests and proficiency tests. ...*

*(CECR 2004, p.27).*

Detailed sets of criteria are provided to support students' self and peer assessments (Self-Assessment/ Peer Assessment Form of Students' English Competence, p.37) in which are defined expected performance at different levels of the five skills (listening, speaking, reading, writing, and translation). Summative assessment is stressed through reliance on the CET-4/6 external examination. CECR 2004 states that an important aim is to be comprehensive and to focus not only on the final product of language learning but also on the process.

Interview comments on the assessment changes in CECR 2004 by participating policy-makers indicate that they highly regarded these changes as a means to improve English teaching in Chinese universities. For instance, as the chief member of the committee for CECR 2004, GS from Beijing, stated that:

*Personally, I do hope the change of assessment in the CECR 2004 will bring a new beginning in our teaching and teachers and universities can really deal with these changes appropriately rather than just focus on some national test.*

**Excerpt 90 [Int] (Prof. GS, Beijing)**

This comment shows that GS hopes the new change in assessment procedures will reform university English instruction. It also shows that he believes that teachers and universities would implement these assessment changes appropriately, not just focus on CET-4/6 in assessment practice, which he implies has been the focus previously. From his point of view, teachers have a degree of autonomy.

However, in contrast to GS, English teachers seem to consider the changes as unsubstantial and impractical. For instance, a lecturer from Beijing, SH showed his disappointment to such changes in assessment in CECR:

*If the national test – CET-4/6 is still there, the change for assessment in the CECR 2004 is not complete. The Ministry of Education seems determined to keep CET-4/6 there. It seems that nobody wants to take a risk to cancel CET-4/6 at the present stage.*

**Excerpt 91 [Int] (SH, Beijing)**

SH is referring to the CET-4/6 when he says 'national test'. This comment illustrates both his disappointment that CET-4/6 was not abandoned and his concern that no one wishes to challenge its use as the primary evaluation instrument.

Another example comes from HY, a lecturer from Harbin:

*... the assessment requirements are not practical because we all have to be responsible for the low scores of students in the national test.... And they are not specific and have high expectations.*

**Excerpt 92 [Int] (HY, Harbin)**

This comment demonstrates that HY seems to consider the stated policy change in assessment as irrelevant because of the power of the CET-4. He notes that teachers generally are concerned about their students' results on the CET-4. His comment also indicates that the change of assessment procedures in CECR 2004 have had little or no effect on classroom teaching as teachers pay more attention to the preparation for the national test than for the assessment method advocated in CECR 2004. In addition, he recognises that CECR 2004 does not explicitly explain the change.

### **7.2.1 The purposes of assessment procedures in CECR 2004**

The stated purpose of assessment in CECR 2004 indicates that on the one hand, the role of assessment is considered important and that autonomy in assessment has been allocated to the universities. CECR 2004 policy offers the following assertion concerning the general purpose of evaluation:

*It not only helps teachers obtain feedback, improve the administration of teaching, and ensure teaching quality but also provides students with an effective means to adjust their learning strategies and methods, and improve their learning efficiency (CECR 2004, p.25).*

This statement demonstrates that, according to the policy, assessment has two purposes. First, it is to obtain feedback about student performance and to improve teaching; second, it is to provide information to students to assist them in becoming effective and independent learners. As mentioned above, CECR 2004 also differentiates between formative and summative assessment procedures:

*In formative assessment students' learning process is under observation, thus contributing to the enhancement of their learning efficiency. ... Summative tests are designed to assess students' all-round ability to use English (CECR 2004, p.27).*

While CECR2004 acknowledges the role of formative assessment in achieving learner-centred objectives and attempting to improve both teaching and learning, it also advocates summative testing in order to assess all-round achievement, to evaluate programs and to maintain standards.

Regarding the forms of summative assessment, CECR 2004 recommends the following:

*To evaluate the results of the set goal, colleges and universities may administer tests of their own, run tests at the intercollegiate or regional level, or let students take **the national test** in accordance with the different requirements set by the Requirements (p.27).*

University tests, which are constructed by the instructors, are designed to measure what students learned in classes at universities or colleges and are non-standardised achievement tests that have not been subjected to rigorous procedures for norm-referencing. Tests developed and administered at the intercollegiate or regional level are also seen as achievement tests. The national test (CET-4/6) is a norm-referenced summative test used to measure outcomes of English language learning after the students have completed four semesters.

Each university is permitted to choose one of these three forms of final assessment: their own test, the intercollegiate or regional level test, or CET-4/6. Thus, the policy statement above asserts that universities have autonomy to decide if students will be assessed by their own evaluation instruments or by CET 4/6. Since the CET 4/6 is a standardised, norm-referenced test, universities generally prefer it as the final method of assessing English language achievement.

*Moreover, CECR 2004 further mandates evaluation of teaching performance: Education administrative offices at different levels and colleges and universities should regard the evaluation of College English teaching as an important part of the evaluation of the overall teaching quality of each school (2004, p.27).*

The university must establish criteria for evaluating teaching performance. This is a further incentive for the university to use CET 4/6 as it provides a standardised measure

of student achievement that can be used as the basis for evaluating teacher performance. In terms of autonomy, this policy statement demonstrates the authority of CECR 2004 to maintain power at the Ministry level by requiring an ‘evaluation of college English teaching’ (CECR 2004, p.27) establishing control by the central government (CECR 2004, p.1; 5; 27) over English language instruction with the university required to provide evaluations of teaching performance that satisfy government criteria. This suggests that the autonomy in assessment that has ostensibly been granted to individual universities and their teachers is in reality rhetorical.

Responding to this apparent contradiction in assessment, the policy-makers who were interviewed preferred to emphasise that autonomy is provided by the policy and insisted on the importance of all three suggested assessment procedures rather than the focus on the national test. For instance, GS, one of the policy makers for CECR 2004, emphasised that:

*The right has been given to you (universities) in making decision about the types and procedures of assessment designed by yourself, and whether you want to participate in CET-4/6 or not. It is your own business about whether you dare or dare not to use such a right (to autonomy) in your institute or your teaching.*

**Excerpt 93 [Int] (Prof. GS, Beijing)**

This comment confirms his belief that the policy has allocated to universities and teachers the decision-making autonomy to participate in CET-4/6 or to use another method for assessment. According to GS, universities are entitled to refuse to use CET-4/6 and have been empowered to design and use their own assessment instruments. From his point of view, the official policy of the Ministry of Education has allocated autonomy for assessment to the universities.

However, university administrators of English language programmes have a different perception of the assessment policy. Administrators who participated in this study generally indicated their suspicion regarding independence from the national test and lack confidence in the feasibility of implementing formative assessment. For example, CL, a dean from a university in Shanghai, noting the provision for evaluating teaching, commented that:

*While the CECR 2004 did not lay down regulations exactly about the passing ratio of CET-4/6 for each individual university, ‘the evaluation of College English teaching’ has to be taken as an important component of the general evaluation in universities. This is enough to make universities think twice about ignoring CET-4/6. Therefore, the purpose of formative assessment is debatable.*

**Excerpt 94 [Int] (Prof. CL in 2004)**

This observation supports the argument that, at the university level, administrators perceive the allocation of autonomy to be only rhetorical and feel an implicit pressure to use CET 4/6 as the assessment standard. CL pointed out the contradiction between the stated purpose of the assessment in CECR 2004 and the perception at the university level that CET 4/6 results are considered by the government to be the benchmark criteria for evaluating teaching performance. As a result, universities, perceiving threats to their reputations, rankings, and subsidies, avoid developing assessment instruments and have concentrated on CET 4/6. The dilemma is that while the CECR 2004 policy explicitly allocates autonomy in assessment to universities, the universities implicitly interpret the policy to favour the use of CET 4/6. CL concludes that formative assessment has little relevance to college English teaching as CET-4/6 results are the criteria used by the government to assess the final outcomes of English learning.

An observation from CH, a dean from a university in Beijing was that:

*... Formative assessment is another game of formalism.*

**Excerpt 95 [Int] (Prof. CH, Beijing)**

CECR 2004 explicitly supports formative assessment but provides university programs the autonomy to choose assessment procedures. When programs at university level could be developed well with their own tests, it is normal to use both formative and summative assessment for different purposes in practice. However, in the context of his interview, Professor CH suggests that the CECR policy of giving autonomy to the universities is just a ‘game’. He knows that the CECR policy explicitly recommends formative assessment and autonomy. However, his perception seems to be that the implicit goal of CECR is to use assessment to agree with government demands and expectations. Therefore, he feels that the CECR is a ‘formality’. His comment shows that administrators might not take formative assessment seriously since the policy is ‘playing a game’. Both the government and the universities know the expected outcome is to prepare students for CET 4/6. Despite the CECR policy, to the university, assessments to evaluate students are not a serious choice for university English language teaching. In reality, preparation for CET-4/6 is the goal. In short, the explicit policy is most likely rhetorical.



### **7.2.2 The rationale of CECR 2004**

CECR 2004 policy explicitly allocates autonomy for assessment to the universities and the English language teachers. The rationale for this divestment of centralized power is to challenge teachers to use their knowledge and skills to develop more appropriate procedures of assessment for their classrooms. As a result of the policy, teachers are now given opportunities to demonstrate their knowledge, skills, and experience to design more effective and authentic assessment instruments. A prerequisite for assuming this autonomy is that teachers have the knowledge and skills necessary to develop formative assessment methods as required in CECR 2004 and in addition to be capable of designing summative assessment instruments that help modify and improve their own teaching. As a point of departure, teachers must know and understand the different goals of formative and summative assessment and know how to administer them and evaluate the results.

However, the theoretical rationale that underlies formative and summative assessment and the relationship between them are not explicitly defined nor explained in CECR 2004. The assessment section in CECR 2004 is a composite, partially of learner-oriented theories and partially of system-oriented theories. The component of system-oriented assessment tells the universities to ‘assess summatively in the context of program evaluation when educational institutions or teachers wish to establish how much of the language or of particular skill has been learned as a result of the program’ (Brindley 1989, p.13). The learner-oriented assessment component informs the universities to ‘assess continuously, usually at the end of an activity or unit of instruction’ resulting in ‘an aggregation of information on attainment which has been collected throughout the course.’ (Brindley 1989, p.16). This component emphasizes the role of assessment in promoting learning and can be seen as learner-based in terms of assessing specific communicative performance in context (Brindley 1989; 1995). In CECR 2004, system-oriented theory and learner-oriented theory are both mentioned but are not integrated, and neither explanation nor rationale is provided to justify their relationships in implementing assessment of English language learning. As a result, the perception that CECR 2004 focuses on summative assessment might result in confusion by teachers about the nature of assessment and the theoretical rationale for implementing the reformed assessment procedures. Just as university administrators perceive summative

assessment (CET 4/6) to be the essential criteria for assessment, the instructors may also conclude that the policy demands teaching for summative assessment that is best met through preparation for the CET 4/6.

### **7.3 University syllabi and assessment demands**

This section discusses present university level assessment procedures, the role of university syllabi in assessment, and teacher-designed test papers used in university English language classes.

#### **7.3.1 Assessment reflected in university-based syllabi**

Although most of the university-based syllabi examined in this study were designed before the issue of CECR 2004 (See Table 7.1) and had not been revised at the time of data collection, they are useful in demonstrating a general attitude in university English language programmes toward the official curriculum. As discussed in Chapters Five and Six on ‘what to teach’ and ‘how to teach’, university-based syllabi were seen as mere rhetoric in terms of curriculum and pedagogy because they generally ignored the role of both curricular and pedagogic theories in the context of Chinese tertiary English teaching. A similar attitude is evident in the approaches to assessment.

Any change in a university syllabus will have significant influence on the selection of assessment procedures, especially in implementing CECR 2004 policy. For example, some considerations include determining appropriate assessment procedures for classroom teaching and how CET-4/6 influences curriculum, instruction, and assessment. However, Table 7.1 suggests that there has been little if any change in assessment procedures in university syllabi. Furthermore, there is no evidence of establishing a theoretical basis to guide teachers toward an understanding of the university curriculum and assessment procedures. Table 7.1 provides a synopsis of English language assessment procedures at three universities in China.

Table 7.1 shows that in BUST, the required final mark for each semester is simply an accumulation of 100 points of which 20% is classified as a general mark which includes unit quizzes and vocabulary and grammar tests, 20% is based on mid-term exam results

and 60% is based on the final term examination. Normally, 60 out of 100 points are the required percentage for passing.

**Table 7.1 Assessment in university-based syllabi (BUST, HLJU)**

<i>Content</i>	<b>BUST</b> (syllabus & planning: renewed in 2003)	<b>HLJU</b> (Syllabus & planning: renewed in 2002)
Assessment	Full mark = 100 pts, including general mark 20%, mark in mid-exam 20%, and mark in final term exam 60%. <b>Unit quiz; vocabulary and grammar quiz; mid/ term exam</b>	<u>Must pass CET-4 to receive Bachelor degree</u> ; Focus on content basis: 60% from textbooks + 40% external content = 40% final exam + 10% test in class + 20% midterm exam + 30% tasks after class

Similar to BUST, assessment requirements at HLJU emphasise assessment of language content, of which 60% comes from textbooks and 40% from other sources. The criteria for the 30% of marks assessed with ‘tasks after class’ are not specified. The primary difference of HLJU from BUST is that the HLJU syllabus explicitly acknowledges that students intending to earn a Bachelor degree must pass CET-4. This confirms the important role that the national test has in assessment and evaluation procedures at this university. The syllabus does not specify the relationship between formative assessment and CET-4.

As shown in Table 7.1, the assessment requirements at HUST syllabus were unavailable.

### **7.3.2 The ambivalent status of university-based syllabi**

The assessment requirements advocated by CECR 2004 impose constraints on university English language programs and illustrate the restrictions on autonomy of university English language syllabi. As noted previously, ostensibly, CECR 2004 allocates a level of assessment autonomy to the university program by permitting the departments to select their preferred form of assessment from three options: designing their own assessment instruments and procedures, using an intercollegiate or regional level examination, and taking the results of CET-4/6. As a result of this policy, universities have been given the right to design their own examination paper, which implies that universities have been given sufficient autonomy to make the decision as to whether students’ performance in English would be evaluated through locally designed assessments or sit for the CET-4/6. However, subsequently CECR 2004 suggests that evaluation of teaching performance through results of the College English Test (CET 4/6) should be considered as an important part in the whole program of university

evaluation (CECR 2004, p.27). This requirement encourages participation in the national test (CET-4/6) and thereby discourages alternative assessment procedures at universities

Data from interviews with administrators and teachers indicate a perception that universities have been placed in an invidious position. The ambiguity of CECR 2004 policy has resulted in confusion about the extent of the decision-making power that universities exercise over assessment procedures. For example, CL, a dean from a university in Shanghai, stated his opinion that the major universities are more concerned about political factors than student needs, and concluded that this resulted in universities opting for CET 4/6 as the means of assessment and evaluation:

*The leading group of universities often follows the political needs rather than academic considerations. That is why almost all universities made the decision to participate in the national test.*

**Excerpt 96 [Int] (Prof. CL, Shanghai)**

The composition of the ‘leading group’ that CL refers to includes the Secretary of the Communist Party (SP or ‘Dang Wei Shu Ji’ 党委书记) and the Chancellors and some Vice Chancellors of the universities. The SP represents the Communist Party and has the same power over university policies as the chancellor, but is expected to deal with politics and personnel management at universities. The Chancellor (normally a professor) is responsible for academics. The composition of the “leading group” follows the standard pattern of organization of authority at different government levels, including the Central Government in China. CL’s comment demonstrates that the decision to participate in CET-4 was made by the leading group, not by the universities themselves.

A dean from a university in Beijing, Associate Professor SHI observed that while university leaders were willing to support alternative options for language teaching and assessment, they feel compelled to follow government policy in assessing English language:

*My university was newly upgraded from a college to a university by the central government. The presidents are capable and open-minded. They encourage me to break traditional restrictions in teaching and assessment procedures. However, I still have to participate in CET4/6 because the passing ratio of CET –4/6 demonstrates the English level of universities and it is taken as one of the important criteria in university evaluation by the Ministry of Education.*

**Excerpt 97 [Int] (Assoc. Prof. SHI, Beijing)**

This comment reveals that Professor SHI felt that participation in CET 4/6 was a *de facto* requirement by the government for university evaluation.

In the interviews, teachers (HY, SH, M, WM) also expressed the perception that universities succumb to political pressures rather than focus on academic principles in English language assessment. For instance, SH, a lecturer from a university in Beijing, stressed the belief that the university made the decision to participate in CET-4/6 in order to compete with other universities:

*It is the presidents of universities who lay down regulations about the passing ratio of CET-4/6 by themselves in order to raise the reputations of their universities. For instance, BUT had a very high passing rate of CET-4/6 several years ago. Now it is believed in the society that English level of teachers and students in this university is very good.*

**Excerpt 98 [Int] (SH, Beijing)**

The comment indicates SH's belief that the community considers the level and the quality English instruction to be reflected in the number of successful CET 4/6 results.

HU, who has an appointment at a newly established university in Shanghai, explained her concerns about her university concerning leadership and assessment:

*The chancellors at my university and the head of the faculty are not qualified. They pay all their attention to power and income rather than teaching, especially assessment. ... It is a fashion that teachers give good marks to students who are required to give them good annual feedback as a deal. ... The fact is that nobody prevents all these!*

**Excerpt 99 [Int] (Assoc. Prof. HU, Shanghai)**

This comment illustrates HU's belief that the selection of English assessment procedures related to concerns about power and funding rather than about the quality of instruction and learning. Furthermore, she associates this attitude with the poor quality of administrators and implies that their concerns are more with maintaining power and income by accommodating students with good final marks. This comment also reflects the externalist view mentioned in the chapter on theoretical framework, which argues that education seeks to preserve the status of those who hold political and economic power in society.

In addition, interview data from teachers indicate that they also perceived that they were constrained by layers of administrative management and that they often acquiesced with the expectations of university policies. Under the university system, instructors have limited opportunities to be involved independently in assessment and receive little

support from the administrators to be actively involved in assessment practices (HY, SH, HU, WM). For instance, SH, a lecturer from Beijing, explained the results of this type of administrative management in the process of designing end-term exams at her university:

*The test papers at the end of semesters are often designed by several teachers who are considered capable, then collected and reorganized by the head based on the format of CET-4/6, which is easy to rate by computer and teachers. In most cases, the dean does not examine the final paper. Sometimes, there are some ridiculous mistakes in the exam paper. ... Most teachers are not given opportunities to be involved in test designing for the reason of confidentiality.*

**Excerpt 100 [Int] (SH, Beijing)**

This comment illustrates the process of developing exam papers at this particular university. The responsibility for designing the end-term test is organized either by two or three teachers or by the head of the program, which confirms that teachers are not provided sufficient opportunities to contribute individually to the development of the exam paper for their particular classes that would reflect their specific instruction. In other words, what was taught is not necessarily what is tested. Additionally, the assertion that the format followed CET-4 confirms that at this university, exams are restricted and influenced by the CET 4, and teachers have limited input into the assessment practices.

In general, teachers indicated that they believed that they did not receive adequate support from their supervisors (HY, SH, HU, WM) or peers (G). Associate Professor HU from Shanghai described her experiences that she felt proved that she received no support in attempting to reform and change test-centred assessment:

*I tried to change the end-term exam in 2000 because I think teachers need to be given more opportunities to be responsible for their teaching, and students need to be responsible for their own learning process. Therefore, I gave 10% of end-term marks to teachers' judgment on students' daily performances. The end-term test paper contains 90%. It took teachers two days to grade the written part, therefore teachers were reluctant to do it and asked for money. When I went to my dean for that, he refused to give me any support but asked me to go to the teaching agency in the university. After I got money from the university, my dean was so angry. I still cannot understand the attitude of the dean. Soon after that, I was taken away from the position of sub-dean.*

**Excerpt 101 [Int] (Assoc. Prof. HU, Shanghai)**

This comment illustrates HU's belief that her trial changes to the final term exam provoked 'hostile' reactions from both peers and supervisors. This reaction could indicate two possibilities. First, teachers might not have been satisfied with her proposed changes to the final term exam and believed that they were a threat. Not only would the original CET-4 format be time saving, it would also follow the format they had been following because they assumed it to be preferred by the government. They may have

been concerned about the performance of their students on an unfamiliar examination format. Second, the resistance from her supervisor might have involved ‘academic politics’ in which her dean was disturbed by new ‘troublesome’ ideas. In addition, he may have suspected her motives and perceived the changes as undermining his power. The lack of support from supervisors and the absence of cooperation by colleagues can be considered a reason that teachers avoid taking responsibility for test development and instead depend on the national test.

Moreover, it seems that the assumption that assessment is equivalent to testing dominates the perceptions of policy at university level; therefore, learner-oriented classroom assessment procedures tend to be ignored, as shown in the data from the interviews with teachers and policy makers. HU, from Shanghai, claimed that at her university assessment seemed disorganized and confused while the supervisor is dependent on the national test as the focus of assessment:

*No appropriate academic person inspected and checked the content of the final exam paper; Teachers have ‘great autonomy’ to assess anything they want in the end-term exam; English assessment in this university is in chaos. ... However, rather than focusing on the final exams, my boss is so interested in joining in CET-4. He tries hard to get high marks of students in order to show his achievements.*

**Excerpt 102 [Int] (Assoc. Prof. HU, Shanghai)**

With this comment, HU is arguing that the main objective for assessment at her university is good results on CET-4 rather than on the final term exam. While teachers have autonomy to determine ‘what to assess’ in the final exam paper, in her opinion there is no organization and coordination, resulting in “chaos”. Moreover, the responsible administrator appears detached from the process and is concerned only with national exam scores as a mechanism to demonstrate his ‘achievements’.

Additional evidence came from SH, a lecturer from Beijing. SH elaborated his perceptions as to why university assessment has not been developed and why university assessment is CET-4 centred:

*The main assessment procedures at university level is mid-term and final-term exams because it is easy to copy the format of CET-4. ... One reason for this is that in formative assessment, sometimes teachers gave high marks to our students for favour. Sometimes teachers are not very careful about the marks we give because we have large-size classes.*

**Excerpt 103 [Int] (SH, Beijing)**

SH’s comment shows that in his opinion the midterm and final exams are the primary forms of assessment in this university. He states that this is due partly to the ease of

following the CET-4 format for these tests. In addition, he suggests that some teachers use formative assessment to gain the favour of students, and that others are careless in evaluation because of the sizeable number of students in a class.

Policy makers also held ambivalent attitudes regarding the choice between using university assessment or CET-4/6. LG, Chief of a Provincial Department for Higher Education, pointed out that:

*One side-effect of the national test is that assessment is CET-4/6-centred, rather than comprehensive assessment developed at universities. How to help students learn English in use in assessment is ignored. ... However, if universities give up CET-4/6, they have to take risks being ranked among universities. If students do not have the certificate of CET-4/6, they might not be accepted by employers. If the Ministry of Education cancelled CET-4/6, there might not be the basic criteria of language measurement, then how shall we stimulate students' learning? What shall we employ to assess students' language abilities?*

**Excerpt 104 [Int] (LG, Harbin)**

LG's comment illustrates a major controversy at the university level. First, the power of CET-4/6 discourages development of comprehensive university-designed assessment procedures. He believes that such procedures could be used to help students improve their competence, but they are ignored. However, he also admits that abandoning CET-4/6 puts universities at risk, since students usually need CET-4/6 to find jobs. He also suggests a problem that was mentioned above: assessing student performance through methods other than the CET 4/6 may be viewed as lowering academic standards. Finally, he poses the salient question: if CET-4/6 is abandoned, then what would replace it? One important reason for maintaining CET-4/6 is that there are currently no other reliable assessment procedures in China. This suggests that LG believes that teachers are not capable of designing sound tests of English language achievement.

### **7.3.3 Teacher-designed examinations**

The issues discussed above are also reflected in teachers' responses to the requirements of CECR 2004 on assessment procedures and are evident in the final examination paper used in January 1999 at Heilongjiang Engineering University (HEU) (See Appendix 6: HEU Test 1999) and the corresponding document notes.

As noted earlier, CECR 2004 (p.27) provides universities with the autonomy for instructors to design their own assessment procedures. This policy assumes that teachers have the knowledge, skills, and experience to write their own examination papers.



However, data from this study indicate that teachers have limited qualifications in this area. For instance, WM, a lecturer from a university in Harbin, referred to this dilemma when he said:

*It is very difficult for us to design any sound assessment procedure by ourselves for classroom teaching and difficult to design a more robust test paper than CET.*

**Excerpt 105 [Int] (Assoc. Prof. WM, Harbin)**

This comment demonstrates the perception that teachers have difficulty in developing tests to assess class performance or in designing a final examination that meets the standards of the CET 4/6. Although WM did not suggest any reasons for this, her comment suggests that teachers lack specialised knowledge for doing so.

Additional evidence was provided by SH, a lecturer from Beijing. When SH discussed reasons why he believed university-level assessments were inadequate, he emphasised his perception that instructors' lack of appropriate knowledge of assessment was responsible:

*... Another reason for this is that my colleagues and I are often sceptical of the appropriateness of our evaluation on what and how students' respond in the classroom; we are also not sure how to design a better final test paper rather than to photocopy the format of CET-4.*

**Excerpt 106 [Int] (SH, Beijing)**

This observation reflects a lack of confidence by teachers in their competence to develop effective assessment instruments that meet CET-4 standards in measuring student achievement. A lack of knowledge of teachers on assessment theories and practice is supported by the document data, such as the final HEU examination paper (January 1999) and the supporting document notes. These documents show what was tested at university level, the nature of such tests and the knowledge and skills the test-makers had.

If the HEU Test of 1999 is compared to CET-4 (200106) (See Appendix 7: CET-4 200106), the content, responses, time, item number, and score requirements are identical. The examination consisted of a total of 100 points and was organized into five sections: listening comprehension, reading comprehension, vocabulary and structure, cloze, and writing, without speaking. The responses to the items of each part were multiple choice except for writing, which required the student to write a composition of 100 words within 30 minutes. Of the five sections, reading comprehension was allocated the most

time (35 minutes), the most items (30), and the most points (40). Since the examination was primarily multiple-choice, the focus was on recognition of display items, which means the test only assessed declarative knowledge. For instance, in part III (Vocabulary and Structure) (HEU Test, p.11), a typical item was:

52. The failure \_\_\_ only when conditions are unfavourable.  
A) will be occurred      C) shall be occurred  
B) will occur              D) should be occurred

This type of item only requires that the student recognise the correct response or at least eliminate three distracters. The test therefore only assesses recognition of items and is useless for determining any level of communicative competence. This suggests that the HEU Test is in the traditional mould and is an example of the type of testing that CECR 2004 has attempted to replace.

This particular HEU Test (Band Three) was intended to assess the English achievement of university students in the third semester of their second year. The purposes of the test were to report the ranking of the final score of students to different stakeholders and then to inform the students what they had actually achieved at the end of the semester. The implicit goal was to encourage students to improve their language skills in the final semester as preparation for CET-4. Interestingly, based on the document notes, an approximate 5% failure rate was expected. This HEU Test was created by three or four instructors, including the sub-dean and program leaders, none of whom were trained in language testing. The development of the HEU Test materials was based on the textbook and what instructors had decided that students were expected to know at this level.

There is no evidence that reliability and validity considerations were systematically established for the test. The test tasks were itemized into discrete sets of knowledge/skills and fixed format (mainly multiple choice). The content and structure of the test were based on the textbook rather than on the National English Curriculum and/or the university-based syllabus. However, the objectives of the 1999 Curriculum were not specific in establishing performance outcomes for Band Three, and assessment was absent in the university syllabus. With no specific guidelines for assessment in either the national curriculum or the university syllabus, the test writers based the content of the HEU Test on the textbook and other learning materials that were used in

teaching. As a result, the HEU test does not move beyond 'textbook English' and fails to assess students' performance (procedural and conditional knowledge) in English. In other words, this test only measures the students' recognition, and not even recall, of display content (declarative knowledge) from the textbooks and class materials.

The evidence from the interviews confirms that the content for the teacher-made tests was randomly selected and the issues of validity and reliability were not considered.

WM from HEU explained:

*When I was asked to prepare test materials for university tests, I often went to some texts which people had used for a while, such as newspaper or other exercise books. ...I often considered the language points which I believed important and students should know in textbooks. ...No, we never evaluated the paper after the exam.*

**Excerpt 107 [Int] (Assoc. Prof. WM, Harbin)**

This comment corroborates the assertion that not only were test materials randomly selected but what was tested in teacher-made tests were mainly discrete language points. As a result, the HEU Test was not based on the national curricula, a university-based syllabus, nor even textbooks. Rather, what was tested was based on what teachers believed was important and what they believed students should know. Moreover, the comment confirms that teachers neglected to evaluate their test to consider areas of improvement for later test designing. The fact that teacher-made tests were never reviewed suggests that HEU did not have well articulated learning outcomes or performance standards to enable teachers to develop effective and consistent assessment instruments.

Test content was based on 'language points' which indicates that test-makers were uncertain about the kind of language knowledge and skills that should be assessed and how knowledge and skills should be shaped in test tasks and TLU (Target Language Use<sup>7</sup>) domains.

## **7.4 College English Test – Band Four**

The College English Test – Band Four was reviewed in Chapter 2 in terms of interpretation of CET scores, validation of CET, and components of CET, with the

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<sup>7</sup> Target Language Use Domain is defined as 'a set of specific language use tasks that the test-taker is likely to encounter outside the test itself, and to which we want our inferences about language ability to generalize' (Bachman & Palmer 1996, p. 44).

present views around CET. This section discusses changes in the CET content, purposes and the role, and the specialised knowledge which teachers are expected to possess.

#### **7.4.1 Changes in the CET-4 content**

Since the examination was first developed, the Ministry of Education has been making an effort to use CET-4 as a means to encourage changes in university English teaching. In February 2005, the Ministry published a policy document called *Reform Plan on the National College English Test Band Four/Band Six* (hereafter RPN CET-4/6, [www.moe.edu.cn](http://www.moe.edu.cn)). According to this plan, a revised edition of CET-4 was to be published by Shanghai Foreign Languages Education Press at the end of October 2005. This was then administered as a trial at 180 universities throughout the country in January 2007. The plan includes the following features:

1. A change in the method of scoring and reporting scores that had been in effect from June 2005. The revised full scores are set at 710, there is no passing requirement, and the test certificate has been changed into a score report. The report includes the overall and specific marks for each item with an interpretation from the Committee of CET-4/6.
2. The content and the form of CET-4/6 have been changed, as shown in Table 7.2. The content consists of four parts: listening comprehension, reading comprehension, cloze (error correction), and writing. The content and the score percentage of listening have been expanded (35%, dialogue and short tests) and include authentic materials, such as dialogues, workshop, and TV programs. Reading includes components called ‘careful reading’ (25%) and ‘fast reading’ (10%). Careful reading assesses vocabulary recognition in texts while fast reading assesses reading rate. Comprehension testing includes a cloze or error correction test (10%) and a short answer or translation task (5%). Writing (15%) addresses the ability to compose in different genres, such as letter, report, and narration.

**Table 7.2 Changes in the reformed CET-4 (Feb.2005 www.moe.edu.cn)**

Please see print copy for image

Table 7.2 shows that in the new CET-4, listening is equivalent in importance to reading as each represents 35% of the total score. The vocabulary and structure component of the earlier test has been deleted (see Table 7.3), and vocabulary has been combined with reading which together represent 25% of the total score. With the new edition, assessment of language structure is distributed into Cloze (III.i) and Translation (III.ii) sections. Although there has been some modification of the format for answering the items, the primary method remains multiple choice (more than 60%), with fill-in (20%), and short answer questions (10%) rounding out the remainder. Thus the revised edition of the CET-4 continues to assess the basic knowledge level of declarative knowledge with minimal attention to procedural knowledge (writing).

**Table 7.3 The original types of content in CET-4 and scores after 1996 and before 2005**

Order	Item No.	Content	Response	Scores	Time
I	1-20	Listening Comprehension	Multiple Choice	20 %	20m
II	21-40	Reading Comprehension	Multiple Choice	40 %	35m
II	41-70	Vocabulary & Structure	Multiple Choice	15 %	20m
IV	71-90	Cloze	Multiple Choice	10 %	15m
V	91	Writing	Free Composition	15 %	30m
IV	<i>After 1996</i>	<i>Short Answer Question; Compound Dictation</i>	<i>Multiple Choice</i>		

\* The italicised part is the change after 1996 that these items were used together with the Cloze test. It is mainly based on Yang & Weir (1998, p.9) and Zhao (2003b, p.95).

Despite some changes in the items and the format of CET-4 2005 (Table 7.2), when it is compared to the earlier version (Table 7.3), no thorough changes that reflect a more innovative approach to assessment or evaluation of communicative competence are apparent.

In reference to CET, interviews with teachers and administrators demonstrated that no substantial changes of CET in content, form and purpose were perceived. For instance, HY, a lecturer from Harbin, pointed out that there was no substantive change in CET-4:

*CET-4 was said to be changed several years ago, but not yet even after the coming of the new national curriculum (CECR 2004). The structure of CET-4 was not changed; the content of CET-4 was not changed. CET-4 is still the 'baton' for tertiary English teaching. The only thing that needs students' hands is writing; most of the items are still multiple choice.*

**Excerpt 108 [Int] (HY, Harbin)**

For HY, writing seemed to be the only assessment task involving the use of independent thinking and language production and all other items were multiple choice that did little to assess students' abilities.

Additional evidence of this perception was provided by an administrator, CH, a dean from Beijing:

*I suspect the change of CET-4/6. For instance, the way of changing scores reporting as 710 and the CET-4 certificate into scores do not make sense in helping both the authority and teachers/ students since the most important thing in assessment theory is the purpose of the test. The passing scores of the new criteria of CET-4 must be over 425; otherwise, undergraduates cannot sit in CET-6, and graduates will not be provided any job in the Beijing area. The committee for CET-4 might owe this blame to the wrong interpretation of the business stakeholders. However, how much has CET-4 really changed towards improving tertiary English teaching and students' language proficiency?*

**Excerpt 109 [Int] (2<sup>nd</sup> interview on the phone with Prof. CH, Beijing in 2006)**

CH's observation that the purpose of CET-4 changes was not to assist students, teachers, and administrators, but rather to establish criteria that suited administrators and employers. By establishing a benchmark score of over 425 for CET-4, the examination committee established the power of the examination over the students' future prospects, both in further education and in possible employment. Furthermore, CH questioned that the supposed changes in CET-4 were substantial. He conceded that this lack of substantial change and consolidation of CET-4 power may not have been intentional, but could possibly have been a result of the committee's misunderstanding of the purposes of the examination. However, his opinion is that the CET-4 does little to improve students' language proficiency.

#### **7.4.2 Structure and content of CET-4**

The test consists of five sections, with Section I divided into two subsections. This means that students respond to six sections. Four of these sections require only

recognition of multiple-choice (declarative knowledge) while one requires recall of fill-in (declarative knowledge). These account for 85% of the examination. In the final section, students are provided an opportunity to produce a writing sample which is a procedural task, but this section accounts for only 15% of the score and students are required only to compose a short paragraph (100 words). As a result, students could leave this section blank and still pass the examination if they have good recognition skills. More likely, if students have some idea about the topics, they will have committed pre-written compositions from their English classes, or from examination preparation institutes (bǔxíbān 补习班), to memory, which they need to reproduce.

Part II assesses reading comprehension and accounts for 40% of the test. The topics of four reading passages are based on geography, sport, environment, and market sales. These topics are considered to be general content in social, cultural, and science areas that is appropriate for all students regardless of their majors. The genres are narrative and argumentation, which are considered suitable for university students (Wang et al 2001, p.218).

The test items were written to assess a variety of reading skills. For example, the purpose of Item 20 is to test summarisation skills, while seven items (No.15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 27, 29) are designed to assess inference skills. These eight items are designed to assess reading comprehension at the *understanding* stage of Bloom's Taxonomy, although only at the recognition level. The remaining 32 items focus on the recognition of explicit content in the sample texts, which is an assessment of declarative knowledge (Bloom 1956).

Part III (vocabulary and structure) assesses recognition of discrete-point knowledge, and accounts for 15% of the examination. Part IV is a cloze test, accounting for 10% of the examination, that requires identification of correct meanings of word or the phrases or sentence patterns. For example, Item 64 requires students to recognize the difference between *result*, *consequence* and *effect*; Item 75 assesses a comparison of meanings with *main*, *central*, and *nuclear*; Item 61 requires a correct match for the phrase *expect of*. Curiously, although this is ostensibly a cloze test, the format is multiple choice, which means that students do not need to recall or produce appropriate vocabulary, but only to recognize the correct item. The purpose of a cloze test is to assess the ability to use words

or phrases correctly in context, yet CET-4 provides vocabulary and phrases in isolation with no context.

Except for the writing sample of Part V, the CET-4 200106 focuses on declarative knowledge and recognition rather on productive ability.

### **7.4.3 The purpose and the role of CET-4**

As noted in the literature review, an explicitly stated rationale for CET-4/6 is absent in the policy documents. No guidance is provided on the role of CET-4, no information given on how the test items were developed, and there is no discussion of the relationship between the CET-4 and the assessment requirements of CECR 2004. Moreover, teachers are given no guidelines on how CET-4 is related to English language instruction in university classrooms.

While no clarification of the purpose of CET-4, nor rationale supporting the content of CET-4, nor explanation of the relationship between the CET-4 and CECR 2004 are available to administrators or teachers, 1985/1986 and 1999 policies required that CET-4/6 be used as the national test to evaluate student performance and in CECR 2004 as the criteria for evaluating instructor performance and programme effectiveness in higher education. This has given CET-4/6 a significant level of power and control in university English teaching that has serious impact on instructor autonomy.

### **The leading position of CET-4**

Interviews with policy makers, administrators and teachers reveal the perception that autonomy is curtailed by the dominant power of CET-4/6. An important policy maker, who is the chief member of the Committee for CECR 2004, Professor GS from Beijing described his view of how the relationship of the Committee for CECR 2004 with the CET-4/6 Committee (CCET-4/6) and the Ministry of Education limits his committee's control over assessment:

*Our group (the Committee for CECR 2004) in Beijing is only in charge of the design of the CECR 2004, not involved to the design of CET-4/6. The CET-4/6, in Shanghai, is responsible for the organization and design of CET-4/6. We do not have relationships. It (the CCET-4/6) was established in the end of the 80's and is directed by the Ministry of Education.*

**Excerpt 110 [Int] (Prof. GS, Beijing)**



This comment reveals that CCET-4/6 was under direct government supervision and independent of the CCECR 2004. As a result, CCET-4/6 was under no obligation to follow the assessment principles established by CECR 2004. This relationship between CECR 2004 committee and the CCET-4/6 indicates that the committee for CET-4/6 is autonomous and free to develop assessment criteria independently from the CECR 2004. This absence of a collaborative relationship indicates that the two committees with responsibility for university English language education reform lack effective communication and coordination.

Another policy maker, LG, who is head of a department of higher education in Heilongjiang Province, explained his view of English language assessment practice as opposed to the power of CET-4/6:

*In order to guarantee language learning, we really need to break dogmatism in assessment, such as the same pattern and routine format led by CET-4/6. Personally, I would like to see a kind of natural and relaxed environment of language learning where students can master language out of interest rather than struggle with any national test. ... We have to face one fact of life in China: controls lead to 'death'; but relaxation of controls results in chaos.*

**Excerpt 111 [Int] (LG, Harbin)**

This observation indicates that LG recognized a need to move away from the traditional, dogmatic CET-4/6 format of assessment and towards the development of a more innovative and authentic method of assessment. According to LG, the power of CET-4 needs to be broken and replaced by what he calls a natural and relaxed English learning environment. Nevertheless, LG recognises that while the current system of control is stifling, reform can lead to problems.

In the interviews, administrators consistently expressed the view that CET-4/6 is an instrument of government control (Q, CA, & CH) and some suggest that it is also an important source of revenue for the government (CH, CL). For example, CL, a dean in a university in Shanghai observed that:

*CET-4/6 is not a purely academic issue. The political orientation always follows a top-down approach which is masked by an illusion of efficient management. That is 'academic politics' is popular. There would not be CET-4/6 if there were no support of the government. Think about it, why could it be there since there is no substantial change of CET-4 these years? Additionally, it involves the issue of business. Roughly calculating, it is said around six million candidates each time participate in CET-4/6. If each of them has to pay ¥16, sometimes more than that, how much is it in total each time?*

**Excerpt 112 [Int] (Prof. CL, Beijing)**

CL notes that in his opinion the problem with CET-4/6 is not merely an ‘academic issue’. He sees it as a mechanism for political control and also as a means of revenue enhancement. He implies that the government has little incentive to abandon CET-4 and great incentive to maintain the test as a national requirement.

English language teachers commented on the issue of the power of CET-4/6. For instance, SH, a lecturer from Beijing, asserted that:

*The requirement of the passing ratio of Band Four Exam is increasing these years. Actually, it is very hard for teachers to achieve it because the general English level of students is low. When English learning cannot be compulsory for students, English teaching is made mandatory for teachers. For example, more and more materials to complement CET-4 are being produced however necessary or not.*

**Excerpt 113 [Int] (SH, Beijing)**

This comment indicates that SH believes that teachers face serious constraints from the passing requirement of CET-4. This has led to a demand for instructional materials that complement the CET-4 content and format to compensate for the low quality of the students’ English competence. SH apparently considers this pressure to prepare students for CET as being ‘mandatory’. This perception of CET power has denied teachers any sense of autonomy to develop alternative assessment methods and has restricted their thinking to preparation for CET.

The constraining power of CET-4 over teacher autonomy was further elaborated by HY, a lecturer from Harbin:

*For teachers, the passing rate of CET-4 is used to judge teaching effect, their amount of workload, their bonus, and their final promotion. All these make teachers exhausted and sick. As for students, English is their compulsory basic course in the first two years, which is believed to take most of their time among all of their courses. Students would not earn their certificate if they failed to pass CET-4.*

**Excerpt 114 [Int] (HY, Harbin)**

This comment demonstrates HY’s view that the power of CET-4 has a significant impact on both instructors and students. First, HY believes that CET-4 has the power to determine teachers’ careers – the results affect evaluation of their teaching performance, their workload, qualification for bonuses, and even their possibility for promotion. Second, HY is concerned that CET-4 has unwarranted power over student graduation depending on the mark they receive in it.

Excerpts above demonstrate that although CERC 2004 advocates Communicative Language Teaching as indicated in CECR 2004 policy, encourages autonomy, and recommends formative assessment, teachers believe that the power of CET-4/6 gives it control over students and themselves. As a result, both students and teachers believe the English language classes should focus on test preparation.

### **Teaching for CET-4**

Interviews with teachers demonstrate that their perception of the dominant power of CET-4 has resulted in CET-4/6-oriented teaching in university English language classes. As a result teachers perceive that their purpose for teaching English is to ensure that students score highly on the CET-4/6. The interviews were consistent in demonstrating that teachers, rather than perceiving themselves as autonomous professionals, are concerned that their students' CET results are used as the criterion to evaluate their teaching performance (HY, SH, HU, G, W). For instance, HY, a lecturer from Harbin, declared that:

*Some of my students want to get a Master's Degree; some of them want to go overseas, whereas most of them want to pass the exams as a compulsory requirement of universities. For me, I teach for the passing ratio of CET. This is the need of the country, university and students. It is out of my control. And the score of students in CET is almost the only way to evaluate my teaching. Except for this, I cannot see what else I can use.*

**Excerpt 115 [Int] (HY, Harbin)**

HY recognises that students have a variety of motives for studying English, but concludes that most are only interested in the CET certificate. As a result, he admits that he does not focus his instruction on meeting the needs of students' language learning, but on preparing students for the CET. He also admits to feeling powerless, especially since he assumes that his students' CET results act as the only criterion for evaluating his teaching effectiveness. This is further evidence that teachers perceive that they have no autonomy in their profession and that they believe they are completely under the control of CET-4.

A comment from SH, a lecturer from Beijing, confirms this perception that the purpose of English language education is preparation for the CET-4:

*Looking at the dominant position of CET-4 means for teachers as well as students. ... If tertiary English teaching was not meant for CET-4/6 teaching, what could it be then'?*

**Excerpt 116 [Int] (SH, Beijing)**

The interviews also confirmed that teachers considered the main source of essential content for CET-4/6 to come from their textbooks (SH, G, M, HY, WM). For instance, G, a lecturer assistant from Beijing, acknowledged that:

*I worry about the mark of my students in CET-4. I always focus on the language points in textbooks which might be tested in CET-4.*

**Excerpt 117 [Int] (G, Beijing)**

This comment reveals that ‘what to teach’ in the classroom is controlled by CET-4. G acknowledged that she focused on vocabulary and grammar points in the textbooks when teaching in order to match what might be tested in CET-4. As a result, she considered teaching textbook content to be essential for preparing her students for CET-4.

These interviews provide the evidence that CET-4 has a negative ‘washback’ effect on English language instruction.

WM, from Harbin, described her classroom teaching as:

*Nothing can be considered if CET-4 is still there ‘as a baton’ for college English teaching. What students believe is the fact that they must pass CET-4, nothing more. This determines that any effort you make in classroom to improve their language abilities, such as story-making, or role play, would never arouse their interest in the classroom. ... Exercises for CET-4 are more worthy.*

**Excerpt 118 [Int] (Assoc. Prof. WM, Harbin)**

WM emphasizes the power of CET over teaching by comparing it to an orchestra conductor’s baton that controls the purpose of teaching and learning. This indicates WM’s perception that CET-4 directly controls ‘how to teach’ in English language education. WM also suggests that innovative learning tasks are perceived by students as a waste of time that distract them from their objective and that they prefer to do exercises that will help them score well on CET-4. The result is that communicative methodologies have evolved into ‘CET-4-centred’ teaching.

The comments and assertions above demonstrate that English teaching at the university level in China is perceived by administrators and teachers to require CET-4-oriented teaching. CET-4 is viewed as the only form of assessment procedure to evaluate programme and teaching effectiveness. Interestingly, in all of the interviews nobody mentioned other forms of assessment procedures; it is as if alternative procedures did not exist for the participants. While it is possible that teachers simply ignored other assessment procedures or did not understand that CET-4 is merely one of several

assessment options, the evidence from the data of this study strongly indicates that administrators and teachers do not consider using innovative formative assessment methods because of their perception of the power that CET wields over both students and teachers.

#### **CET-4 as measurement of program quality and teacher performance**

The goal of CECR 2004 was to develop assessment tools that would permit teachers to make valid conclusions about the knowledge and skills that English language students have as a result of instruction. But there is an enormous amount of English knowledge and skills that students need to acquire and the substantial amount of English language that a national achievement test is supposed to assess poses severe difficulties for the developers of this test. If a national test actually covered all the knowledge and skills English language students are expected to learn, it would be impossibly long. Therefore, a national achievement test needs to accomplish authentic assessment with a small collection of test items. The solution for a national achievement test would be to sample English knowledge with no more than 100 items. However, sampling knowledge is not the same as assessing proficiency.

The challenge for those who are developing a national test is to create an assessment instrument that, with few items, provides a valid assessment of a student's mastery of English. However, such a test contains too few items to allow meaningful assessment of a student's communicative competence and proficiency. Unfortunately, the data above show that both administrators and teachers often credit too much accuracy and attach too much significance to students' scores on a national test, such as CET-4. Several factors might affect the legitimacy of these scores. Yet, because CET-4/6 scores are reported in numbers, administrators may attribute unjustifiable precision to them.

Moreover, a national test, such as CET-4, should not be used to evaluate the quality of English language education. That is not its purpose. There are several important factors from the data above to support this point. The main reason is that students' scores on this test do not give an accurate guide to teaching effectiveness and any assumption about teaching quality made from students' CET-4/6 results is likely to be invalid.

Second, CET-4 designers encounter a difficult problem with the diversity of English language curricula in Chinese universities despite CERC 2004. Because different universities may emphasize different objectives, the creators of CET-4/6 face the challenge of developing a test that could be aligned with different curricular choices. Therefore, the second reason that CET-4/6 should not be used to assess the effectiveness of a teacher or programme is that there is likely to be a significant mismatch between what is taught and what is tested unless teachers teach directly to CET-4.

#### **7.4.4 Knowledge needed for CET-4**

Given the perceived influence of CET-4/6 on assessment, data was examined to determine the degree of knowledge and the understanding of assessment by test developers and university English language teachers. Data from interviews with teachers, administrators, and policy makers were examined to provide evidence of the degrees of knowledge and understanding of assessment.

As noted previously, CET-4 test items are developed by randomly selected teachers in universities across China. While this might be democratic (and inexpensive), it brings into question the knowledge and understanding of assessment of these developers. One such lecturer assistant from Beijing, G, noted that:

*One test I designed for reading comprehension was selected last June! ... As for CET-4, language points are the main content to be tested, therefore, to some extent, it seems easy to design. ...I am sure many people who participated in CET-4 designing do not have assessment background because it is difficult for them to explain what and why they want to test.*

**Excerpt 119 [Int] (G, Beijing)**

From this comment, G demonstrates a perception that the content of CET-4 should focus on vocabulary and structure. As a contributor to the examination, he reveals his assumption that CET-4 should be a knowledge-oriented test. Interestingly, he suggests that many of his colleagues in designing examination items were even less qualified and capable than himself. Finally, G's comment reveals that there are no systematic procedures for establishing the validity of the test, particularly in terms of construct validity.

Interviews conducted with administrators (Q, CA, CH) also indicated a general agreement that CET-4 was not properly designed, as well as concerns about test content and the qualifications of the test makers. For instance, CL asserted that:

*CET-4 does not test what should be assessed of students' abilities because it is based on a model of language as structuralism. ... If the designers did not change their limited understanding of the nature of language, which leads to the nature of CET-4, any possible changes of CET-4 will remain rhetorical.*

**Excerpt 120 [Int] (Prof. CL, Beijing)**

CL offers his judgment on the lack of content and construct validity of CET-4. His perception is that development of the examination was based on a structuralist view, even though the syllabus and contemporary language and learning theories promote a more communicative, functional approach. In addition, CL expresses his concern that any reform of CET-4 would be ineffective if the test designers did not expand their knowledge and understanding of language learning.

Interviews with teachers revealed that, in addition to concerns over the content-centred format of CET-4 and the limited qualifications of CET-4 makers, there was a perception that the dominance of CET-4 devalued their own professional knowledge (SH, HY, G, WM, M). For instance, G, from Beijing, commented that:

*The current teaching only demands the passing ratio of CET; therefore, the level of teachers' knowledge and abilities on pedagogy are not required to be very high. ... You will be fine if you just make your students pass CET-4/6.*

**Excerpt 121 [Int] (G, Beijing)**

This observation demonstrates that G believes that because of CET-centred teaching, there is no need for a high level of knowledge or teaching skills. In his opinion, teachers need only prepare students for the CET. A lecturer from Harbin, HY agreed that CET-4-oriented teaching does not demand extensive assessment knowledge or skills from teachers:

*There is no need for teachers to get more knowledge on assessment because it would be okay if you can make your students pass CET-4/6.*

**Excerpt 122 [Int] (HY, Harbin)**

From these comments, it appears that there is little incentive for English language teachers to upgrade their knowledge or skills. If the goal of teaching English in the university is only to prepare students to pass CET-4/6, then teachers perceive no need to engage in in-service development to improve their skills or knowledge. In this sense, CET-4 has had significant effects on the quality and professionalism of Chinese

university English language teachers.

Additional evidence supporting this argument was provided by SH, a lecturer from Beijing. SH contended that teachers did not need to improve their knowledge of pedagogy or assessment because of CET:

*Probably, teachers might have some problems in their abilities in English teaching, but for CET-4-centred teaching, their abilities for assessment are sufficient. We do not need to know more than CET-4.*

**Excerpt 123 [Int] (SH, Beijing)**

Despite these constraints, interviews also revealed that teachers believe that they have had insufficient pre-service and in-service training in assessment (HY, SH, HU, M, WM). WM from Harbin acknowledged her lack of in-service and pre-service experience with assessment:

*I never learned assessment and was never trained for that (for thirty years) ... However, if I was asked to design a test for students, I think I can manage it based on my experience and the format of CET-4/6. It would not be worse than that (CET-4).*

**Excerpt 124 [Int] (Assoc. Prof. WM, Harbin)**

WM conceded that she had never received any pre-service and in-service training in assessment in thirty years of professional experience in language education. However, despite this lack of assessment background, she feels confident that she could design a test based on CET-4 as a model. Such a view emphasises the dominance of CET-4 as the pre-eminent form of assessment. Rather than develop an understanding of assessment theory and practice, teachers need only copy CET-4.

M, a lecturer from Beijing, in her interview (2004) offered her opinion on the reason that teachers did not receive pre-service training on assessment:

*Almost all English courses for English major graduates and undergraduates fail to provide any class on assessment. Therefore, I never learned any assessment theories. And we also do not have any professional training for assessment because we focus on CET-4 teaching.*

**Excerpt 125 [Int] (M, Beijing)**

M's conclusion is that teachers receive no pre-service training on assessment because the program for English majors is not a language education program and therefore does not provide assessment courses for undergraduates and postgraduates. Moreover, she points out that teachers feel no need for in-service training in assessment because of the focus on CET-4-preparation.



A salient insight was provided by SH, a lecturer from Beijing, who commented that:

*Teachers who focus on something external, such as the passing ratio of CET-4 and how much money they can get after class, ignore developing their ability. ... This might be why they focus on those things that make them comfortable rather than any opportunities for further learning in assessment although most of us never received any training for that as undergraduates.*

**Excerpt 126 [Int] (SH, Beijing)**

SH suggests that because English language teachers are focused on CET-4 results and the additional income they receive from private tuition, they have no interest in professional development. From this point of view, teachers are not only subject to the power of CET-4 as discussed above, but also have their own vested interest in maintaining the status quo. Any reform that reduced the influence and power of CET-4 would also jeopardise an important source of teacher income.

## **7.5 Issues of validity**

While there are issues of reliability in relation to assessment in China, these have less impact on classroom teaching than issues of validity – particularly content validity (does the test assess what it claims to assess?), construct validity (does the test reflect contemporary understandings of the object of learning?) and consequential validity (does the test have a washback effect on the curriculum?). This section will review the ways in which validity issues impinge on teachers' response to change.

Although the aim of language teaching may be 'communicative competence' as proposed in CECR 2004, teaching and assessment often focus only on the declarative knowledge necessary to prepare students for the national examination. To answer 'what should be assessed', one possible interpretation could be *declarative knowledge*, also referred to as 'display' or 'content' knowledge. When students know declarative information, they know *what* (Marzano et al, 1988). For example, a student might know *what* the simple past tense represents or *what* an irregular verb is. On a test, the student may be able to identify or recall the simple past tense forms of a variety of irregular verbs. However, CECR 2004 encourages the use of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) and CLT moves beyond declarative knowledge to address the need for *procedural knowledge* and *conditional knowledge*. Procedural knowledge includes the range of actions performed in language in use. In other words, it is knowing *how*. For example, procedural knowledge includes knowing *how* to use the simple past tense in

authentic contexts (Paris, Lipson, & Wixson 1983). CLT does not ignore the importance of declarative knowledge. Declarative knowledge is essential to procedural knowledge, as is illustrated below:

DECLARATIVE KNOWLEDGE	PROCEDURAL KNOWLEDGE
Rules of regular and irregular verb tenses	Telling what happened the day before
Comparative forms of adjectives	Comparing and contrasting
Rules of indirect speech	Reporting a conversation
Formation of conditional (If . . . then . . .)	Predicting events

*Conditional knowledge* refers to knowing *why* a given language action is best and *when* to use one skill or action as opposed to another (Marzano et. al, 1989). Knowing *when* and *why* to use a given tense is an example of conditional knowledge. Thus, students must know what skill is necessary for the task (declarative knowledge), how to apply the selected skill as a strategy (procedural knowledge), and which procedures are appropriate (conditional knowledge). Unlike declarative and procedural knowledge, conditional knowledge cannot be explicitly taught in the classroom – students develop it through authentic interactions integrated into class activities.

Ideally, teaching methods and assessment should be designed to support student learning. However, in reality, the data above show that mandated standardized testing dissuades teachers from changing substantively. If CET-4, with its dubious content and construct validity and its negative washback, weren't so dominant and if instructors had more autonomy in developing assessment at the university level, there might be a more positive orientation towards change. Unfortunately, as this study demonstrates, in the context of university English language instruction in China, teachers are not only deprived of autonomy in developing assessment, but they also lack the knowledge and experience essential for developing effective curriculum and pedagogy, much less assessment.

## 7.6 Summary of Chapter Seven

This chapter addressed changes in the university English language policy in China and the responses of university English teachers and administrators to these changes in terms of 'how to assess'. The chapter first provided a description of assessment in CECR 2004, university-based syllabi, and the College English Test – Band Four (CET-4), and then

discussed responses from the surveys and the interviews of teachers, administrators, and policy makers on 'how to assess'. Specific attention was devoted to the perceived conflict between CECR 2004 policy and the influence of CET-4 over assessment.

Assessment was considered mainly from the perspectives of the third of Bernstein's message systems (assessment) and Maton's conceptualisation of orientation to change (temporality), autonomy, and specialist knowledge (specialization).

### ***Orientation to change: temporality***

As in curriculum and pedagogy, in terms of temporality, assessment in CECR 2004 would appear to be forward-looking (prospective). In realities, curriculum, pedagogy and assessment remained largely unchanged (retrospective).

CECR 2004 endorses formative and summative assessment for the first time compared to the former national curricula 1999 and 1985, as seen in the literature review. And in fact, formative assessment was given more prominence than summative assessment in classroom teaching (2004, p.27). However, in reality the CECR does not do enough to support such change. Although both formative and summative assessment are recommended, the two different approaches to assessment are not adequately explained or integrated, leaving teachers without a clear idea of the nature or status of formative, classroom-based assessment.

Assessment requirements in CECR 2004 appear to have had no impact on university-based syllabi and CET-4. Although CET-4 claims to have continued changing since it was established in 1987, it is still believed to be retrospective in content, form and purpose. The data above show that the theoretical underpinnings of CET-4 design in the new sample (2005) were still based on structural linguistics.

Assessment in university-based syllabi appeared to be unaffected by CECR 2004. One reason is the timing. Although a draft of CECR 2004 had been at universities, the university-based syllabi seemed not to be affected and almost all of them had not made any changes based on the draft CECR 2004. The fleeting reference to assessment in university syllabus documents focused mainly on procedural matters with little reference to any commitment to changed assessment practices.

Despite the rhetoric of CECR 2004 and the interest in changing assessment on the part of some teachers, there is a great deal of inertia in the system. From the interview data, many teachers and administrators find change threatening and new assessment trends time-consuming (e.g. developing outcomes and criteria).

### ***Autonomy***

CECR 2004 appears to afford teachers and universities many opportunities and space for decision-making in assessment. It emphasises the function of formative assessment and provide three types of test for universities. However, in reality, CET 2004 delivers relatively weak autonomy. It claims that ‘evaluation of college English teaching’ (p.27) is an important part of higher education, which follows the principles of the central government (CECR 2004, p.1; 5; 27). This means that universities have to participate in the national test, CET-4/6, as one of the main means of assessment. It appears then that the autonomy which was given to individual universities and teachers in terms of formative and summative assessment and the selections among the three forms of tests, is illusory.

The weak autonomy of teachers has led to a predominant CET-4/6 and has made formative assessment largely meaningless for tertiary English teaching. CECR 2004 challenges universities and teachers in terms of decision-making, such as whether they should participate in CET-4/6 or not and universities are entitled to refuse CET-4/6 and are empowered to design assessment at university level. However, the requirement of ‘evaluation of college English teaching’ (p.27) indicates that high pass rates in CET-4/6 should be what universities strive for since they function to symbolize universities’ reputations and ranks, and determine the money universities might obtain. The importance of CET 4/6 results in the promotion of teachers also limits teachers’ autonomy in relation to teaching and use of formative assessment.

Universities were put into a position of weaker autonomy by the CECR 2004. As described above, each university is entitled to administer three forms of test: their own test, a test at the intercollegiate or regional level; or CET-4/6. It appears then that universities have been given sufficient autonomy to make their own decision on whether they want to use CET-4/6 or to design their own examination. However, the

requirement of the college English teaching evaluation of holistic higher education encourages use of the national test (CET-4/6) and discourages assessment procedures at university level. In addition, the leaders at individual universities appeared to favour the national assessment of tertiary English teaching because results on CET-4/6 are used in comparison of and competition with other universities.

Moreover, data from interviews with teachers show that teachers were managed by different layers of academic and administrator management and often merely followed the dictates of the faculty and university. Most teachers seemed to have few opportunities for autonomy in assessment and little support for varying assessment practices. The lack of support from supervisors and from colleagues might be one of the reasons for teachers' dependence on the national test, rather than designing their own forms of assessment.

CET-4/6 holds a special position in tertiary English teaching, and widely impacts on tertiary English teaching in China. This important role of CET-4/6 is shown in the CECR 2004 (p.27) discussed above, and the present CET-4/6-oriented teaching in classrooms.

Administrators perceived that the lack of relationship between the CECR 2004 group and the Committee of College English Test indicates that the committee for CET-4/6 has greater influence than the committee for the national curricula. Almost all administrators seemed to take CET-4/6 as reflecting policy of government (Q, CA, & CH). Teachers perceived that they faced strong pressure from CET-4: increasing passing ratios, raising students' low English levels, and providing more and more materials to train students in CET-4 items. They believed that this pressure had reached an extent which greatly impacted on teachers as well as students, therefore interfering with teaching and learning. Teachers perceived that their teaching is CET-4-driven teaching.

### ***Specialist knowledge***

CECR 2004 has high expectations of teachers' professional expertise by emphasising both formative and summative approaches, in particular, the importance of formative assessment in classroom teaching. However, without clear guidelines and rationale,

these policy changes place high demands on the assessment expertise of both test designers and teachers.

Test developers at the level of the CET-4 have shown no initiative in attempting to design assessment instruments that reflect contemporary advances in high-stakes, standardized testing such as the online TOEFL or the IELTS. Teachers who write items for the CET-4 have no specific training in such matters and feel unprepared for the task. At the regional level, there is no evidence of groups of universities developing rigorous yet innovative tests reflecting local conditions. At the university level, administrators do not appear to have the necessary background in assessment theory to provide leadership and guidance in appropriate assessment policy and practices. Several teachers indicated a willingness to consider new methods, but, with no pre- or in-service training in assessment, felt that they had inadequate preparation to implement classroom-based, formative assessment. Others asserted that their assessment knowledge was sufficient, though their conception of assessment was simply copying the format and content of the CET-4. And yet others were complacent about their expertise in assessment because the status quo was comfortable (or even financially rewarding). CET-4-oriented teaching does require too much teacher knowledge and skills in assessment, which might indicate to them that teachers do not need to improve in these areas.

In summary, while changes in national policy appear to promote a more learning-oriented approach to assessment and promise greater autonomy for universities and teachers, these are thwarted by the dominance of the CET-4 examination and the lack of specialist knowledge in the area of assessment.

## **CHAPTER EIGHT:**

### **DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION**

#### **8.1 Introduction**

The objective of this study was to examine the changing context of tertiary English teaching in China and the responses of university English teachers, administrators and policy-makers to these changes. In particular, the study focused on the tension between change, autonomy, and specialisation and in terms of curriculum, pedagogy and assessment in Chinese university English teaching.

To address these issues, the following research questions were identified for this study:

1. What changes in English language teaching have occurred in the Chinese context over the past twenty years?
2. What expectations have been placed on the teachers as a result of these changes?
3. How have teachers and administrators responded to these changes?

##### **8.1.1 Changes in the Chinese context**

The first research question ('What changes in English language teaching have occurred in the Chinese context over the past twenty years?') has been addressed briefly in Chapter 1 and in greater detail in Chapter 2. To summarise the main points, the rapidly developing Chinese economy requires English language education at university level to provide highly qualified intellectuals for the market. This has resulted in policy changes which aim to *deepen the reform and to improve of College English teaching, foster the comprehensive English abilities of students* (CECR 2004, p.1). At the same time, there are issues and debates in the field of tertiary English teaching such as effective teaching methods (Zheng et al 1997; Dai et al 2004; 2005), English for General Purposes or for Specific Purposes (Cai 2003), the nature and role of CET-4/6 (Liu et al 2003), and so on.

As a result, the introduction of the trial College English Curriculum Requirements (CECR 2004) in January 2004 brought a new wave of educational reform in the field of tertiary English teaching. This study has framed these changes in terms of Basil Bernstein's approach to curriculum (*what to teach*), *pedagogy (how to teach)*, and

assessment and evaluation (*how to assess*). CECR 2004 has been promoted as the required curriculum policy for all universities and colleges by Chinese Ministry of Education. Changes in the policy include recommending a shift in emphasis from reading and writing to listening and speaking; a computer-teaching model to achieve autonomous learning; the specification of levels of achievement; formative and summative assessment along with student self evaluation. The College English Test – Band Four and Six (CET-4/6) was also in the process of being changed between 2005 to 2007 to reflect the changes in English language teaching mandated by CECR 2004.

### **8.1.2 Expectations on teachers, administrators and policy makers**

To answer the second research question (‘What expectations have been placed on the teachers as a result of these changes?’), an analysis of key documents was conducted to provide evidence regarding the demands placed on the teachers and administrators (and policy makers) in terms of their *orientation to change*, *autonomy*, and *specialist knowledge*. *Orientation to change* refers to the degree to which teachers and administrators are open to change and willing to comply with new policy directions. As mentioned above, the main focus of the 2004 policy is to recognize the importance of speaking and listening (CECR 2004, p.5). This in itself is a major shift in a system which has a strong tradition of teaching through intensive reading. Additionally, the content of the syllabus has been specified according to three levels of achievement: basic level, intermediate level, and higher level. (pp. 5-19), organized in terms of listening, speaking, reading, writing, and translating.

In addition, there is a move towards student-centred learning along with a new computer-based multimedia teaching model (CECR 2004, p.25). This poses another major challenge for teachers who have grown up with a very teacher-centred model and with little knowledge of communication technologies. The move towards autonomous learning and computer-based approaches is not based purely on pedagogical principles but also on a pragmatic recognition that in a context of large classes and increasing pressure on teachers, the use of computers is expected to ease the burden (CECR 2004, pp. 21-23), with students using computer-based support to learn independently.

Assessment is another area which has undergone substantial change. In the assessment guidelines 2004, comprehensive and student-centred assessment is seen as both



formative and summative (CECR 2004, p.27). Detailed sets of criteria are provided to support students' self and peer assessments (Self-Assessment/ Peer Assessment Form of Students' English Competence, p.37) in which the expected performance at different levels of the five skills (listening, speaking, reading, writing, and translation) is defined. Again, the inclusion of on-going, formative, responsive assessment, as well as peer- and self-assessment, represents a major change for teachers who have been used to a system of formal tests.

While the policy in 2004 expects teachers and administrators (even policy-makers) to be open to change in terms of curriculum, pedagogy and assessment, it seems that such expectations are problematic. In terms of curriculum, while the requirements suggest a forward-looking approach to syllabus content, in fact the innovations are simply mentioned in passing and contrast with the majority of the document, which still stresses the content of discrete areas such as vocabulary and grammar. In terms of pedagogy, the move towards student-centred learning along with the basic structure of the suggested model and the process of computer-based English learning appears to lack a sound theoretical rationale. And in terms of assessment, while CECR 2004 defines and differentiates between formative and summative assessment procedures, it still appears to favour formal testing and fails to provide adequate information on how teachers might implement formative assessment practices.

With regard to *autonomy*, the document analysis also provides expectations regarding the degree of *autonomy* given to teachers and administrators to implement change. In terms of curriculum, the role of CECR 2004 is defined as providing minimum content and standards, while decentralizing the authority for designing specific, detailed syllabi to individual universities (CECR 2004, p.3). It emphasises the important role of university-based syllabi in actual classroom teaching in the individual institution. In relation to pedagogy, what CECR 2004 mandates is the computer-teaching model. Institutions are urged to 'take into full account and incorporate into it the strengths of the current model while fully employing modern information technology' (p.23) in order to make students 'more autonomous'. And in relation to assessment, CECR 2004 also appears to provide teachers and universities opportunities and space for decision-making, emphasising the function of formative assessment and providing a choice between three types of summative tests for universities (CECR 2004, p.27).

CECR 2004 appears to afford teachers and universities a great deal of space for autonomy in curriculum, pedagogy and assessment, however, these expectations surrounding autonomy also appear to be problematic. Such autonomy is not taken up at the level of the individual institution and administrators, with the university-based syllabi simply copying the main points of CECR 2004 and only elaborating in terms of formalities such as time allocation and assessment. The lack of detailed guidance as to how the national syllabus was to be implemented in the classroom appears to leave a great deal of autonomy to the individual institutions. However, this autonomy is not fully taken up at the level of the university, with little leadership being shown in terms of assisting teachers to plan and program in ways that could make their teaching more interactive or learning-centred. The response of teachers has been to heavily rely on the textbook. Moreover, in terms of assessment, there is still an implicit expectation that the CET-4/6 will be adopted despite the apparent autonomy to choose assessment procedures. Such weak autonomy of teachers, administrators, and policy-makers in universities has led to a predominant CET-4/6 and has made formative assessment largely meaningless for tertiary English teaching.

With regard to *specialist knowledge*, the document analysis suggests that it is assumed that teachers and administrators/policy makers have the specialist knowledge needed to implement change. CECR 2004 has high expectations of teachers' professional expertise by requiring substantial changes in *what to teach*, *how to teach*, and *how to assess* as described above. It provides little insight, however, into its theoretical rationale or research base and the document itself appears somewhat eclectic in its content, with teachers questioning its credibility and relevance. Although CECR provides a great deal of autonomy, the lack of specialist knowledge has an impact on the extent to which this autonomy can be taken up.

A major reason why the autonomy provided by the syllabus has not been taken up in the universities is the teachers' lack of confidence in their knowledge of current pedagogical approaches. As for their knowledge of assessment, while changes in national policy appear to promote a more learning-oriented approach to assessment and promise greater autonomy for universities and teachers, these are thwarted by the dominance of the CET-4 examination and the lack of specialist knowledge in the area of assessment.

### 8.1.3 Responses of teachers, administrators and policy makers

In addressing the third research question (‘How have teachers and administrators responded to these changes?’), the responses of teachers, administrators and policy makers can be interpreted in terms of the tension between the rhetoric of change, autonomy, and specialisation and the reality, in relation to ‘what to teach’, ‘how to teach’, and ‘how to assess’ in tertiary English teaching in China, revealing a subtle and complicated picture.

#### Rhetoric of change versus reality

As noted in Chapters 5 to 7, CECR 2004 claims great changes in all areas of curriculum, pedagogy and assessment. For example, in terms of teaching content, three levels of undergraduate College English teaching are required: *basic requirements, intermediate requirements and higher requirements* (CECR 2004, p.5) with five language learning skills: listening, speaking, reading, writing and translation, and vocabulary. Among these requirements, there is a change in emphasis from the written mode to listening and speaking as a part of the objective of College English teaching (CECR 2004, p.5). Another example of change comes from the new computer-teaching model which is required to remould the traditional teacher-centred approach:

*... colleges and universities should remould the existing unitary teacher-centred pattern of language teaching by introducing new teaching models with the help of multimedia and network technology (CECR 2004, p.22-23).*

As for assessment, formative procedures appear for the first time in a national English curriculum for higher education in China (CECR 2004, p.27).

In reality, however, there is little evidence of change based on the survey and interviews of teachers and administrators on the ground. Most were unaware of the existence of CECR let alone its contents. Teachers perceived that although CECR 2004 seems to mandate a change to communicative language teaching and formative assessment, and assigns specific curriculum responsibility to universities, in fact it is seen as ambiguous in terms of its theoretical rationale and the clarity of the purpose of tertiary English teaching.

The simple example of the undeveloped university-based syllabuses is evidence that the changes in curriculum are not being taken up at the university level. Despite the opportunity provided by CECR 2004 for university-based syllabi to ‘flesh out’ the curriculum guidelines and make them relevant to the individual institution, the university syllabuses failed to take up such autonomy. Teachers perceived the university syllabi as irrelevant, providing no guidance to their teaching mainly because of their lack of professional expertise and their failure to participate in the curriculum design process. WM, Assoc. Professor at a university in Harbin, perceived that the university syllabus at her institution was not meaningful to her teaching (Interview, 2004):

*I do not think the English syllabus designed for our university is useful and meaningful for classroom teaching. I just use my textbook to organize the content each time.*

CL, a dean in a university in Shanghai, pointed out that (Interview, 2004):

*Principally, there should be something to interpret CECR 2004 further to help teachers understand ‘what to teach’ and ‘how to teach’. However, in practical terms, the university-based syllabus does not exist at all.*

As a result, teachers reported feeling lost and uncertain as to ‘what to teach’, ‘how to teach’, and ‘how to assess’; therefore, they returned to the comfort and security of **textbook teaching**, relying on their own previous experience. Teachers commented that the textbooks still tend to concentrate on intensive and extensive reading along with vocabulary, grammar, translation and writing. In addition, Teachers’ handbooks were seen to tend to focus on traditional exercises rather than provide the basis for more communicative activities, concentrating on accuracy at the expense of fluency. The dependence on the textbook neither values nor enhances teachers’ professional knowledge. This is verified by HY, a lecturer from Harbin (Interview, 2004):

*Teachers’ books follow the similar pattern and content as other previous teachers’ handbooks: language points, key answers, and translation. ... I cannot see any special meaning of teachers’ handbooks.*

Pedagogy is also perceived not to have changed in reality based on the survey and interview data. Teachers keep doing things as they had done before. Despite CECR 2004 mandating computer-teaching and formative assessment, tertiary English teaching was perceived as CET-4-oriented and test-centred. Teachers felt that the Ministry of Education continued to evaluate programme and teacher effectiveness through CET-4

scores. Therefore, even though CECR 2004 policy supports the autonomy of teacher-designed tests and universities are given the right to assess students internally with teacher-designed tests, the students would still be required to sit for the CET-4 to gain the necessary certificate of achievement. In addition, teachers felt that teacher-designed tests would not meet the demands of CECR 2004 due to their insufficient knowledge of assessment theory and practice. In this way, CET-4 has maintained its power over university English language programmes. A lecturer, HY, from a university in Harbin, noted that (Interview, 2004):

*... the score of students in CET is almost the only way to evaluate my teaching. This measurement comes from the policy as well as students... Except for this, I cannot see what else I can use to evaluate my teaching.*

Another example came from Q, a chancellor from a university in Harbin, who commented that computer teaching is not new and not effective in his university (Interview 2004). An example of unchanged pedagogy can be seen from the interview with WM, who still focused on vocabulary teaching even after making a great effort based on her experience (Interview, 2004):

*I always adjust my teaching because I have to find what students really like. I help students remember more vocabulary to help their reading ability by helping them to see how it is formed and how to use them in context. ... I then put vocabulary and sentence patterns into translation. ... I cannot do more trials for change because I do not want to take risk of CET-4.*

As a result of the unchanged pedagogy, there remains a strong preference by teachers for traditional Chinese education methods, such as vocabulary and translation teaching. Although CECR 2004 requires a learner-centred approach instead of teacher-centred teaching, it does not describe what these teaching philosophies are in detail and there is little guidance on what they mean in the Chinese context or how such an approach might be implemented. The push for the use of new technologies was not greeted as a means of employing innovative techniques, but simply as a way to reduce the burden of large classes. In addition, there was no evidence in the university syllabuses that a more communicative approach to pedagogy was being encouraged. Moreover, since textbooks still adopted an approach emphasising vocabulary, grammar, translation, and ‘electronic textbooks’, they failed to provide models of how to develop a ‘communicative’, ‘learner-centred’ approach. Teachers, therefore, felt safe to come back to traditional methods of language teaching.

Proposed changes in assessment also do not match the reality. For instance, CL, a dean in a university from Shanghai, felt that formative assessment procedures were fanciful since people still had to strive for a passing rate in CET-4 (Interview 2004):

*'The evaluation of College English teaching has to be taken as an important content of the general evaluation of universities. This is enough to make universities crazy to compete on the score of students for CET-4/6. Therefore, the push for formative assessment is ironic.'*

A lecturer from Beijing, SH stated that the main form of assessment at university level was still mid-term and final-term tests (Interview, 2004):

*The main assessment procedures at university level are mid-term and final-term exams because it is easy to photocopy the format of CET-4.*

Fullan (1991) found that one of the most fundamental problems in education reform is that people do not have a clear and coherent sense of the reasons for educational change, what it is and how to proceed. As described in the theoretical framework, because of the nature of change, it is unrealistic to expect change to happen immediately and uniformly in response to policy. However, the reform of Chinese tertiary English teaching might have been better adopted if changes were implemented with a well-planned schedule over several years. When teachers were suddenly confronted with many changes without sufficient explanation or rationale and not provided with the means to put them into practice, it is not surprising that they stayed with what they were familiar with. WM, Assoc. Prof. from Harbin, exemplifies the frustration of teachers in trying to deal with the changes (Interview, 2004):

*68 hours in a semester for one volume of an approved textbook, no space for your professional development, no time for trialing your new methods. ... It is impossible for teachers to make students improve their ability of listening and speaking. ... All you have to do is to finish the content of the textbook and do more exercises for CET-4.*

Although a rather negative picture has been painted above of teachers' uptake of changes, in fact the data point to a more complicated reality of Chinese tertiary English teaching. There are some teachers who welcome changes and are really trying hard to embrace changes under very difficult circumstances, with very little support, and making very little progress. Others just give up, for reasons such as heavy workload, poor salary, and huge classes. The issue of pay, for example, affected some teachers' attitudes to taking a professional interest in implementing change. Some teachers saw their tertiary jobs as just one source of income while they also taught English to children after class for extra money. SH, a lecturer from Beijing, stated (Interview, 2004) that:

*Survival in this city is challenging and problematic for me, how could I do my work better? That might be the reason that probably almost 99% of teachers teach English to get more money after class.*

SH also commented (Interview, 2004) on other disincentives:

*In addition, there is no opportunity for professional development. To attend doctorate program, I have to sign contract with my university and keep working here. Moreover, universities could not satisfy some needs of teachers for problems of policy, support, and technology at universities.*

The realities of insufficient income, the need for professional development, more flexible policy, academic support, and for more access to technology tend to work against implementing the rhetoric of CECR 2004.

### **Rhetoric of autonomy versus reality**

As discussed in Chapters 5 to 7, CECR 2004 claims to provide teachers and universities with the space to do what they want. The following example shows such an intention of CECR 2004:

*Because institutions of higher learning differ from each other in terms of teaching resources, students' level of English upon entering college, and the social needs they face, colleges and universities should formulate, in accordance with the Requirements and in the light of their specific circumstances, a scientific, systematic and individualized college English syllabus to guide their own College English teaching (CECR 2004, p.3).*

In reality, while the policy seems to be allocating autonomy to universities and teachers, CECR 2004 is still retaining power by several means:

(1) By being vague about expectations, such as the deficiency of theoretical rationale, which leads teachers as well as students to maintain the status quo and not seize the opportunity for autonomy. For instance, although they are given the freedom to introduce English for Specific Purposes and Academic English, teachers tend to stick with teaching for general purposes in TET as the policy provides no detail on what is involved in ESP or EAP (Q Interview, 2004):

*(For students), vocabulary and grammar teaching repeats what students have learned in their high schools. Such general English teaching leads to the huge consumption of their (students') valuable time and energy. ... On the other hand, teachers are not challenged at all.*

(2) Using CET-4 as an instrument of control of university evaluations. The example comes from the policy itself:

*Education administrative offices at different levels and colleges and universities should regard the evaluation of College English teaching as an important part of the evaluation of the overall teaching quality of each school (2004, p.27).*

Such a ‘hidden’ control of the system through CET 4 results in a false autonomy as teachers are coerced into the traditional test-oriented teaching (WM, Interview, 2004):

*Nothing can be considered if CET-4 was still taken ‘as a baton’ for college English teaching. What students believe is the fact that they must pass CET-4, nothing more. This determines that any effort you make in the classroom to improve their language abilities, such as story making, or role play, would never arouse their interest in the classroom. Exercises for CET-4 are more worthy.*

(3) Although the policy appears to confer autonomy on teachers, the system fails to provide opportunities for teachers’ systematic professional development to enable them to deploy this autonomy. One example comes from SH, a lecturer from Beijing (Interview, 2004):

*The only possible opportunity of training for my colleagues is to go to textbooks sale meetings. Since 1998, some publishers organize conferences every year for marketing. Some scholars are sometimes invited to present workshops on how to use those textbooks, or how to use some methods ... Oh, another opportunity for training at present is computer operation.*

(4) Teachers’ autonomy was constrained by the academic and cultural context. Teachers felt that they were dependent on the leadership of their work place academically and culturally. This was perceived, to some extent, to prevent teachers from taking initiatives, as exemplified by the example of a teacher at a university in Shanghai after she conducted assessment reform but could receive no support from her colleagues and the dean, and finally lost her position (Hu Interview, 2004):

*... After I really got money from the university, my dean was so angry for that I still cannot understand the attitude of the dean. Soon after that, I was taken away from the position of sub-dean.*

In this sense, the space provided by CECR 2004 for teachers and universities is illusory and such autonomy seems to have not been explored and used yet. Teachers could not take autonomy into practice or they were not allowed or encouraged to do so.



Based on the notion of autonomy, as developed by Maton (2004) from Bourdieu and Bernstein, autonomy should be established upon well-developed economic production, political power and other fields of social practices. This is because autonomy is relative and often determined by external impacts in complicated pedagogic practices; it could be stronger or weaker in certain situations. When economic and political influence is not properly used, autonomy for teachers and universities is compromised. CL, emphasised this issue (Interview, 2004):

*‘Academic politics’ is popular. There would not be CET-4/6 if there were no support of the government. ... Additionally, it involves the issue of business. Roughly calculating, it is said around six million candidates each time participate in CET-4/6. If each of them has to pay ¥16, ... how much is it in total each time?*

CL analysed the impact from both economic and political aspects. First, ‘academic politics’ concerns top-down power, indicating that teachers might not have autonomy with regard to CET-4, even though the policy appears to encourage such autonomy. Second, economic power was misused to pursue money rather support teachers in using their autonomy. Such weaker autonomy in the field of tertiary English teaching has profound effects on the context of this teaching in China because it controls the nature of change, teachers’ perceptions of change, and the actual practice of teaching in English language classrooms.

### **Rhetoric of specialisation versus reality**

As can be seen from the data from Chapters 5 to 7, there is an expectation that tertiary English teachers are knowledgeable professionals. It assumes that teachers understand all the requirements of the policy in terms of ‘what to teach’, ‘how to teach’, and ‘how to assess’. For example, in describing ‘what to teach’, CECR 2004 requires that:

*Colleges and universities should cover components of **learning strategies** and **intercultural communication** in their teaching so as to enhance students’ abilities of **independent learning and of communication** (CECR 2004, p.19).*

About course designing, CECR 2004 requires that:

*The course system, which is a combination of required and selective courses in comprehensive English, language skill, ... and **English of the specialist disciplines** (p.19).*

In terms of teaching model, CECR 2004 states that:

*... English language teaching will be free from the constraints of time or place and geared towards **students' individualized and autonomous learning** (p.23).*

As for assessment, CECR 2004 simply states as that

*Formative assessment is particularly important in computer-based teaching which is characterized by **students' independent learning** (p.27).*

The words emphasised by the researcher carry with them technical and theoretical assumptions about curriculum development, pedagogy and assessment. In the policy, however, they are simply mentioned in passing without further explanation as to why they are mentioned, what they mean and how to achieve them. They are supposed to be understood by teachers naturally and automatically.

In reality, teachers admitted that they lacked the specialist knowledge required to implement the policy. The tension between what teachers were assumed to know and what they know in reality is also a factor that drives teachers back to the comfortable and familiar. For instance, teachers and administrators felt that they did not have knowledge in the area of syllabus development and curriculum planning due to the deficiency in their pre-service training and in-service training, as shown in the interview of SH, a lecturer from Beijing in Chapter 5. Another example came from M, the head of a program at a university in Beijing (Interview, 2004):

*(As the head of a program), I have realized that there must be something wrong with it (the syllabus), but I am not sure what the issues might be and how to make change. I was thinking that if I did know what these issues are and how I can deal with them, things might be different.*

Teachers also perceived that they did not have adequate specialist knowledge in pedagogy. For example, some teachers explained why they felt they did not have sufficient pedagogic induction in pre-service training (WM Interview, 2004)

*The time when I was an undergraduate was just after the Cultural Revolution. There was no teaching methods provided for us; therefore, the method I adopted in teaching textbook is based on my experience and what students like.*

The specialist knowledge of assessment is also perceived as insufficient. The data show that both teachers as well as the test designers lack the required knowledge of contemporary assessment theories and practices. As G, a lecturer from Beijing, described in her interview (2004):

*I am sure many people who participated in CET-4 designing do not have assessment background because it is difficult for them to explain what and why they want to test.*

HY, a lecturer from Harbin, reflected the attitude of some teachers: they did not think having specialist knowledge of assessment is necessary because of CET-4-oriented teaching (Interview, 2004):

*There is no need for teachers to get more knowledge on assessment because it would be okay if you can make your students pass CET-4.*

A major issue in terms of the knowledge base of university English language teachers is that most of them are Literature and Linguistics majors who have little or no training in curriculum, pedagogy, or assessment theory and procedures. Therefore, they have insufficient education theory, curriculum development, and methodology including both teaching and research methodology. Beyond this inappropriate pre-service training, teachers also have inadequate in-service professional development. Teachers perceived that the preparation programs for English teachers in higher education in China was not suitable for the demands of present tertiary English teaching. In their workplace, teachers felt they could not understand the requirements of CECR 2004 and they were confused by proposed teaching methods, textbooks, and CET-4.

In the theoretical framework of this thesis (Maton 2004a), specialisation refers to the issue of whether knowledge or the knower is privileged. A *knowledge* modality emphasises mastery of specialised procedures, techniques or skills whereas a *knower* modality stresses the dispositions of the subject, whether portrayed as ‘natural’ abilities, cultivated sensibilities or resulting from the subject’s social position. In tertiary English teaching in China, the policy wrongly assumes a knowledge modality, requiring specialist knowledge and skills. This is reflected in the data above where teachers as well as policy designers lacked sufficient knowledge and skills in curriculum development, pedagogy, and assessment practices, as they openly admitted.

### Contextual considerations

The tension between change, autonomy and specialisation and the reality of Chinese university English teaching in terms of curriculum, pedagogy and assessment is not simply a matter of ‘knowledge’ and ‘autonomy’. It involves issues of history and culture as discussed in Chapter 1, and economic development, and structure and system as discussed in Chapters from 5 to 7. Some teachers, for example, felt that their professionalism was undermined by structural and administrative issues. SH, a lecturer from Beijing stated that he was not allowed to undertake doctoral research because of the policy at his university (Interview 2004):

*There is not sufficient support from my university. I want to go to another university to get my Doctorate. I do not like the serious issue of inbreeding academically. But I had to make a contract with my own university if I went to another university for the degree. Otherwise, I had to be fined.*

M, another lecturer from Beijing emphasised how the institutional culture impacted on the standard of teaching (Interview 2004):

*Sometimes social relationships determine everything. ... The spoken English of one of my colleagues is terrible. Many students reflected that he even cannot speak a complete English sentence. ... I always wondered how he could be here. Then, I heard he is the classmate of my dean.*

In other cases, teachers reflected on structural issues such as the low pay and high workload of teachers in China, resulting in reduced motivation to implement change. HY, a lecturer from Harbin, claimed that (Interview, 2004):

*I am not that enthusiastic to be a teacher and I do not want to make any changes by myself. But one problem is: if my students change, I have no alternative but follow them to make changes. People are lazy, you know, ... But I am happy that I am not too numb to improve my teaching.*

Such issues are not open to easy resolution but do serve to remind us of the complexity of the reform process, where cultural traditions and institutional power relationships come into play.

More than two thousand years of history and ancient cultural traditions contributed to today’s conflict between language teachers’ orientation towards present changes within English language teaching at university level in China. Traditional Chinese philosophy which emphasises ‘harmony’ or ‘unity’ puts Chinese intellectuals in an environment in which they never question the demands of authority. Education was used to serve the

powerful since the time of Confucius. Language teaching was constructed as the learning of ‘characters’, ‘phrases’, ‘sentences’ and ‘texts’ accompanying reading and reciting what the students had learned. The Ke Ju Examination System restricted ‘what to teach’ to the *Analects of Confucius* with the interpretation by Zhu Xi. The intellectuals coming from this educational system had to know the Confucian classics and be able to write essays and compose poems. Such a strong ‘collection’ code (See Chapter 3 Theoretical Framework) leads to the elite educational system which persists until today.

## **8.2 Significance of the study**

At a time when China is facing unprecedented economic and social change, the teaching of English is seen as an integral factor in China’s global interactions. To improve the standard of English at tertiary level and to cater for the vast numbers of students of English, the government has promulgated substantial policy reforms. The major significance of this study lies in the fact that it has sought to give voice to those affected by these changes – primarily the teachers and administrators. The fact that the researcher is an insider – both a Chinese national and a university English teacher – has provided access to data otherwise difficult to retrieve. The researcher was able to get around the bureaucratic barriers often facing researchers in China and gain the trust of the interviewees, resulting in surprisingly candid data. Such rich, qualitative studies are uncommon in China.

The study is an important contribution to the analysis of those factors that militate against the uptake of policy changes. The insights provided by this study will enable a more subtle and realistic approach to policy development and implementation.

## **8.3 Issues and implications**

The following section will summarise some of the key issues arising from the study along with suggestions for addressing these issues.

### **Issue #1**

The first issue concerns the national policy document (CECR 2004). The policy appears to be positively oriented towards change and yet there is tension between the

communicative rhetoric and the conservative emphasis on endless lists of vocabulary. There is no explicit theoretical rationale underpinning the document and no elaboration of what is meant by the ‘buzzwords’ that are encountered throughout the document, leaving teachers to infer a fairly eclectic approach which provides little guidance.

A recommendation for future policy development would be that the committee appoint a team with specialist knowledge and expertise in ELT theory and practice to develop a coherent policy statement that is grounded in research and sensitive to the Chinese context. Such a statement should be supported by detailed support documents providing practical guidance on how the syllabus might be implemented at the level of the institution and the individual classroom.

## **Issue #2**

The autonomy granted by the national policy appears not to have been taken up by the individual institutions. The responsibility for interpreting the national syllabus in terms of the local context and for fleshing out the requirements as a working document has been largely ignored, resulting in minimal institutional statements that are invisible to the practitioner in the classroom. Administrators and teachers reported feeling unprepared to tackle such a task so it would be useful to provide support to this level of management to enable it to undertake the critical task of mediating between the national policy requirements and the local conditions.

## **Issue #3**

Many teachers expressed an openness to change but felt inhibited by their lack of specialist knowledge, falling back on the security of the textbook. The tension between change, autonomy and specialisation and the reality of curriculum, pedagogy and assessment in Chinese university English teaching as discussed above points to the key argument of this thesis: in attempting to respond to the pressures of change, the lack of specialist knowledge of teachers means that any autonomy given by policy is just a fantasy. Without sufficient knowledge background, teachers feel unable to take up the challenges and opportunities that change provides and instead stay with old practices.

Perhaps the strongest recommendation from this study would be that pre-service courses place less emphasis on literature and traditional grammar and that they include

components on pedagogy, curriculum development, and assessment theory and practice. As most of the students these days are not English Majors, teachers should be trained in English for Specific Purposes (e.g. English for Engineering) and English for Academic Purposes. For those already practising, substantial in-service professional development is needed to help the teachers understand and implement the policy changes.

#### **Issue #4**

The textbooks, which are relied on so heavily by the teachers and students, demonstrate little willingness to accommodate the policy changes, resulting in a deal of inertia in the system. Even the directive to include ICT support materials has resulted simply in the placing of traditional textbook material and exercises into electronic media, rather than exploiting the potential for creating innovative learning environments. While the next generation of textbooks might better reflect the changes in policy, there should be stricter monitoring by the national syllabus body to ensure that the textbooks provide high quality models of best practice rather than being driven by commercial interests.

#### **Issue #5**

Just as there is an ambivalent connection between the national syllabus and the textbook producers, there is an equally problematic relationship between the syllabus and the national assessment, with the high-stakes assessment taking precedence over the syllabus reforms and dominating classroom practice, effectively eliminating any possibility of teacher or institutional autonomy in developing curricula. Again, this tension might be resolved with the planned overhaul of the CET-4/6, but the existence of two separate bodies (syllabus and assessment), with their own territorial and commercial interests, adds to this problem. It would be beyond the scope of this study to suggest major reforms to the national system, however it would seem to be common sense to have a single body to ensure coherence between the syllabus and the assessment procedures, as well as the textbooks.

In summary, the need for reform in tertiary English language education is recognized by the Chinese government and by administrators and instructors at universities. An essential step in developing and implementing successful reform requires an understanding of the problems and constraints imposed on the participants. By identifying these problems and constraints, this study provides a sociological basis,

informed by Bourdieu (1971b), Bernstein (1990, 2000) and the principles of Maton (2004a, 2005) (See Chapter 3) for re-examining policy as a foundation for effective reform in university English language education. Having provided a broad explanation of factors affecting the implementation of policy reforms in Chinese tertiary English teaching, further studies are now needed into the more specific issues outlined below.

## **8.4 Recommendations**

Based on the findings of this study, there is a significant recognition of the need for reform in tertiary English teaching in the context of China. This need for reform arises from the gaps that exist between practice and policy. Drawing on the theoretical framework, the following recommendations can be made.

### **Temporality**

If change is to be effected, then we need to know more about the orientation to change on the part of the policy-makers, those who administer the policies and the teachers in the classroom – and indeed the students themselves. The results of this study indicate that there is a general desire for change, but it is difficult to envisage what this change might look like as there is a lack of adequate pre-service training for English language instructors in the areas of ELT curriculum, pedagogy, and assessment, and a lack of sufficient in-service professional development for further understanding and implementing policy in their teaching. In terms of temporality, comprehensive research is required on what and how professional development programs, including curriculum, pedagogy, and assessment, need to be designed in order to implement the policy change.

### **Autonomy**

The present study found that university English language instruction is in a state of inertia. Despite the fact that the policy reforms assume a great deal of autonomy on the part of administrators, teachers and students, in reality the autonomy is generally illusory. This means that further systematic research is required to investigate how such stakeholders are endeavouring in different ways to take up autonomy in the areas of curriculum, pedagogy, and assessment. Such studies would be able to provide models for



others, demonstrating various ways in which educators are exploiting the autonomy offered to them in a system which is traditionally very hierarchical and authoritarian.

### **Specialisation**

It was found that policy appears to be inconsistent and unclear in its theoretical basis; the universities tend not to play a mediating role in interpreting national policy at the local level, leaving teachers to fall back on what is familiar; and thus textbooks and external examinations dominate tertiary English teaching, inhibiting change.

Firstly, there is an urgent need to design a national curriculum that is sound and consistent in its theoretical framework based on the Chinese context of university English teaching. One of the purposes of such a curriculum with a strong theoretical framework is to specify curricular, pedagogical and assessment knowledge that teachers need to have, in order to take up the challenges and opportunities that change provides and instead of staying with old practices. Meanwhile, a series of specific attributes (skills and knowledge) that English teachers need to have should be investigated, validated, and authorized. These standards could be based on a Quality Assurance regime. Secondly, the role of the university syllabus needs to be sufficiently emphasised in terms of informing and interpreting the national policy at the local level, and thus supporting teachers in the development of their teaching. Thirdly, research into the design of textbooks needs to be undertaken to accommodate the practical needs of students.

## **8.5 Conclusion**

This study concludes that there is a gap in Chinese tertiary English teaching between policy reforms and the perceptions of teachers towards the changes brought about by these reforms, particularly in terms of curriculum, pedagogy and assessment. While generally there is a positive orientation towards change, structural and cultural issues inhibit the implementation of the reforms. In particular, the lack of specialist knowledge on the part of policy developers, administrators and teachers results in impoverished policy and practice and prevents the uptake of autonomy. Until there is greater coherence between syllabus, assessment and textbooks, until the universities themselves are willing

to take on their responsibilities for curriculum development, and until teachers have access to greatly increased professional development, the gap will remain.

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## **APPENDICES**

Appendix 1 Survey for teachers (Chapter 4 Methodology)

Appendix 2 Interview schedule with teacher (Chapter 4 Methodology)

Appendix 3 Interview schedule with administrators and policy-makers (Chapter 4  
Methodology)

Appendix 4 The List of Content of CECR 2004 (Chapter 5 Curriculum)

Appendix 5 Requirements on assessment in CECR 2004 (Chapter 7 Assessment)

Appendix 6 Sample Content: 1999 HEU English Examination  
(Chapter 7 Assessment)

Appendix 7 College English Test 200106 (Chapter 7 Assessment)

## Appendix 1 Survey for teachers

Original survey was administered in Chinese. This is an English translation.

### SURVEY

#### **The Changing Context of Tertiary English Teaching in China and Teachers' Responses to the Challenges**

This survey is being conducted as part of a study of the changing expectations on English teachers in tertiary contexts in China. **Your** opinion is very **valuable** for a further understanding of teachers' work in your Department as well as in college English teaching. The survey will be kept **anonymous and confidential** by giving it to the Dean of the Department **inside the sealed envelope enclosed**. As such, this study will **not** affect your work in your university. The result of this survey will be used as a part of a doctoral study. The survey should take you around 5 - 10 minutes. Please tick the relevant boxes.

#### **The Demographic Information** (Translated from Chinese)

In order to ensure **anonymity and confidentiality**, please do **not** provide your name on this form.

**University:** \_\_\_\_\_

**City:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Gender:** Female ☐ Male ☐

**Age:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Qualification:**

Bachelor of Arts ☐ Bachelor of Ed. ☐ Master of Arts ☐  
Master of Ed. ☐ Doctor of Ed. ☐ Doctor for Philosophy ☐

**Other, please specify :** \_\_\_\_\_

**You teach Non-English Major Students** ☐  
**English Major Students** ☐

**Length of Service in Teaching:**

Around 2 years ☐ Around 5 years ☐ Around 10 years ☐  
Around 20 years ☐ Over 30 years ☐

**Position:**

Assistant Lecturer ☐ Lecturer ☐  
Associate Professor ☐ Professor ☐

**SOME PRELIMINARY QUESTIONS TO FIND OUT FAMILIARITY WITH/ RESPONSE TO THE CHANGES TO THE SYLLABUS:**

1. To what extent are you familiar with College English Curriculum Requirements 2004?

- ☐ perfectly familiar
- ☐ very familiar
- ☐ somewhat familiar
- ☐ slightly familiar
- ☐ not at all

2. What are your feelings about the reformed college English syllabus?

- ☐ extremely positive
- ☐ positive
- ☐ neutral
- ☐ negative
- ☐ extremely negative

3. To what extent do you feel that the reformed English syllabus has had an impact on your teaching?

- ☐ Extreme impact
- ☐ Large impact
- ☐ Some impact
- ☐ Negligible impact
- ☐ No impact

**TEACHING APPROACH**

4. What terms would you use to describe your present approach to English teaching? (eg: Grammar -Translation, etc.). Please specify in your own words.

---

5. Has your approach changed in the past few years?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

6. To what extent are your lessons based on the textbook?

- ☐ completely
- ☐ a great deal
- ☐ somewhat
- ☐ incidentally
- ☐ not at all

7. To what degree were you involved in designing the course curriculum that you are currently teaching?

- ☐ I participated in the design fully
- ☐ I participated in some part of the design
- ☐ I participated in a little of it
- ☐ I did not participate in the design, but I know the content of the curriculum

☐ I know nothing of the curriculum

**ENGLISH PROFICIENCY**

8. What do you think of your language competence as an English teacher at the university in speaking, listening, writing and reading?

- ☐ Elementary Proficiency  
☐ Limited Working Proficiency  
☐ Professional Working Proficiency  
☐ Full Professional Proficiency  
☐ Native or Bilingual Proficiency

9. Do you feel that your level of proficiency in English is sufficient to properly implement the reformed English syllabus?

☐ Yes ☐ No

10. Do you make on-going efforts to improve your English proficiency?

☐ Yes ☐ No

11. If yes, how?

---

**PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT**

12. Do you believe that your qualifications have prepared you to implement the reformed college English syllabus?

☐ Yes ☐ No

13. Have you participated in professional development activities to help you to implement the reformed college English syllabus? (Please tick):

- ☐ attended departmental seminar  
☐ attended short in-service workshop (less than one day)  
☐ attended extended professional development course (eg 1-7 days)  
☐ attended professional conference/s  
☐ undertook additional professional qualification (please specify):
- 

14. Do you believe that you have been provided with sufficient professional development support to enable you to deal with the reformation of the college English syllabus?

- ☐ High level of support  
☐ Sufficient support  
☐ Some support  
☐ Insufficient support  
☐ No support

Other comment: \_\_\_\_\_

## **Appendix 2 Interview schedule with teachers**

Interview including the questions were conducted in Chinese. This is an English translation version.

### **Interview Questions for Teachers**

1. What changes have occurred in the field of English language teaching in Chinese context institutions over the past 20 years?

- Have you noticed any changes in your Department / College English Teaching Program?
- If so, what changes took place? (Particularly in terms of curriculum / teaching approaches (methodology) / assessment)
- Why such changes took place?
  - a) Are you familiar with the official government documents?
  - b) Are you familiar with research into teaching, or teaching trends?
- How would you describe your work life / teaching practices now as compared to the past (ten years)?
  - a) Do you think your older colleagues' practices have changed?
  - b) How have these changes impacted on your own teaching or that of your colleagues?
- How do you feel about these changes (or: what is your attitude to the reformation of college English teaching?)
  - a) What are the good outcomes of the changes?
  - b) What are the negative outcomes?
  - c) Do you think the changes will result in significant improvements in their students' ability to use English in academic and professional contexts?

2. What expectations have been placed on teachers and administrators as a result of these changes?

- What sort of expectations are placed on the teachers as a result of these changes? (eg: What expectations placed on teachers from the changed syllabus, etc.?)
- How have these expectations affected your work?
- In what way do you think you are involved in these changes?
- Would you please let me know your ideas on changing your own teaching practices and yourself?
  - a) Would you please explain how you want to change yourself and your teaching? (For example, improving language proficiency.)

3. How have teachers and administrators responded to these changes?

- Do you feel that your training has prepared you sufficiently to implement the changes? (in terms of methodology / in terms of assessment / in terms of own language proficiency?)
  - What sort of training have you undergone with regard to English teaching at university? (in terms of methodology, curriculum design, ...)

- What would make you more confident about implementing the changes? (more professional development / a better understanding of theory / the knowledge of subject matter / a higher language proficiency)
  - Do you take the syllabus into consideration when designing your lessons?
  - Do you think the textbook you are using reflects changes in English teaching in China? If so, provide an example from the book. (I will ask them to bring along their textbooks)
  - How closely do your lessons follow the textbook?
  - What are the most effective ways of teaching a foreign language? (Or: What do students need to know/be able to do in order to succeed in English at tertiary level?
  - Do you want to change your teaching method?
  - By what means / methods do you evaluate your teaching?
  - Do you think the assessment currently used is in keeping with the changes in terms of methodology?
  - How much responsibility are you given in terms of developing your own teaching programs?
  - What support do you need to take on these responsibilities? (Do you actually want these responsibilities?)
  - If you think you should change, what would help you change?
  - If you want to change, have you considered that there are some constraints which may prevent your change? What are these factors?
  - How are you constrained by such factors? (such as the Confucian philosophical ideology, political elements, the syllabus, the examination system, the textbooks, the lack of professional development opportunities, lack of financial resources, lack of facilities, etc. )

#### **4. Concluding question/s**

- What are the most important things, do you think, for the department, college English teaching program and the Ministry of Education to accomplish now in order to improve the quality of English education?
- Are there any other points, issues, etc. you would like to mention or discuss in order to specify and clarify your opinions?

## **Appendix 3 Interview schedule with administrators and policy-makers**

Interview including the questions were conducted in Chinese. This is an English translation version.

### **Questions for Administrators and Policy-makers**

#### **1. What changes have occurred in the Chinese context over the past 20 years that have increased the demands placed on tertiary teachers of English?**

- Are there any changes around English teaching?
- What are these changes? Why are there such changes?
- What do you think of these changes? (Or: What is your attitude towards these changes? )
- What do you think of the innovation in College English teaching?
- Do you think the innovations in college English teaching consider the problems from the teacher's practical situation and the real classroom?
- What do you think of the College English Test? (Do you think the College English Test will be abrogated?)
- What do you think of the relationship between the new Teaching Requirements on College English and the National Curriculum?
- How are the syllabus and the new Demands being interpreted and implemented in teachers' programs, course curricula and textbooks?

#### **2. What sort of expectations are placed on the teachers as a result of these changes?**

- In what ways do these changes affect English teachers and their work?
- What sort of expectations of the teachers do you have (in terms of curriculum development, the target language context, English for Academic Purposes/ General Purposes, the higher level of English proficiency, contemporary pedagogy---for myself) ?

#### **3. How have teachers and administrators responded to these changes?**

- What sort of training have they undergone?
- What levels of English proficiency do they have?
- What should they change?
- What would help them change?
- Do you have any criteria for recruiting a new language teacher at your faculty or university ? What are they?
- How well do you think teachers can satisfy these requirements?
- What aspects of standards relating to college English teachers are unsatisfactory?
- To what extent do you know the work life of college English teachers?
  
- Do you think college English teachers are constrained by any factors when they tend to develop themselves?
- What are these factors do you think to constrain meeting the expectations? In what ways are the teachers constrained by these factors?



**4. Concluding question:**

- How do you think to improve the English teaching program from the point of view of **(1)** the Department and the university in terms of expectations on English teachers, English teachers professionalism, their development, teachers' training, etc. **(2)** the college English teaching program, **(3)** the Ministry of Education?
- Are there any other points, issues, etc. you would like to mention or discuss?

#### **Appendix 4 The List of Content of CECR 2004 (Ch 5)**

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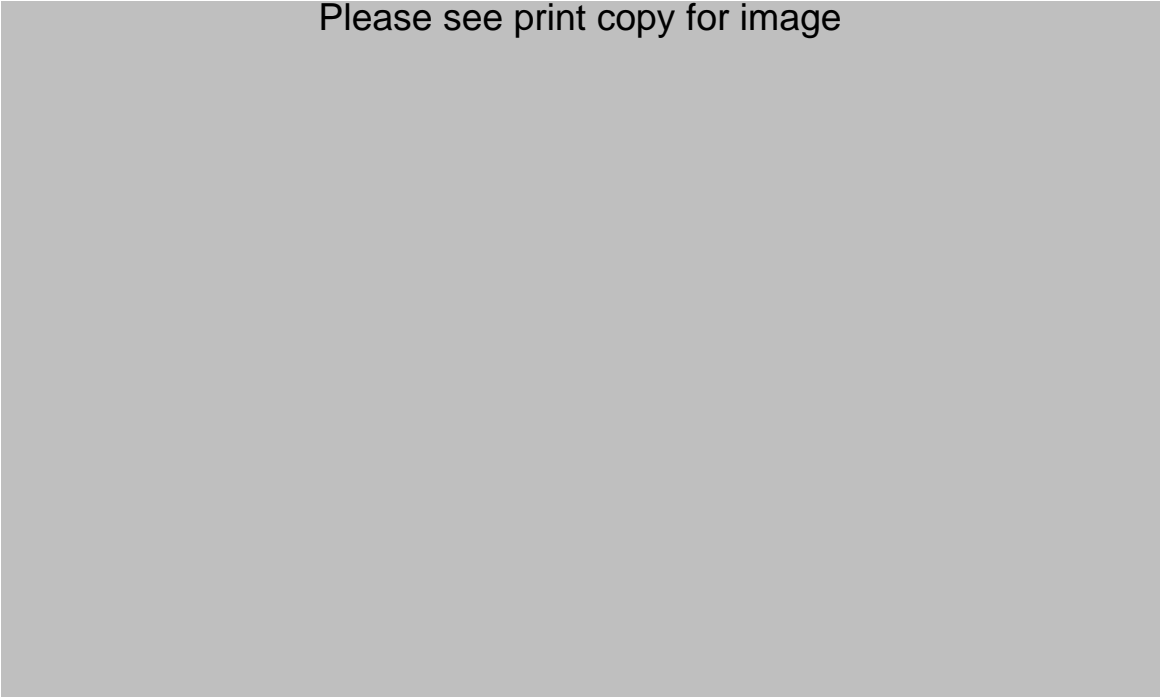
## **Appendix 5 Requirements on assessment in CECR 2004 (Ch7)**

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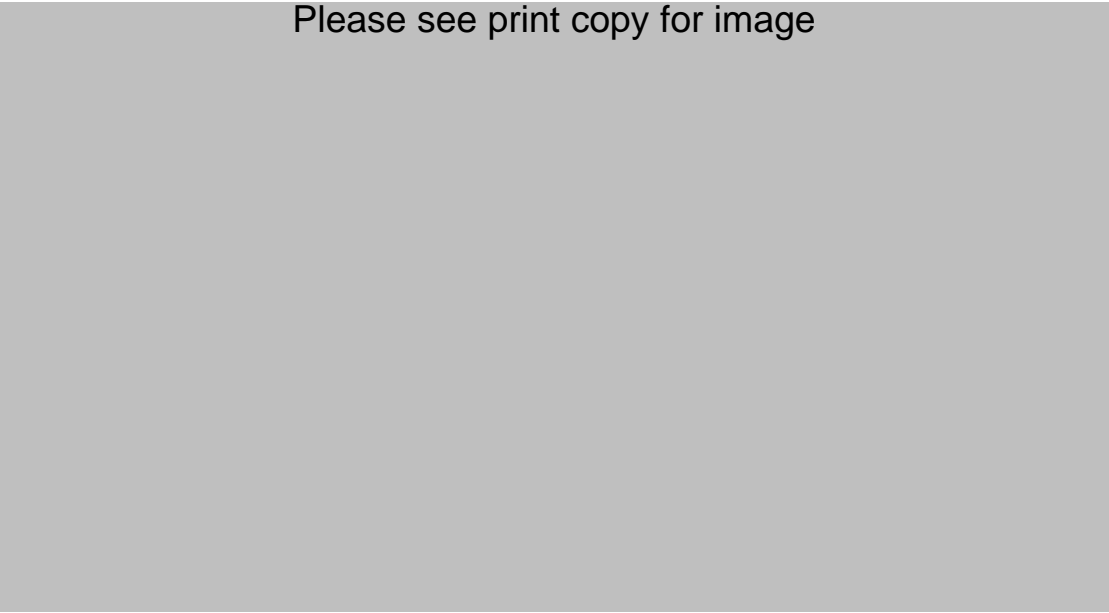


## **Appendix 6 Sample Content: 1999 HEU English Examination**


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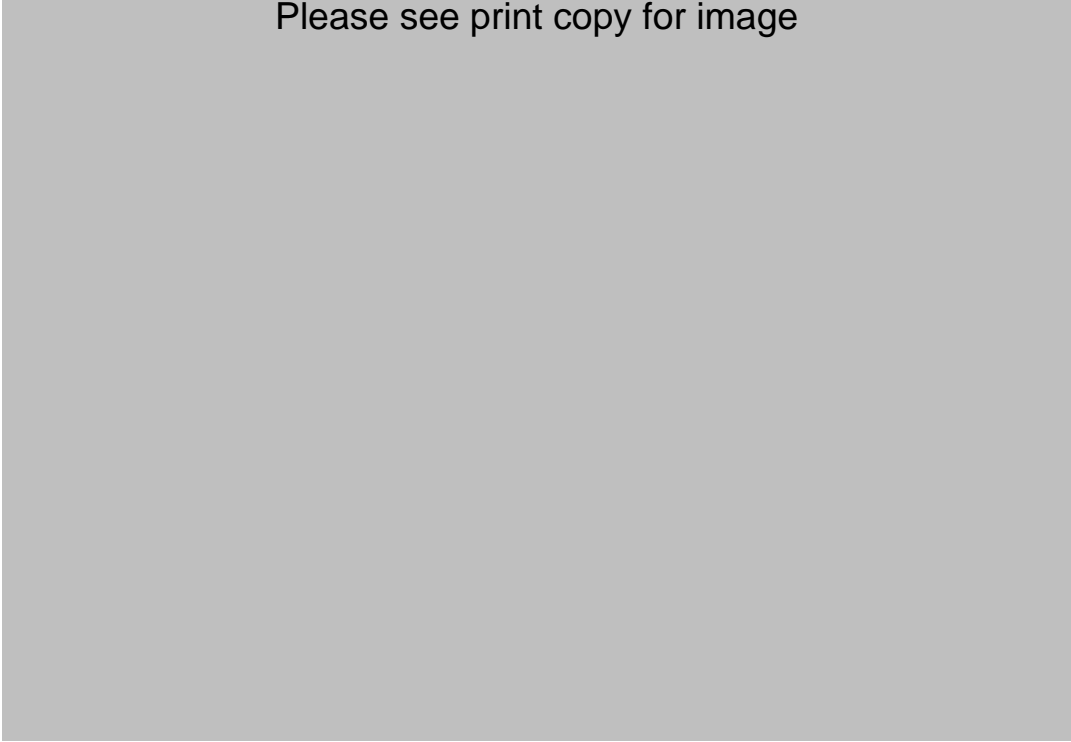
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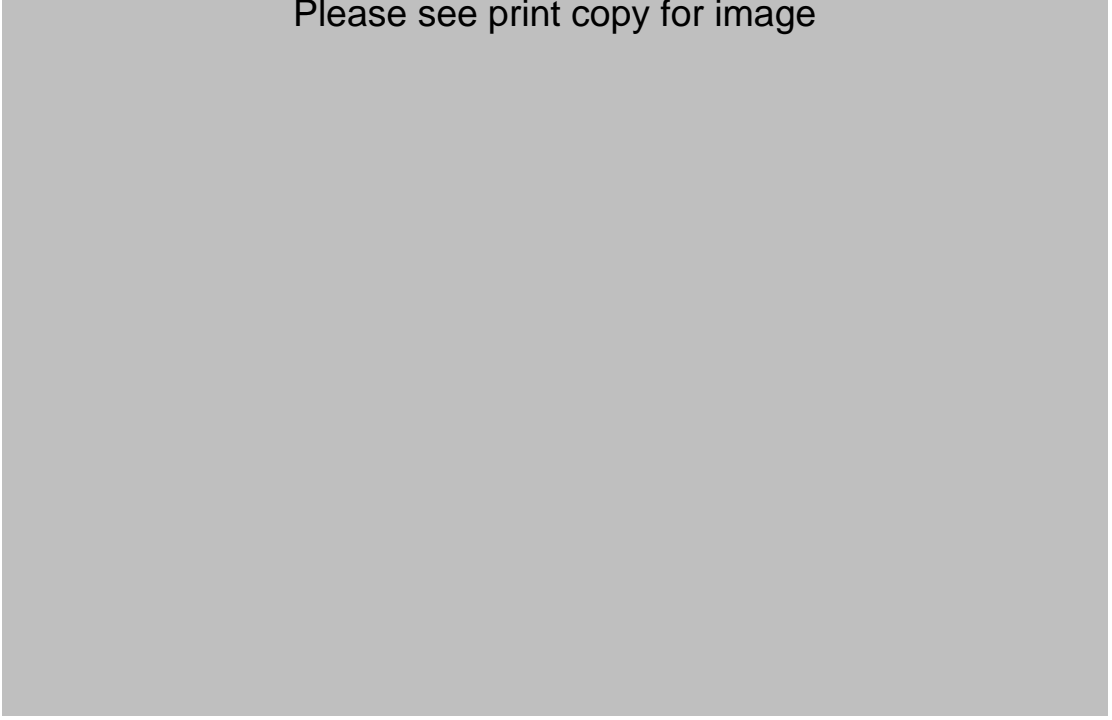
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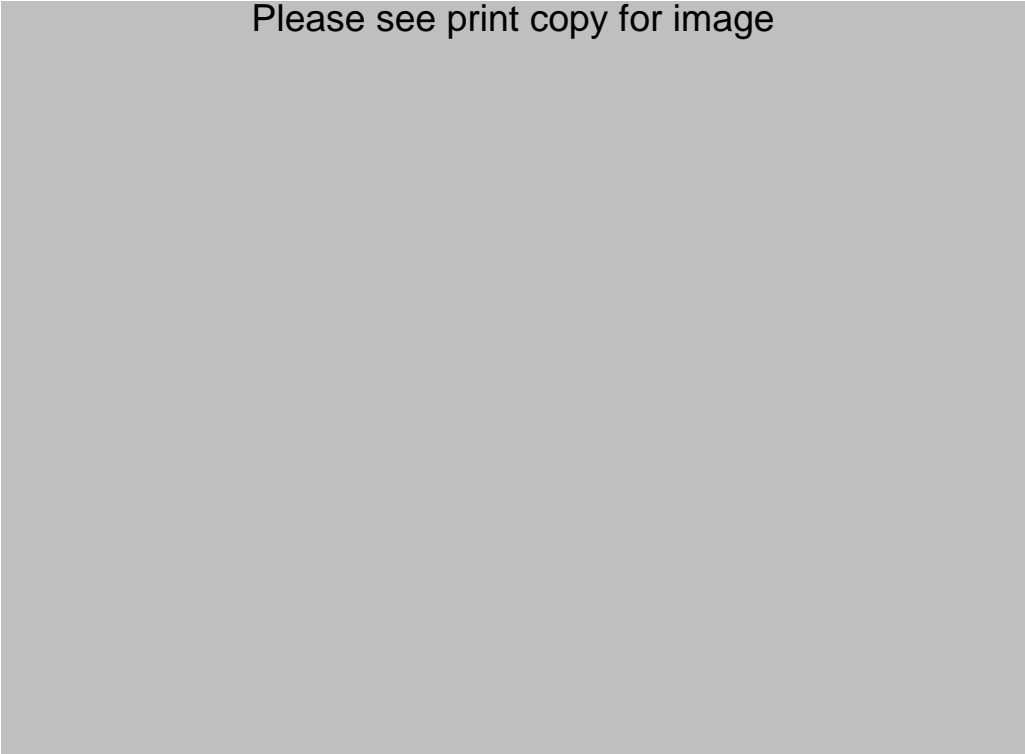
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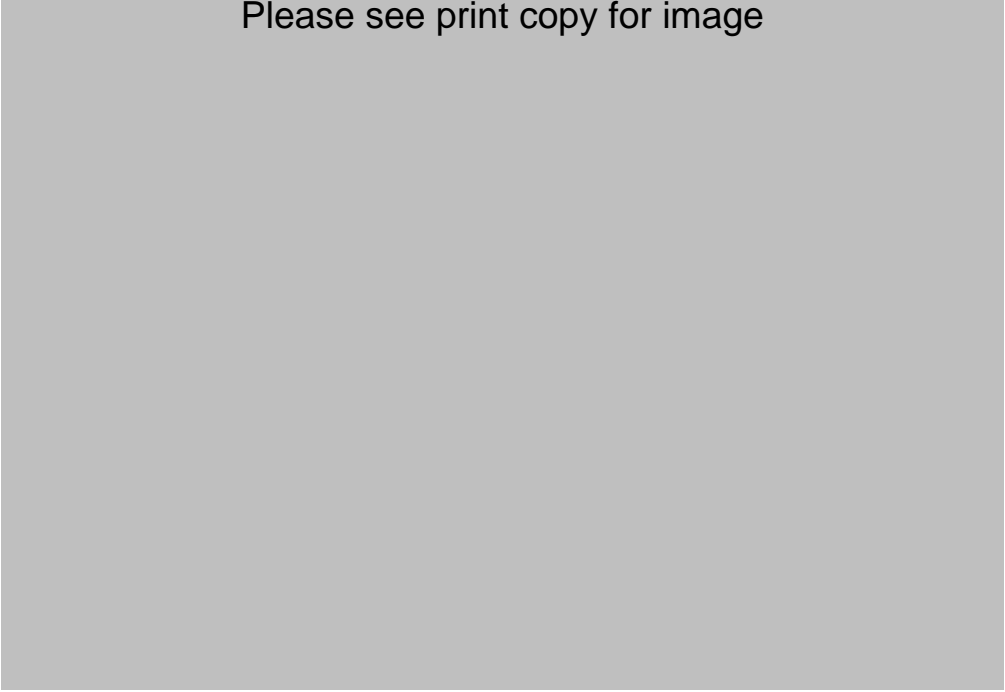


## **Appendix 7 College English Test 200106**

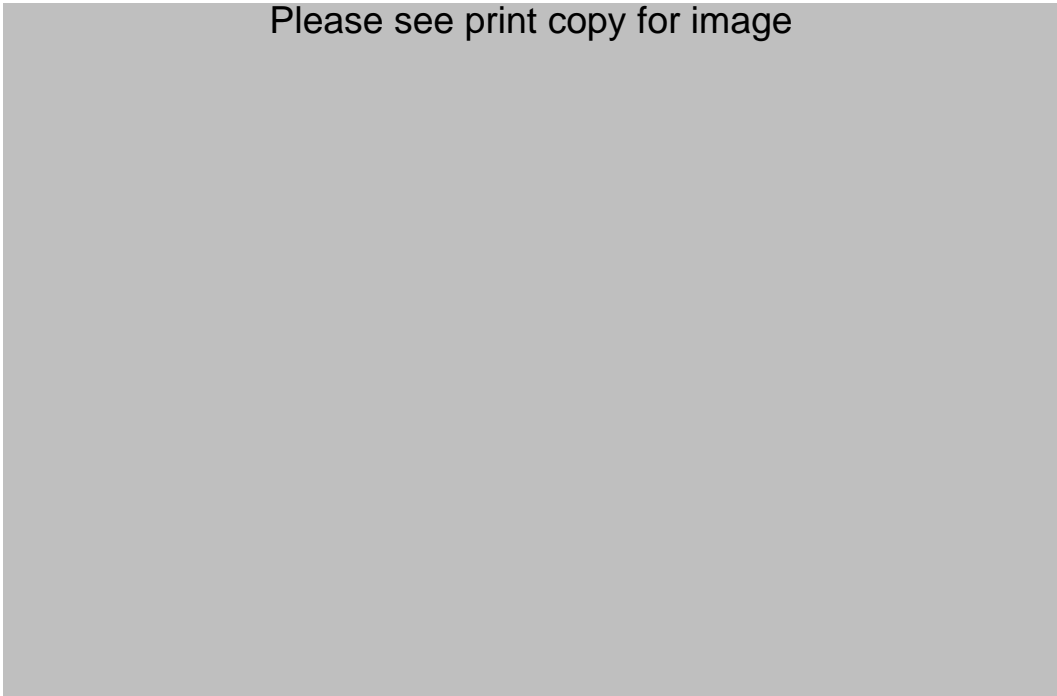
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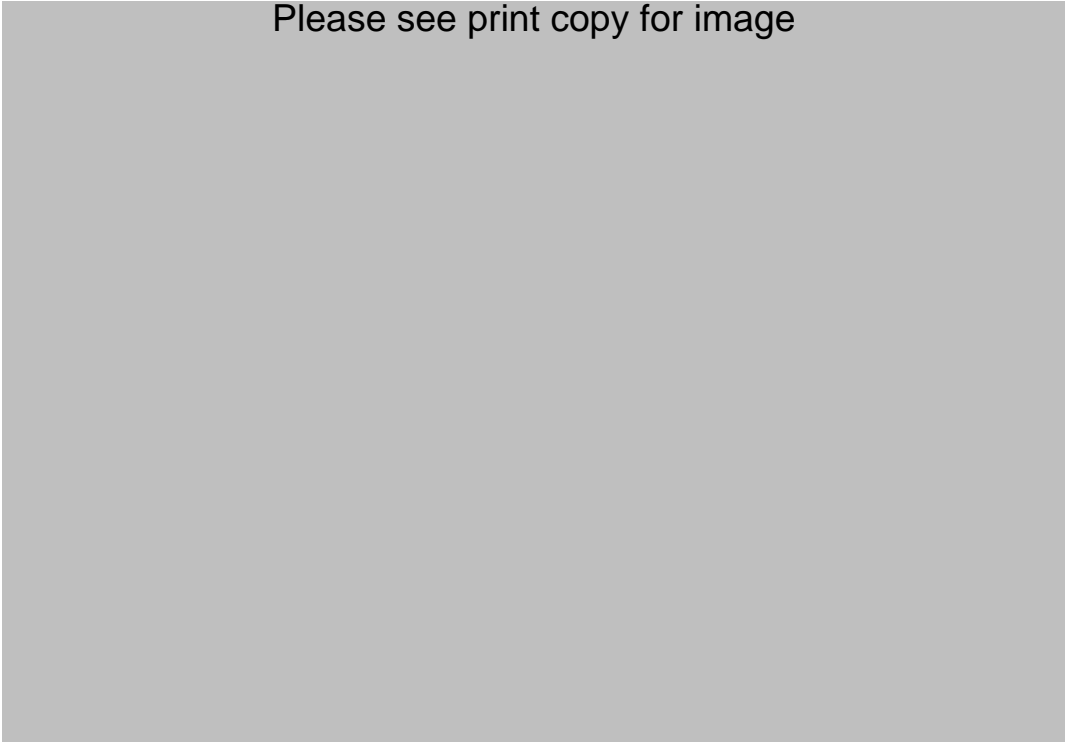
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